

# VUE

WINTER 2012

ANNENBERG INSTITUTE FOR SCHOOL REFORM • *Voices in Urban Education*

## Civic Investment in Public Education

The National Commission for Civic Investment in Public Education

*Wendy Puriefoy*

Reaffirming the Dream:  
The Case for Civic Investment

*Richard W. Riley and Linda  
Darling-Hammond*

A Story of Civic Investment in  
Public Education

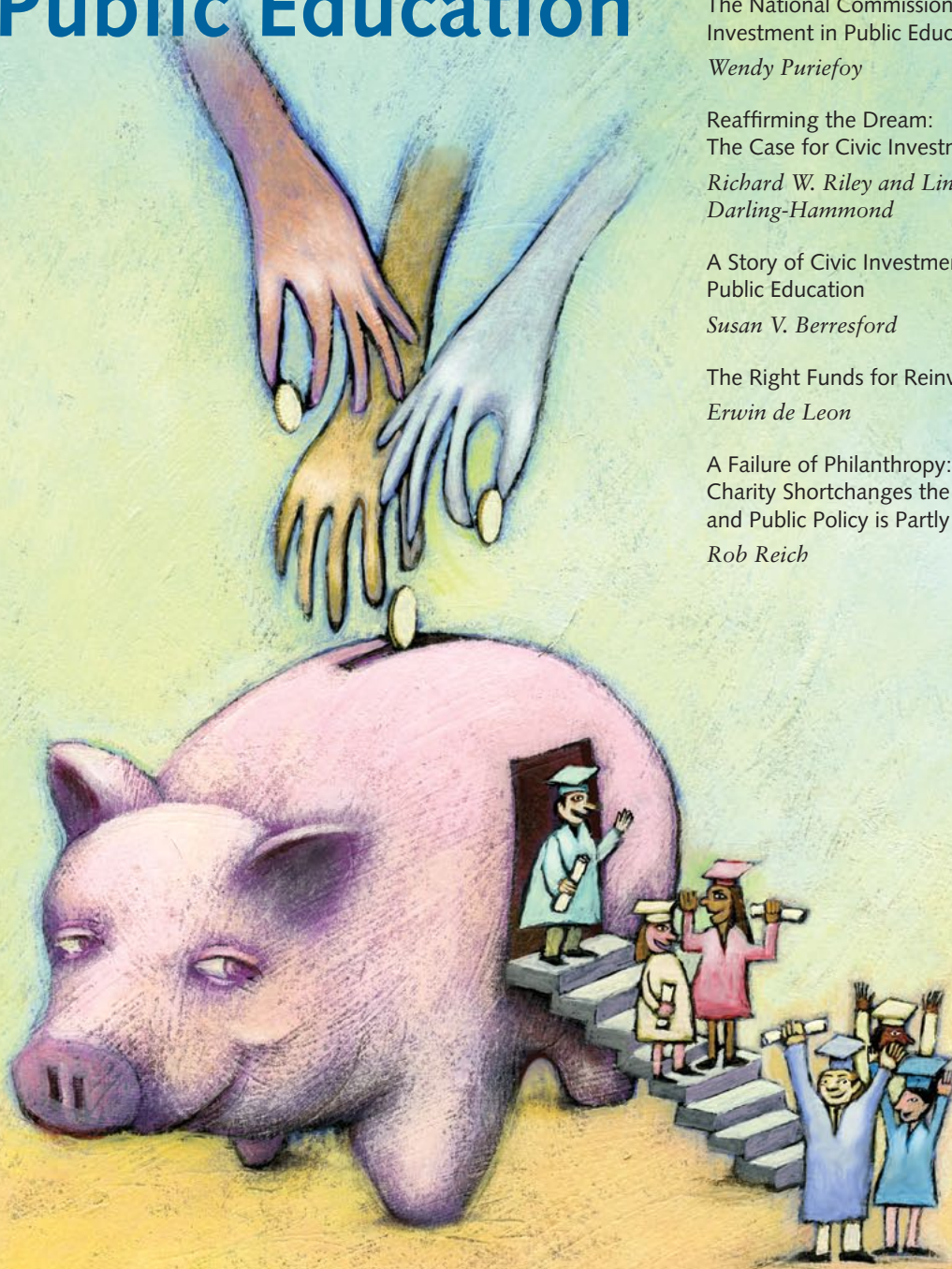
*Susan V. Berresford*

The Right Funds for Reinvestment

*Erwin de Leon*

A Failure of Philanthropy: American  
Charity Shortchanges the Poor,  
and Public Policy is Partly to Blame

*Rob Reich*



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# VUE

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# A Charge to Our Leaders and to the American People: Redouble Investment in Public Schools

WARREN SIMMONS

This past May, after eighteen months of research, study, analysis, and deliberation, the National Commission on Civic Investment in Public Education, convened by Public Education Network (PEN), presented its report – along with recommendations regarding increased civic investment in the nation's schools – to President Obama, Education Secretary Arne Duncan, the U.S. Congress, and the American people.

It was a privilege to serve on the Commission along with its co-chairs, Stanford University School of Education Professor Linda Darling-Hammond and former U.S. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley, and its fifteen distinguished members. PEN charged the Commission with making the renewed case for civic investment, highlighting organizations that build and channel that investment, and developing standards for those organizations.

When asked to serve, it was more than an honor; it was my duty. Discussions with my fellow Commission members only underscored my own belief that the need for a redoubled civic investment in public education is urgent.

Today, students arrive at school with more unmet needs than their predecessors; schools and districts face intense financial pressures not experienced in the past sixty years; and despite these remarkable challenges, public schools are expected to meet higher standards and better prepare their students than those of the previous generation. The case for civic investment in public education is abundantly clear: U.S. public schools – particularly those in urban areas – face far greater challenges than ever before with far fewer resources.

As the Commission's report noted, "The challenge of meeting the goal of improving student outcomes and closing gaps in opportunity and achievement is particularly acute." At its core, the Commission's

*Warren Simmons is executive director of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform.*

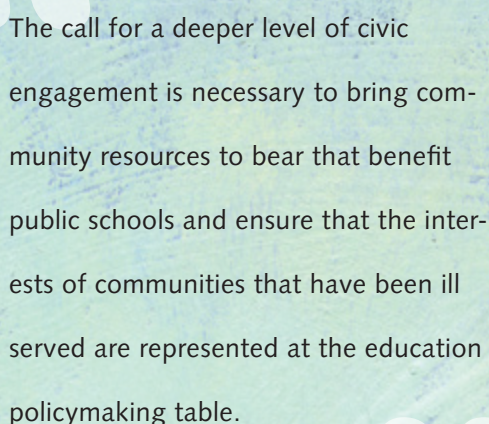
report asked the nation to increase its civic investment in public schools so that every American student receives an excellent education.

As states and cities face draconian budget reductions, or pursue innovative approaches to improve the quality of public schools, the number of local community organizations focused on public education assistance has rapidly increased. Over the past thirty years, locally driven organizations have been formed in more than 2,000 communities to engage citizens in support of public education. These nonprofit groups are striving to restore and build the capacity of the nation's public education system; however, in far too many school districts, the traditional policies that created and perpetuate the inequities in American education remain in force.

The call for a deeper level of civic engagement is necessary to bring community resources to bear that benefit public schools and ensure that the interests of communities that have been ill served are represented at the education policymaking table.

To quote the Commission's report, "This deeper level of engagement focuses on three areas: creating a demand for excellence for all schools, holding public officials accountable for achieving equity and excellence, and ensuring that educational resources and assets are allocated equitably."

The Annenberg Institute shares with the Commission its commitment to support avenues that ensure equal opportunities and outcomes for every student, regardless of his or her circumstances. Hence, through this redesigned issue of *VUE* (our first redesign since *VUE*'s inception in 2002), we are "hosting" many of the National Commission members' views on civic investment in public education and sharing this critically important discussion with our readers and website visitors.



The call for a deeper level of civic engagement is necessary to bring community resources to bear that benefit public schools and ensure that the interests of communities that have been ill served are represented at the education policymaking table.

Wendy Puriefoy, president of PEN, opens the issue with the charge of the Commission and its findings: the growing number of public education funds demonstrates the power of communities coming together to support their schools, but the need is urgent to redouble civic investment in public education.

Commission co-chairs Richard Riley and Linda Darling-Hammond argue that by adopting and implementing high standards of accountability such as those developed by the Commission, public education funds can help galvanize public will to achieve equity and excellence in the nation's

schools. Commission member and Massachusetts secretary of education Paul Reville offers his perspective on how public education funds can lead the way toward a twenty-first-century education system.

Susan Berresford, Commission member and former president of the Ford Foundation, describes how “patient philanthropy” in support of public education funds has provided the means for community members to invest in their schools and led to dramatic reforms and a renewed civic commitment to democratic values. Jim Colloghan shares his perspective as executive director of the National School Foundation Association, which has around 1,000 PEFs as members, on the benefits of clear standards of accountability and transparency for PEFs.

Erwin de Leon, lead author of an Urban Institute report for the Commission, recognizes that current economic and social realities make it hard for public education to thrive and succeed, but emphasizes that public education support organizations are helping more and more communities reinvest in our shared future. Commission member Barbara Bartle, president of the Lincoln [Nebraska] Community Foundation, and Margaret Hiller, executive director of the Bridgeport [Connecticut] Public Education Fund, offer on-the-ground perspectives from public education funds.

We close with Commission member Rob Reich’s article on equity issues and the over-reliance on private philanthropy. He cautions us that philanthropic support of public education in itself is insufficient; public policy must change to ensure that charitable gifts remedy existing inequities rather than reinforcing them. My sidebar adds the Annenberg Institute’s perspective of a “smart education system” in which all education stakeholders – including districts, communities, policymakers, the philanthropic community, civic leaders, educators, researchers, and young people – collaborate to provide a network of supports and opportunities that ensures an excellent education for all young people.

A growing number of education stakeholders share the vision outlined in these pages of a renewed civic movement to invest effort and resources in public education. We hope that the stories and perspectives emerging from the work of the Commission will inspire readers to build on this urgently important work that is so crucial to the future of our nation.



## The National Commission for Civic Investment in Public Education

WENDY PURIEFOY

*The work of a growing number of public education funds shows the power of public will and commitment, but the need is urgent to redouble civic investment in public education.*

**O**n behalf of the members of the National Commission on Civic Investment in Public Education, the board of directors of Public Education Network (PEN), and the 19,000 public education support organizations across America, I thank Warren Simmons and the Annenberg Institute for School Reform (AISR) for the opportunity to present PEN's decade-long pursuit to build a field and set standards for a group of nonprofit

organizations working to improve their public schools. We also thank the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Prudential Corporation for their support of this work.

### INTRODUCTION

The fifteen members of the National Commission for Civic Investment in Public Education have performed an extraordinary service for this nation and for America's schoolchildren. The Commission's work was ably led by co-chairs Richard W. Riley, former U.S. Secretary of Education (1993–2001) and Linda Darling-

*Wendy Puriefoy is president of Public Education Network.*



Hammond, world-renowned education scholar and professor of education at Stanford University. Other members included leaders from the corporate, philanthropic, and nonprofit sectors; educators; researchers; and public education support organization leaders from around the country. Together they shared a commitment to expand civic knowledge and support of public education through citizen involvement.

The technical problem that PEN established the National Commission to address was a lack of consistent standards for the growing number of nonprofit, tax-exempt organizations – typically local education funds (LEFs), comprising PEN’s own network, and a larger array of public education funds (PEFs), independent foundations, or “school foundations” (see sidebar on nomenclature) comprising what may fairly be described as a new national field. The field is distinct from older public education support organizations, like PTAs, in that its members’ primary purpose is to increase pub-

lic and financial support for public schools. Now, some twenty-five years into the field’s development, it was time to make sure that these organizations were more fully accountable for their work.

At the time of the National Commission’s creation, PEN was concerned (and remains so) that inequality of household wealth and income in the country was increasingly replicated within our public school systems as schools in wealthy communities started PEFs to provide amenities that were not available in less-affluent schools. Given the power of persistent economic, social, and political trends, the growth of these groups is only likely to accelerate in number and exacerbate inequalities between students from affluent families and those from poor families. An analysis conducted by Rob Reich, associate professor of political science and ethics in society at Stanford University, appearing in this issue of *VUE*, illustrates this problem.

## A NOTE ON NOMENCLATURE

Many terms are used – not always consistently – to describe the different types of organizations in the relatively new field of independent foundations and “school foundations” described in this article. Throughout this issue of *VUE*, we will use the following definitions:

*Public education support organizations (ESOs)*: Nonprofits exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code set up to aid local public schools, including such organizations as parent-teacher groups and alumni associations. The Urban Institute’s report *Who Helps Public Schools* (de Leon et al. 2010) identified more than 19,000 such groups.

*Public education funds (PEFs)*: The largest group (2,147, or 11 percent) of ESOs, dedicated to assisting public schools and districts (de Leon et al. 2010). More than a thousand PEFs are members of the National School Foundation Association (NSFA). For more on NSFA, see the sidebar by Jim Collogan in Erwin de Leon’s article in this issue of *VUE*.

*Independent foundations or school foundations*: Used interchangeably with *public education funds*.

*Local education funds (LEFs)*: The 77 PEFs that are members of the Public Education Network. Exception: Rob Reich’s article in this issue of *VUE* uses *LEF* synonymously with *PEF*. Note: The Urban Institute report refers to LEFs as “PEN members” and other non-PEN PEFs as “non-PEN members.”



Clearly, the work of the National Commission on Civic Investment was needed. Its tasks were to:

- determine the scope, size, and practices of public education support organizations (ESOs);
- establish and recommend standards, principles, and practices to ensure public accountability of these organizations;
- promote the use of the standards to the ESOs that currently comprise the field.

The combination of these strategies resulted in research on the field and the development of standards for a fast-growing group of ESOs to guide the development of these organizations and assure schools, communities, corporations and foundations, volunteers, and civic organizations of their efficacy and accountability.

What do we know now about these ESOs? The National Commission turned to the Urban Institute's Center on Nonprofits and Philanthropy based in Washington, D.C., for more information. Some brief demographics of the field include:

- In 2007, there were 19,306 ESOs, of which 2,147 are PEFs. Within this group of PEFs, 77 were PEN members (LEFs).
- The number of PEFs has grown substantially over the last decade; there were 2.5 times as many PEFs in 2007 as in 1997.
- More than 20 million children in the United States are served by PEFs.
- PEFs support a wide range of activities, but their primary goals are to enrich or expand educational programs and improve student achievement.

We also learned that PEFs operated differently from other ESOs, and PEN's LEFs operated differently than other PEFs.

- Although PEFs accounted for 11 percent of all ESOs in 2007, they generated 29 percent of all revenue for ESOs – that is, \$1,241,300,000. LEFs, which composed less than half a percent of all ESOs in 2007, generated 4 percent of all revenues, or \$170,200,000.
- LEFs are twice as likely as other PEFs to assist school districts in which a majority of students are from low-income homes and are racial/ethnic minorities.
- LEFs are significantly larger than other PEFs and tend to have larger governing boards. Moreover, the governing boards of LEFs are more racially and ethnically diverse compared to other PEFs.
- LEFs interact more frequently with public policymakers. At the local level, LEFs interact with elected officials during the year. In contrast, about 20 percent of other PEFs never interact with elected officials. At the state level, nearly all LEFs interact with elected officials at least once during the year, compared with 43 percent of other PEFs that never interact with elected state officials.
- Nearly all LEFs collect some type of performance data, while only two-thirds of other PEFs do so.

By November, when this publication is released, PEN member LEFs will not only have adopted the standards proposed by the National Commission, but will also have adapted the standards more specifically to LEFs, recognizing the impact LEFs have in addressing and meeting the needs of low-income students and minority students in low-performing schools – for instance, making the standards even more stringent with regards to equity.

## THE BEGINNING OF A NEW NARRATIVE ON CIVIC INVESTMENT IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

In addition to the challenge of reporting on ESOs and developing standards, the National Commission chose to address a spiritual challenge: to re-engage Americans in rebuilding and strengthening their public schools. The Commission decided to create a new narrative on civic investment in public education that would educate, inspire, and require the nation to build systems of public schools all across America that are worthy of our children and secure our democracy. The challenges and the opportunities facing America today demand that we tell ourselves a new story and act, act, act to save our nation.

For eons, military strength has been the primary measure of a nation's power and status. History books are replete with descriptions of astoundingly powerful military battles that built and sustained the Greek, Roman, Ottoman, and British empires. Through these military conquests the victors expanded the geographic reaches of their empires – they acquired land, gained access to valuable trade routes, built commerce and increased wealth, installed new leadership, and expanded the base of loyal and faithful people who would become a part of the conquering nation state. In other words, a strong military delivered land, fealty, commerce, wealth, and super-power status.

However, the founders of the American enterprise proposed another tool to build our new, democratic nation: education.

After winning independence from England, American leaders turned their attention to building the nation. Founders looked in two main directions to accomplish this

task – well-formed structures of government and the character of the citizenry. The search for the first led to the ratification of the U.S. Constitution. The second spurred leaders to propose plans for public education. (Fuhrman & Lazerson 2005, p. 2)

Founding father John Adams promoted education for the masses and viewed education as the public's responsibility:

The education of a nation, instead of being confined to a few schools and universities for the instruction of the few, must become the national care and expense for the formation of the many.

Yet it would take nearly a century after the establishment of the Republic in 1787 to formalize the relationship between education and the public: the first public school wasn't established until 1832, and the first election of a school board, along with the first allocation of public funds for public schooling, did not take place until the middle of the nineteenth century.

Nonetheless, the Founders' belief that an educated citizenry is the bedrock of a democratic society echoes through the centuries, adding another metric to define what certifies a nation's status in the global hierarchy of power. Simply put, intellect counts. To be a super-power means that a nation must have a standing army of intellectually capable and educated patriots.

## A STANDING ARMY OF INTELLECTUALLY CAPABLE AND EDUCATED PATRIOTS

The founding fathers were prescient in their belief about the timeless role of public education to strengthen our nation and our democratic way of life. Educational competency played a critical role in the founding of America and in sustaining and advancing our demo-

cratic way of life for all who came to these shores. Social, political, and economic pressures such as globalization, rapidly changing demographics, immigration, and the interplay between domestic and international policymaking make it very clear that in twenty-first-century America, higher levels of knowledge and skills are a prerequisite for individuals to live with any level of satisfaction and competence in a democratic society, engage with government, advance our democratic way of life, and be effective workers in the rapidly changing world of commerce.

The technical task and spiritual work facing Americans today is clear: to educate all of our children for the twenty-first century. Attaining that goal is going to call for a movement equal to that of actions undertaken by the abolitionists and suffragettes in their successful attempts to convince the nation that the enslavement of blacks and the disenfranchisement of women were so incompatible with the nation's stated democratic principles and beliefs that if left unchallenged, they would compromise the nation's future.

Today, we face a similar challenge in the widely disparate performance of our public schools – in some instances, the outright failure of our public schools to educate all of our children – which, if left unchallenged, disenfranchises large numbers of children from the American dream, dilutes our democracy, and compromises our nation's future. What can be done to attain the goal of educating our children? How do we educate Americans to value the benefits of quality public education, and how do we inspire them to extend those benefits to every child in every community across our nation?

The members of the National Commission on Civic Investment in Public Education believe that the public education support organizations described in this issue of *VUE* play essential roles

in both the improvement of public schools and educating and engaging the people of this nation in their schools. Their existence stands as one measure of so many Americans' intent to provide high-quality public schools.

The Commission members remind us that three powers are clearly within the *public's influence and control*:

- creating demand for and setting expectations for excellence in public education;
- ensuring accountability through elected officials and effective school governance for the vision of quality public education; and
- providing adequate and stable financial resources for quality public schools.

Coordinated and aligned actions in these three arenas will create a system of public education that fulfills the nation's needs and builds its aspirations. And that is why the members of the National Commission on Civic Investment in Public Education felt it was essential to restate the case and issue a new call for civic investment. However, the very worthy work of these ESOs cannot supplant (nor is it their intention to do so) the power of public will and public actions to leverage the fundamental and structural changes that must take place in public education systems across this nation to build the standing army of educated patriots that will move themselves and their nation forward.

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## Reaffirming the Dream: The Case for Civic Investment

RICHARD W. RILEY AND LINDA DARLING-HAMMOND

*By adopting and implementing high standards of accountability, public education funds can help galvanize public will to achieve equity and excellence in the nation's schools.*

Americans have long committed themselves to civic investment in education, recognizing that equal educational opportunity is a bedrock of democratic society. Indeed, one of the earliest laws enacted by the federal government – the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, which predated the ratification of the U.S. Constitution

– required that land in new territories be set aside for schools and stated: “Religion, morality, and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged.”

Today, however, that civic commitment to equal educational opportunity is in peril. Schools face two significant challenges. On the one hand, the population of students that schools have traditionally underserved is growing rapidly. At the same time,

*Richard W. Riley was U.S. Secretary of Education from 1993 to 2001. Linda Darling-Hammond is the Charles E. Ducommun Professor of Education at the Stanford University Graduate School of Education. They co-chaired the National Commission on Civic Investment in Education.*



there is greater and greater pressure for improving outcomes for all students, so that all young people will be equipped with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in the twenty-first century. Thus, schools must do better than they ever did before, with a student population made up of a large proportion of students who have a wide range of needs and have often been ill served by schools in the past.

Meeting these challenges will require a redoubling of the civic investment in education. Yet in too many places the bonds of civic commitment to education appear to be fraying. Our public schools increasingly resemble sports stadiums, in which more advantaged patrons sit in skyboxes and enjoy well-appointed accommodations – in the case of schools, state-of-the-art facilities, access to high-level coursework and out-of-school support, and well-qualified teachers, among other benefits. Meanwhile, students from less-advantaged backgrounds sit in the equivalent of the bleachers, lacking basic amenities and straining to see the field.

The good news is that community members in a number of places, such as Bridgeport, Connecticut, and Mobile, Alabama, have been able to mobilize civic support through local education funds. They have built public will for policies and the resources necessary for equitable educational opportunities and have held political leaders and school officials at all levels accountable for ensuring equal opportunity and outcomes for all public school children. And they have achieved dramatic improvements in outcomes for youths.

The National Commission on Civic Investment in Education, which we had the privilege of co-chairing, was formed by Public Education Network (PEN) to spark similar efforts throughout the country and intensify the nation's civic investment in education. We were charged with making the case for

renewed civic investment in education, highlighting the work of the thousands of organizations that are currently building and channeling civic investment, and developing standards that will allow these organizations to hold themselves accountable to their communities.

The Commission's report, issued in May 2011, is a clarion call (National Commission on Civic Investment in Public Education 2011). Our work convinced us that the need for civic investment is more urgent than ever. But it also filled us with hope: we are confident that Americans can summon the political and civic will to make equal educational opportunity not just an ideal, but a reality.

## THE CHALLENGES

Throughout our history, Americans have maintained a strong belief in schools as “engines of opportunity,” as Horace Mann put it. In contrast to other, closed societies, Americans have clung to the faith that children, through education and effort, can advance as far as they can aspire to go.

To be sure, the reality has failed to live up to this ideal. Most corrosively, the effects of segregation and its legacy denied educational opportunities to millions of African Americans – and gaps in opportunities and outcomes between White and more-advantaged students, on the one hand, and low-income students and students of color, on the other, have been persistent.

Nevertheless, there is a growing consensus that these gaps are unacceptable and that all children, regardless of background, deserve a high-quality education. The adoption by forty-five states and the District of Columbia of standards aimed at college and career readiness for all students is evidence of that consensus.

However, the nation faces two serious challenges in reaching that ideal. The first is internal: the student population is growing and changing. Currently, more than fifty million children attend U.S. public elementary and secondary schools, the highest total in history. And this total includes record numbers of children with significant needs, those whom the education system has historically ill served. One in five children under age eighteen was in poverty in 2009, the highest proportion in more than a decade. The number of students who speak a language other than English at home has tripled over the past three decades, to nearly 11 million, and the number of students with disabilities has doubled over that period, to 6.6 million. All of these children – those in poverty, those who speak other languages, and those with disabilities – need support and resources, particularly because the U.S., unlike other industrialized nations, provides relatively few supports to individuals in need.

The student population is also growing more diverse racially and ethnically. Diversity is enormously beneficial, but it poses challenges for schools. Many teachers and administrators are ill equipped to deal effectively with students from different backgrounds.

At the same time that schools face the challenge of the changing student population, they also face a challenge coming at them from society. Simply put, schools are under increasing pressure to educate all students to a higher level than ever before. The changing global labor market demands that students have a high level of knowledge and skills, and an increasingly complex society requires voters and citizens who can comprehend difficult issues, from climate change to HIV/AIDS to the recent financial collapse. The goal of college and career readiness for all students is a worthy one. But it is one that few education systems, including that of the United States, have ever reached.

Thus schools are now in a situation where they must perform better than they ever have, with a student population increasingly made up of children whom schools have served inadequately in the past. As one of us (Linda Darling-Hammond 2010) put it in a recent book, this is a “Catch-22” situation, in which schools have under-invested in students who need to succeed more than ever. Schools cannot resolve this on their own. They need the active support of community members who can muster the political will to provide schools with the resources to succeed.

## CIVIC INVESTMENT

Despite rhetoric about “failing schools,” there is a strong wellspring of support for public schools that can serve as a foundation for a renewed civic investment. Public opinion surveys consistently show that Americans strongly support public education, even if they are not fully satisfied with the current results.

With good reason. Many Americans, though not all, look fondly on public schools as the places that gave them and their parents and grandparents a start in the world. And most parents are pleased with the public schools their children attend. Furthermore, the public schools are, or should be, the *public’s* schools – the places where community values are taught to the next generation.

In true American fashion, community members have formed organizations to channel their support for public schools, as they do in many other realms. A report prepared for our commission by the Urban Institute identified more than 19,000 organizations devoted to supporting public education (education support organizations, or ESOs) that collectively spent \$4.3 billion for schools in 2007 (de Leon et al. 2010). Most of these organizations are quite small, but the

report identified 2,147 ESOs classified as public education funds (PEFs) – twice the number from a decade before – that provided \$1.2 billion in funds to support public schools in 2007; more than 20 million children are in schools served by PEFs.<sup>1</sup> These PEFs include seventy-seven members of PEN, referred to as *local education funds* (LEFs), that channel resources to schools and augment public engagement, and another more than 1,000 that belong to the National School Foundation Association, which typically generate private dollars to augment school funds.

LEFs and other PEFs can be prime vehicles for civic investment in public education. They have a substantial track record in bringing to bear community resources and support to improve outcomes for young people. For example:

- In Bridgeport, Connecticut, one of the nation’s poorest cities, the Bridgeport Public Education Fund (BPEF) annually engages more than 250 volunteers to support public school improvement. Among other things, the Fund sponsors a “First Day” reading initiative, in which volunteers hand out books to incoming first-graders to help them start personal libraries. BPEF also sponsors the Mentoring for Academic Achievement and College Success program, which pairs high school students with mentors from local colleges and universities to reduce dropout rates and encourage the transition to college. Since its inception in 1988,

MAACS has mentored more than 3,800 students and employed more than 800 college students.<sup>2</sup>

- In Mobile, Alabama, the Mobile Area Education Foundation (MAEF) designed and managed the “Yes We Can” initiative to build an informed coalition of citizens who would demand higher standards for and greater accountability from the public schools. Through that process, the community developed a “Yes We Can Community Agreement,” which was translated into the district’s plan, known as “Passport to Success.”<sup>3</sup>

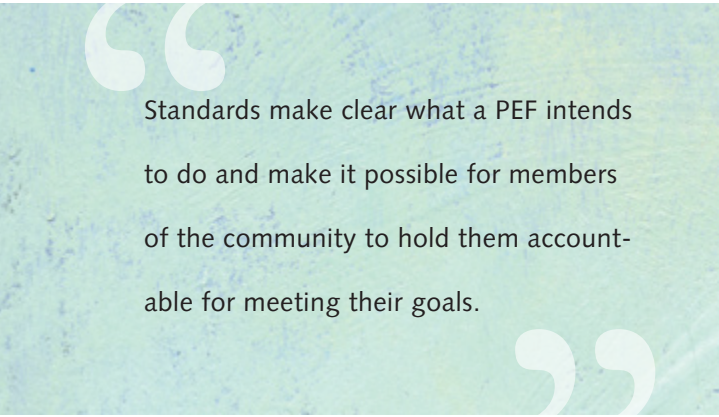
Research shows that efforts like these to mobilize community resources on behalf of public schools can improve educational opportunities and outcomes. The good news is that efforts like these are proliferating throughout the country. For example, community members and educators have created more than 5,000 charter schools to develop innovative programs to support students (Campbell 2010). However, these efforts are limited and do not always address the students with the greatest needs. The goal for civic investment must be to improve opportunities and outcomes for *all* students,

In true American fashion, community members have formed organizations to channel their support for public schools, as they do in many other realms.

1 The Urban Institute report defines ESOs as tax-exempt nonprofits that are set up to support public education, and PEFs as those ESOs that primarily assist schools and districts. LEFs are those PEFs that are members of Public Education Network. See the sidebar on nomenclature in Wendy Puriefoy’s article in this issue of *VUE* for a more detailed definition of ESOs, PEFs, and LEFs.

2 For more about BPEF, see the sidebar by Margaret Hiller in Erwin de Leon’s article in this issue of *VUE*.

3 For more on MAEF, see Akers 2005.



Standards make clear what a PEF intends to do and make it possible for members of the community to hold them accountable for meeting their goals.

especially students who have traditionally been ill served by public schools.

In many communities, PEFs are the main vehicles for civic investment. They offer ways for community members to channel their resources and energy in ways that support schools, and they represent communities; their boards are often composed of community leaders.

In addition to providing direct support for schools, PEFs also serve as advocates. They help build public will for change and hold school boards and districts accountable for improvement. Simply providing funds is not enough; reform is often necessary to ensure that funds are spent effectively.

## ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

PEFs can only function effectively, however, if they meet high standards for efficiency, effectiveness, and ethics. Just as they hold public agencies accountable, so they must be accountable to the community. The standards by which they operate must be clear, and their practices and results must be fully transparent.

Independent Sector, the nation's pre-eminent nonpartisan voice on behalf of the nonprofit sector as a force for building private initiative

for the common good, set standards for nonprofit organizations. As that organization put the case for creating standards:

Public trust is the most important asset of the nonprofit and philanthropic community. The rights and responsibilities that the independent sector enjoys are a result of the trust afforded to the organizations in this sector. Donors give to and volunteers get involved with charitable organizations because they trust them to carry out their missions, to be good stewards of their resources, and to act according to the highest ethical standards. Most fundamentally, voluntary and philanthropic organizations must abide by the highest ethical standards because it is the right thing to do. (Independent Sector 2002)

Standards make clear what a PEF intends to do and make it possible for members of the community to hold them accountable for meeting their goals. They also help those within the organizations understand their objectives. Just as standards for student performance highlight what schools need to do to improve performance, standards for PEFs can help those organizations improve. In 2009, the National Commission on Civic Investment in Education created a set of standards specifically for PEFs (which will also be adapted further for those PEFs that are PEN members, or LEFs), based on the standards set by Independent Sector. The standards are in five areas:

- **Mission and Programs.** The mission of PEFs is to provide external support to the schools and/or districts where they work. The mission of LEFs is to support whole-school and whole-system reform and engage the public. All of the organization's



programs derive from and support its mission, and resources are allocated for purposes consistent with the mission.

- **Evaluation and Transparency.** PEFs are committed to ensuring that they are serving the schools and communities with which they work as effectively as possible. Good practices to support this standard include financial reviews, program evaluations, financial disclosure, and clear external communications.
- **Responsible Stewardship.** Each organization has an active governing body that is responsible for setting its mission and strategic direction. The board is accountable for and actively exercises oversight of the finances, operations, policies, and programs of the organization. It represents a diverse array of experience, perspectives, and communities.
- **Legal Compliance.** Each organization's stewards comply with all applicable laws and regulations.

- **Personal and Professional Integrity.** Organizations promote a working environment that values respect, fairness, and integrity.

(See the sidebar on page 17 “Ensuring Public Trust” for a summarized version of these standards. For the full standards, see National Commission on Civic Investment in Education 2011.)

Of course, as with student standards, simply adopting standards is not enough. The standards must be implemented so that they become standard operating procedure for PEFs. To that end, the Commission recommends that the organizations conduct and report to their stakeholders the results of “ethics audits” and take advantage of seminars on best practices that PEN and NSFA plan to hold. In addition, PEFs should be as transparent as they can be about the extent to which they are meeting these standards.

## CIVIC INVESTMENT: BEYOND FINANCIAL RESOURCES

“Civic investment” includes – but goes beyond – providing funding for the community's public schools. There are three main avenues for community members to participate in civic investment that go beyond financial support, and PEFs can facilitate their involvement.

- **Taking an informed interest.** By taking time to find out about what public schools are doing and the challenges they face, community members build an understanding of the most pressing issues and make informed choices at the voting booth. A vast amount of information on schools is now available on school district and newspaper websites.
- **Putting in time.** By tutoring or mentoring, volunteering at a school, or lending expertise to help a school or district, community members make a tangible investment in public education. At the same time, such efforts help inform community members about schools' successes and challenges.
- **Getting political.** Some community members take an extra step and work for candidates and ballot measures that support education, or run for office themselves. Not everyone can take this step, but for those who do, the investment is substantial.

## GETTING PRIORITIES STRAIGHT

We are confident that Americans will affirm their commitment to a public education system that works for all young people. Both for reasons of justice and self-interest, Americans will pursue equal educational opportunity for all as a critical step for building a more secure future for current and future generations. The alternative is perfectly predictable: if Americans do not pull together, what is now a near-term crisis in our system of public education will have immense negative consequences for generations.

At this time of financial crisis in nearly all states, public officials must make some difficult choices. The road they choose will show clearly their priorities. Unfortunately, there is some evidence that the priorities in many states are misguided: a 2009 study found that spending on corrections was the fastest-growing segment of state budgets, outpacing spending on education, and that over the past

two decades spending on corrections has grown faster than any other state expenditure except Medicaid (Pew Center on the States 2009).

Setting policymakers' priorities straight will take public will. Policymakers must see that their constituents demand equity and excellence in education opportunities and outcomes. PEFs can lead the advocacy efforts necessary to make that demand clear to elected and appointed officials. But these organizations can only do so effectively if they have the strong support of the public they represent and who work as part of these organizations. Such support can only build if PEFs demonstrate their commitment to the principles Americans share. The standards our Commission is now promulgating can stand as a statement of this commitment. By announcing their adherence to the standards, and by living up to them year after year, PEFs can lead the way toward equity and excellence in American education.

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ENSURING PUBLIC TRUST: STANDARDS FOR LOCAL EDUCATION FUNDS AND PUBLIC EDUCATION FUNDS

These standards for local education funds and other public education funds are adapted and significantly condensed with permission from “Section B: The Standards” of *An Appeal to All Americans*, a report of the National Commission on Civic Investment in Education (Washington, DC: Public Education Network [PEN], 2011), convened by PEN in 2009. The full report and complete standards are available for download on the PEN website at: [www.publiceducation.org/pubs\\_20110526\\_report.asp](http://www.publiceducation.org/pubs_20110526_report.asp).

The standards are based on those developed for nonprofit organizations by Independent Sector.<sup>4</sup> While education support organizations have a wide diversity of purposes and circumstances, these standards are intended to apply to all such organizations, and Public Education Network and National School Foundation Association aim to gain active acceptance of them by their members.

Mission

Public education funds (PEFs) provide external support to the school(s) and/or district(s) with which they work. Those PEFs that are PEN local education funds (LEFs) support whole-school and system reform on a single or multi-district basis, and engage the public, in districts with a high proportion of children from low-income families.

Good Practices

Each PEF has a clearly stated mission that is approved by its board of directors and is responsive to its constituencies and the communities it serves.

Programs

All of the organization’s programs derive from and support its mission, and all who work for or on behalf of the organization understand and subscribe to its mission and purpose.

Good Practices

A PEF ensures that its programs are aligned with the mission of the organization, the needs of the community it serves, and the full set of standards to which the organization agrees. Programs are guided by priorities set by board and staff every three to five years through visioning and strategic planning. The organization seeks to produce measurable metrics of systemic impact, and the board regularly monitors the organization’s strategic plans. To the extent feasible, programs are carried forward in clearly defined partnerships or collaborations that clearly state goals and operating and financial responsibilities.

Allocation of Gifts

The organization’s gifts or grants to schools or districts are consistent with its mission. All decisions about use of resources raised by the organization are made by the organization’s board and staff and, to the extent feasible, in consultation with the organization’s own funders and representatives of the district, school, and other major constituencies.

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4 Adapted from Independent Sector 2004 and other reputable standard-bearers, recommended for all 501(c)(3) organizations.

### *Good Practices*

The organization has constructive relations with gift-seekers and beneficiaries, based on mutual respect, shared goals, fairness, and clear, timely communication. It seeks to understand and respect the organizational capacity, needs, and mission of organizations seeking support and respects their expertise in their fields. It selects and awards student scholarships through a transparent and fair process.

### **Evaluation and Transparency**

PEFs ensure that they serve the schools and communities with which they work as effectively as possible. All information about the organization fully and honestly reflects its policies and practices.

### *Good Practices*

#### EXTERNAL ORGANIZATION REVIEW

Each organization periodically conducts an external organization review to receive input from constituents and partners about the performance of the organization as to whether it effectively addresses the needs of the schools and communities with which it works.

#### PROGRAM EVALUATION

The organization regularly reviews program effectiveness; has mechanisms to incorporate lessons learned into future programs; is responsive to changes in its field of activity and to the needs of its constituencies; and ensures that its programs demonstrate alignment with the organizational mission, achieve results that are appropriate and measurable in relation to the funding supplied, and produce evidence of sustainable outcomes. For example, LEFs report annually on the impact of their work on student achievement (including college and career readiness metrics) and on the public's commitment to ensuring a quality public education is available to every child in the district(s).

#### FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

The board and staff of the PEF manage the organization's funds responsibly and prudently to ensure that resources spent are having the desired impact consistent with the mission of the organization. The board authorizes an external annual financial audit or review and ensures that all financial reports are accurate and complete.

#### INVESTMENTS

The board and staff of the organization invest in ways that not only increase the organization's assets, but also protect their donors' investments and preserve the endowment, taking economic factors into consideration.

#### FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE

Data about the organization such as audited financial statements are made available to the public, and all financial, organizational, and program reports are complete and accurate. Annual reports are distributed to all stakeholders. All solicitation materials truthfully represent the PEF's policies and practices and reflect the dignity of program beneficiaries. The organization respects the privacy of donors, expends funds consistent with donor intent, and is prepared to disclose to any potential donor the costs of fundraising in comparison to the amount of funds raised. The organization reports to the public information about significant contributions to the community using the charity's funds and programs and strongly evidences commitment to ethical behavior.



#### INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

Board members, staff, and school personnel use frequent and clear communications to attract and retain donors and establish public consciousness about its needs and values of the organization. The organization ensures the confidentiality of its donors, board, and staff in its website, email communications, and associated IT information.

#### GOVERNANCE AND ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICE DISCLOSURE

A PEF annually assesses and reports on the extent to which it has followed these ethical and effective governance and organizational practices.

### Responsible Stewardship

The organization has an active governing body that sets its mission and strategic direction. The board is accountable for and actively exercises oversight of the finances, operations, policies, and programs of the organization. It represents a diverse array of experience, perspectives, and communities; maintains independence from the school districts with which it interacts; and ensures that its perspectives on equity draw from, as well as contribute to, the communities they serve.

#### *Good Practices*

##### THE GOVERNING BODY

The governing body sets the mission, strategic direction, and policy for the organization, and ensures that programs align with them. It ensures that the organization acts with integrity, honesty, respect, fairness, and openness in all its dealings; that the organization has the capacity to carry out its programs effectively; and that resources are responsibly and prudently managed. It ensures that the board membership, staff, volunteers, and its own composition reflect the diversity in the community, and that the board understands the issues the community is trying to address and has the skills, experience, and knowledge to address them. It selects and evaluates the chief executive officer. It ensures that minutes of board meetings are detailed and broadly disseminated and that "executive sessions" are used only for a limited number of sensitive matters.

##### THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER (CEO)

The CEO carries out the policies, procedures, and strategic plan adopted by the governing body; is effective in the use of the organization's assets, human resources, and program delivery; helps the governing body set high organizational goals; and assures compliance with legal, financial, accounting, and ethical requirements.

### Legal Compliance

The organization complies with all laws, regulations, and applicable conventions, including IRS rules governing tax exempt status and state department of education guidelines for education foundations. Where applicable, the organization has a mission-justified Memo of Understanding with the school(s) or district(s) it serves.

### Personal and Professional Integrity

All staff, board members, and volunteers of the PEF act with honesty, integrity, fairness, and openness with each other and in all their dealings as representatives of the organization.



## TOWARD A TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY EDUCATION SYSTEM

**S. Paul Reville**

*S. Paul Reville is Secretary of Education for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.*

Two decades of standards-based reform have taught Americans one powerful and painful lesson: improving schools alone will not ensure that all students succeed. The record of the past twenty years shows some improvement, but even the most passionate advocate of standards-based reform will have to admit that at the current pace, even in the highest-performing states, it will take centuries before all students graduate prepared for success after high school.

Clearly, the job of improving learning and development for all young people, particularly those who come from challenging backgrounds, is too big for schools to tackle on their own. The narrow silo called school, which young people attend for six hours a day, 180 days a year, beginning at age six, simply does not provide all the support young people need. Indeed, school time accounts for less than 20 percent of a child's waking hours during their school years. In order to achieve our ambitious school reform goal of a successful education for each child, other partners need to be mobilized to extend learning opportunities and provide children with additional service and support. Health and human service providers and the community at large need to be at the center of these efforts – schools alone, in their current format, cannot achieve our educational goals without help. All agencies and organizations need to support young people in a concerted way so that they can become productive adults and active citizens.

School improvement is essential, of course. But the challenge needs to be reframed: cities and states must ensure that each child has a healthy platform on which to come to school and take advantage of an optimized learning environment.

The issue is one of equity. Middle-class and advantaged youths have always had access to high-quality health care, preschool, and learning and enrichment opportunities after school and in the summers. For students who lack those advantages, though, the need for a coordinated opportunity and support system is great.

Public education funds (PEFs) are well situated to lead the effort to develop and sustain a partnership between schools, civic agencies, and community organizations. First, they have a historic commitment to equity and see their mission as ensuring that all young people, particularly those who have been ill served by the education system, succeed.

Second, PEFs are already established as community organizations with close relationships with school systems. They have proven that they can bring to bear community resources in support of children's education and development. To take just one example, New Visions for Public Schools in New York City, through its New Century Schools initiative,

created 133 new high schools by linking schools with community partners who could provide additional resources and support to the schools and their students.

Third, PEFs have a well-established track record of mobilizing community support for education. Perhaps the best-known example is the Mobile Area Education Foundation, which led a massive community engagement effort that resulted in a community-wide strategic plan for the county school system (Akers 2005).

What would it take for PEFs to lead the creation of a school-community partnership that provides opportunities for all young people? The first step would be to organize a community-wide effort to craft an imaginative vision of education reform. This vision would outline a truly twenty-first-century system of education: one that delivers the services, supports, and additional learning opportunities that will enable all students to achieve proficiency and be prepared for success. For example, in Massachusetts, a new state law, the Achievement Gap Act of 2010, calls on chronically underperforming schools to institute planning processes that include community partners and pay serious attention to the health and human service needs of the students.

PEFs can help change the culture in communities to see the health, well-being, and education of each and every one of our students as vital to our national prosperity and part of our moral obligation to the next generation. It is hard for parents and citizens to envision an education system that is much broader, deeper, and more differentiated, one that meets every child and gives him or her what they need, one that is not bounded by the increasingly irrelevant parameters of time and space, one that harnesses technology while deepening learning relationships between children and a wide variety of masterful adults.

Once the vision is crafted, PEFs would then mobilize the community resources to achieve that vision. These resources would include civic agencies, health and social-service providers, community-based organizations, and businesses, as well as schools, who would work in concert to create a system that supports students effectively and efficiently. Once again, Massachusetts is attempting to lead the way by providing Race to the Top seed funding for several communities to establish wraparound service zones that are designed to enable health and human service providers to connect more effectively with schools. The goal is to ensure that all students are able to attend school regularly and supply attentive, motivated effort when they get to schools, as well as to provide students with learning opportunities outside of school that engage them and enrich their in-class experiences.

This is what it will take to make every child a winner. Schools can't do it alone. PEFs are the tried and true instruments for organizing widespread civic participation in the development and education of all of our children. They can lead and energize this movement, providing a sense of urgency and framework for the development of a truly twenty-first-century education system.



## A Story of Civic Investment in Public Education

SUSAN V. BERRESFORD

*“Patient philanthropy” in support of public education funds provides the means for community members to invest in their schools and has led to dramatic reforms and a renewed civic commitment to democratic values.*

Nearly thirty-five years ago, a woman in San Francisco named Gladys Thatcher had an idea. She knew that teachers had creative ideas to improve classroom teaching and learning, but to implement them they had to reach into their own pockets. So she created a small fund to provide grants to teachers with worthwhile ideas, believing that

others would soon see the value of this mechanism. She recruited more and more people, including civic leaders, to contribute to the fund and, most importantly, she asked them to read teachers’ applications, so they could see the creativity and energy in the San Francisco schools. Word spread, and the number of teachers who submitted proposals for mini-grants grew so much that Gladys transformed her idea into the San Francisco Public Education Fund.

Across the country in Pennsylvania, David Bergholz had a similar idea. David led the Allegheny Conference,

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a business group in Pittsburgh. He knew that a strong education system was essential for a thriving democracy and a vibrant economy. Like Gladys, he knew that teachers had ideas for improving schools, so he also created a fund to provide grants for innovative instructional projects. And just as the Public Education Fund of San Francisco had done, the Allegheny Conference Education Fund attracted contributions for school improvement and strengthened the ties between civic leaders and the public schools.

At around the same time, I was working at the Ford Foundation and looking for ways to restore positive connections between communities and schools. We saw that in too many places civic leaders had lost confidence in public schools and that this disconnect put the schools at risk for civic underinvestment. Ford had always seen good public schools as central to a diverse democracy and as crucial components of healthy communities. Independent school foundations like the ones created by Bergholz and Thatcher represented a concept we found appealing. Although we did not know exactly what we could accomplish, we wanted to support the innovation and its leaders. So we began giving money to strengthen several new funds like these that could serve as examples for the rest of the country.

These proved enormously successful, so Ford and the funds' leaders began to think about ways to speed replication in more and more states and cities. To do so, we created a national organization that would nurture the development of local education funds – in 1983, the nationally focused Public Education Fund was born. David Bergholz agreed to direct it for what we expected would be a five-year life span, during which time we hoped for maybe twenty or more new organizations to emerge. Bergholz skillfully

offered matching grants, tough love, and technical assistance to local innovators in and around the schools, and all sought to have self-sufficient organizations so his national organization could go out of business by year five.

How wrong our expectations were! The local funds (local education funds, or LEFs) did grow throughout the country and did gain financial independence, but they insisted that they still needed a strong national organization to help them work out problems, give advice, exchange best practices, and begin to forge a shared voice in educational reform. And so the national organization transformed itself into Public Education Network (PEN), led brilliantly by Wendy Puriefoy. PEN flourished, as did its member LEFs, a large number of other independent school foundations (public education funds, or PEFs), and, more broadly, other nonprofit organizations that support public education in many ways (education support organizations, or ESOs).<sup>1</sup>

How many ESOs are there? When the National Commission on Civic Investment in Education (of which I was a member) asked the Urban Institute to investigate, they found 19,000! And that was in 2007, the most recent year for which data were available. In that year, these organizations collectively spent \$4.3 billion on activities to support public education and worked with schools serving 20 million children (de Leon et al. 2010). Only a small minority of these organizations

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1 The Urban Institute report *Who Helps Public Schools?* (de Leon et al. 2010), defines ESOs as tax-exempt nonprofits that are set up to support public education; PEFs as those ESOs that primarily assist schools and districts; and LEFs as those PEFs that are members of PEN. See the sidebar on nomenclature in Wendy Puriefoy's article in this issue of *VUE* for a more detailed definition of ESOs, PEFs, LEFs, and other terms.

were PEFs, but they all focused on local school improvement and began to explore working together around such matters as best practices, relations with school systems, and fundraising techniques. It was suddenly clear that the PEFs represented a huge force for school improvement across the nation, as yet not fully realized. Their capacity derived from their local footing, national linkage, and the support of parents, teachers, and civic leaders.

To realize their national and local potential, the local funds needed to be clearer and more vocal about their role in school reform and how they were accountable to their communities. Being publicly accountable for operations and results would make them more influential in the complex environment around schools that our democracy has produced – and if this accountability and power were put to use to express the shared vision of parents, educators, and civic leaders, the local funds would reinforce confidence in our democratic system. So they needed to base their accountability on a set of standards that established high performance goals and a commitment to report to the public on progress. The National Commission on Civic Investment, a PEN-inspired coalition of local fund managers, scholars, educators, and policy leaders, came together to create these standards, and having done its work is now engaged in publicizing them and helping the local funds get started on broad implementation. The standards will guide the PEFs' work for years to come.

Why is this still-unfolding story significant? Because it holds several ideas for consideration by the nonprofit community, by people concerned with educational reform, and by philanthropists. The evolution of the PEFs and their work provides real-time examples of self-regulation in the sector, opportunities for those interested in

educational improvement to make both financial and civic investments in their communities, and the role of “patient” philanthropic money.

## SELF-REGULATION

Let's start with the self-regulation aspect.

Private, nonprofit organizations play crucial roles in American society. As Tocqueville noted nearly two centuries ago, from its earliest days the United States relied on community-based organizations to engage its people in public life and to undertake some public responsibilities. As a result, nonprofit organizations today do everything from providing health care to protecting the environment to supporting public schools – and much in between. In recognition of the critical role such organizations play in public life, the federal government exempts them from taxation.

But for the most part, oversight of the sector has been relaxed, probably because the overwhelming majority of nonprofit organizations provide good service. However, we all know of instances in which some organizations, or individuals within them, behaved unethically or illegally. We all also see that the bad actions of a few can damage the entire sector's reputation. So there is growing recognition that we need better mechanisms for oversight and accountability.

In 2004, following some well-publicized cases of abuse by nonprofits and donors, the U.S. Senate Finance Committee asked leaders of the nonprofit sector to develop principles for good governance and ethical practice. While new laws might be necessary to guard against some abuses, policymakers encouraged the sector to govern itself and abide by mutually agreed-upon principles. The national organization, the Independent Sector, created the Panel

on the Nonprofit Sector (on which I served) in the wake of the Senate committee’s request. As the panel put it:

The best bulwark against misconduct will always be a well-informed vigilance by members of the nonprofit community themselves, including a set of principles they could adopt, promote sectorwide, and improve over time. These principles should be clear enough to be practical and readily implemented in a wide variety of organizations, but flexible enough to allow each organization’s governing board and management to adapt them to the dictates of that organization’s scope and mission. Widespread use of such principles would enable organizations to improve their operations by learning from each other. Critically, it would also provide a common yardstick by which members of the public can evaluate how to direct their support. (Panel on the Nonprofit Sector 2007, p. 3)

When the National Commission on Civic Investment in Public Education set out to frame its standards for 19,000 ESOs, the principles the panel developed formed the basis of their proposals. The new standards for local education funds are grouped into five areas – *Mission and Programs, Evaluation and Transparency, Responsible Stewardship, Legal Compliance, Personal and Professional Integrity* – each of which has clear and detailed goals (National Commission on Civic Investment in Education 2011).<sup>2</sup>

The Panel on the Nonprofit Sector spurred this process, with the result that a group of organizations voluntarily came together to raise the performance bar and encourage the

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2 See the sidebar “Ensuring Public Trust” in the article by Richard Riley and Linda Darling-Hammond in this issue of *VUE* for a summarized version of the standards.

best practices in public accountability. Of course, promulgating standards is one thing. We will now see how well the PEFs proceed, with the help of PEN and the National School Foundation Association,<sup>3</sup> to implement and use them. But the first steps at self-regulation have been taken and they appear quite promising.

CIVIC INVESTMENT AND DEMOCRACY

Now let us turn to the broad topic of educational reform in our democratic system. The growth of PEFs has demonstrated that the original concept that generated them – the innovation of Gladys Thatcher and David Bergholz – was absolutely correct. These organizations have proved themselves as important vehicles for civic investment in public education.

At one level, this has meant “investment” in the conventional, financial

“These PEFs represented a huge force for school improvement across the nation, as yet not fully realized. Their capacity derived from their local footing, national linkage, and the support of parents, teachers, and civic leaders.”

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3 The National School Foundation Association is a national association with over 1,000 PEFs as members. For more information, see the sidebar by Jim Collogan in Erwin de Leon’s article in this issue of *VUE*.

sense; PEFs have enabled individuals to pool their financial contributions into investments in the public schools. Just as mutual funds enable individual investors to contribute to the capitalization of a wide range of firms, PEFs have allowed citizens to make relatively modest contributions that collectively add up to major boosts of support for schools and teachers.

But PEFs have also contributed to civic investment in a broader sense. For one thing, they have enabled community leaders to take an active role in public education through a new mechanism that is independent of but deeply connected to the school system. Just as Thatcher and Bergholz found when they asked leading citizens to evaluate proposals from teachers, PEFs across the nation helped civic leaders see inside schools. They, in turn, discovered that schools are filled with creative and hardworking teachers and school leaders who are making a real difference in the lives of children. This involvement has strengthened the PEFs because PEFs' governing boards include civic leaders who insist that the PEFs reflect community values and priorities.

Community leaders, through PEFs, also lend their expertise to support schools. And these efforts are leading to real improvements. The efforts of a number of PEN's LEFs provide examples. For example, the Boston Plan for Excellence has been a close partner of the Boston Public Schools, working with the school district to develop a number of supports, such as a residency program, akin to medical residencies, for prospective teachers that has been replicated in several other cities, something the district could not have developed on its own. Similarly, the Public Education Fund of Chattanooga, Tennessee, has provided expertise in data collection and analysis that strengthens that district's ability to make data-informed decisions and improve teaching and learning. New

Visions for Public Schools in New York City created 133 new high schools and now works as a support organization for seventy-six schools, which have a higher graduation rate than other city schools and are narrowing achievement gaps. The Mobile Area Education Foundation led a campaign to engage community members in a community-wide visioning for the school system. This effort led to the first tax increase for schools in more than four decades (Akers 2005). The school district could not have done this on its own.

In these and other ways, PEFs have been exceptionally important investments in democratic participation and community civic engagement.

## PATIENT PHILANTHROPY

Finally, we should consider the role of patient philanthropy in this story of self-regulation and civic investment in education. The decision to invest in PEFs was not what you commonly see in foundation decision making. Often, philanthropies require a clear theory of action, where a set of steps is expected to lead to a measureable outcome. Some find it hard to consider the creation of *institutions*, especially where the organization's goal is civic and community engagement, rather than a clear set of deliverables or explicit outcomes.

But Ford wasn't stymied by these concerns. Its values and history connected with the idea that democratic participation and decision making, fortified by performance accountability, are essential if public education is to survive. PEFs had strengthened democracy and education by providing an avenue for citizens to get involved in their local schools and resources for them via a new set of independent organizations.

PEFs' efforts have strengthened the capacity of school systems and made possible dramatic reforms that have en-

riched the lives of many children. The local funds and their donors, including the Ford Foundation, did not start with a program that they wanted to apply in the schools; rather, they worked patiently and closely with school system innovators to see what the needs were and developed the necessary knowledge and skills to provide needed assistance. Since school systems often suffer from rapid turnover in leadership, PEFs have also fostered institutional stability. They took ideas and stayed with them, even as the winds of change buffeted the school systems.

But the advances PEFs can claim don't come on a schedule, and they don't come as a result of a tight business plan. They require patience, donor flexibility, and a belief in the core function that takes time to gain traction. Such funding isn't for every donor, especially those who demand near-term, dramatic results. This is a role for patient money and confidence in the creative abilities and dedication of leaders outside the donor institution. I hope the example of this work underscores the need for some number of long-term and non-directive donors committed to building organizations and networks like the more than 2,000 PEFs, including PEN's 77 LEFs, that now reach across America. This can be a very satisfying and important form of philanthropic giving.

## TOWARD DEEPER CIVIC INVESTMENT

This is a challenging time for public education. Budget reductions from Maine to California are leading to cuts in school programs, teacher layoffs, and reductions in summer school and after-school programs. At the same time, the sluggish economy is making it difficult for community members to invest in schools as they might in more prosperous times. And a long history

of failed school reform effort has left a jaundiced public wary of investments in new strategies.

But the story of the success of PEFs ought to give us hope. Over the past twenty-five years, through good economic times and bad, these organizations have made it possible for community members to invest in their public schools and strengthen them. They have strengthened democracy by fostering citizen participation and organizational accountability. And they have made a difference in the lives of millions of children.

The need for civic investment is particularly acute now. Schools are under pressure to produce greater results than ever before, at a time when the population of students who have been historically underserved is growing. Only with the support and involvement of community members and innovators within the schools can schools reach this goal. Let us hope that more donors see and invest in their capacities – and also provide the patient philanthropy to build and strengthen such organizations and their abilities to self-regulate.

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CIVIC INVESTMENT AND PUBLIC EDUCATION FUNDS

Jim Collogan

*Jim Collogan is executive director of the National School Foundation Association.*

Since 2001, the Fort Thomas Education Foundation in Fort Thomas, Kentucky, has provided \$366,000 in teacher grants. In 2011-2012 alone, the Foundation is providing the schools with \$28,000 for technology and supplies. These funds represent a significant boost for the district, which has five schools (one high school, one middle school, and three elementary schools), 2,600 students, and 184 teachers.

The Fort Thomas Education Foundation is fairly typical of the more than 1,000 public education foundations (PEFs) that are members of the National School Foundation Association (NSFA).<sup>4</sup> PEFs' partnering districts range from small rural districts to sprawling suburban schools to large urban districts. The PEFs raise between \$100,000 to \$250,000 per year, employ part-time staff, often shared with their partnering school system, and utilize on average more than 100 volunteers yearly in their fund-raising efforts. They are also fairly young; most began operating during the past ten to fifteen years.

For the PEFs that are part of the NSFA, the work of the National Commission on Civic Investment in Education,<sup>5</sup> convened by Public Education Network (PEN) and on which I served, is extremely valuable. Because these organizations are relatively new with small staffs, they have spent most of their time getting up and running and raising funds. They have had little time to ensure that organizational guidelines are in place. Having standards for their operations and resources to help them implement those standards will help ensure that they remain strong and vital in their communities.

The standards will also help ward against malfeasance. Unfortunately, there have been instances of embezzlement in PEFs; in two cases, in Nebraska and Utah, as much as \$1 million in donated funds were lost. PEFs will benefit from checks and balances.

PEFs also can learn a lot from the experiences of local education funds (LEFs, or PEFs that are members of PEN) that were expressed in the Commission's deliberations. In

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4 See the sidebar on nomenclature in Richard Riley and Linda Darling-Hammond's article in this issue of *VUE* for definitions of PEFs, LEFs, and other terms.  
5 See Wendy Puriefoy's and Richard Riley and Linda Darling-Hammond's articles in this issue of *VUE* for more information on the work of the Commission.

contrast to other PEFs, LEFs tend to be larger and play more of a role in advocacy.<sup>6</sup> Smaller PEFs are not in a position to push for changes in school district policy. However, all PEFs can – and should – make sure that there is transparency and accountability for the funds they provide. They should expect, at the least, a report on how the funds are spent.

That does not mean that the funds should zipper the bag if their contributions are not used as intended. But the funds can make sure that districts disclose their use. After all, donors should know that what they contribute to school districts actually was used for its intended purposes. That is what private foundations and government agencies do all the time.

The standards of practice for PEFs should go a long way toward ensuring that funds are transparent, accountable, and operating in the interest of their donors and communities. PEFs are an important way for community members to provide a civic investment in their schools. All of us have an obligation to ensure that they operate effectively and ethically.

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<sup>6</sup> See de Leon et al. 2010 for more on the differences between LEFs and other PEFs.



## The Right Funds for Reinvestment

ERWIN DE LEON

*Current economic and social realities make it hard for public education to thrive and succeed, but organizations that support public education are helping many communities reinvest in our shared future.*

President John Adams, a former teacher, wrote in a letter to John Jebb in 1785:

The whole people must take upon themselves the education of the whole people and be willing to bear the expenses of it. There should not be a district of one mile square, without a school in it, not founded by a charitable individual, but maintained at the public expense of the people themselves. (Adams 1856)

Sadly, we have not collectively taken on the responsibility of educating all our children. There is a lack of political will to compel people to pay enough taxes to support public schools (Kober 2007). Public education has therefore failed to meet its mission of advancing the common good.

Nonetheless, communities can still band together and support public schools and school districts. Kober (2007) reminds us that in the 1830s, “little by little, public schools took hold in communities, often because the local people, rather than politicians, demanded them.” It is contingent upon communities now, as it was then, to ensure and sustain public education

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for all its members. Public schools will continue to flounder unless we all pitch in. In this article, I describe the growing number of local nonprofit organizations that are mobilizing their communities to do just that.

**CHRONIC FUNDING SHORTAGES**

These are trying times for public schools. As many Americans remain unemployed or underemployed and most of us live in constant anxiety about our financial future, state and local coffers remain bare. Programs and services have been cut across the board in most municipalities, and public education has not been spared.

In order to succeed, American students need a solid educational foundation from our schools. The knowledge-based U.S. economy relies more and more on highly skilled and educated workers. Among the fastest-growing occupations listed by the Bureau of Labor statistics are bio-medical engineers, network systems and data communication analysts, home health aides, financial examiners, and medical scientists.<sup>1</sup>

Public schools can give poor and minority children a leg up, but the system can also set them further back. Public schools, especially those in urban areas that have more than their fair share of poor and minority children, are ill-equipped to meet their needs (Foote 2005). Funding cuts, increased accountability, and changing demographics are additional strains on these struggling schools.

A survey of school districts nationwide by the Center on Education Policy paints a bleak picture for schools. Districts anticipate continued funding shortages through the current

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1 Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Fastest-Growing Occupations," [www.bls.gov/emp/ep\\_table\\_103.htm](http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep_table_103.htm).

academic year, resulting in less resources and diminished capacity for a majority of public schools (Kober & Rentner 2011).

During the 2010-2011 school year, seven out of ten school districts experienced funding cuts; this academic year, eight out of ten expect funding decreases. Among those that anticipate shortfalls, six out of ten plan to cut teaching staff and five out of ten intend to let go of administrative or support staff while five out of ten expect to scale back, postpone, or altogether stop reform initiatives. Cuts in other areas are also projected by school districts. Sixty-four percent plan to reduce or eliminate purchases of instructional materials or technology and equipment. Close to half are considering reducing or eliminating professional development. Roughly forty percent anticipate having to eliminate extracurricular activities and student support services.<sup>2</sup>

These cuts will make it all the more challenging for strained public schools and in particular for low-performing ones trying to meet stringent accountability standards set by No Child Left Behind. Diane Ravitch (2011) points out that

it is almost always the work of an inspiring principal and a dedicated staff, whose efforts are enhanced by professional development, a strengthened curriculum, a culture of collaboration, greater access to resources, better supervision, reduced class size, extra instructional time, and other common sense changes

that truly make a difference – the very elements school districts will forego due to funding shortfalls.

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2 At the time of the survey, about 31 percent of these districts had not yet decided where to cut spending, so it is possible that since then districts have decided to make more cuts in these areas.

**A DISPROPORTIONATE  
EFFECT ON POOR AND  
MINORITY CHILDREN**

All this does not auger well for poor and minority children who populate urban public schools.

A UCLA study that examined the impact of the recession on public schools and working families lays out how budget cuts disproportionately impact high-poverty schools<sup>3</sup> and students. Schools have come to rely more and more on fundraising in order to supplement inadequate budgets, leaving students in poor communities further behind those in wealthier communities. Schools in more-affluent neighborhoods are able to raise the funds necessary to avoid cuts in staff and programs, while those in low-income neighborhoods are unable to do so. In California, for instance, high-poverty schools were four times as likely as low-poverty schools to experience teacher layoffs. These schools were also three times as likely to eliminate summer school (Rogers et al. 2010).

The latest figures show that for the 2008-2009 school year, approximately 22 percent of elementary students and 8 percent of secondary school students attended high-poverty public schools, up from the 20 percent of elementary students and 6 percent of secondary school students who did so the prior school year (NCES 2011).

While 54 percent of public school students nationwide were White in the 2008-2009 academic year, only 14 percent attended high-poverty schools. African American and Latino students, in contrast, were overrepresented in

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3 The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) defines high-poverty schools as those where more than 75 percent of students are eligible for the free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL) program. The percentage of eligible students is a proxy measure for the concentration of low-income students within a school.

high-poverty schools. African American children made up only 17 percent of students overall, yet 34 percent went to these schools. Latino children, 21 percent of students overall, were even more likely, at 45 percent, to be in high-poverty schools (NCES 2011).

In the 2008-2009 academic year, the distribution of students in high-poverty schools also varied by location. Twenty-nine percent of students go to school in urban areas and 58 percent of them attend high-poverty schools. In contrast, 35 percent of all students attended schools in suburban areas, but only 23 percent were in high-poverty schools. A lower proportion of students in rural areas attended high-poverty schools; of the 24 percent of all students in rural areas, only 11 percent attended high-poverty schools (NCES 2011).

**INCREASINGLY DIVERSE  
STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS  
AND RESEGREGATION**

The racial and ethnic diversity of America’s children has been steadily increasing. At the turn of the century, a majority of all public school children were White (61 percent) and a minority were African American (17 percent) and Latino (16 percent). A decade later, the percentage of White students decreased to 55 percent and African Americans to 15 percent, while Latino students increased to 22 percent (NCES 2011). It is projected that twelve years from now, more than half of all children will be of color and that by mid-century, four out of ten children will be Latino, up from two out of ten today. In contrast, four out of ten children will be White, down from five out of ten today (FIFCFS 2011).

American public schools, however, are resegregating. Four out of five Latino students and seven out of ten African American students are in



predominantly minority schools<sup>4</sup> (Children’s Defense Fund 2011). Latino and African American students are more likely to be concentrated in urban schools than suburban or rural ones, even though more children attend suburban and rural public schools than urban ones.

## CHILDREN OF IMMIGRANTS: A SPECIAL CONCERN

Children of immigrants<sup>5</sup> are of particular concern because they are the fastest-growing segment of the U.S. population. They account for nearly the entire growth in the country’s child population during the past two decades, and as of 2010, one in four children in the U.S. is part of an immigrant family (Fortuny, Hernandez & Chaudry 2010).

This considerable demographic shift will have major social, political, and economic implications for the U.S. In less than a decade from now, when baby boomers have reached the retirement ages of 65 and older, the current cohort of immigrant children will comprise a large proportion of new workers and voters who will bear the responsibility of supporting the aging boomers (Hernandez & Cervantes 2011).

It is crucial, then, to provide quality education for children of immigrants.

Since the nineteenth century, public schools have been integral to the social, political, and economic integration of immigrants. Through public schools, new Americans have been introduced to their native-born neighbors, have

learned how to be responsible citizens, and have gained the education necessary to be productive members of society (Kober 2007; Crosnoe & Turley 2011).

A functional and successful public education system can help secure economic and social parity for immigrant children and their families by giving students a solid foundation for higher education and subsequent gainful employment. This in turn can promote intergenerational mobility for immigrant groups.

Poorly functioning and dysfunctional public schools can widen existing economic and social gaps between racial and ethnic groups and between haves and have-nots by denying disadvantaged students the educational foundation they require to progress.

Educating immigrant children, however, is and will be daunting for public schools due to the schools’ diminished capacities and increased burdens of accountability coupled with the linguistic and cultural challenges unique to immigrant students.

English proficiency is a significant barrier faced by children of immigrants. Two out of five immigrant children are English language learners and three out of four live in households where no one older than the age of thirteen speaks English proficiently (Hernandez & Cervantes 2011).

In addition, many immigrants have limited financial resources. Children in immigrant families make up close to one-third of the nation’s poor children and a similar proportion of the nation’s low-income children.<sup>6</sup> Five out of ten immigrant children live in low-income families compared with four out of ten native-born children (Fortuny, Hernandez & Chaudry 2010).

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4 That is, public schools in which at least three-quarters of students are children of color.

5 Children of immigrants, children in immigrant families, or immigrant children are defined as those with at least one foreign-born parent. The children may have been born abroad (first generation immigrants) or in the United States (second generation).

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6 Poor children belong to families whose income falls below the poverty level; low-income children belong to families whose income is below twice the federal level.

Through community organizations, individuals are able to address government and influence views on public expenditures, community roles, and parental responsibility for children.

### **PUBLIC EDUCATION FUNDS: A WAY FORWARD**

The support needed by our public schools has long been led by dedicated and passionate individuals and the organizations they establish. The Center on Nonprofits and Philanthropy's study of public education support organizations, commissioned by Public Education Network (PEN) for the benefit of PEN's National Commission on Civic Investment in Education, put the spotlight on the more than 19,000 nonprofit organizations devoted to advancing public education.<sup>7</sup> These include booster clubs, PTAs, public education funds, scholarship funds, and others, which altogether spent roughly \$4.3 billion in 2007 to support public schools (de Leon et al. 2010).

Nonprofit organizations are well poised to help facilitate civic engagement and reinvestment in public education. These organizations have

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7 The study was commissioned by Public Education Network (PEN) as a follow-up to a 2003 study of PEN member organizations and other education support organizations. This study included 2,358 public education funds, of which 77 are PEN member organizations. The study only included associations that filed IRS tax returns. The total number of groups that support public education is most likely higher than 19,000.

always been a vanguard in advancing the well-being of children and families. They provide much-needed social services, advocate for their constituents, and provide avenues for citizen participation (De Vita, Mosher-Williams & Stengel 2001).

Public education funds (PEFs), which serve more than 20 million children nationwide, are especially equipped to bolster public schools and school districts. PEFs are founded by parents, educators, and other concerned stakeholders to assist individual schools and school districts by raising money to support programs for teacher training and support, after-school programs, and school supplies. They rally the broader community behind public education.

The support provided to schools and school districts by PEFs is crucial now more than ever as districts anticipate the need to cut staffing, reduce professional development, eliminate extracurricular activities and student support services, and make do without instructional materials, technology, and equipment.

A handful of PEFs – the local education funds (LEFs) – serve mostly poor and minority students. LEFs are members of PEN, which is a national association of education funds and individuals working to advance public school reform in low-income communities across the country.

LEFs focus mainly on populations that need the most assistance. Two out of five are located in states where 20 percent or more of children live below the poverty line. LEFs are twice as likely as other types of public education funds to assist school districts with low-income and minority students.

Achieve!Minneapolis for example, administered a \$750,000 grant in 2004 to meet the needs of sixteen urban public schools for such basics as

computers, text books, library books, musical instruments, and desks.<sup>8</sup>

LEFs have the capacity and resources to provide assistance to schools and school districts that have a majority of disadvantaged students. They tend to be larger than other PEFs, with more financial and staff resources. In 2007, for instance, they averaged \$2.4 million in revenues and roughly \$2.6 million in expenses, whereas other PEFs average \$156,000 in revenues and \$437,000 in expenses. LEFs also have more staff than smaller PEFs, which tend to rely on volunteers.

LEFs are plugged into their communities and view accountability to their constituents as paramount. Their governing boards are more racially diverse than other PEFs and represent a broader range of community stakeholders including business leaders, parents, teachers, school administrators, foundations, and nonprofits.

Another unique aspect of LEFs is that they are more likely to engage and devote more of their resources than other PEFs in reform efforts. These initiatives entail educating the wider community about educational issues and frequently interacting with elected officials and policymakers at all levels of government.

The LEF El Dorado Education Foundation, for instance, advocated against school district mergers in the state of Arkansas that would have maintained White majorities. In response to a state mandate for small school districts to consolidate, predominantly White districts tried to merge with other White districts, even if they did not share geographical borders. The organization successfully stemmed the resegregation effort.<sup>9</sup>

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8 Public Education Network, [www.publiceducation.org/LEFaccomplishments.asp](http://www.publiceducation.org/LEFaccomplishments.asp).

9 Public Education Network, [www.publiceducation.org/LEFaccomplishments.asp](http://www.publiceducation.org/LEFaccomplishments.asp).

The education and enrollment of the broader community and elected officials in promoting education reform is vital for all our children and can be life-changing for poor and minority students and their families who look to public schools as the only way to move up economically and socially. Parents bank on schools to ensure a bright and secure future for their children.

Nonprofits like LEFs can lead the charge for changes in the educational system by harnessing their resources and providing a venue for “voices of dissent” that would “encourage government and nongovernmental structures to respond to the needs of the poor, people of color, women, and others who face significant odds in their pursuit of a quality of life” (Harmon 1996, p. 5).

Through community organizations, individuals are able to address government and influence views on public expenditures, community roles, and parental responsibility for children (Reid 2001). Communities will thereby have a hand in shaping policies that ultimately affect the well-being of their children.

## A POWERFUL WAY TO INVEST

Communities can’t do much to alter the volatility of the financial markets or force state and local governments to cough up school funding they do not have. Communities can pull together however, under the aegis of nonprofits like PEFs, to bolster burdened public schools and school districts. Individuals, businesses, and local groups can donate to nonprofits that fill in the gaps left by funding cuts. People can join community organizations in holding local, state, and federal elected officials and policymakers accountable and in pushing for sound and substantive educational reform.

Times are indeed bleak, but the future need not be.

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## COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION IN AN ENVIRONMENT OF GROWING DEMANDS AND SHRINKING RESOURCES

**Barbara Bartle**

*Barbara Bartle is president of the Lincoln [Nebraska] Community Foundation and former head of the Foundation for Lincoln Public Schools, a member of Public Education Network and the National School Foundation Association.*

As the world moves toward a more global marketplace, as technology becomes more advanced, and as nations around the world grapple with the democratic process, public education becomes the central and grounding concept that keeps us connected and focused on the work of ensuring that all children develop to their fullest potential.

Our education system must continue to adapt so America is not left behind. While accountability soars and resources dwindle, our schools are working hard to assure that our children can compete in a global economy. It is no longer realistic to expect that public schools can financially support all aspects of exceptional teaching and learning through tax dollars alone.

As important as public schools are to our quality of life, they are, now more than ever, vulnerable to the political and cultural realities of growing demands and shrinking resources. Education faces the continued challenge of financial realities that place stress on all levels of government. Public and private partnerships are needed to continue to provide excellence in K–12 education.

Schools cannot do this work alone. A public education fund (PEF) can constitute the critical difference as it brings alumni, parents, friends, corporations, and other foundations together in opportunities to privately support continuing excellence in education.<sup>10</sup>

Here in Nebraska, for example, the Foundation for Lincoln Public Schools has provided critical support for local schools. The foundation focuses on helping private donors find effective ways to use their money to improve education. Since it began, the foundation has granted more than \$24 million in programs, scholarships, and awards. The programs have ranged from grants to school libraries to the Fund-a-Need program, which gives small grants to teachers for things like class projects and field trips. More than

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<sup>10</sup> See the sidebar on nomenclature in Richard Riley and Linda Darling-Hammond's article in this issue of *VUE* for definitions of PEFs and other terms.



76,000 students have benefited from these private funds. The foundation has also given significant funding to Lincoln's Community Learning Centers, which offer safe, supervised before- and after-school programs, weekend and summer enrichment programs, and other supports for citizens of all ages, using the local school as the service hub.

Fifty years ago, it was cutting-edge thinking to raise private money for a tax-supported institution of higher learning. Today's cutting-edge thinking calls for private support of K–12 education. But this cannot be done in isolation. Strength will come when these organizations focus on success together. That is the power of Public Education Network (PEN) and the National Schools Foundation Association (NSFA).<sup>11</sup>

In order to have credibility, PEFs must demonstrate that they meet clear, high standards. These organizations must not only support all of the children in our schools but also, through accountability and transparency, ensure the public's trust and will to support public education. By setting a priority to adhere to a measurement based on the standards for nonprofit organizations developed by Independent Sector, PEFs will affirm a commitment to serve their critical mission and lead the way toward equity and excellence for all of the children in our schools.

This is hard work. But our effort to meet the needs for our children and youth has never been more important. These are difficult economic times, but our students are depending on us. Every year, children keep growing, learning, graduating, and moving on. They will not wait for us to take a break. This is the best investment we'll ever make.

Note: For more information on the Foundation for Lincoln Public Schools, see [www.foundationforlps.org](http://www.foundationforlps.org).

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<sup>11</sup> Both PEN and NSFA are national membership organizations with PEFs as members. PEN's members are referred to as local education funds (LEFs).



## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN BRIDGEPORT

**Margaret Hiller**

*Margaret Hiller is executive director of the Bridgeport [Connecticut] Public Education Fund, a member of the Public Education Network.*

The Bridgeport Public Education Fund, Inc., (BPEF) established in 1983, has grown in stature and credibility throughout the greater Bridgeport area through its support of good educational practices, ability to address critical issues in the school system, and ability to engage the community in thoughtful discussions of local and national educational issues. Although the work and focus of BPEF have evolved over the past twenty-eight years, the mission has remained unchanged: “to develop programs and mobilize the community for quality public education in Bridgeport.”

In the fall of 2010, BPEF produced a strategic plan that will be our roadmap for the next five years. We have focused our work on college readiness and success, community engagement, and teacher recognition based on input we gathered from the community using tools like public community conversations, student-led forums, and a survey.

### Community Conversations

An understanding of the many issues that surround public education in urban areas, where the majority of students in the schools are living in poverty and have limited resources to achieve a first-class education, is key to building a groundswell of support from the business/corporate community and from our surrounding neighbors in more affluent communities. Partnering with the school district, United Way, and other non-profit partners, we sponsored a community conversation that attracted more than 350 people who wanted to provide input into the next strategic plan for the school district. Our process allowed their concerns, suggestions, and solutions to be incorporated into the new strategic plan.

BPEF has been working in the arena of public engagement for more than twenty years and has conducted conversations on many topics. We have developed an education issues guide to help inform conversations among community stakeholders on improvement in their neighborhood schools. BPEF’s guide is adapted from a moderator guide originally developed by Public Agenda, which is the definitive guide for outlining the role of the moderator and the recorder, setting the timeline, and most importantly, establishing the series of questions and probes that will serve as the discussion guide.

We have modified Public Agenda's original guide many times to suit our audience and the topic. Many conversations begin with a panel discussion or a short video that lays out the framework for the conversation that will follow. We made our own "starter video" in preparation for a series of twenty-five conversations in the early 2000s in Bridgeport that were part of an initiative to empower a wider range of stakeholders to lead education reform in the district through "school leadership teams." We used parents, principals, teachers, and the superintendent to inform the audience about the purpose and implementation mechanisms of the leadership teams. As executive director of BPEF, I served as narrator. This ten-minute starter video noticeably captured the attention of participants in the conversations. Participants loved seeing people they recognized who were supportive of their difficult task in forming the leadership teams.

**Student-Led Forums on the Achievement Gap**

By far the most interesting conversations we have conducted have taken place in schools with students as the moderators. In 2007, BPEF joined a cohort of twelve organizations participating in an initiative sponsored by the Kettering Foundation to discuss the academic achievement gap in communities across the nation.<sup>12</sup> BPEF chose to focus our work on students. The student-led forums empowered students to share their opinions and concerns about the achievement gap and to share ideas for improving conditions in their schools. What to the students was a local issue became a much bigger concern as they learned that this is a huge national issue and that Connecticut, which is one of the richest states in the country, lags far behind the rest of the U.S. However, they felt that the global impact was too big to tackle, and their work continued to focus locally. They did wonder about their legislators and the "head in the sand" syndrome that seemed to lead people to ignore the big issues.

What we are not able to assess or track is the impact of these conversations on students as they leave high school and enter the world of college or work. Are they more informed? Do they read articles with more knowledge and understanding or talk about the issue with friends, colleagues, and family?

**The Survey**

BPEF conducted a survey among a variety of people and organizations in the greater Bridgeport area – founders, contributors, private foundations, BPEF board members, community partners, and school district staff – to assess their familiarity with BPEF's current programs. Much to the surprise and delight of the committee, our community engagement work was highly rated and thought of as the best mechanism to get the

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<sup>12</sup> At the conclusion of the initiative, The Kettering Foundation released the report *Helping Students Succeed: Communities Confront the Achievement Gap*, available for download at [www.kettering.org/media\\_room/publications/Helping-Students-Succeed](http://www.kettering.org/media_room/publications/Helping-Students-Succeed).

“pulse of the people” who mattered and whose lives were impacted by the discussion topic. Feedback comments included “People trust BPEF and the conversation process” and “BPEF should market their expertise in moderator training and adapting the guide to specific topics.”

### **A Focus on Community Engagement**

Community engagement has become a strong focus area of the work of the BPEF. Our engagement work continues to focus on helping organizations discuss issues, prioritize solutions, and develop implementation plans. We are often asked to help other organizations develop consensus by adapting our moderator guide to their issues and training their people to be good moderators. We have trained moderators and worked with organizations throughout Fairfield County who appreciate our expertise and ability to help guide community conversations about issues such as early childhood, parent involvement, and violence in the schools.

Directing the work of the BPEF since 1984 has given me the opportunity to work with the entire Bridgeport community and to watch our community begin to thrive and work together. We live in Bridgeport, our daughter attended the public schools and graduated from Central High School, and my husband taught in Bridgeport. This is my community. Helping people understand issues regarding urban education, supporting best educational practices, meeting experts in the field of education through Public Education Network, of which BPEF is a member, and helping our students become successful college graduates has given me great satisfaction. I am proud of the accomplishments of BPEF, our many partnerships, and our dedication on behalf of the children in the great city of Bridgeport.

Note: For more information on the Bridgeport Public Education Fund, see [www.bpef.org](http://www.bpef.org).



## A Failure of Philanthropy: American Charity Shortchanges the Poor, and Public Policy is Partly to Blame

ROB REICH

*Public policy must change to ensure that philanthropic support of public education helps remedy existing inequities rather than reinforcing them.*

Note: This article is excerpted with permission from the *Stanford Social Innovation Review* from the article “A Failure of Philanthropy: American Charity Shortchanges the Poor, and Public Policy is Partly to Blame,” *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Winter 2005, pp. 24–33.

**T**he Woodside School Foundation in Woodside, California, is a fantastically successful local education foundation (LEF).<sup>1</sup> Since 1983, it has been raising money for the Woodside School District, which is made up of a single public elementary

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<sup>1</sup> Editor's note: The term *local education fund*, or LEF, in this article, in contrast to the other articles in this issue of *VUE*, does not refer only to members of the Public Education Network; rather, it is used synonymously with the broader term *public education fund* (PEF).

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school that enrolls fewer than 500 students. Between 1998 and 2003, the last year for which data are available, the foundation collected more than \$10 million, adding several thousand dollars per student per year to public funds for the school. Woodside Elementary uses that money for programs in music, art, physical education, and technology, says Superintendent Dr. Daniel A. Vinson. The school has won the top rating on California's Academic Performance Index (API) for the past six years. Less than ten miles away in East Palo Alto is the Ravenswood City School District. Ravenswood does not have its own school foundation, although it could use more funding. The district, which serves 4,500 students in grades K–8, regularly struggles to provide such basics as textbooks, classroom supplies, and building maintenance, says interim Superintendent Mariade la Cruz. Families are not in a position to help, since 94 percent of Ravenswood students currently qualify for free or reduced lunches, as compared to fewer than 10 percent in Woodside. (Median household income in East Palo Alto was \$45,000 in 2000, as compared to \$171,000 in Woodside.) Ravenswood schools are among the lowest performing in the Bay Area, with half of them earning the lowest rating on California's API.

It's not surprising that wealthy school districts like Woodside can raise substantially more money for their students than can poor school districts like Ravenswood. Across California, for example, LEFs in wealthy suburban school districts generate vastly more charitable dollars per pupil than do LEFs in poorer urban school districts [see original article for full data]. And who could fault wealthy parents and townspeople for wanting to do best by their children and local institutions? That their efforts may widen the gap between their own children and children growing up in more disad-

vantaged districts is an unfortunate, yet unintended, side effect of their generosity. What is surprising is that public policies governing philanthropy encourage and reward this gap-widening. Laws grant the Woodside School Foundation's status as a 501(c)(3), and laws allow donors to deduct their contributions to the foundation from their income. These deductions constitute a kind of federal subsidy for charitable giving – a subsidy that is greater for wealthier people than for poorer people.<sup>2</sup> The effect of these unequal subsidies is to increase inequalities between the rich and the poor, not only in education, but also in other domains of charitable giving.

If public policies governing philanthropy, such as tax subsidies, are indeed worsening social inequalities, then American philanthropy is failing. For isn't charity supposed to remedy inequalities by assisting the poor and disadvantaged?

## SHOULD WE CHANGE PUBLIC POLICY?

The philanthropic and nonprofit sector is often described as separate from the state – the “independent sector” or “third sector.” And yet the public policies designed to support it represent a wide-scale, costly governmental intervention. As things currently stand, this intervention does not do much to enhance equality through helping out the less fortunate. And in some circumstances – such as local education foundations, like the Woodside School Foundation, which inadvertently augment the disparities between wealthy and poor school districts – our public

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- 2 Tax deductions for charitable contributions are subsidized at the same rate at which a person would have been taxed, had he not made the donation. Since wealthier people are taxed at a higher rate than poorer people, their charitable contributions are also subsidized at a higher rate.

policies reward individuals for creating inequalities. The state is therefore implicated in these philanthropic harms, unjustifiably.

Public policy can do better, and sometimes quite simply. For example, to equalize the tax benefits of giving for more and less affluent Americans, Congress could allow all donors – itemizers and non-itemizers alike – a tax credit that is linked to the amount donated, rather than a tax deduction that is linked to the donor’s tax bracket. This fix would be of the greatest value to lower-income people, but would still provide a subsidy for all. Congress has at times debated this remedy, but it has never become law.

In order to channel charitable giving toward equality-enhancing organizations, Congress could give additional tax advantages for programs redressing poverty. In 2001, President Bush urged Congress to adopt such a measure – a targeted tax credit to individuals who make donations to organizations that spend 75 percent of their budget on direct services for the very poor. (Bush also suggested, unfortunately, taking money from the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program to offset the cost of the tax credit.) Alternatively, Congress could make subdivisions

within the 501(c)(3) category – poverty-redressing organizations in one subdivision, others in another – with smaller incentives for giving to the latter. Furthermore, organizations that tend to worsen inequalities might be removed from the 501(c)(3) category altogether. People could still make donations to them, but they would not receive any public subsidy.

In the end, public policy changes are limited only by our creativity. And so when we think about philanthropy, we must not limit ourselves to justifying the current arrangement. Instead, we must aim to identify what role the state should play in the creation and operation of the philanthropic and charitable sector. Though pursuing greater equality is not the only aim of social policy, it is certainly one of the central aspirations of social justice. If the massive tax subsidies given to philanthropy do not enhance equality, then either the political regulation of philanthropy will have to change, or the justifications for state-supported philanthropy will have to lie elsewhere. It is very possible that justifications do lie elsewhere, but we should then stop kidding ourselves that charity and philanthropy do much to help the poor.



## SMART EDUCATION SYSTEMS: COMMUNITY-CENTERED SCHOOL REFORM

**Warren Simmons**

*Warren Simmons is executive director of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform.*

Reality has often failed to live up to the ideal of equal educational opportunity. Most notably, the corrosive effects of segregation and its legacy denied education opportunities to millions of African Americans, and gaps in opportunities remain substantial between schools that serve advantaged students and those that serve students from less-advantaged families. The sustained effort at education reform over the past few decades shows clearly that Americans remain committed to the ideal. And concerted action by community members organized and dedicated to public education has time and again demonstrated that civic investment can pay large dividends.

– *An Appeal to All Americans*. A Report by the National Commission on Civic Investment in Public Education, May 26, 2011

The above quote from the 2011 report of the National Commission on Civic Investment in Public Education, convened by Public Education Network and on which I was privileged to serve, strongly resonates with the view of the Annenberg Institute. Over our years of work with districts and communities on educational improvement, we have seen that community-centered education reform can strengthen the effectiveness and sustainability of technical or research-based reforms by providing the political, social, and moral capital required to counter forces that often derail and delay essential changes in policy and practice. In addition, community-centered reform recognizes the need to adapt rather than replicate “best” practices so that they address local conditions and aspirations.

We envision a high-functioning district with a range of civic and community partners that provides a broad network of opportunities and supports to young people inside and outside of school. We call this vision a “smart education system.” The article in this issue of *VUE* by Susan Berresford and the Perspective sidebars by S. Paul Reville, Barbara Bartle, and Margaret Hiller attest to how public education funds (PEFs) have built a foundation for smart education systems by raising money from the business community, philanthropy, and private individuals to support school innovation and,

later on, larger systemic reforms such as the Annenberg Challenge.<sup>3</sup> In addition to raising additional funds, these efforts increased the strategic ties between education systems, businesses, community groups, and philanthropy and laid the groundwork for broader community engagement.

The emergence of the standards movement contributed another important element for the development of smart education systems by clarifying the salient outcomes education reform and community engagement should strive to achieve – that is, communities should act to ensure that their education systems, be they traditional districts, school networks, or charter management organizations, provide all students and schools the supports needed to meet high academic standards. In addition to this central aim, we believe that effective community-centered education reform should be guided by the following tenets:

- The specific needs of students, schools, and families are best understood and addressed when the local context is treated as a potential resource for development rather than solely as a neutral or negative circumstance.
- Building capacity for incremental or radical reform requires, but goes beyond, securing additional funding for schools or gaining support for new school/district policies and practices; it also entails revitalizing communities so that families and entire neighborhoods can offer the supports children and youth need to achieve the full range of positive outcomes (e.g., academic, health, emotional, social, spiritual).
- Broad-based coalitions of “communities” are formed not just to increase participation in the work of education reform, but also to engender a productive ecology for school reform. Thus, the inclusion of underrepresented groups becomes a primary objective and not a secondary or tertiary goal.
- Enhancing the capacity of “communities” to accomplish their work involves an examination of fundamental issues of power, race, class, and diversity that have traditionally undermined the efficacy of urban school reforms and weakened the development of broad-based coalitions needed to challenge the status quo.
- Researchers, practitioners, and advocates must acknowledge the multidisciplinary nature of schooling and explore the intersections of teaching and learning, community engagement, youth development, economic revival, and college readiness.
- Efforts to link education reform and reinvention to community engagement and development should be guided by research and evidence-based practices developed by researchers working in partnership with communities.

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3 The Annenberg Challenge was a half-billion-dollar gift by Walter H. Annenberg that became the largest public/private endeavor in U.S. history dedicated to improving public schools. Over five years, eighteen projects in thirty-five states funded 2,400 public schools that served more than 1.5 million students and 80,000 teachers. More than 1,600 businesses, foundations, colleges and universities, and individuals contributed \$600 million in private matching funds. In many cases, sites have secured additional funding or established successor organizations to continue the work.

These principles require a significant shift in thinking about urban school systems and their relationship to the settings in and around them. A community-centered approach to reform underscores the need for education systems to develop “community” within and among schools, and in relationship to the neighborhoods and cities they serve and rely on to support students’ learning and development. This approach represents a departure from strategies that treat families and neighborhoods narrowly as clients, or as “victims” who don’t know what’s good for them and thus should let the “experts” lead in their behalf. In contrast, community-centered education reform treats families and communities as a central partner in the development of what the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation’s Time, Learning, and After School Task Force (2007) called a New Day for Learning System (NDL). In such a system schools, families, and communities collaborate as equals to:

- expand the definition of student success to incorporate twenty-first-century competencies that emphasize the 4 C’s: creativity, communication, collaboration, and critical thinking;
- use research-based knowledge to design and integrate new learning supports; and
- provide educators with new opportunities for leadership and professional development.

To meet these aims in difficult economic times, urban school systems – which now range from traditional districts to organizations that operate portfolios of schools – need to function in concert with municipal agencies, cultural organizations, businesses, higher-education institutions, community-based organizations, and advocacy groups, not in isolation from or in opposition to this broad network of potential partners and resources.

To quote from Paul Reville’s sidebar in this issue,

Clearly, the job of improving learning and development for all young people, particularly those who come from challenging backgrounds, is too big for schools to tackle on their own. . . . Other partners need to be mobilized to extend learning opportunities and provide children with additional service and support. Health and human service providers and the community at large need to be at the center of these efforts. All agencies and organizations need to support young people in a concerted way.

In an era of declining funding for public institutions, smart education systems that link a school district with a web of supports provided by other city agencies, cultural and community organizations, businesses, and postsecondary institutions is essential to develop the high-quality learning opportunities that all students need in school, home, and community settings to acquire a twenty-first-century education. Rather than being an end in itself, this kind of cross-sector collaboration is a means to creating an education system that acts in concert with other community-based resources for learning and development to ensure that all young people have access to the services and supports they need to



meet the new common core standards, as well as the goals and aspirations families and communities set for children and youth.

State and districts can become part of a smart education system by emphasizing the need to:

- maintain multiple and substantial cross-sector partnerships that provide a broad range of supports to young people and their families;
- achieve a broad set of positive outcomes – including, but not limited to academic achievement – for students, families, and communities and gather evidence of progress;
- develop indicators, measures, and processes that foster shared accountability across partner organizations and groups;
- create a systematic approach for bringing the work to scale; and
- develop strategies for managing power differentials, for example by creating meaningful roles for all stakeholders and shifting partner relations away from the standard grassroots–grass tops conventions.

Out of necessity and with a spirit of innovation and collaboration, people in cities such as Boston, Cincinnati, Providence, and Nashville are moving much faster toward building smart education systems than partners that operate at the state and national level. Although the Twenty-First Century Schools and Community Schools initiatives recognize how schools must work with multiple partners to ensure broader success, these approaches stop short of developing platforms that redefine the work of larger school systems, and these initiatives don't fully address the systemic through-line that has to be developed at the state and federal levels to sustain effective school-centered collaboration and take it to scale. Simply saying "pre-K to 16" doesn't create a system that makes it happen without concerted effort across layers of institutions, organizations, and agencies that share responsibility for the learning and development of all of our nation's children and youth.

To quote once more the report by the National Commission on Civic Investment in Public Education:

Citizens must strengthen their commitment to public education and ensure that they provide a high-quality education for all young people. Women and men from all walks and stages of life must commit to making public schools effective, build the public will for policies and resources necessary for equitable educational opportunities, and hold political leaders and school officials at all levels accountable for ensuring equal opportunity and outcomes for all public school children.

## REFERENCE

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