



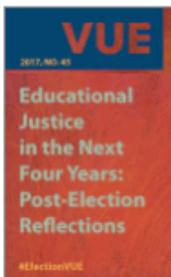
Home / Issues

View

Edit

Devel

Educational Justice in the Next Four Years: Post-Election Reflections



2017, NO.45

This special post-election, online-only issue of VUE features interviews with a wide range of thought leaders in the field of educational justice – including practitioners, policy and foundation leaders, youth and adult activists, and academic researchers – reflecting on what lies ahead in the aftermath of the 2016 election.

About this issue

Released just before the inauguration, this special online-only issue of VUE features interviews with key leaders in public education reflecting on what lies ahead for our work in educational justice in the aftermath of the 2016 election. Each interview offers a unique perspective, but a few common themes emerge: that now is a time for action at the state and local level, a time to think creatively about forming new coalitions and developing a new generation of leaders, and a time to ensure that schools serve as safe spaces for all students.



Post-Election Apprehension, Activism, and Educational Justice

by Keith C. Catone

"I call what we were experiencing after the election a moment of 'anxious apprehension,' which can also be a moment of activist birth that sets the stage for a new level of consciousness to be awakened."



District Leadership: A Time for Activism and Coalitions

by Deborah Jewell-Sherman

"After the election I wrote to all of my students – past and present – and said, 'We were born for a moment such as this. And we will do what is necessary to secure the future for all children.'"



In the Classroom: Pedagogy to Activate Student Voices

by José Luis Vilson

"We need to give students the ability to activate their own voice, to speak up, and create spaces for them to solve problems that we may not be able to see as adults."



Youth Activists: Be Proud of Who You Are, and Never Stop Fighting

by Licelot (Lee) Caraballo, Aidan Donahue, and Thaina Merlain

"You still have your voice. You still have people power. Continue to fight for what you believe in."



Education Policy Moving Forward: Power and Progress at the State Level

by Linda Darling-Hammond

"The onus now is on educators, community organizations, civil rights organizations, and others in the states to engage with state agencies to build new approaches to educational improvement."

The issue includes perspectives from youth activists, a classroom teacher, a former urban superintendent, a community organizer, university researchers, policy experts, and leaders supporting municipal government and educational philanthropy.

We hope that these voices provide hope, inspiration, and concrete strategies for advancing educational justice in the next four years.

Related resources

AISR VOICES

Several members of AISR's program staff offer their thoughts about moving forward after the 2016 election.

Op-Ed: A Time for Tested Leadership
by Michael Grady

AISR Dispatch: Inauguration Day Student Walk-Out
by Angela Romans

Maintain Momentum in the Fight for Public Education
by Rosann Tung



Foundations as Change Agents: Developing Leadership and Infrastructure

by Kent McGuire

"We're going to advance a narrative about what needs to change and see if we can grow a group of new leaders who will be courageous but also smart enough to push in that direction."



Education Activism: A Moment to Stand Up

by Keron Blair

"I think people see this as a call to really stand up, and say, 'Our schools will be safe places. Our schools will be sanctuaries. We will have good public schools in our communities, and we will fight for them.'"



Going Local: Priorities and Strategies for Municipal Leaders

by Audrey M. Hutchinson

"Municipal officials know that education is tied to quality of life and public safety; cities are better off when more people are well-educated."



A View from Academia: Creative Strategies for New Coalitions

by Kenneth Wong

"Charter schools and traditional public schools should not be avoiding one another, but instead I think we need to convene as soon as we can to explore common ground. We are all serving similar students, similar needs, and we are facing similar challenges."

Facing Race Conference a Source of Strength and Hope
by Alethea Frazier Raynor and Keith Catone

Supporting a New Generation to Build the World We Hoped to Build
by Warren Simmons

All materials © Brown University unless otherwise specified.

Usage & Permissions
Order Print Copies
Contact



Annenberg
Institute for
School Reform

AT BROWN UNIVERSITY

Post-Election Apprehension, Activism, and Educational Justice

by Keith C. Catone

Keith C. Catone is the associate director of Community Organizing & Engagement at AISR.

“I call what we were experiencing after the election a moment of ‘anxious apprehension,’ which can also be a moment of activist birth that sets the stage for a new level of consciousness to be awakened.”



On the morning of November 9, 2016, I felt numb, jaded, hazy, and unclear. I had stayed awake until past 2 a.m., waiting (hopelessly) for the electoral college projections to change. When I awoke, I wasn't sure what to do, how to react, or even what to feel. While on my way to work, I received a call from my wife who told me that she was having trouble breathing. She was experiencing a panic attack that we could only attribute to a visceral physical reaction to the election of Donald Trump – anxiety produced at the prospect of what his election might mean for Black and Brown communities, women, immigrant families, Muslims, LGBTQ people, those who are economically vulnerable, and anyone else who otherwise experiences the byproducts of a society whose structural inequalities result in oppressive living conditions.

Researchers who have examined how and why people become social activists or involved in social and political movements point to these moments of “moral shock,” when their own personal belief systems and sense of justice is dissonant with what they've witnessed happening around them in the world (Jasper 1997; Teske 1997). In my academic research on how people come to and then actively lead lives of activism, I've theorized that *purpose*, as derived from various forms of apprehension, is one of the foundational elements of an [activist pedagogy](#) (Catone 2016). I call what we were experiencing a moment of *anxious* apprehension, which can also be a moment of activist birth that sets the stage for a new level of consciousness to be awakened.

Luckily, my wife and I – along with several colleagues from AISR – had already planned to attend [Race Forward](#), a national racial justice conference, the following day. In this space,

surrounded by a beautiful multiracial mix of racial justice activists from across the country, we were able to immerse ourselves in a community that was collectively processing its anxieties, sadness, and fear, but also (re)discovering its strength, solidarity, and critical analysis in order to gain a deeper clarity and understanding of what to do. We spent the next three days honing our *critical* apprehension (think *aprender* in Spanish) in order to learn more deeply about how to fight for racial justice in the world around us, which in that moment seemed a perfect response to the election of Donald Trump.

Finally, we returned home, ready for action, motivated to seek ways in which we could channel a reinvigorated energy into local and national work to effect justice. Through our critical explorations at Race Forward, our anxieties had been transformed into anger. Community organizers sometimes talk about cultivating “cold anger,” which takes the hot reactions to injustices and cools them down to become useful tools to organize to improve communities (Rogers 1990). We now have an *angry* apprehension, that can simultaneously feel uneasy and clarifying, but that also motivates us to act.

At AISR we are committed to working to advance educational equity in partnership with all those most affected by public schools in urban America. With that in mind, we have invited key leaders representing a variety of stakeholders in public education to participate in interviews for this special post-election issue of VUE.¹ We’ve asked each of these leaders to think about, reflect upon, and then tell us what they see in terms of what lies ahead as we enter into a new period in American history after Donald Trump is inaugurated as the 45th President of the United States. The questions we posed sought out what each individual thinks our communities need to do to protect and advance the interests of educational equity and social justice. We wanted to know what they would have their constituencies think about and do, what they would hope for elected officials from federal to state to local levels to do with respect to public education, and what it is that they’re hopeful for, looking forward to, or see as sources of strength as we take up the challenging work of ensuring that every child in the United States has the opportunity to receive a high-quality education. We asked each contributor to respond to the following questions:

- Given the results of the election, what are the highest priority action steps emerging from your work, and what advice would you give to your various constituencies about actions they can take?
- What are the ramifications of down-ticket state and local election results?
- What makes you hopeful looking ahead?

As you read this special, online-only issue of VUE, I hope that you are motivated to act in the aftermath of this election and that the voices in this issue can serve as sources of inspiration and action. You will hear perspectives from [youth leaders](#) and a [classroom teacher](#); ideas from a [former urban superintendent](#) and a [community organizer](#); thinking from a [university researcher](#) and an [academic policy expert](#); and reflections from leaders supporting [municipal government](#) and [education philanthropy](#). While contributors offer their unique responses to our questions, common themes do emerge. Collectively, they help us understand that we must:

- Galvanize activism and motivate support for public education and racial justice;
- Focus attention on state and local education issues where there is potential to address issues of equity;

- Reach out to form new coalitions;
- Focus attention on nurturing young, local leaders – as well as student voice – to continue to press for equity; and
- Reinforce that schools should serve as safe spaces for anyone who feels at risk under the new administration.

The day after the election, I tweeted “Activists are born from moral shocks and sense of outrage. Well. Perhaps a bunch of activists were born last night?” Let’s hope that’s the case.

Footnotes

1 Interviews were conducted by VUE Associate Editor Sheryl Kaskowitz, via phone or in person, between November 17 and December 2, 2016.

References

Catone, K. C. 2016. *The Pedagogy of Teacher Activism: Portraits of Four Teachers for Justice*. New York: Peter Lang.

Jasper, J. M. 1997. *The Art of Moral Protest: Culture, Biography, and Creativity in Social Movements*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Rogers, M. B. 1990. *Cold Anger: A Story of Faith and Power Politics*. Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press.

Teske, N. 1997. *Political Activists in America: The Identity Construction Model of Political Participation*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

District Leadership: A Time for Activism and Coalitions

by Deborah Jewell-Sherman

Deborah Jewell-Sherman is a professor of practice at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and former superintendent of Richmond Public Schools in Virginia.

“After the election I wrote to all of my students – past and present – and said, ‘We were born for a moment such as this. And we will do what is necessary to secure the future for all children.’”



I don't know the degree to which I can be insightful, because this election was my worst nightmare, for reasons far and above political party ideology. I've lived through many elections and have voted since I was able, and I often had to withstand the opposition winning, whether it was a local, state, or national election. But I have never been frightened by the possibility of a candidate winning, as I was at the possibility of Trump becoming president. And now that he is president-elect, I have grave concerns about this nation's children and our future.

As a practitioner for more than three decades, I've lived through forward momentum with significant setbacks, but not complete derailment. I was still in high school or college during the Nixon years, and was a teacher during the Reagan years – those were periods of retrenchment, but they acted within the law. Reagan made significant changes to integration policy by seeking to dismantle busing and other efforts to provide a more integrated landscape for America's children and schools. But nothing like Trump.

So I'm concerned about what Supreme Court justices may enact in every regard, specifically in educational issues. Progressive states and locales will continue in their own efforts, but I am very, very concerned about southern states. Their rural populations, their students of color. I can't even imagine what the educational opportunity will be for those young people. You know, those hard-won gains can be wiped out for a generation.

BECOMING ACTIVISTS

So for me, it is time to mobilize in significant ways at all levels – local, state, and federal, forming new alliances. I have one former student, who is now a school principal. And the day after the election, she sent out into her social media a request for women who felt as she did to come together to address education and political issues at the local and state level. When last I heard from her, she had 150 women who had signed on, and they are delineating tasks according to strengths and capacity and networks. So some are going to be blogging, some are going to be monitoring legislation at the local and the state level. She's in North Carolina, and they're already letting their locally elected officials as well as their congressmen and state senators know that they are monitoring every one of their efforts as they relate to children and education and families and women.

So I think it's time for those kinds of grassroots actions, hopefully with new strategies. Because marching alone and other strategies that were used in the past to earn hard-won civil rights, gay rights, women's rights – those strategies in and of themselves will not be sufficient. I think that we have to learn that we have to analyze just how Trump was able to galvanize majorities in these key states, sometimes just by thousands of votes, so that he was able to carry the election. But he used some strategies that are very new, or certainly hadn't been used before in political campaigns. We can learn from those. And we have to learn from them, so that he is a one-term president.

I think that we have to be active on the local level. I think that it'll become increasingly important that we field school board candidates in local elections that support a progressive educational agenda. Because they really can make a difference, in spite of what is happening at the national level and the state level.

I have been saying to my students that even though there are one or sometimes even two generations between us, we both share that we haven't paid for the privileges that we enjoy. I was a young child during the civil rights struggle. Dr. King was assassinated when I was a high school student. So I saw my mother and other adults protesting and working to secure these rights for me. That opened up scholarships and other opportunities at universities that I got to walk into, without earning it. And although I've been a practitioner and certainly have worked hard for four decades, I haven't had to be on the battlefield as an equity warrior, a social justice warrior, who did what others have done before me. And neither have my students.

And so the class that we had the day after the election, I challenged them, as I am challenging myself, to be more active. Because we have enjoyed a privilege; others planted the trees under whose shade we sit, and we now have to do that for generations going forward. And with this man in power, and a Republican Congress, there's legislation and Supreme Court decisions that can be enacted and passed down that will affect generations. I think that we need to learn from our adversaries, mobilizing our voice like the NRA has; in spite of all of the tragic shootings, the NRA was able to hold Congress in check.

I think that if we mobilize in our communities and then develop structures so that we're knitting together these grassroots efforts, in sync with established national efforts, that we will be able to put pressure on congressional leaders. And I think that it's time for all of us, especially those of us who sit in positions of comfort, to use that privilege to be real activists. And to support those

who are on the battlefield to create our discomfort among people who would rather just maintain the status quo.

So I'll continue to do the work of preparing future leaders – that's the role that I have as a professor of practice – but I think I and others like me have to get out of what is comfortable, even though it's difficult. The work that I do is difficult and worthy, but it's not uncomfortable. I think that it's important for us to enter into a space that is impactful and will be uncomfortable. It may cost us in significant ways, but the stakes are just that high.

But one of the lessons learned through this is that we have to fight. That it's never over. You know, the fight for social justice and a progressive education for every student—it's never a right that is won, and therefore over and done, and we can move on to something else. And I think that there's always the desire to be done with that part of the work. Each generation has to fight those battles anew. And that's the work that's before us. I'm hoping that millennials, current leaders, and people like me who are baby boomers can find common ground and get over the politics of celebrity or personality and focus on broader issues. So that we can thrive even in what I envision will be a very toxic educational environment.

KNOWING WHEN TO FALL ON THE SWORD

I graduated from the Urban Superintendents Program that was in existence for 20 years, led by Robert Peterkin as our director. And now we have a new [doctoral program in education leadership](#) that again is preparing students to go out and make a difference – this time not only as superintendents, but in other parts of the sector. So I'm telling all of them that it is time for us to be politically astute. I'm reading *The Art of War* again, which I've read so many times in my life. Because I do see this as warfare – I see it as equity warfare. People are not going to give up power and privilege because of the righteousness of our argument; that only persuades some. I think that we're going to have to be tacticians and continuously develop political and social capital to effect an agenda that's progressive and not regressive: forming networks, helping them understand that in many ways the urgent is going to take precedence; that they need to be thoughtful, they need to be able to play a long game. They also need to do what is necessary to stay in their positions, and be very, very clear about what they're willing to fall on the sword for.

For example, the day after the election, the superintendent in Baltimore County, Maryland – Dallas Dance – retweeted a tweet from Josh Starr (CEO of [PDK International](#)) about protecting and being sensitive to the needs of students on that day, especially those students who are undocumented, are Muslim, are Black and Brown or in any other way Other. And so Superintendent Dance retweeted it, and he [came under immediate and harsh criticism](#) from politicians in his community. At first they were seeking to have him resign immediately. I think that he mustered sufficient political and social capital that they had to back off, but they still felt that he should resign, and I think now they're not even asking for his resignation, but he has now acquired enemies who will be after him every step of the way. This was an instance in which he was willing to fall on the sword. He decided that he would not retrench, he would not recant, he would not apologize. So that's the point at which I think he decided, “This is a stand that's so important, I'm willing to take whatever comes with it.”

I think that there's a new kind of courage that leaders are going to have to demonstrate, that goes above and beyond instruction, teaching and learning. And we as leaders are going to have to be

instrumental in building cultures that provide schools as safe havens. And that sharing that knowledge of best practices has to become the norm, not an exception.

And I think in this changed political milieu, people are going to find themselves unexpectedly and sometimes as the result of a calculated risk, in a political maelstrom. And they need to have political cachet so that they can weather the storm. They have to be affiliated with networks nationally, at the state level, and locally, so that they can do the right thing.

BUILDING BRIDGES

We are going to have to figure out ways to build coalitions not just of the willing and among those who share a progressive agenda, but really find a way of building bridges with some elements of this new world order that we've inherited. One of my students who is from Wisconsin and who formerly was the principal – founding principal and a teacher – at a charter school, shared her story that I think is worth noting. She is a queer woman, and she started a school that was against bullying with a specific focus on protecting queer students. The school is open to many. But when they opened their doors, they had members of a conservative Christian group outside of her door with signs, protesting. This was before the children came. So her first reaction was to just go inward, to try to seal the school off from the community, and not deal with it. But she was encouraged by the school board member from her district to do what she always does – talk to people.

So she went out there with cookies and hot coffee, and told them that this is not a school teaching people how to be LGBTQ, but it's a school that's teaching people not to bully, and how not to be bullied. And then she went on to talk about how she had been bullied, how she was sure they had been bullied, which opened a floodgate for them, because they then talked about being bullied because of their religious beliefs. And as a result, that was a bridge that was built between two people who on the surface seemed to be holding completely diametrically opposed ideologies, and they now are supportive of her school. Not supportive of being LGBTQ, which goes against their religious beliefs, but supportive of young people who are at the school – and I mean actively supportive. So I think that there's a need for us to do more of that kind of bridge-building. And I think that we have to do that locally, because that's more likely to be face-to-face. It's hard to demonize one that you're looking at.

STATE AND LOCAL CHANGE

I live in Cambridge, Massachusetts, because that's where I work. But my home is in Richmond, Virginia, and I come home frequently. And I vote in Virginia. We've had school board elections in my city of Richmond that are going to signal a complete change in our local school district – of the nine members on the board, eight new people. So, there's going to be a change. I think that there's an opportunity here. It's a small enough city for educational leaders and community leaders of all levels to have their say. Our new mayor defeated a business leader in the election. So I think that there's a possibility of a more progressive agenda going forward.

I know in Massachusetts the big issue on the ballot in addition to the presidential election was lifting the cap on charters, and that was resoundingly defeated. However, I think that we may be getting a mandate or push from the federal level that pushes against what was just decided at the state level in a place like Massachusetts. So, I think that in many ways it will be a state-by-state fight.

GAINING HOPE

I think it's in the book *Good to Great*, about confronting the brutal facts without losing hope. And there's that tension that exists in the life of any leader. That's where I stand. I really feel that I am too blessed to despair. There's a difference between facing the brutal facts and despairing of them.

I gain hope every day that I teach. Because all of these younger leaders at various steps in their careers give me hope in the possible. And I tell them that – that they are my legacy. That the work that I do with them is to ensure that they are knowledgeable, that they are able to demonstrate compassion in their decisions, that leadership is not only a function of the mind (even though they are brilliant!) but also a function of the heart. And then instill in them a willingness and a predisposition to act boldly, courageously, and urgently to effect change. And the way that they receive these lessons and build upon them and grow – that gives me hope. They bring their passion and their zeal and their belief in the positive, and I try to help them become wiser and more strategic and caring in demonstrating it.

I am not without hope. I know that the arc of justice, though long, always veers towards righteousness. I've seen it in my lifetime. I know that it did in the lifetime of the giants on whose shoulders I stand. And these younger leaders who are coming into their own will not give up. And they are innovative. They are creative. They are thinking about different ways to make things right. And they are willing to shake up the crucible and do what needs to be done.

And I am not without hope as I talk to my peers, who have been at this work for decades, but who as they look at their children and grandchildren, are willing to go back into the fray in significant ways. So I think that there's a mighty coalition rising. And that somebody as horrible as that man and his people – some of whom voted for him out of blissful ignorance, some who voted for him because they could not believe that somebody would actually do what he said he would do, and some who believe in every ugly, hateful thing he said – I think that in their own way, they have called to action sources of strength that were dormant in us as individuals and in us collectively.

And I am looking forward to seeing the leaders that rise up to meet others. Something that I wrote to all of my students, past and present, after the election was, "We were born for a moment such as this. And we will do what is necessary to secure the future for all children." And I believe that.

In the Classroom: Pedagogy to Activate Student Voices

by José Luis Vilson

José Luis Vilson is an author, activist, and educator. He is the founder of EduColor and teaches middle school math in New York City.

“We need to give students the ability to activate their own voice, to speak up, and create spaces for them to solve problems that we may not be able to see as adults.”



As far as the election is concerned, I’ve always felt that we were having to do the work regardless. There was always a sense of creating a path for equity, for access for true integration, for true understanding of what the work needed to be for all of us in our schools and in our democracy. What the election result highlighted for me, however, is that we definitely need to create broader senses of coalition among many different peoples, whether they be Native American people at Standing Rock, or the Black Lives Matter Movement or our Dreamers – anyone who has been disenfranchised. These are the folks who we need to start building coalitions with, because we need to create a government that suggests that everyone is included, not just for a small percentage, but for every single body in America.

IMPORTANCE OF STUDENT VOICES

Some of the things that I think need to happen as a result of this election is giving students the ability to activate their own voice, to speak up, and create spaces for them to solve problems that we may not be able to see as adults. The thing about adults is that we do suffer from what I call a “severe case of adultism,” where we often feel like we have to be the only ones who have the solutions, instead of trying to develop people intergenerationally to be able to lead and to work within our communities, so we can truly create a space that is for us, by us, about us. That

matters a lot in terms of trying to build broader coalitions not just across racial groups, but also along intergenerational groups.

I also believe that we need to concentrate not just on policy for our public schools, but also on pedagogy. The way that we interact with our students and build relationships – not just through the social-emotional piece, though that’s a big component, but also through academics. We have to make sure that all of our students can find ways to learn, and the ways that they learn best, and have a path towards their own successes – help them develop their own channels for being successful in their own ways.

I think for many of the students who I have been blessed to serve – that includes English language learners, that includes my Muslim students, that includes even the Polish and Irish students who I’ve taught who hear the anti-immigration, xenophobic rhetoric – they don’t necessarily feel like America is theirs. So, in my classroom, we have to have the conversation around what it means to be a full participant in this republic, in this democracy.

VUE45 Jose Vilson Interview from Annenberg Institute on Vimeo.

JOSÉ LUIS VILSON, FILMED AT THE COALITION FOR ESSENTIAL SCHOOLS FORUM IN PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND, ON DECEMBER 2, 2016.

I had a myriad of interactions on November 9. There was a class, 702, that is a hodgepodge of different backgrounds and cultures – Central and South American students, from Mexico, from all over the place, all over the continent of Africa. So, I have a few folks who are Muslim, Christian, et cetera. On that day, we had to have a simmer-down of different content conversations, because it really became more about what the devastation might have felt like to their brothers, to their sisters, to their parents, whether immigration statuses were threatened now.

Of course, two weeks prior to that, I had a conversation in that particular class, and that class was the first class that said, “We don’t like this candidate because he’s racist; he’s sexist; he is xenophobic; he’s got all these issues with Muslims. They were more ready to point those issues out than mainstream media at times is. And when you have a situation like that, it’s like – yes, the children are alright. They’re going to be fine, because they’re activated in that way. But then to see that someone like that could then be elected says a lot about how my students then see America at large. Like, they have this awakening now, and we have not yet pushed back against all those things that isolate and disenfranchise our least empowered students. And that’s a problem.

COMPLEXITY OF LOCAL ISSUES

I think when you look at America at large, I believe that two-thirds of the State Houses are how Republican, and all of the governors are White. So, when students are looking at the statehouses, they’re like, “Oh snap! How can I feel included in this?” And then we also have to understand too with the electoral map, that whether that urban district is heavily populated or not can

determine a blue state. So, New York State wouldn't be as blue without places like New York City, Syracuse, Buffalo and Albany. Without those big urban districts, unfortunately, the rest of the state is red. So, that's when things get really complicated, and then you have to have the conversation how our Republic was founded. It gets more complicated than just saying red or blue and numbers of electoral votes, et cetera. The down-ticket elections also matter, and really we have great opportunities to activate – because the mayors, the state representatives, they're the ones who get access immediately and they get to be our proponents if you know how to organize well, and get our issues to the floor.

SPACE FOR ACTIVISM AND HOPE

My students give me hope on a daily basis, because they're a lot more in tune and a lot more frank than a lot of adults are. Because adults – we have these things that hold us back: bills, taxes, our families that we have to take care of. And that often makes us a little bit more conservative and less activist than the kids would be. Versus kids, they would just say, "This is what we're doing now. I believe in this and we're going to make this happen. And all I need is for adults to either support me or get out the way."

But then I also think about the adults who are still doing this work, people who have been doing this work for ages and keep plugging away, my colleagues who are constantly pushing the agenda of trying to rehumanize our kids and work within the most difficult places to help our kids get better at what they do.

So, I just think overall there is a space for movement, for constantly moving people towards building broader coalitions of people who are concerned about what's happening in this country. So, that gives me hope on a daily basis – having this conversation with folks.

Youth Activists: Be Proud of Who You Are, and Never Stop Fighting

by Licelot (Lee) Caraballo, Aidan Donahue, and Thaina Merlain

Licelot (Lee) Caraballo is a senior at E-Cubed Academy in Providence, Rhode Island, and a member of the Providence Student Union. Aidan Donahue and Thaina Merlain are both seniors at Classical High School in Providence; Aidan is a member of Young Voices and Thaina is a member of Youth in Action.

"You still have your voice. You still have people power. Continue to fight for what you believe in."



Given the results of the election, what are the highest priorities for you in your activism, and what advice would you give to other student and adult activists?

Thaina:

What I would tell other adult and student activists now is: don't stop fighting for what you believe in. The election results don't mean that the volume goes down on all of our voices, and the power of our communities becomes diminished. You still have your voice. You still have people power. Continue to fight for what you believe in. Even though the person in power is opposite to the things that we believe in, it's not over. You should still keep marching on, because change doesn't stop here. Keep going.

And another big thing to prioritize is breaking stereotypes. Because I feel like a lot of these things come up because of stereotypes – like “Illegal immigrants are rapists,” and “Muslims are terrorists.” That's all just the people thinking that because one thing happened, you can label everyone under that. But not all Mexicans fall under the title of rapist and murderer, and not all Muslims fall under the title of terrorism and hatred and extremism.

We encounter different kinds of people every day. I know in the school I go to, I encounter different kinds of people every day – Mexicans, Muslims, Black people, White people, and none of them are the same. No two people you will ever find are the exact same. So, as people, we should begin to break the stereotypes that we've built in our society to begin to see people differently. And I feel like that's another thing that will allow us to move forward, is seeing people in a different light than we've seen them in the past.

Lee:

Our [campaign for ethnic studies](#) was based on that idea of breaking stereotypes. In the Providence Public School System, 91 percent of our students are of color, but when they go to school they feel embarrassed or shameful because of their background. If you grow up and you speak your native language and follow your traditions at home but you don't feel proud of that outside of home, then you are feeling like that doesn't belong in society, that society rejects that. So we don't want that to happen, but the stereotypes make them feel even worse. I think that in order to break the stereotypes and to break that embarrassment that prevents people from feeling proud of their own culture or background, we need to have these conversations with them. So the purpose of ethnic studies was to provide a true history that wasn't provided in schools, which was mainly Eurocentric, European history, and didn't provide 91 percent of the students with their true history. So, we wanted to provide that history and then reflect on how that has contributed to our society today, how they can understand and feel proud of where they come

from, and how they can correct other people from saying negative things when it comes to their own culture.

Aidan:

For me, the priority becomes getting as many people involved as possible. There are lots of people who say, “My vote doesn’t matter.” But then you have three of those people, that turns into ten of those people, that turns into 1,000 of those people, and it grows and it grows and it grows, until you have more of the population saying, “My vote – my voice doesn’t matter.” Then you have the minority of people actually going out voting and lobbying, then people who did vote see that and say, “Why should I vote, if this is going to happen?” But I love to flip that, because this is exactly why you should vote. This is exactly why you should become involved – find something that you can fight for. It’s getting those people to recognize that if we come together, that your voice does matter.

Thaina:

I agree with Aidan in the sense that the reason a lot of people are saying that their vote doesn’t matter, their voice doesn’t matter, is because they think, “Things are going to happen the way they’re supposed to happen no matter what I do.” I feel like that’s the reason why bad things happen, because people decide to step down when they feel like they don’t matter or they will not be significant.

I feel like one of the big reasons why Donald Trump is president is because a lot of the people thought that they didn’t matter or they couldn’t really make a choice. But I feel like making people more aware that it’s better to choose than to not, because in choosing not to, you’re giving that voice to someone else. And maybe that someone else has terrible ways of thinking, and you probably have a better way of coming at things. But because you gave that voice away, you let other people take that place that you should have had yourself.

Now that Donald Trump is president, I feel like this is a wake-up call, because our society has been very comfortable for too long. And when you’re very comfortable, that’s when you don’t realize the bad things that are going around you. I feel like when he takes power, a lot of people will begin to realize: I need to get stuff done. I need to start moving in a direction that I’ve been delaying for a very long time. And maybe his election, maybe our society will learn to grow, because it’s been very dormant for a while. And now, people will begin to realize that what they say does matter in society and it will matter in society.

You are all high school seniors. If you were going to talk to some younger student activists right now – let’s say, freshmen, as they look toward the next four years – what would you like to pass on to them?

Thaina:

For me, I would say educate themselves first. Like if they’re an activist, educate themselves on the problem, but also figure out what they want from whatever they’re standing up for. Because we always see what we don’t want, but we never talk about what we want. I know in the past year we’ve seen a lot of protests all throughout the country and all we see is a bunch of people

protesting for things that they don't want. They don't want their brothers to be killed. They don't want police brutality anymore. Sometimes younger kids are in those too, but some of those younger kids, they don't really know what it's about and they just go out there just to go out there, and they don't really know what it is that they want. They just see all the negatives and they don't really see a solution for it. So, I would say, figure out the problem first and how you would go out and create a solution for that, because I feel like that's one thing we miss. We always notice a problem, but we never see past that problem. We never seek for a solution. And educate themselves. It's better to start while you're young. You become more powerful when you start when you're young.

Lee:

Also, people are saying this a lot, and I guess it's kind of cliché, but: know where you come from and know what aspects of your environment, your community growing up have made you the person you are today. Because I feel like most of my peers are going through difficult times because of the violence that has arisen suddenly after the election towards African Americans or Hispanics or other immigrants from all sorts of backgrounds. Honestly, it makes me mad and I feel like it doesn't have to be like this.

So I would also say: feel proud of who you are. Don't feel ashamed, and speak up if you feel like you have been violated or disrespected in such a way – never stay quiet about that. And also, communicate that issue, that problem to your peers, your parents, to the people of your community. Because I feel like – as Thaina said – everybody rejects the problem. Maybe they can identify it, but they won't address it with anyone. They won't do anything to eradicate it, to find a solution. So, be brave enough and actually willing to do something to change it.

I feel like there are always going to be people that are going to be racist and are going to discriminate against others and are going to be homophobic, but there is a chance to address this in society in general, in your community and your school and the environment that you're in. Never stop addressing those things, because I feel like it's always going to be present. So, try your best to say, "Hey, no. This is wrong."

Thaina:

I feel like a big piece of that, piggybacking off of what Lee said, is to be aware of your identity. I know younger kids are still growing into their identity, but I feel like when you know who you are and you understand who you are and you're comfortable with who you are, then that is very effective, especially if you're an activist, because you will never let someone else tell you different. You will never let someone else take that identity from you. When you don't know who you are, it's harder for you to stand up for something, because you don't know what to stand for. You're like, "Should I stand here? Should I stand there? Where do I put my feet?" It is very important, especially in activism, and especially now with Donald Trump enforcing these stereotypes. And people agree with it as well, because they have that very closed mindset. If you don't know who you are, you will tend to accept those stereotypes for yourself, because you never felt as though that you could have gone beyond that, and I feel like that's very important.

Aidan:

The morning after the election, I was having a conversation with my father and he shared with me that there is this Jewish reporter that he follows who was retweeting all of these anti-Semitic comments he's been getting during the election. What my father says to me after that is: "I hope I raise my voice to be better than that and to stand up to that." For me, I guess I realize – I'm White, I'm straight, I'm male. But that doesn't mean that I can't help somebody who isn't White, straight, or male, who does not have the advantages I do. And for a big part that becomes to not only recognize the advantage you have, and to not feel ashamed for the advantage you have but help those that don't have that advantage. Help those that need the help.

Any final thoughts?

Aidan:

Change takes time. Sometimes it's a day, an hour, sometimes it's years. But change takes time, and keep at it, because if we stop even for a moment, all that change that we've worked towards doesn't mean anything. Because if we stop at all – an object in motion likes to stay in motion. An object at rest likes to stay at rest. Things need to keep going. There is momentum built and we can't let it go away, because as soon as that momentum goes away, then again, it becomes harder for us to get things done.

The other thing is: even if you don't want to be involved, become informed. Because I do understand that there is not a lot of time, but if you can take minutes out of your day to read something – find a new source you like, find a new source that is maybe the exact opposite of what you like, and read both, because at that point you're looking at two different views on the same topic. And whether you agree with the other one or not, it becomes more about understanding. It's where we have to find that common ground. There are some things you are going to have to settle for. And that doesn't mean don't fight for those things. But at some point you have to recognize that it's better instead of butting heads constantly, to work something out.

Thaina:

I would say to all those out there who are negatively affected by this election and by the results of it, I would say to keep an open mind and be optimistic, because the road doesn't end here. It keeps going. And he is not the first terrible leader. He is not going to be the last. So, if we know how to deal with him, if we know how to deal with all those who support him, then this will just be nothing for us when another terrible leader comes through.

I know we're going to miss the good leader we've had for eight years and we've got to test different waters now. But for all leaders in education, for all activists: keep going, because the work doesn't stop here. Another thing is that during the entire election, Donald Trump has been very bold and very disrespectful in how he speaks. One thing I want to say is: do not ever let anyone become comfortable with disrespecting you. I know with his election now, with him being in power, people feel as though anything is okay to say, anything disrespectful or rude is okay to just be said. And I would say, know who you are and stand up for who you are at all times, because the minute you let that go is the minute you give it to someone else to trample all over it. So, yeah, keep going. That's my thing.

Lee:

I totally agree with Thaina. I feel like if you do not exercise your voice, your rights, then you will just be giving the advantage to your oppressor. Okay, I'm going to say the cliché thing again: just know who you are, know where you stand and don't ever, ever be afraid of standing up. Because nothing bad is going to happen if you don't let it, if you're strong enough to not let it happen. Just keep believing in what you believe, have conviction, be strong about it, inspire others as much as you can.

Education Policy Moving Forward: Power and Progress at the State Level

by Linda Darling-Hammond

Linda Darling-Hammond is the president and CEO of the Learning Policy Institute and the Charles E. Ducommun Professor of Education Emeritus at Stanford University.

“The onus now is on educators, community organizations, civil rights organizations, and others in the states to engage with state agencies to build new approaches to educational improvement.”



It is clear that Trump has only really one stated goal, which is to expand choice through charters and vouchers, with a frame around privatization, and I think we can look to his own experiences with Trump University's for-profit approach to providing education for some clues. So, we can anticipate that the framing for the proposals will include for-profit institutions in K–12, as well as in higher education, that are less regulated than they are now. That's what we have been told.

HOW CAN “CHOICE” BE BENEFICIAL?

I think it will be very important for people to sort out what the features and conditions are for a productive public education system that provides what’s needed in a democracy, and the ways in which strategies like charter schools may fit in that context and add value, and the conditions under which choice strategies disrupt and are destructive to public education and actually undermine access to a quality public education for all kids. Choice can go in either direction, and we need to be much more sophisticated about how we think about the frameworks. So, for example, in some states – like California, Minnesota, Massachusetts – charter school laws are fairly thoughtful about the responsibilities of authorizers and schools that are chartered. The expectation is that they’ll accept all of the kids who apply, and they will not keep out or push out children who are harder to educate. There is much less access in the system for either fly-by-night or for-profit institutions. Whereas, with charter laws in states like Louisiana, Indiana, Ohio – which you might think of as a “Wild West” kind of approach – there has been an enormous amount of exploitation of public funding by charter operators who are not providing high quality education and do not have the pieces in place that would allow all kids to be served well, and that are making, in some cases, very large profits on the backs of taxpayers’ public funding. So, I think we have to anticipate that it will be important to be clear about what are the productive ways that “choice” can move forward and be a benefit and what are the less productive ways – and be prepared to organize both policy and practice around those.

ESSA AND THE POWER OF THE STATES

The other thing that we should be ready for – and this is a good-news story – is the implementation of the [Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\)](#). One of the interesting moments we have is that under the leadership of Republican Senator Lamar Alexander, along with Patty Murray, a minority leader in the Senate, we have a bipartisan bill that replaced No Child Left Behind, corrected some of its major failings, and put a lot of opportunity in the hands of the states to figure out how to organize for public education improvement. Given the very large majorities that pass the bill and the fact that it occurred with Republican leadership, I think it’s unlikely that it will be easy to undo that piece of legislation, despite whatever a new Secretary of Education might come in believing they want to do.

The onus now is on educators, community organizations, civil rights organizations, and others in the states to engage with state agencies to build new approaches to educational improvement. States plans are due in September of 2017. There are many, many positive elements in the law that can be taken advantage of over the coming nine months. Among those is the fact that schools cannot be evaluated only by test scores; states must use multiple measures to look at school progress, and these must include things like graduate rates and progress of English learners. They can include indicators like school climates, social-emotional learning, chronic absenteeism, suspensions or expulsions – ways to both tackle equity issues that have been longstanding and to support improvements in school climate and operations that ultimately lead to both achievement and attainment and better school environments for kids.

The law requires states to enact standards that look at higher-order thinking skills and assessments that do so, and allows explicitly for the use of projects, performance tasks, and portfolios as part of state assessment systems, and for multiple kinds of evidence about students’ learning. Taking advantage of that could transform the way in which we think about assessment,

the way in which we think about measuring student learning, and how we make those opportunities more authentic and grounded in what kids actually have to do in college and careers, rather than filling in bubbles on multiple-choice tests. So, there are real opportunities there that are explicitly written into the law.

ESSA gives states the opportunity to put assessments in place that are not used for punishments and sanctions, but instead for improvement and information. There are no longer requirements that certain things have to follow on the heels of particular changes in scores. States have the opportunity to design continuous improvement systems for schools to put in place thoughtful ways of engaging in things like school quality reviews, to choose and support interventions that are very responsive to the needs of children for schools that need assistance – anything from wraparound services in community schools to strategies like high-quality professional development, investments in strong curriculum, and investments in preschool education, which may close the gap that occurs before kindergarten. So there is a lot that is possible under ESSA, and it will really be up to educators, their partners in the community, and parents to work with state agencies to build a new approach to how education is pursued and improved.

OTHER STATE-LEVEL PROGRESS

In Georgia, the voters rejected the idea of an “Opportunity School District,” which was to be modeled after the Louisiana Recovery School District, which if you look at the data with reasonable comparison groups, has done little to improve student achievement and a lot to stratify and segregate the provision of education in the state (Adamson, Cook-Harvey & Darling-Hammond 2015, pp. 39–43). This is not a moment where we need more stratification and segregation. It’s a moment where we need to invest in public schools that bring people together, that are organized around inclusion, around the idea that every school should be worth choosing and every child should be chosen, which was not the result of that approach in Louisiana.

In Massachusetts, the voters said they were going to stick with our public education system as we have it and **not expand charters**, although there are some wonderful charters. That was really a vote in favor of making sure the public education system is the site for innovation, is the site for improvement, is the site for serving all children.

We’ve been buffeted by a lot of ideology at the federal level. Education is not actually always so partisan at the state level, because both Republicans and Democrats who are involved – for example, in educational committees in the legislatures and in statehouses – are typically interested in creating schools that work for kids.

I think it is important for the public to be engaged. It’s important for educators to be engaged to be sure that the voices for quality are there, that the voices for productive investment are at the table. But a lot can be done at the state level and good progress can be made irrespective of what’s happening federally.

“THIS ELECTION HAS TRIGGERED A MOVEMENT”

As a candidate, Trump was explicitly and, I think, consciously divisive in his statements of disdain for so many groups of people – Muslims, immigrants, Latinos, African Americans, the LGBTQ community, and you can go on. Because of that, there has been a real organization of resistance to the message of hate by a lot of people, and because it has been so explicit, I think

that has enabled and stimulated a lot more explicit opposition against it. In the United States, we have often been too sanguine politically, not highly organized and activated to stand together and say, “What does it mean to be an American? What do we stand for as a nation? What do we stand for as people? What do we stand for as individuals? And how do we actually stand collectively with others?”

I think that this election has triggered a movement. Now, it has also triggered a lot of hate activity, but because that has come to the surface, it’s triggered a lot of people to say, “No, that’s not who we are.” So, it’s an interesting moment, like various important moments in our history – in the height of the Civil Rights era in the 60s and the early 70s, in the moments like the founding of the Republic, the Civil War, where people have had to stand up and say what they stand for and be counted and really throw down, so to speak. This is a moment like that.

I think the good news is so many people are standing up and saying, we are Americans who stand for an inclusive America and we’re going to fight for it, rather than sitting at home on the couch flicking from CNN to Fox News. I think that’s hopeful.

Foundations as Change Agents: Developing Leadership and Infrastructure

by [Kent McGuire](#)

Kent McGuire is president and CEO of the [Southern Education Foundation](#) in Atlanta, Georgia.

“We’re going to advance a narrative about what needs to change and see if we can grow a group of new leaders who will be courageous but also smart enough to push in that direction.”



I've been in four cities in six days and in several meetings over that period of time, and all of them have started with a conversation about the election and what it means. One of the common conclusions – for those of us who are focused on trying to make the country a better place, more just, more civil, a place that is about expanding opportunities – is that our work is maybe as important as it's ever been.

POST-ELECTION PRIORITIES

In terms of our priorities, there are probably two or three that, oddly enough, we were already focused on at the [Southern Education Foundation](#) (SEF). Maybe that's because we live in the South – some of the tone and angles on issues that surfaced in the national election are not foreign to us here in the South.

One of the things that we think is a big priority is leadership. We've done a little bit of that work with college students, but we think we need to greatly expand our efforts there by pushing down towards younger students and thinking more about how to help kids in high school and underclassmen become more organized, better organized, more civically engaged, and to help develop their capacity and vision for doing that. And also working concomitantly with people in the community organizing and activist space so that they are better equipped to represent their own interests politically and institutionally. And we're about to launch a big initiative that's focused on the leadership inside school systems – we're working with a few partners on a big racial equity leadership network that would be made up of school superintendents, deputy assistant superintendents, chief academic officers, and other people in leadership positions in school systems in the South. We're wrestling with how much of what we focus on has to do with helping them grapple more honestly and effectively with issues of bias and race and class and stuff like that, versus how much focus is on content – health and wellness, accountability, assessment, things of that sort.

There is one thing that we are clear about and that we are determined to do that we think will be in contrast with a plethora of leadership initiatives that now exist in our space. The opening assumption about those leadership experiences is that they are trying to do something at the level of the *individual*, where the individual is the intervention. We think the whole logic or premise of an individual riding into town on a white horse is flawed. So, we're going to come to this work with a different notion of leadership that has more to do with collective – as opposed to individual – actions, systemic change, and more focus on the issue of care and empathy. We're not trying to create something where the point is to puff up the CVs of the individuals who

participate in them. We also are trying to build community. We're trying to create a network of people who are bound by some common values and principles.

In assessing our impact, we're working on some way of thinking more holistically about what is really important to measure. Measuring what matters, as opposed to measuring what's easy to measure, so that the folks we work with have ways of understanding where they are now and whether they moved the needle. We would like to think that we can do something more robust than orbiting around standardized test scores, as if that is the principal way you know whether you've made school a better place, a healthier place, and a place where learning, not just achievement, is actually going on.

And we're going to try to study some of the Fellows, people who go through this experience with us, so that we can try to understand how this experience has changed how they think, how they act, and what their changes in perspective and behavior gave rise to in terms of their leadership style. Then do those changes in leadership behaviors bring about any changes in the things we care about in schools and school systems? That's going to be a pretty big and important four- or five-year chunk of work for us. But we think it's hugely important, and we're persuaded that we can't actually get the learning outcomes we want for this new, diverse majority of students.

The idea that we'll get those outcomes by patching up or working around the edges of the education system we have is just unlikely. Nor do we think we get them by blowing up the system we have and creating a hundred thousand charter schools. Systems do matter at the end of the day. So, we're going to advance a narrative about what does need to change and see if we can grow a group of people who will be courageous – that's a good word – but also smart enough to push in that direction. So that's one big complicated thing we're going to do on the leadership front.

PROGRESSIVE INFRASTRUCTURE

Leadership is one part of a bigger issue that I think needs attention: the building of infrastructures for progressive ideas and policies. In addition to efforts to identify, attract, recruit, engage, support, and develop leaders, there is data and communication and the development of proposals – so that the people who are pushing for equity and social justice can play offense. We play way too much defense, and there is every reason to believe that the election results have set us up to play even more defense. But what we need to be playing is offense. We need to be taking the ideas to the system, to the legislature, to city hall, to the school boards. But doing that requires that we have the information, that we are not stumbling over ourselves about what we actually want – there is a big difference from knowing what you don't want to knowing what you actually want.

So we need the infrastructure. We need people whose job it is to create opportunities for us to see and understand those things and come to agree about them. When you think about what the far right has done over a couple of decades, that infrastructure exists, and there and there is such correspondence on methods, on ideas, on strategies. In fact, there are a bunch of people who have grown up in a pipeline where the experiences they've had have been informed by those things. So we can't be surprised, on some level, at some of the political and policy outcomes we see, at the prevalence of certain ideas about education reform that we see, because people got to work on this more than a couple of years ago.

We think that SEF is a natural hub for this work, at least for a defined part of the country, because of the think-tankish nature of the work that we do. We're going to have a communications and messaging operation; we're going to continue to mine, organize, and use data to describe the patterns in relationships—at least in the South—and we'll compare and contrast those to what we see nationally; and we're going to try to backstop a large number of advocacy and civil rights groups who just don't have the bandwidth to do those things. Finally, we're going to make sure that those groups are in relationship with each other, talking to each other, so that they're collaborating, as opposed to competing, and they're communicating with each other. We think we'll get more alignment and concerted effort and greater impact if these broad coalitions that are well-informed come to exist.

STATE AND LOCAL STRATEGIES

We're already turning our attention to the state level; we've been chipping away at these red states for decades. Our strategy at SEF had been predicated on the assumption that there are reasonable people sitting in legislative offices at the state level who just knew what was going on. If you could give them the facts, they would consider those facts and they would do the right thing. That might have been true twenty years ago, when there was cooperation between parties, when redistricting and gerrymandering had not so greatly impacted who served. Now, all of the competition is at the primary stage, and things have ossified around ideology. So you could show up in Alabama or Mississippi or Georgia with all the facts you want, but when (a) the ideology trumps the facts or (b) everybody gets to use their own facts, then just showing up with nice reports turns out probably not to be enough.

We need to work closer to the ground where the issues are right in your face. If you can get at some distance from the problem, it's easier to ignore it or look the other way—you can't put faces on the problem, you can't put names on the problem, you're not so uncomfortable not addressing the problem. So our sense has been that report and data are necessary, but they're not sufficient in this world. We actually need to do more work closer to the ground where we can organize those who have the most at stake and we need to try to work-- so that's working from the outside in. We also need to try to get inside some of these systems and work from the inside out. If we can do both of those things, and it's not promised we can get away with it, we've got a better shot at trying to move something.

This new federal law – [ESSA](#) – serves up one of those interesting moments. Huge questions about what a new Trump Administration's posture vis-a-vis ESSA, but the good news is that the law has already been passed. I'm not saying that they won't throw the regulations out. But for the most part, this new administration doesn't actually give two hoots about education. They don't care about it at all. But the silver lining in that is you've got to show up with the states, and especially at the local level and basically say, "Hey, you guys have carte blanche. The real question is: what are you going to do with it?" This is why you need to have a set of ideas ready to go at a moment in which the pen has been handed to you—especially local school boards, school superintendents, and others who can probably do what they want. Will the federal government's enforcement mechanism be neutered? Yes. Might the guardrails come off, some of them? Yes. Might they figure out a way to even further consolidate or block grant funds? Yes. All of those things are possible. Some of those things are likely. And if we're not there playing often with ideas and evidence for how to use that newfound flexibility well, then we have dropped the ball.

That's why I think the stakes are actually very high down-ticket, at the local level. Being organized isn't just about what you want to see happen. It's also about who is lifted up and encouraged to run, encouraged to serve, and that, once again, is what I mean by the leadership component of a larger infrastructure-building strategy. Those people don't just materialize out of thin air. They have to be found and encouraged and supported. They have to know what platform they are running on. And they're going to make the decision to run – because the incentives to serving are not high – but they're much more likely to run when they think they could win. They're much more likely to think they could win when someone cajoles them that there is an organized constituency that believes in and cares about what they believe in and care about.

So, there is a link between a well-crafted, progressive story and policy agenda and leadership strategies designed to find the people who can carry that water into office. But we know that it's not going to just happen overnight. If we want to accelerate it, we better build that infrastructure. We know that the power isn't just handed off or downloaded onto people. It has to be earned. So, I really do think there is a correspondence between having progressive agendas and having people well organized around them and our ability to recruit and advance leaders, whether it's school boards, city councils, mayors, state legislators. And we think education is one of the issues around which progressive coalitions, maybe even bipartisan ones, can be built. I'm hopeful that if we don't just get angry but we get organized and work smart, that we'll see real progress.

LOCAL VICTORY

In Georgia, we had what we thought was a very dis-equalizing [ballot initiative](#) to take over “failing schools,” which was defeated. We could celebrate that victory – it was hugely important. But it was the tip of the iceberg, because what's going on in schools that brought this ill-informed policy idea into view is still a problem. And if we don't jump into this space right now with that progressive vision, if we don't stay organized and use the coalition that helped defeat the ballot initiatives, if we don't bring that same sense of organization to the legislative session, if we don't turn to the communities where those so-called “failing schools” are, if we just go to sleep on that issue, it's almost like saying the governor was right, and it opens the door. They will be back – they already had plans for how to do legislatively what they couldn't get done through the state constitution, because the governor can't put one an amendment on the ballot one year after the next. The point is, this was no time to go to sleep, and we have let children down if we simply assume that we won because we stopped a bad policy from happening, if we don't actually do something that makes a positive difference in those schools. So, that's really the kind of collective action that we need in the wake of both the national and more local election results.

I can't underscore the importance of the *Investing in What Works* report that we did with AISR in setting the information phase right. It wasn't so much the event when we released it that mattered, but our ability to pull from it, reproduce it, create fact sheets on the basis of it, and point to it on the website during the ensuing ten months that was really important. When people first came together, so many of the people around the table were skeptical about whether they should be against it because there was so much anxiety about the status quo. Our ability to say that there are other ways of thinking about these issues made a huge difference. So for AISR to be thinking of itself as a place that tries to assemble these resources broadly and to know enough to be able to inform some of these challenges when they surface is sort of like one of those

Whack-A-Mole games. As soon as you hit one, you knock it down, another one pops up and you have to catch him.

There is not enough progressive infrastructure available to us. We're going to try to build ours with the resources we can assemble. Hopefully, you'll build yours and there still won't be enough. So I think it's important work in terms of helping people to actually think in earnest about what to do, especially when a lot of what you see seems irrational.

Education Activism: A Moment to Stand Up

by Keron Blair

Keron Blair is a Chicago-based activist and the director of the Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools.

"I think people see this as a call to really stand up, and say, 'Our schools will be safe places. Our schools will be sanctuaries. We will have good public schools in our communities, and we will fight for them.'"



The political landscape that we hoped for – and in many places worked to create – did not happen after the election, and so people are still trying to figure out the significance. What are the real implications of living in a Trump America? And for a lot of people, those are scary realities, not just because of the man himself, but because of the people that he awakened, the ideas that he appealed to, and people are concerned that those ideas seem to have won.

So that's the context. The priorities, then, are still being shaped, but what is emerging is that there is a real need for us to push back and invalidate claims around the role of the private sector as it relates to education. In a speech that Donald Trump gave a month before the election, he said, "We've got to break up the monopoly that is public education," and he plans to push a choice agenda. And so we've got to really invalidate the claim that what we need is more choice. And to really launch an effort that says, "What we actually need is real and deep investment in Black and Brown communities, with real dollars being invested in our public schools and our

public infrastructure.” We need to lift up the value and power of neighborhood-based community schools that have the curriculum, the teachers, the resources that we know make education successful.

The second priority is to really build in infrastructure that can run strong campaigns, at the local and state level. Because, as it relates to the progressive agenda, the federal landscape is a lot more complicated and perhaps unyielding. So we need to really be thinking about, “What can we do at the city and state levels to build a strong coalition?” That can then enliven an agenda that produces wins at the city level and at the state level.

And then a third priority is being very clear that to the extent that the current administration is anti-Black, anti-immigrant, anti-public education, that we need to build a really powerful force that can counter and push back in real ways against that agenda.

QUESTIONS AND ADVICE FOR THE FIELD

You know, we have a new education law in the form of the [Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\)](#). How is that an opportunity for us to fight, or to run campaigns, at the state level?

How do we, at the city and state levels, scale up community schools as the alternative, as the solution, to the challenges that many schools face?

And then how do we fight for money – again, at the city and state levels? Because we understand that our schools don’t just fail like the weather changes from hot to cold. Our schools are made to fail because we do not invest the kind of resources that we know it takes for them to succeed.

I know that a lot of people are concerned, and they are concerned for good reason. I think we have to be clear about the new political reality which we find ourselves in. And so I think we have to be prepared to build and to take action that is bold and creative, that forms a real resistance to any threat against our communities. That’s one thing. I think really build on strong and powerful organizations. There’s so much energy that people have right now, and how do organizations capture some of that energy? And say, “Hey, we’ve been fighting, come join us. Come join our ranks.” I think it’s an opportunity to do real recruitment, and really strengthen the infrastructure that folks have at the local level.

I also think for people who have resources – foundations or philanthropies – I think this is a moment to really invest. We cannot have a resistance that is not resourced to fight the kinds of fights that we will have over the next four years. I think we may have to throw out some of the old ways of doing things, when it comes to resourcing campaigns and organizations, and really invest and invest big, because folks will need it in order to rise to this moment.

LOCAL VICTORIES

I think some of the local election results provide some hope. Like in California, where you have [Kamala Harris](#) going to the Senate, and you have [Tammy Duckworth](#) in Illinois. There were some real wins that suggested that progressives won. For our particular work in [Georgia](#), we beat back a referendum that was really anti-public schools. In [Massachusetts](#), we beat back a charter agenda. So, the electorate at the local level really showed up in a number of places and delivered what we think are real victories, and so that’s really hopeful.

I think this is a moment for us to interrogate those stories and lift them up, to point the way that all of America is not Trump America. I think another thing to really lift up in the moment is that, for what it's worth—the candidate that the progressive community was most behind won the popular vote. And there is some comfort in the notion that almost two million more voters voted in favor of us than the current president. And I think that's a hopeful moment, because it says to us that we are still in the majority. I think we really ought to capture that as a win, that more votes were cast in our direction and our favor than for the presidency.

So when we see the [alt-right in a meeting with 200 people](#), saying really awful things, that can be a blow to us, it can be devastating, but we should not forget that there are more people in America who stand for the right of young people to have good public education than those who are opposed to it. There are more people in America who stand for progressive immigration reform than those who are against it. There are more people in America who are for racial justice than those who are opposed to it. And the numbers actually bear that out. The ultimate victory is a bit daunting and a lot more complicated, but the numbers and the way people voted actually bears out differently. And for me, that's a hopeful light, out of the November elections. I admit it may be naïve. And I think we sometimes meet absurdity with absurdity, so I accept that I might sound absurd right now, but the moment is absurd, and so a little bit of absurdity might be the thing we need.

SOURCES OF HOPE

I just spent seven days in West Africa and got a chance to visit the slave capitol on the coast of Ghana. And that slavery occurred in the US—still blows my mind, I cannot fathom it. But as a black man, the descendent of slaves, I was able to stand as a free man in the doorway of the dungeons where slaves were held. To me, as it relates to the community that I come from – we are not unaccustomed to fighting, resisting, and winning. And so for me, when I tell people, “I am a descendent of slaves,” that means a lot for me. Because we won that fight. And there is power in that.

And I think in a lot of ways, what Donald Trump and his administration might do in four years pales in comparison to the kind of resistance that many of the folks that I work with have forged and won, and that is really hopeful for me – that in moments of crisis, we have been able to organize and resist and build, and ultimately turn the tide in our favor. And I think we have a moment here to do that. And to define what it means to be radical, and define what it means to be revolutionary, and define what it means to build really a democratic America. And I think people are thinking seriously about that, and that is encouraging.

And I think as it relates to public education, people see this as a call to really stand up, and say, “Our schools will be safe places. Our schools will be sanctuaries. We will have good public schools in our communities, and we will fight for them.” And I think people are becoming sensitized to the kind of risks, the kind of momentum that we have to build in order to make sure that at the end of these four years, that we have strong public education and public schools in the communities that are most vulnerable.

Going Local: Priorities and Strategies for Municipal Leaders

by Audrey M. Hutchinson

Audrey M. Hutchinson is the director of education and expanded learning at the National League of Cities' Institute for Youth, Education, and Families.

“Municipal officials know that education is tied to quality of life and public safety; cities are better off when more people are well-educated.”



OUTLINING PRIORITIES

In my world, working with mayors, councilmembers, and school districts across the country, the focus is on cradle to career. National League of Cities (NLC) recently convened our Mayors' Education Task Force, and this is what emerged as I listened to the conversations:

Mayors want to focus on improving the quality of education, providing wraparound supports in schools (especially for the neediest students), and, of course, seriously thinking about how to create or strengthen pathways connecting post-secondary and career success, with workforce preparation as an important component. Our mayors also emphasized the importance of career technical education, the highest form of vocational education, where young people can receive the necessary skills to help them successfully enter the workforce. Municipal officials are serious about helping their young people achieve a credential or a degree to make them marketable in the workplace. Our mayors are also concerned about increasing the graduation rate, decreasing the drop-out rate in cities, especially for schools in low-income communities. They are also very keen on addressing early learning by focusing on supporting families, beginning with prenatal care and beyond. The mayors on the task force also felt that ensuring all students are reading at grade level by third grade is critical to their success. They noted that engaging families by potentially using home visits is a critical part of that strategy.

Afterschool, out-of-school time, and other expanded learning opportunities were significant aspects of the task force's conversation as well. The demand for high-quality afterschool remains critical because we know that at the end of the day, based on the [Afterschool Alliance's data](#), programs help to support academic achievement, working families and keeping kids safe.

Afterschool is a venue for developing STEM skills which are critical because we know that there is a growing focus on STEM-related jobs. Science, technology, engineering, and math – jobs that require those skills are driving the global economy at the moment. Afterschool and summer learning opportunities can provide activities that develop social emotional learning, which can strengthen young people's resiliency and ability to adapt in the workforce. Our mayors are concerned about summer learning loss and the importance of using time during the summer to strengthen young people's skills. And, of course, we know that low-income students lose the most because families often have less resources to place them in meaningful programs and opportunities.

Looking forward, school districts need to pay attention to teacher quality, making sure that high-quality teachers are in every classroom, especially for communities that do not have as many resources. I think focusing on low-performing schools is critical, and that the [Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\)](#) implementation remains intact. In terms of providing wraparound services in low-performing schools and making sure that young people have supports to keep them in school – we are seeing the community school model expanding in more and more cities across the country with mayors and superintendents being vocal champions for this strategy. If a child is having trouble with vision and does not have proper glasses, it is impossible for him/her to learn. If a child is hungry and does not have adequate food and nutrition, learning becomes secondary, and if proper health checks are not done to screen for asthma or lead this can cause absenteeism. Another key piece that I would want to share with the President-elect is the importance of those supports that will help take young people through the different transition stages, such as from middle school to high school, assuming that supports are in place to enable them to move from one level to the next. Creating rigor and opportunities for them to graduate, and then go off to college is the ideal.

CITY-LEVEL SUPPORT FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

While changes are occurring at the federal level and there is growing concern about whether we will be able to rely upon the critical federal funding streams that have historically been used to support education, I am delighted to say that at the local level we saw voters asking for support for children, using new tax revenues. NLC saw 12 out of 15 ballot measures approved – in places like Baltimore, Muskingum County, Ohio, and Boulder, Colorado – where cities are using new taxes and the renewal of existing taxes, or in some cases soda tax to augment supports for children and youth. For many years, Seattle has had their city-level education levy which they use to support a number of initiatives, including afterschool programs. There is a groundswell of activities. Some cities have had these in place for a long time, but we're seeing more and more movement, where mayors are taking their responsibility seriously to make kids a priority, and are beginning to see the benefits of making an investment in children

2016 Local Funding Initiatives Supporting Services for Children and Youth

Information and links provided by the National League of Cities

Baltimore (MD) [Children and Youth Fund](#): charter amendment requiring city officials to commit more than \$11 million per year for youth activities and programs

Cincinnati (OH) [Early Childhood Education Levy](#): raises property taxes to generate new revenue for schools, including expanding preschool access

Dayton (OH) [Income Tax Increase](#): raises income tax to support preschool education and other city services and infrastructure

Hamilton County (OH) [Children's Services Levy](#): renews property tax to support children and family services

Jackson County (MO) [Children's Services Fund](#): increases sales tax to support social service agencies serving children

Mercer County (OH) [Children's Levy](#): new tax levy to support children's services

Muskingum County (OH) [Children's Levy](#): renews levy to support services for children and youth

Fairfax County [Human Services and Community Development Bond](#): supports a range of services for families and youth

[Soda taxes](#) that generate revenue for public health programs for children and adults were passed in:

- Boulder (CO)
- San Francisco (CA)
- Oakland and Albany (CA)

Mayors across the country are dedicating staff to focus on key education issues – to work on partnerships between school districts, their colleges and universities, and to create multi-sector partnerships and collaboratives to support education. Clearly municipal leaders can do this by using their own bully pulpits, convening authority, and leadership to help their public understand the importance of education - even without authority over their school districts. Mayors can also hone and nurture other partnerships among every sector in the community including businesses, chamber of commerce, faith-based, non-profit, philanthropic community, and even their own city resources through city agencies to support young people.

NLC has been building the capacity of municipal leaders to be strong advocates for education, building stronger cities together. In 2003, NLC created our Mayors' [Education Policy Advisors Network \(EPAN\)](#), which represents senior education advisors in mayor's office from the 75 largest cities across the United States. We convene them on a regular basis to discuss a broad array of K–12 and post-secondary issues, along with afterschool, summer and other expanded learning opportunities. EPAN is our longest-standing and strongest network at NLC, addressing issues such as equitable educational opportunities and college and career readiness. The Post-

Secondary Success City Action Network (P-SCAN), a subset of EPAN, focuses on increasing postsecondary attainment rates in their cities. I should mention that there are also cities that are not in the largest 75 group that we have invited to be part of EPAN because their mayors are so focused and committed to education outcomes. And mayors and city council members in cities of all sizes across the country are highly engaged in supporting afterschool programs, so we also created the mayors' [Afterschool Policy Advisors Network](#) in 2004, another long-standing network. With the new federal administration, a groundswell of local innovation will continue to thrive.

Mayors are not engaged in education just to be doing it – the success of education is really tied to their cities' economic well-being, and to ensure that they have a strong workforce and highly engaged citizens in their community. Municipal officials know that education is tied to quality of life and public safety; cities are better off when more people are well-educated.

FINDING OPPORTUNITIES AND COMMON GROUND

It is hard to tell what is coming with the new administration – and I am sure it is evolving. What I have seen so far of this administration's agenda is school choice, charters, and vouchers. But there are some opportunities in other priorities that have been mentioned – expanding college affordability, and access to career and technical skills, which I think is fantastic. I'm just hoping that the public can convince the new administration to keep programs like Title I and IDEA intact, in terms of making sure that more young people receive this support, especially for low-income kids, kids who are immigrants, kids of color, and kids with special needs. I hope that this administration and the new Secretary of Education honor how much work went into passing ESSA and will work to implement it as it was intended.

At our Mayors' Education Task Force meeting, I heard mayors say that they may still have an opportunity to influence the new administration. I think there is some concerns, but they want to figure out, where are the intersections, where are the sweet spots and issues that resonate with the new administration? One mayor talked about the opportunity that might exist to work with the new leadership around access to career and technical skills, and also college affordability. I did not hear much discussion of school choice, charters, or vouchers. Maybe they were being cautious – I don't know. I think they were talking mainly about the issues that matter to them.

The mayors are focused on where they can intersect with the administration's education agenda. The hope is that there are no major reduction in funding that supports school districts across the country as well as afterschool programs, such as the [21st Century Community Learning Centers](#), which are funded through ESSA and housed in the US Department of Education. We want to keep what we have; our school districts and our cities need these resources.

From where I sit at the NLC, our task is to find ways to work with this administration by sharing what we know and what we have seen that works in local communities. We want to try to use data, evidence and stories to influence decisions they are going to make and also to provide them with information, in terms of how cities are experiencing the education climate right now and what cities need. We are going to try to find common ground, wherever we can find it because cities know there is no time to waste. Our youth are the future of cities and the success of our nation depends on them.

A View from Academia: Creative Strategies for New Coalitions

by Kenneth Wong

Kenneth Wong is the Walter and Leonore Annenberg Chair for Education Policy at Brown University.

“Charter schools and traditional public schools should not be avoiding one another, but instead I think we need to convene as soon as we can to explore common ground. We are all serving similar students, similar needs, and we are facing similar challenges.”



First of all, the federal government has a unique responsibility to address educational inequality and educational quality for all children. Regardless of how the new US Secretary of Education is going to redefine or reframe the federal education agenda, I think all the stakeholders need to continue to focus on their work so that the federal government under the new leadership will continue to pay attention to schooling inequality, resource disparity, and teacher quality in high-needs communities.

RETHINKING RELATIONSHIPS AND STRATEGIES

The election may have certain implications in terms of coalition building. We may need to think about reassessing who should be included in some of these conversations with the new administration in charge. For example, right now we see a lot of tension between the charter schools and the traditional public schools. So with the new administration, there might be a need for us to reassess this tension, particularly in urban areas where the traditional public schools as well as the charter schools are all serving high-needs students – low-income students, students of color, minority, recent immigrants, and so on. Given the election, these two groups of stakeholders should not be avoiding one another, but instead I think we need to convene as soon as we can to really explore the common ground. We are all serving similar students, similar needs, and we are facing similar challenges. There is really a lot of common ground, and I think we need to rethink that relationship.

I also think the relationship between states and local communities should be revisited. Often we try to build up the capacity of the local community, but we need to think about how to connect to stakeholders at the state level. Oftentimes, stakeholders at the state level may not share the same degree of urgency as local urban stakeholders. But I think because of the election, and because of the reallocation of responsibility under [ESSA](#), the states are going to play a leading role in shaping the agenda and the priorities. That's a reality that I think local stakeholders need to pay extra attention to. Instead of thinking that it is sufficient for us to really work on the local ecosystem, I think we need to think about the dynamic interplay between the local ecosystem and the state policymaking process, and think about ways to make our voices heard in the state policymaking process.

A case in point would be state funding. Oklahoma is one example, where they did not pass the [statewide referendum](#) to provide additional money to the school system. And so you can see that in order to create the conditions that enable us to do a better job in improving urban schools, we need to think about the overall policymaking context at the state level, in terms of funding, teacher quality, and academic standards. Regardless of how powerful local stakeholders are in organizing within urban areas, it is not sufficient; we need to think about ways to connect to the state-level policymaking. Just in terms of those three critical issues, that is going to affect how well we are able to do our work.

Education reform will be substantially defined by who is in charge in the statehouses across the country, and who is in charge in the governors' offices, across the country. The larger governing landscape is that you've got two-thirds of the state legislatures now under the control of the Republican Party, and 34 governors from the Republican side. It is not just the federal government. So we need to think of ways to communicate more effectively. How do you translate your findings, your research, in ways that allow you to make a persuasive argument, to get their attention? Maybe up to now, we are very effective in terms of communicating to urban mayors, maybe we are very used to that. But then a question is, how do you communicate across the aisle? I think that may be an interesting challenge for a lot of the stakeholders.

We need to identify who are the key stakeholders at the state level. And so some typical ones would be the statewide taxpayers, and some suburban communities who may not see the need to provide additional money to the school funding formula, and may not see the need to address low-performing schools. So there are some differences of priorities because their needs are very different. So we need to work at the state level and communicate the needs of urban areas, particularly inner-city schooling challenges. I think we need to take their perspective into consideration and see if there may be ways to be mindful of their interests, and yet at the same time push forward with urban interests.

Oftentimes we have looked at resource and policy priorities as a zero-sum game, and may oversimplify them as a dichotomy: you are either for equity, or you are against it. So I think we need to think about ways to capture the grey area. I think the grey area is the opportunity for us to make a difference. The grey area is that you can push for equity within the framework of efficiency, for example. A lot of the new governors and the legislature are going to push for more efficiency, meaning that they are going to tighten the belt, there will not be any additional resources, and there might be even stronger accountability to make sure that the teachers are producing the results, and maybe holding more schools accountable, state by state, in terms of their state definition of accountability. So, within that framework, we can find ways to push for

more equitable allocation of resources and more equitable definition of efficiency – more equitable, more targeted. So, I’m pushing for more creative thinking, in terms of the current framework of equity and education for all children.

There might be opportunities to target the resources that don’t create a lot of political opposition. One example that I’m thinking about is early childhood education – the political opposition against early childhood doesn’t seem to be too visible. We all know that there are only limited resources for early childhood – preschools, kindergartens, Head Start programs, and wellness development for infants and toddlers. Within that framework, there may be opportunities to actually target the resources in ways that will serve those who otherwise may not have the resources to do preschool by themselves. So in a way, we can still get to what we want to get to by pushing for support in areas that oftentimes we may not see a direct link, but by creating these kinds of enabling conditions, broadly defined, then we will get to that equity.

STRENGTH OF THE “CHILDREN’S AGENDA”

Looking at the broader picture of the children’s agenda – not just in terms of formal public schooling as an institution, but the broad concern about creating quality of life for children and supporting children as a whole – I’m hopeful that the children’s agenda will remain vibrant. With the US Senate races bringing in new women Senators, and even Trump having talked about daycare – regardless of the particular way of doing it, but even thinking that children’s affairs are part of the federal government’s major responsibility – I think that’s a welcoming sign.

And a lot of governors and legislative leaders are supportive of some kind of children’s agenda – different states have now developed family and children’s cabinets or children’s cabinets, at the state level. This trend is not going to slow down. And so that gives me hope that we will continue to be able to push public commitment and public resources to address the needs of children.