

PUBLIC  
EDUCATION  
NETWORK

Public involvement. Public education. Public benefit.

# Public Affairs:

## The Community's Role in Public Education



---

## **Our Vision**

Every day, in every community, *every* child in America benefits from a quality public education.

## **Our Mission**

To build public demand and mobilize resources for quality public education for *all* children through a national constituency of local education funds and individuals.

## **Our Guiding Values**

Public education is fundamental to a democratic, civil, prosperous society.

Public schools are critical institutions for breaking the cycle of poverty and redressing social inequities.

Education reform must be systemic to be effective.

Public engagement, community support, and adequate resources are essential to the success of public education.

Independent community-based organizations must play a central role in building and sustaining broad support for quality public education and for achieving significant reform in the nation's public schools.

Parents and caregivers should be involved in all attempts to improve public schools.

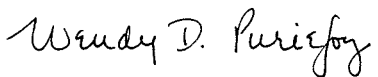
Dear Colleagues:

Today, Public Education Network is celebrating the realization of a public engagement initiative that began five years ago with invaluable support from the Annenberg Foundation. With the completion of a national evaluation conducted by Policy Studies Associates, we are now at a point where we can share the lessons and accomplishments of this groundbreaking work with you.

Rather than seeing this challenging and rewarding journey as the culmination of a remarkable initiative, we view it as a beginning. It is a time to not only acknowledge our work, but strategically apply our insights where they can be most effective – in communities throughout the country.

This work is our most compelling roadmap for the critical roles that public engagement must play in helping to strengthen schools and communities. PEN's local education funds have been vital partners in this work, and their leadership has strengthened the network's understanding and resolve to build broad-based public responsibility for public education.

Thank you, as always, for your interest and steadfast support of our work.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Wendy D. Puriefoy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each word being capitalized and prominent.

**Wendy D. Puriefoy**

President

Public Education Network

## FOREWORD

At first mention, school reform brings to mind moments of high drama – the Kentucky Supreme Court’s ruling that the state’s public school system in its entirety was unconstitutional; the issuance of *A Nation at Risk* by the National Commission on Excellence in Education; and the bipartisan enactment of No Child Left Behind. Each event was extraordinary, and each signaled that education was no longer to be regarded as a matter of routine concern. Each recognized not only that today’s world calls for equitable education of first quality, but also that we are still a long way from realizing that goal. 000

Significant as such high-profile moments are, the struggle for comprehensive school reform involves much more. With constituency building her aim, Public Education Network’s Wendy Puriefoy calls for a citizenry that is “vigilant, knowledgeable, and active.” In a complex arena like public education, lasting change does not just happen. If educational improvement is to take hold as a sustainable reality, then a broad-based and continuing source of public support is very much in order. Drawing on their experiences in the field, Puriefoy and others remind us that this kind of support is not something that happens magically, as if by spontaneous combustion. Robert Sexton, head of Kentucky’s Prichard Commission, attributes success in that state’s school reform effort to the presence of an “organized public voice.”

Through its 81 local education fund affiliates, Public Education Network (PEN) is positioned to encourage and enlist the kind of civic scaffolding that deep reform calls for. The study reported here is an exploration of the link between public engagement and school reform and of the ways in which public engagement can be strengthened. PEN is a leading force in refining our understanding of public engagement and how it operates. Yet, despite PEN’s pioneering work in constituency building, citizen involvement is often equated with such things as PTA bake sales, passive receipt of information from school administrators, and attendance at back-to-school nights.

PEN has long held a more robust view of engagement and has sought local action commensurate with that view. Directly involving top officials in reform and committing them to sustained action is an important strategy embodied in the community covenant for public education in Durham, North Carolina. Signed at a public ceremony, the document committed leading local officials to a continuing effort to improve student achievement in partnership with a covenant task force of parents, business figures, and members of community-based organizations.

---

Linking citizens to key policy makers is, of course, a vital component in an overall picture of public engagement. But necessary as that link may be, it is far from sufficient. The experience of Mobile, Alabama, reminds us how important an active and informed public can be. As an electorate, the citizenry renders important judgments about what is or is not to be done. Mobile's experience reminds us that informing and activating a public is itself a process that requires careful planning, resources, and a thought-out structure of organization.

Experiences from many places offer significant lessons. In an effort to make crucial information more accessible, Denver developed a citizen version of that city's complex school budget. Washington's DC VOICE used citizens to collect information to highlight the needs of the school system. Across the continent in southern California, UCLA's Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access has shown the important and empowering role that young people and community members can play in analyzing school practices and pushing for change.

Kentucky's Prichard Committee takes as one of its central tasks keeping public attention focused on school reform. Enactment of a reform package is only a preliminary step; implementation is an ongoing process. In the decade following the adoption of the Kentucky Education Reform Act, members of the Prichard Committee and its staff made 3000 public appearances before various groups across the state. And, at strategic points, the Prichard Committee made sure that reform opponents did not monopolize media attention.

Public engagement, however, extends far beyond efforts to mold public opinion. As PEN's Annenberg-supported initiative shows, another aspect of public engagement is to tap the world of service providers and encourage their collaboration with one another, with community organizations, and with school systems. Community schools and school-linked services have become a significant part of the education scene in communities as diverse as Lincoln, Nebraska; Lancaster, Pennsylvania; and Paterson, New Jersey. In a thriving system of public education, citizens are not a passive audience; rather, through parent and neighborhood groups and a variety of informal means, they are active contributors to the process.

With backing from the Annenberg Foundation, PEN promoted intensified civic involvement in selected cities and documented the kind of ground-level work needed to make headway. Technical assistance in mastering the engagement process, developing local skills in facilitation, building on and from personal connections, and training in various forms of participation all show that linking citizens with their public institutions is no easy matter that springs into place just because it is acknowledged to be useful.

Closer linkage between citizens and officials is a widely felt need, and it is felt as keenly in public education as anywhere else. Although promoting public engagement is challenging, it is not a matter of overcoming underlying resistance. In the Annenberg-supported initiative, measures to provide an open process revealed that, given genuinely inviting circumstances, citizens are eager to take part. Those involved in a series of town meetings in Pennsylvania on No Child Left Behind reported being overwhelmed by just how much people wanted to be engaged.

Nevertheless barriers to participation abound, and the experiences reported here document various aspects of those barriers. Educators guard their professional prerogatives closely; citizens are often distrustful of public officials (sometimes with very good reason); corruption can gain a foothold in areas such as school construction and facilities renovation; communication across the citizen-expert divide can be difficult; untimely staff changes can disrupt what is often a delicate task of process construction; stakeholders may possess antagonistic understandings of what they want from public education reform; change is sometimes discomforting; and the list of friction points runs on. Still, there are steps that can be taken to break down some of the barriers, aid the flow of information, facilitate constructive public discussion, and build valuable alliances and networks. Careful attention needs to be given to seemingly small matters, and making more personal contacts is a valuable approach. Overscripting a process in advance can be a hindrance since leaving room for local creativity can engender a vital sense of ownership. There are many lessons to be learned.

Building public engagement is not a technical matter devoid of interpersonal dynamics, nor is it a matter unconnected to structures of community influence. As one local education fund director put it: “This is not rocket science. It’s political science.” Indeed, for the kinds of skills needed to bring about a shared understanding of the public education challenge, one might say it is more the art of politics than the science of it. Even so, theory has its place.

PEN’s venture into expanded constituency building was guided by a theory of action, one with kinship to the experience of the Prichard Committee in Kentucky and with numerous other efforts to organize people for school reform at the level of the local community. In its simplest form the theory posits that a reform idea plus public engagement equals change in education practice; reform idea minus public engagement equals inability to cope with an intricate process. The world of public education reform obviously has many complexities not captured in this preliminary model, but the experiences reported here point us in the direction of identifying those complexities, thinking about how to incorporate them into a more refined theory of change, and, ultimately, of achieving that change.

**Clarence N. Stone**

Professor Emeritus, University of Maryland.

# INTRODUCTION

Public education is essential for a vibrant democracy, a healthy economy, and a pluralistic society. In the United States, public education is the primary institution that prepares each successive generation to participate in American democracy. The knowledge and actions of those generations will determine the priorities we set as a society and will frame what constitutes our quality of life.

For public education to survive and thrive, Public Education Network (PEN) believes the public must support the vital roles of public schools, and that good public schools can only exist when the public plays an active role in ensuring a high-quality education for every child.

Therefore, in 2001, PEN undertook a bold four-year, \$15 million initiative to increase public responsibility for public schools – i.e., the degree to which the public explicitly demands high-quality schools for every child – in 14 communities around the country.

## WHY PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT MATTERS

We know what quality public education looks like: it includes high expectations; qualified teachers; standards aligned with curriculum, instruction and assessment; safe and healthy learning environments; comprehensive academic and social supports for students; and high levels of parent and community involvement.

Indeed, enormous progress has been made in establishing standards and in identifying the levers that make the greatest difference in student achievement. However, because many school systems lack accountability, reforms undertaken by education professionals or brokered in back rooms tend to be faddish and ephemeral. The past two decades have witnessed a litany of programs and strategies designed to improve schools and increase student achievement, all with limited success. As a result, education reform has yet to go to scale and sustained large-scale improvement remains elusive.

Today's renewed emphasis on accountability and academic achievement, and on the ever-widening gaps among student populations, puts the focus back where it belongs, namely, on what needs to be done so that every child can achieve at high levels.

To be effective, accountability must be a very “public” affair with clear goals, clear expectations, and clear consequences that all can understand and all can act upon. When a school system is no longer working, the public must demand accountability and take back

its responsibility – which it has currently abdicated to school boards and school administrators – to exert a clear vision for what needs to change and how these changes will occur.

Sustainable reform that benefits all children requires significant public involvement and a fundamental shift in public commitment. In high-performing school systems, the public delegates its responsibility for quality education and maintains oversight of school performance by participating in elections, attending school board meetings, and serving on school committees. When the public abdicates its responsibility, involvement in these activities dwindles, active oversight declines, authority wanes, and schools flounder.

Broad public involvement and buy-in of an education reform agenda can also help school systems to avoid policy “churn” – the abrupt change in policies and priorities that often accompany the arrival of a new superintendent, school board members, or state legislators – that stalls or impedes progress. PEN believes policy change can be stabilized when the public is actively involved. In this scenario, the vision for school improvement is held by the community, whose members then elect a school board that shares their vision, and that board, in turn, hires a superintendent who is committed to implementing the vision.

Unfortunately, public engagement is most difficult



to achieve in the very communities where it is most needed. Residents of low-income communities, where students often have the furthest to go to meet new academic requirements, have become increasingly disengaged from their schools. Indifference, disillusionment, and sometimes outright hostility undermine the prospects for quality schools and improved student achievement.

## Building Public Responsibility for Better Public Schools

Restoring public responsibility and involvement is critical to the future of public education in this country. Without public demand for improvement, too many schools will continue to wallow in low expectations and failure. The connection between the public and its schools is tenuous and has been strained to the breaking point in far too many urban school districts.

PEN's concept of public engagement includes a commitment to engage multiple constituencies, ranging from opinion leaders to the business community to the sometimes disenfranchised public. When all constituencies in a community take responsibility for public schools, much more than policy changes occur: a stronger civic infrastructure will develop, an increased capacity to solve problems will emerge, a stronger economic status will result, and citizens fully participating in a democratic society will become the norm.

## PEN's Theory of Action

PEN's goal for its public engagement initiative was to create public demand for quality education for all children and to see this demand result in improved public schools.

In designing this initiative, we envisioned communities developing substantive education agendas that result in real gains in student achievement and we envisioned communities developing a strong community voice that argues for improvement in public schools and helps to guide the changes leading to improvement.

Public Engagement +  
Specific School Reform Goals  
=  
Sustained Policy and Practice +  
The Public Taking Responsibility  
for Public Schools

At the heart of PEN's initiative lies a *theory of action*, which states that school reform efforts can be sustained only if they are shaped by the public and only if a wide array of stakeholders are involved in the identification of the problems, diagnosis of the causes, strategic development of the solutions, monitoring of the impact solutions have on the problems, and holding public officials accountable. PEN's theory of action is based on a proactive concept of public engagement, one that enlists the public directly in formulating the policies to be carried out. The theory defines the public as comprising three distinct audiences – the public-at-large, organized stakeholder groups and professionals, and policymakers – and employing three key strategies:

- structuring and hosting inclusive public conversations about public schools and how to improve them

- enlisting professional service providers inside and outside schools in collaborations designed to extend and enhance their professional work
- communicating early and often with policymakers about priorities identified by the public

## Implementing the Theory of Action

PEN has grounded its theory in real practice in real communities. In 2001, PEN implemented a large-scale public engagement initiative covering three broad policy areas: standards and accountability, schools and communities, and teacher quality. PEN issued a request for proposals to its local education fund (LEF) members and subsequently awarded three-year implementation grants of \$500,000 to 14 LEFs.

As independent, credible voices for better public schools in their communities, LEFs are in a unique position to build and facilitate public engagement campaigns around education reform initiatives. They can bridge the gap between school district leaders and the public-at-large, and are well positioned to marry public policy with public engagement strategies.

LEFs led this pioneering effort in 14 communities across the country. Working with community leaders and members of the public, LEFs facilitated the development of community-wide visions for local public schools, and then helped these communities realize their visions for school improvement by fostering community responsibility inside and outside public schools.

Through this work, a movement has begun to take hold – a movement to create communities that care about the quality of their public schools, that take action to support their schools, and that feel engaged

and connected to the work of their schools. The end result is better education outcomes for students and stronger communities that know how to work together to solve problems.

## Uncommon Starting Points

PEN recognized from the beginning that the degree of community disengagement, the success of existing school improvement efforts, and the willingness of the school district to change would vary dramatically by location.

In addition, PEN recognized that the different organizational structures of the grantee LEFs, along with the different kinds of relationships they had with their school districts, would influence the success of the initiative in their respective communities.

The nature and activities of public engagement work would vary by community, as would the outcomes. These different starting points offer fertile ground for learning about public engagement strategies that make a lasting difference.

PEN learned much about what is possible and what it looks like when a community truly does begin to take responsibility for its schools.



## Engaging the Public-at-Large

Mobile Area Education Foundation (MAEF) , Mobile County, AL

*Standards & Accountability*

### Public Engagement

Launched a multi-year public engagement process involving 1,500 citizens in 60 community conversations on public schools

Employing a process adapted from the Harwood Institute for Public Innovation, used the conversations as the basis for the *Yes We Can!* community agreement

Using the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence, MAEF worked with the school district to translate *Yes We Can!* into *PASSport to Excellence*, a strategic plan for district and community action

### Policy & Practice Outcomes

The Mobile school board endorsed *Yes We Can!*, an agreement that articulates the community's vision on student achievement, district and school leadership, communications and engagement, governance, and equity.

The *PASSport to Excellence* was adopted by the school board and guides the district's work today.

Citizens monitor the work of the school board, the superintendent, and schools through "dashboards" (indicators of progress against strategic plan goals) displayed at each school and by keeping track of the district's progress against the *PASSport to Excellence* as publicly reported in annual reports.

The Education Alliance, West Virginia (Statewide)

*Teacher Quality*

### Public Engagement

Engaged citizens from 70 percent of WV counties through dialogue and interviews on local and state policies to support teaching quality

Surveyed 1,422 secondary public school teachers

Organized a May 2005 statewide education summit, the culmination of the bottom-up engagement process, attended by state leaders

### Policy & Practice Outcomes

In 2004, a bill was passed by the West Virginia legislature supporting a five-year effort to close the achievement gap for African-American students and students from low-income families in 10 counties; \$700,000 in funding was appropriated for the first year.

The 2005 statewide summit generated recommendations on school governance, teacher recruitment and retention, funding, teacher preparation, and personnel evaluation that were then submitted to policymakers. A special legislative session was called later that year to address several education issues raised during the summit.

## Durham Public Education Network (DPEN), Durham, NC

### Standards & Accountability

#### Public Engagement

Launched a community-wide initiative to close the achievement gap, with more than 120 people participating in 15 teams, resulting in the development of a *Covenant for Education*

Created a task force of 40+ community members to conduct a needs assessment of Durham's schools to determine what was needed to close the achievement gap

Despite driving rain, 700 people participated in an LEF-sponsored "Walk for Education" to draw attention to the needs of local public schools and demonstrate support for public education.

#### Policy & Practice Outcomes

Over 200 community leaders signed the *Covenant for Education* thus going on record and giving the community the means to hold them accountable for closing the achievement gap by 2007, half the time required by NCLB.

Durham citizens passed a ~~local~~<sup>state</sup> bond referendum with a 79 percent majority, with DPEN serving as one of the major community leaders of the effort.

## DC VOICE, Washington, DC

### Teacher Quality

#### Public Engagement

Drawing upon national effective practices, produced a customized a framework to improve teaching quality: the *DC VOICE Supports for Quality Teaching*

Researched critical data on supports provided by the school system to teachers and principals

Conducted two annual new-teacher surveys

Trained 50 community members to gather data on staffing, teaching and learning conditions, facilities, and parent and community involvement

Used data from 43 DC public schools to produce the *Ready Schools Project* report, highlighting teacher hiring and professional development

#### Policy & Practice Outcomes

In 2004, the DC Board of Education passed a resolution supporting new policies for teacher induction based on the DC VOICE framework. A Community Policy Advisory Group will monitor the school system to make sure the new policies are implemented.

In 2005, the school system, in tandem with the teachers union, significantly altered its teacher hiring policies and instituted earlier dates for recruiting and hiring, as recommended in the *Ready Schools Project* report.

**Alliance for Education, Seattle, WA**  
*Teacher Quality*

**Public Engagement**

Developed a steering committee including children’s advocacy groups, the PTSA, the district, teachers and principals associations, city and county government, the business community, and the University of Washington to guide public engagement around teaching quality

Conducted 53 public dialogues about teacher quality in Seattle’s public schools that involved more than 1,500 members of the community

**Policy & Practice Outcomes**

Paved the way for increasing the number of hours dedicated to teacher professional collaboration. Obtained private funding and provided technical assistance for the development of a new, standards-based teacher growth and evaluations system. Spearheaded the development of an on-line exit interview system to more accurately track trends in teacher movement and termination.

~~Secured funds to~~ support early career teachers in high-turnover schools to pursue continuing certification. Teachers commit to remaining in their positions two years beyond the certification process.

The Seattle public school district now holds community forums on its five-year transformation plan and engages the community on the issue of school consolidation. The union also has adopted the LEF’s public engagement process.

**Public Education Foundation, Hamilton County, TN**  
*Teacher Quality*

**Public Engagement**

Documented issues on teaching in high-poverty schools in Chattanooga as compared to teaching in schools in nearby suburbs

Convened 200+ participants in public forums organized in partnership with Urban League to discuss teacher quality issues in Chattanooga

**Policy & Practice Outcomes**

Funding from regional foundations is supporting new programs that focus on high-poverty schools and teacher quality.

**Paterson Education Fund , Paterson, NJ**  
*Schools & Communities*

**Public Engagement**

Convened the Paterson Alliance, an umbrella group of community-based organizations, to support the development of community schools

Continues to convene annual conferences on community schools

**Policy & Practice Outcomes**

In 2004, the school board adopted a policy formally supporting community schools.

# Collaborating with Community-based Organizations & Service Providers

## Foundation for Lincoln Public Schools (FLPS), Lincoln, NE *Schools & Communities*

### Public Engagement Strategies

Promoted partnerships to leverage resources and create a seamless system of care for children, youth, families and neighborhood residents

Focused on achieving improved student learning and development, strong and supportive families, and engaged neighborhoods

### Policy & Practice Outcomes

FLPS has opened 19 community learning centers (CLCs) in elementary and middle schools, with active collaboration and financial support from community agencies and a broad-based leadership team.

Tremendous growth in service delivery, inter-organizational relationships, and community support for CLCs has occurred. Potentially fragile partnerships among the participating agencies have solidified. The CLCs are an established community resource.

## Lancaster Foundation for Education Enrichment (LFEE), Lancaster, PA *Schools & Communities*

### Public Engagement Strategies

Partnered with the School and Community Network (SCN), a coalition of more than 90 service providers, to develop school-based services in Lancaster's public schools

### Policy & Practice Outcomes

LFEE and SCN developed school-based services in nine elementary and middle schools. Community schools are now part of the school district's strategic plan.

## New Visions for Public Schools, New York, NY *Teacher Quality*

### Public Engagement Strategies

Conducted 10 town hall forums and 100 smaller meetings to gather input on creating small high schools in NYC; more than 50,000 people participated

Worked to get community partners deeply involved in school design and program implementation

### Policy & Practice Outcomes

Community organizations were deeply involved in starting up 78 new small NYC high schools. Each high school had a community organization as a partner in school management, after-school services, and teacher professional development. The result – a diverse group of 78 innovative campuses of community-based small high schools

## The Education Partnership, Providence, RI

### *Schools & Communities*

#### Public Engagement Strategies

Started offering school-based programs and then extended the model district-wide and began advocating for state funding

Piloted a new approach to after-school services which grew into the Providence After School Alliance (PASA), a public-private partnership led by the mayor and developed in a process with over 100 community leaders.

#### Policy & Practice Outcomes

PASA provides after-school services to students throughout Providence, and is partially funded by national and local foundations.

The governor has proposed state funding for after school services throughout the state.

## Communicating with Policymakers

### Portland Schools Foundation (PSF), Portland, OR

#### *Standards & Accountability*

#### Public Engagement Strategies

Created a task force comprising district leaders, school unions, community and parent organizations, teachers, principals, and city officials to develop strategies to close the achievement gap

Held a series of community forums to discuss priorities in education, and to re-engage community members in advocating policy change and voting for more funding for Portland schools

Waged a campaign to elect new members to the school board and then provided the new board with governance training by experts from the Broad Institute

Brought in consultants from the Annenberg Institute for School Reform to study the district and make recommendations

#### Policies & Outcomes

The Achievement Data Task Force, convened by PSF, released *All Children Achieving: Creating a System of High-Performing Learning Communities*.

Despite statewide sentiment for cutting taxes, the citizens of Portland agreed in 2003 to tax themselves to support the public schools, raising \$53 million for the local public school system in each of the next three years, and rebuffed a 2004 ballot measure that would have repealed that tax.

In 2004, voters replaced four incumbent school board members with people more supportive of closing the achievement gap and improving the schools.



## New Jersey LEF Consortium, New Jersey (statewide)

### Standards & Accountability

#### Public Engagement Strategies

Formed a consortium of New Jersey LEFs to work at the state level on implementation of the *Abbott* school finance decision

Consortium partnered with the New Jersey Education Law Center to achieve full, good faith implementation of the *Abbott* decision by the state

Created an e-advocacy website, GiveNJKidsGoodSchools.com; Within a week of its launch, more over 1,000 citizens sent an email to the governor urging him to maintain adequate state funding for *Abbott* school districts

#### Policy & Practice Outcomes

PEF ~~helped~~ relatively ~~inactive~~ New Jersey LEFs build capacity to advocate for policy changes.

PEF staff members were appointed to state level working groups, and local groups took on more visibility in Trenton.

## Pennsylvania Public Education Partnership (PAPEP), Pennsylvania (statewide)

### Standards & Accountability

#### Public Engagement Strategies

Formed a coalition to prepare and distribute more than 25,000 Voters' Guides on education issues during the 2002 gubernatorial election

Cultivated relationships with Good Schools Pennsylvania (GSPA), Education Policy and Leadership Center, and the statewide PTA

Convened seven town meetings on No Child Left Behind attended by more than 450 people

Participated in a 2003 "Stand for Children" rally in Harrisburg, co-sponsored by the Mon Valley Education Consortium and GSPA and a rally co-sponsored by the Lancaster Foundation for Educational Enrichment and GSPA that drew over 200 participants

#### Policy & Practice Outcomes

PAPEP gained a place at the table at the state level and access to other state-level advocates, policymakers, and grassroots constituencies.

Participants from town meetings went on to testify at the statewide hearing on NCLB in Harrisburg.

## LESSONS LEARNED

### LEF Roles

To develop greater levels of public engagement, LEFs had to play two key roles in their communities: building community capacity and building school system capacity.

LEFs helped to build community capacity by developing venues for discussion of issues and by broadening the base of trust within the community. They teamed up with community-based organizations and, in several instances, added additional staff that had credibility in particular parts of the community.

LEFs helped to build school system capacity to incorporate community engagement into district practice by bringing in consultants with national expertise in effective governance from organizations such as the Broad Institute; by utilizing proven strategies of leadership and strategic planning such as those embodied in the Baldrige Education Criteria for Performance Excellence; and by showing districts more effective ways to convene members of the public and key stakeholders.

LEFS PLAY TWO KEY  
ROLES: BUILDING  
COMMUNITY CAPACITY  
AND BUILDING SCHOOL  
SYSTEM CAPACITY.

### LEF Challenges

LEFs experienced dramatic changes and underwent significant growth during the course of the initiative. Participating LEFs said the policy initiative had changed their organizations and brought a new organizing framework to their work.

Entering the policy arena was new work for many LEFs and most found it hard to make the transition from programmatic concerns to a policy focus. They found it difficult to identify and pursue policy targets and LEF leaders found it particularly challenging to exercise community leadership without formal authority. Some executive directors even found themselves embroiled in political battles.

Finding ways to navigate the expert-citizen divide was another challenge. LEFs found it hard to keep the public engaged when conversations turned to detailed explorations of policy and program mechanisms. As it turned out, when LEFs tried to shape their initial work around specific policy prescriptions, they were not able to gain broad-based community support.

Many LEF directors and board members had concerns about taking a more higher-profile role in community mobilization. Some LEF boards, especially those whose members predated the start of the policy initiative, would have preferred to see the LEF focus on funding services rather than branching out into policy development and public engagement. However, as the effectiveness of public engagement as a vehicle for school improvement has emerged, many now see public engagement as central to the LEF mission.

### Lessons Learned

Public engagement is difficult work – sometimes even a very tough fight – that takes a great deal of time. But we believe our theory of action will pay dividends for thousands of children in low-performing schools where “business as usual” has been allowed to go on for too long.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT  
IS DIFFICULT BUT WILL  
PAY DIVIDENDS FOR  
THOUSANDS OF CHILDREN  
IN LOW-PERFORMING  
SCHOOLS.

We know there is a need to assemble a powerful force on the side of change and we have learned what is possible, how obstacles can be overcome, and how long it takes to do so.

In the short-term, the initiative helped participating communities develop broadly held visions of what they want from their schools, promoted greater community involvement, and resulted in more effective action.

But the larger objective of this work is to create public demand for good public schools and to have this demand result in improved student achievement. So, over the long term, we hope communities will develop a substantive education agenda that leads to real improvement in student achievement. We hope that a strong community voice will emerge to argue for improvement and guide change. We hope to see robust community organizations that are continually building new leadership and sustaining involvement. And we hope to have accountability systems that assign shared responsibility for success to everyone in the community.



## Public Education Network Resources

*[www.PublicEducation.org](http://www.PublicEducation.org)*

*Taking Responsibility: Using Public Engagement to Reform Our Public Schools* tells the story of how local education funds have strengthened democracy by working with their communities to structure, convene, and apply lessons learned from public engagement activities.

*Communities at Work* highlights strategic interventions used by local education funds to involve parents, business leaders, and a wide range of community members in education issues.

*A Community Action Guide to Teacher Quality* is designed to help communities arrive at a better understanding of teachers and teaching, and the community role in attaining high-quality teaching.

*The Voice of the New Teacher* looks at the needs of new teachers in the context of quality teaching.

*Using NCLB to Improve Student Achievement: An Action Guide for Community and Parent Leaders* highlights ways NCLB can be used to strengthen the public's voice in education, and increase community and parental involvement in school- and district-level operations and decisions.

## LEF Products & Tools

### Data Collection & Community Engagement

#### DC VOICE

- Report, *Ready Schools Project 2005*  
Project with data collection using community members as researchers
- Executive Summary, *Ready Schools Project 2004*
- Report, *Ready Schools Project 2004*
- Report, *Youth Voices*, w/high school youth speaking out about DC schools in focus groups

#### Alliance for Education (Seattle)

- Report, Washington Teacher Retention and Mobility  
Public Engagement: Reached 1,500 community members in 44 public dialogues

#### The Education Alliance (West Virginia)

- West Virginia Education Summit PowerPoint on Teaching Quality Community Dialogues  
State-wide Public Engagement Process: Reached 215 participants in 16 counties

#### Pennsylvania Public Education Partnership

- PAPEP Fact Sheet  
State-wide Public Engagement: Reached 450 participants in seven town meetings

### Community Strategic Plans

#### Durham Public Education Network

- Durham Community Action Plan 2002  
Signed by 200 community leaders in a public ceremony

#### Mobile Area Education Foundation

- *Yes We Can* Community Agreement
- PASSport to Excellence strategic plan report
- Carolyn Akers, MAEF Executive Director, “Developing a Civic Infrastructure,” *VUE: Voices in Urban Education* (Number 9, Fall 2005)  
Public Engagement: Reached 1,500 community members in 60 Community Conversations

### Supporting School Boards & Districts for the Long Term

#### Mobile Area Education Foundation

- Baldrige Education Criteria for Performance Excellence

#### Portland Schools Foundation

- School board training from the Broad Institute
- Annenberg Institute for School Reform

### Community Alliances

#### The Education Partnership (Providence)

- Providence for After School Alliance  
A public-private partnership with 100+ leaders from business, government, philanthropy

#### Foundation for Lincoln Public Schools

- Lincoln CLC Overview  
Working with community agencies and raising diverse array of funding

#### New Visions for Public Schools (New York)

- Report, *Reframing Education: The Partnership Strategy and Public Schools*  
Documenting the New Century High Schools community partnership strategy

## Participating Local Education Funds

### Teacher Quality Sites

Alliance for Education  
Seattle, WA  
206 343 0449  
[www.alliance4ed.org](http://www.alliance4ed.org)

**DC VOICE**  
Washington, DC  
202 986 8538  
[www.dcvoice.org](http://www.dcvoice.org)

**The Education Alliance**  
Charleston, WV  
304 342 7850  
[www.educationalliance.org](http://www.educationalliance.org)

**New Visions for Public Schools**  
New York, NY  
212 645 5110  
[www.newvisions.org](http://www.newvisions.org)

**Public Education Foundation**  
Chattanooga, TN  
423 265 9403  
[www.pefchattanooga.org](http://www.pefchattanooga.org)

### Schools & Community Sites

**Education Partnership**  
Providence, RI  
401 331 5222  
[www.edpartnership.org](http://www.edpartnership.org)

**Foundation for Lincoln Public Schools**  
Lincoln, NE  
402 436 1612  
[www.foundationforlps.org](http://www.foundationforlps.org)

**Lancaster Foundation for Educational Enrichment**  
Lancaster, PA  
717 391 8660  
[www.lfee.org](http://www.lfee.org)

**Paterson Education Fund**  
Paterson, NJ  
973 881 8914  
[www.paterson-education.org](http://www.paterson-education.org)

### Standards & Accountability Sites

**Mobile Area Education Foundation**  
Mobile, AL  
251 476 0002  
[www.maef.net/pages](http://www.maef.net/pages)

**Durham Public Education Network**  
Durham, NC  
919 683 6503  
[www.dpen.com](http://www.dpen.com)

**Portland Schools Foundation**  
Portland, OR  
503 234 5404  
[www.portlandschoolsfoundation.org](http://www.portlandschoolsfoundation.org)

**New Jersey Consortium**  
**Paterson Education Fund**  
Paterson, NJ  
973 881 8914  
[www.paterson-education.org](http://www.paterson-education.org)

**East Orange Education Foundation, Inc.**  
East Orange, NJ  
973 266 5763

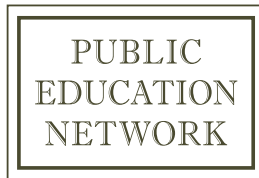
**Montclair Fund for Educational Excellence**  
Montclair, NJ  
973 509 4021  
[www.mfee.org](http://www.mfee.org)

**Pennsylvania Public Education Partnership (PAPEP)**

**Mon Valley Education Consortium**

McKeesport, PA  
412 678 9215  
[www.mvec.org](http://www.mvec.org)  
**Lancaster Foundation for Educational Enrichment**  
Lancaster, PA 17602  
717 391 8660  
[www.lfee.org](http://www.lfee.org)

**Philadelphia Education Fund**  
Philadelphia, PA  
215 665 1400  
[www.philaedfund.org](http://www.philaedfund.org)



**Public involvement. Public education. Public benefit.**

**601 Thirteenth Street NW, Suite 710 South**

**Washington, DC 20005**

**202 628 7460**

**[www.publiceducation.org](http://www.publiceducation.org)**