

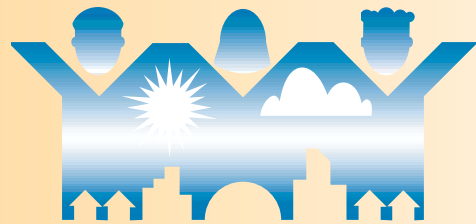


National League of Cities

Improving Public Schools

Issue #5

action kit for Municipal Leaders



Institute for Youth, Education, and Families

Dear Municipal Leader:

This kit was created not just for you, but for the children, youth, and families in your community. It is based on the latest research and best practices from across the nation and offers a wide-ranging menu of opportunities for municipal leadership to make children, youth, and family issues a community-wide priority. Whether you are ready to launch a major initiative or are just getting started, the ideas in this kit will help you move forward.

NLC's ongoing series of action kits for municipal leaders, published by the new Institute for Youth, Education, and Families, will address each of the Institute's five core program areas: education; youth development; early childhood development; the safety of children and youth; and family economic security. The goal is to give you and other municipal leaders throughout the country the ideas and the tools you need to take action on these all-important issues for the future of our cities and towns.

Mayors and city councilmembers all across America know that our communities' success depends on the health and well-being of the nation's children, youth, and families. Now is the time to act on this knowledge. As a municipal leader, you have the ability to focus the attention of your community on the needs of children, youth, and families. Working with your colleagues in local government, you can strengthen municipal policies, support effective programs, and bring diverse partners to the table in order to make things happen.

NLC and its Institute for Youth, Education, and Families are eager to assist you in these vital efforts. We encourage you to use this action kit to get started, and we hope you will contact us whenever we might be of assistance. Institute staff are readily available to provide additional information about the strategies highlighted in each of the action kits and to help you identify steps that make sense for your community.

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About the National League of Cities:

The National League of Cities (NLC) is the oldest and largest national organization representing municipal governments throughout the United States. NLC serves as a national resource and advocate on behalf of over 1700 member cities and for 49 municipal leagues whose membership totals more than 18,000 cities and towns across the country.

The mission of the National League of Cities is to strengthen and promote cities as centers of opportunity, leadership, and governance.



About NLC's Institute for Youth, Education, and Families:

The Institute for Youth, Education, and Families, a special entity within the National League of Cities, helps municipal leaders take action on behalf of the children, youth, and families in their communities. NLC launched the Institute in January 2000 in recognition of the unique and influential roles that mayors, city councilmembers, and other local leaders can play in strengthening families and improving outcomes for children and youth.

As a national resource to cities and towns across America, the Institute provides guidance and assistance to municipal officials, compiles and disseminates information on promising strategies and best practices, builds networks of local officials working on similar issues and concerns, and conducts research on the key challenges facing municipalities. NLC's Council on Youth, Education, and Families guides and oversees the Institute's work.



..... *Education as a City Priority*

The quality of public schools and the long-term prospects of cities – almost every local elected official knows that these two things are closely linked. The connection is based in part on the central role that schools play in building stable communities and shaping residents' perceptions of the quality of community life. Municipal leaders also understand that a strong public education system is a great asset as their cities compete for new jobs and industries. An NLC survey found that local officials view improvements in the quality of elementary and secondary education as one of the three most effective strategies for promoting local economic development and reducing poverty.

Despite this consensus regarding the importance of good schools, however, nearly every school district in America faces challenges. For some communities, the challenges are a reflection of rising expectations: graduation rates and achievement levels that used to be “good enough” now fall short of what's needed to meet new standards and prepare students for a 21st-century economy. In many other cities and towns, the problems are more serious and pervasive. Public schools are serving an increasingly diverse student population, and those who come from impoverished or immi-

grant backgrounds often arrive at school without an adequate foundation for future learning. Shortages of well-trained teachers and experienced school administrators, inequities in school funding, and aging facilities in need of repair or replacement compound the difficulties, particularly in poor urban and rural areas.

No school district by itself can do all that needs to be done to improve our public schools. Good schools are the shared responsibility of many partners: school boards, superintendents, principals, teachers, families, community and faith-based organizations, cultural institutions, business leaders, and elected officials at all levels of government. Francis Keppel, former U.S. Commissioner of Education, put it succinctly: “Education is too important to be left solely to the educators.”

Mayors and city councilmembers are essential partners in improving public schools, and they can play key roles even when they have no direct authority over local school districts. This action kit outlines a wide range of ways that municipal leaders, working in partnership with school officials and the community as a whole, can help ensure that our public schools work for all children.

Keys to School Improvement

To play a leadership role in improving public schools, municipal leaders must focus their attention on fundamental issues of student achievement, teaching, and supports for learning. Mayors and city councilmembers can get a sense of how their schools are faring in these critical areas by posing the following questions:

Are all children learning and meeting high standards?

Successful schools start with the premise that all children can learn. They have high expectations for students, regardless of their backgrounds, and offer challenging curriculum to help ensure that every child realizes his or her full potential. Most importantly, effective schools do not make excuses or give up on struggling students, instead providing the extra support they need to help them succeed.

Are students taught by competent and well-trained teachers?

High student achievement depends upon high-quality instruction. Successful schools must be able to recruit and retain teachers who are certified and trained in the subject areas they are teaching. Teachers also need opportunities to maintain and improve their skills through ongoing professional development programs. While well-trained and experienced teachers are essential in all public schools, they are particularly important in schools serving large numbers of poor and minority children who face greater learning challenges.

Do schools provide an effective climate for learning?

Even the best teachers and students perform better when their schools support conditions that are conducive to learning. Smaller learning communities, manageable class sizes, and adequate facilities with up-to-date technology are key ingredients in any effort to raise student achievement. Strong leadership by principals who work closely with teachers to improve instruction and who create an ethic of high standards and discipline within the school building is also critical to long-term success.

Is the entire community involved in the education of its children?

Research shows that greater family and community involvement can result in improved student academic performance, reduced dropout rates, and higher graduation and college enrollment rates. Efforts to turn schools into centers of community life can help engage parents and give surrounding neighborhoods a stake in public education. High-quality early childhood programs can also support parents and enhance school readiness. Finally, effective engagement of business leaders can help keep school improvement at the top of the community's agenda.

Being clear about what's important when seeking to improve public schools, and then staying focused on these core issues, is the key to effective municipal leadership in education.

Using Data to Frame the Challenge

The road to effective municipal leadership in education often begins with good data. This may surprise many mayors and city councilmembers who have trouble getting timely information from their school districts or don't want to "get bogged down in the details." Yet in the same way that cities routinely use U.S. Census and local survey data to guide their work in areas such as economic development, zoning, housing, and crime prevention, city officials need to obtain reliable school data in order to assess current performance, target reform efforts, and establish benchmarks by which to measure future progress.

Here are several suggestions to guide mayors and city councilmembers as they get started:

Gather data from multiple sources.

Local school districts already collect a great deal of data on topics ranging from student achievement and demographics to school staffing and expenditures. The newly-enacted federal reauthorization of elementary and secondary education programs (the Leave No Child Behind Act) will require school officials to publish these data on a regular basis for every school, with detailed breakdowns by race and ethnic group. Using school district data as a starting point, municipal leaders can fill in gaps by finding out what information is available from other local organizations (e.g., parent groups, a local education fund, the chamber of commerce) and by soliciting help from area colleges and universities. Finally, local officials can use public forums, surveys, and focus groups to elicit resident input and begin to build a citywide vision for school improvement.

Tell stories that the public can understand

Mayors and city councilmembers are well positioned to help diverse stakeholders – including parents, business and faith-based leaders, media representatives, and neighborhood groups – understand the challenges facing local schools. By highlighting data that is important to the community and making it part of their public message, municipal leaders can build understanding and a consensus regarding the need for change. Local elected officials tend to be particularly good at translating the findings of professionals for the broader public; indeed, it's an everyday part of their jobs!

Pay particular attention to resource and achievement gaps.

By asking good questions and analyzing available data, mayors and city councilmembers can also get a clear view of disparities in both resources (e.g., funding and staffing levels) and achievement across schools and between groups of students of different race/ethnicity, income, and language backgrounds. Honest information about resource and achievement gaps is usually a prerequisite to the development of effective remedies.

Document successes in order to highlight possibilities

Good data can shed light on solutions as well as problems. When reviewing school achievement data, municipal leaders should keep an eye out for individual schools that consistently enable students from diverse backgrounds to meet high academic standards. These "home-grown" models can often be replicated as part of a community-wide school improvement strategy.

Building Coalitions for Change

A diverse array of stakeholders needs to be involved in community-wide efforts to improve public schools. Mayors and city councilmembers are perhaps the only local leaders who can bring disparate groups – including school officials, teachers, parents, community organizations, cultural institutions, and business, neighborhood, and faith-based leaders – together to discuss key priorities and concerns. While a common vision for school improvement is not easy to achieve, municipal leaders can foster dialogue and set the stage for coordinated action by taking the following steps:

Use public forums and the media to focus attention.

Local elected officials are uniquely able to command the attention of the media and the public they serve. By sponsoring public forums such as a local “education summit,” mayors and councilmembers can give residents a voice in the education debate. Through high-profile media events, municipal leaders can also create a sense of urgency and educate the public about the challenges facing public schools. For example, in Columbus, Ohio, the mayor has used an annual, day-long summit to gather information and build support for Cap City Kids, the city’s successful after-school program. The 2002 summit will focus on ways to narrow the achievement gap.

In Lansing, Michigan, the mayor appointed a Blue Ribbon Commission on Lansing Schools in 1997 to develop a school improvement plan and marshal public support for long-term change. The group included top leaders from the school district, business community, labor unions, neighborhood groups, and local government. Wide-ranging recommendations contained in the commission’s final report continue to guide the community’s school improvement efforts.

Join community leaders in establishing a local education fund

Local education funds (LEFs) are nonprofit, community-based organizations dedicated to increasing student achievement in public schools and building broad-based support for quality public education. Municipal leaders can work together with LEFs to analyze problems, develop school improvement strategies, increase public engagement, and build public will to make necessary changes and investments. In Charleston, South Carolina, the mayor helped to found an LEF – the Charleston Education Network – and continues to serve on its board of directors.

Enlist the support of the business community

When successfully engaged in school improvement efforts, corporate and business leaders bring both political clout and resources to the table. Mayors and councilmembers can ask prominent businesspeople to chair an education task force, co-sponsor public forums, serve as a spokesperson in public service ads, or lead a campaign in support of a school levy or bond issue. More formal school-business partnerships can support schools in a myriad of ways, ranging from mentoring and technology-related initiatives to school-to-career and summer jobs programs.

Create a framework for community-wide action

Lasting improvements in the quality of schools typically take time, commitment, and sustained effort. One key challenge for municipal leaders is to develop a coalition or committee to involve and represent all community stakeholders, frame action agendas, and hold all parties accountable for results. For example, Fort Lauderdale’s Education Advisory Board, a 20-member body appointed by the mayor and city commissioners, serves as a focal point for discussions regarding the city’s needs, interests, and role within the context of the larger county school district.

Promoting Adequate School Funding

Good schools are not cheap. Adequate funding enables school officials to recruit and retain qualified teachers and principals, maintain smaller class sizes, update instructional materials and technology, and ensure that school buildings are safe and conducive to learning. Municipal leaders can work to ensure a strong financial base for their schools in the following ways:

Support school budgets that invest in key reforms.

In some communities, the mayor and city council have a direct role in appropriating funds for the public schools. In every city and town, municipal leaders can urge the approval of school budget requests that are tied to well-conceived school improvement strategies. Such vocal support for adequate education funding can and should be accompanied by expectations that school funds will be effectively managed and that schools will demonstrate progress in raising student achievement over time. By insisting upon accountability for results while avoiding the temptation to seek a "quick fix," mayors and councilmembers can reassure the public that its tax dollars are being invested wisely.

Urge passage of bond issues to improve school facilities

Large numbers of school buildings throughout the nation are dilapidated, unsafe, and technologically outdated. In communities that are experiencing rapid population growth, new school construction is also needed to keep up with rising student enrollments. Mayors and councilmembers can work in partnership with school officials, parents, and community and business leaders to secure passage of school bond issues that finance urgently needed renovation and construction projects. In Medina, Ohio, the city and school district organized a series of informal coffee klutches in the local community as part of a two-year effort to build support for an \$88 million school bond issue. Its passage financed the construction of a new elementary school and expansion of the local high school, which houses a city-run recreation center.

Fight for equitable state financing of public schools

Schools serving low-income and minority children start out at a great disadvantage when they do not have the resources they need to provide a high-quality education to their students. Numerous court cases and a growing body of research have documented large disparities between per-pupil spending in wealthy school districts and less affluent communities. State education funding can play a key role in narrowing these funding gaps. Mayors and councilmembers can work with their state legislative delegation to push for funding formulas that direct extra financial help to those schools and districts that have the greatest needs.

Seek additional help from other sources

Even modest amounts of outside funding, if carefully targeted to address unmet needs, can stabilize and strengthen the financial base of public schools. By helping to identify new grant opportunities and partnering with school officials on grant applications, municipal leaders can secure additional funds for school programs from federal, state, and foundation sources. Many cities and towns have a lot of experience competing for public or private grants, and this expertise can provide an important boost to fundraising efforts within their local school districts.

In Portland, Oregon, the mayor took a lead role in establishing the Coalition for Community Funding Now to respond to a statewide school funding crisis in 1996. The Coalition's members include business and community leaders, education advocates, parents, teachers, and concerned citizens who believe that every child in the state should have access to a high-quality public education. During the past two state legislative sessions, the Coalition won approval of an additional \$1 billion in school funding beyond what the Governor had initially proposed. Portland's mayor and city commissioners have also contributed more than \$40 million in city funds to the local school district budget as part of a community-wide effort to raise student achievement.

Removing Obstacles to Achievement

Many potential impediments to learning are difficult, if not impossible, for schools to address without the community's help. Lack of school readiness when children enroll in kindergarten, threats to the safety of students who are on or near school grounds, and unmet health or social service needs can impede or derail teachers' efforts to promote academic achievement. Even the school district's efforts to recruit qualified teachers can be thwarted by a shortage of affordable housing or other "quality of life" concerns in the broader community.

Municipal leaders cannot solve these problems overnight, but they can play important roles in a community-wide campaign to remove obstacles to student achievement. Possibilities include:

Improve school readiness through early care and education

The foundation for academic success is built during the first five years of a child's life. For this reason, children who enter school with fewer cognitive and social skills than their peers typically struggle to catch up and keep up in class. Mayors and city councilmembers can promote successful early childhood and improve school readiness by supporting high-quality early care and education programs and by ensuring that low-income families can gain access to these essential services.

Enhance the safety of children in or near schools

The risk of accidents and threats of violence can both be reduced through close partnerships between municipal leaders, local police departments, and school officials. Simple steps such as posting crossing guards at key intersections and increasing police patrols near schools can translate into greater peace of mind for parents, teachers, and students. Cities such as Claremont (Calif.), Plano (Tex.), and Toledo (Ohio) are among a growing number of communities that assign police officers to work as school resource officers in middle and high schools. These officers become an integral part of the school staff and frequently are able to build relationships with students, break down barriers of mistrust between police and youth, and enforce truancy laws more effectively.

Address health and social service needs

Children's ability to learn and achieve their full potential is inevitably diminished when medical, personal, or family problems take center stage. By locating health, nutrition, and other child and family services in or near schools, city officials can help ensure that these needs are addressed. Collaborations with public schools give service providers additional ways to reach disadvantaged populations, offer teachers and school administrators a valuable resource when dealing with nonacademic concerns, and may even produce cost savings for municipal agencies.

Support teacher recruitment efforts

Local school districts must pay competitive salaries and offer good working conditions in order to attract qualified teachers. At the same time, mayors, councilmembers, and other municipal officials can support teacher recruitment efforts by developing affordable housing options for teachers and offering other financial incentives to teaching candidates who move into the community. For example, as a result of a joint initiative involving both the city and the school district, Baltimore is offering recruiting incentives for teachers that include \$5,000 for closing costs on a home purchase in the city and an additional \$1,200 in moving expenses.

In New Haven, Connecticut, the Mayor's "Best Beginnings" initiative seeks to provide quality child care for all preschoolers regardless of their parents' ability to pay, thereby giving the city's children a better chance to succeed in school. The initiative also focuses on expanding quality care for infants and toddlers – in fact, it has already secured funding to expand such care and provide greater support to home care providers. An expanded School Readiness Council, co-chaired by representatives of the mayor and the school superintendent, leads the planning and implementation of this collaborative, public-private effort. Outreach and support to parents as well as state legislative advocacy to secure additional funding for school readiness efforts are other top priorities for the Council's work.

Sharing Information & Resources

Strong city-school partnerships begin with a willingness to share information and resources. Effective communication between municipal and school leaders can reduce tensions and counterproductive turf battles, surface problems before they become unmanageable, and open the door to coordinated efforts that respond to the entire community's needs. Here are some examples of how mayors and councilmembers can work more effectively with their counterparts in the school district:

Commit to regular meetings with top school officials.

Frequent discussions with superintendents and school board members are essential in order to build trusting relationships and lay the groundwork for collaboration. Regular meetings provide much-needed opportunities to explore common concerns, identify ways in which city policies affect schools or school policies affect the city, and develop cooperative approaches to pressing problems.

Assess current city-school partnerships.

City and school officials do not always have a complete picture of how municipal agencies and schools are working together to meet student and community needs. By undertaking a full inventory of current partnerships, municipal and school leaders can get a better sense of the scope of their joint activities and use this information to guide future efforts. Mayors and city councilmembers can also be catalysts in developing new coalitions or partnerships not only between city agencies and schools, but also between schools and other community entities such as colleges and universities, cultural institutions, and civic groups.

In Long Beach, California, the city and school district have established "Collaborative Conversations," a joint forum that brings the mayor, city councilmembers, and school board members together on a quarterly basis. These regular meetings enable municipal and school leaders to discuss school improvement and youth-related issues. Topics such as afterschool programming and the development of a youth master plan have proven particularly useful in enhancing city-school coordination and collaboration.

Develop joint use agreements to reduce costs.

Needless duplication of facilities, equipment, and staff can squander scarce tax dollars that neither cities nor schools can afford to lose. When school and municipal leaders look for creative ways to pool their resources, however, everybody comes out ahead. In Minneapolis, for example, a new elementary school serving 500 students was built on city parkland and includes a city-financed recreation center that is used by both the school and the broader community. Joint use of maintenance vehicles, equipment, and playgrounds or sports fields offers additional opportunities to reduce costs and promote cooperation on behalf of public education.

Consult with school officials on land use planning.

Zoning and land use decisions by municipal agencies often have a direct impact on local schools. Similarly, decisions about the location of new schools or alternative uses for school buildings that are no longer needed can either bolster or undermine local planning and economic development efforts. Mayors and city councilmembers can minimize the chances of missed opportunities and unintended consequences by establishing regular lines of communication with school officials on these important matters. They can also work together with local school officials to take advantage of state funding for school construction and to push for effective remedies when state policies (such as acreage requirements for new school buildings) threaten to distort or impede local land use decisions.

Share credit for successes and responsibility for shortcomings.

When public schools raise test scores and narrow achievement gaps, their successes should be celebrated and used to generate momentum for further gains. Public recognition by mayors and councilmembers goes a long way in boosting morale within the schools and confidence among the public. At the same time, when schools fail students, municipal leaders must be willing to share the blame and ask: What more can I do to support improvements in our public schools, and who else can I enlist in these efforts? This approach builds goodwill and keeps the focus where it belongs – on the community's children.

Supporting Learning

Municipal leaders are often the only individuals in local communities who have a scope of influence and authority sufficient to organize, coordinate, nurture, and expand the array of learning opportunities available to children and youth when they are not in school. They can use multiple strategies to promote expanded learning opportunities in their communities:

Develop a citywide afterschool system

An estimated eight million school children ages 5-14 go home to an empty house on a regular basis. Cities and towns have a unique opportunity to design an afterschool system that reinforces children's learning gains and supplements the academic curriculum offered at school. Mayors and city councilmembers can allocate funding to open or expand programs in underserved neighborhoods, and they can convene providers in an effort to enhance the quality of current programs. Research indicates that youth who regularly attend high-quality afterschool programs have better grades and conduct in school, score higher on achievement tests, and are more likely to graduate.

Turn schools into centers of community life

An important strategy for building an afterschool system is working to keep schools open beyond traditional school hours. Municipal leaders can work with school officials to create community schools – partnerships in which a variety of organizations join forces with schools to support student learning, build stronger families and communities, and make more effective use of school buildings during non-school hours. For example, neighborhood city halls located in two elementary schools in Wichita, Kansas, provide a wide array of municipal services – including public health, park and recreation, adult education, afterschool, library, building code enforcement, and community policing services – to students, their families, and other neighborhood residents.

Through a joint funding arrangement between the City of Birmingham, Alabama, and its local school district, community schools across the city offer lifelong learning opportunities and essential services to area residents while also involving the community in the ongoing work of the public schools. Each school tailors its offerings to meet the needs and interests of the neighborhoods it serves. This approach enables the city to provide a broad range of services on site to children, families, and other residents during non-school hours, responding to problems such as illiteracy, unemployment, substance abuse, teen pregnancy, and homelessness.

Encourage libraries, museums, and city parks to get involved

With an estimated 122,000 libraries, 10,000 museums, and thousands of parks and recreation departments across America, local communities often have valuable assets outside of public schools that can be utilized to bolster student achievement. Municipal officials can encourage these institutions to take a more active role in children's learning, setting up programs that appeal to diverse student populations and utilizing staff or volunteers as homework tutors, art directors, or recreation team builders. In Southern Pines, North Carolina, for example, the public library sponsors the Junior Library Leaders Program, collaborating with local businesses and the police department to promote out-of-school learning activities and positive behavior among middle school students.

Broaden the range of non-traditional education options

Nationwide, nearly a quarter of all students drop out of the "traditional" K-12 education system before receiving their high school diploma. Municipal officials are in a position to promote second-chance learning opportunities for those who struggle in traditional classroom settings and to commit city resources when necessary to support them. For example, the City of Louisville is working with the local school district and county officials to develop a data tracking system that will help determine whether students who are falling behind in school have access to non-traditional learning activities, and whether participation in these activities improves academic achievement. The system is being piloted in eight community schools and six Boys & Girls Club sites.

Establish or strengthen school-to-career initiatives

Work-based learning programs, when effectively designed and implemented, can promote student achievement and help prepare young people for entry into the workforce. Mayors and councilmembers can help school districts develop school-to-career initiatives by reaching out to, and securing pledges for participation by, key corporate and business leaders. Partnerships with colleges and universities, including community colleges, can also open the doors to postsecondary education for a broader cross-section of the student population. In New Orleans, the city and surrounding parishes are part of a regional MetroVision School-to-Career Initiative, which brings local governments, schools, private businesses, and other segments of the community together to improve the connection between education and the job market for area students. The initiative's work has been the catalyst for new high school academies, internships, career exploration options, and curriculum development efforts.

Akron, Ohio: Mayor's Education Summit (Pop. 223,019)

The Mayor of Akron organized an education summit in partnership with the Summit Education Initiative (SEI), a non-profit organization dedicated to improving schooling and learning for all children in Summit County. The forum brought together school district and community teams from similar communities across the nation that have engaged in effective strategies to improve student achievement. Topics covered in the course of the summit included: teacher preparation and professional development; strategies to improve student performance and close the academic achievement gap; community use of schools; and social needs of students. The education summit initiated a collaborative process to engage key community stakeholders in the challenges of local school improvement.

Boston, Massachusetts: School Technology (Pop. 547,000)

In 1996, Boston's mayor pledged that within five years all 130 schools would be wired with high-speed Internet access. He also promised a 1:4 computer-student ratio, a computer for every teacher, and high-speed Internet access for Boston's public libraries. The mayor committed \$50 million in capital money to develop the infrastructure and partnered with dozens of regional and national corporations and raised over \$30 million in resources. In 1998, Boston was the first major urban school district to network all its schools. Currently, the city's schools have a 1:5 computer-student ratio, 80 percent of teachers have received professional development on instructional computer usage, all 27 public libraries are networked and there are over 100 community-based technology centers throughout the city.

Denver, Colorado: Club Denver Afterschool Program (Pop. 554,636)

In partnership with the Denver Public Schools, the mayor launched an effort to support afterschool programming for Denver's middle-school youth. The resulting program, called Club Denver, is modeled after "career academies" and now operates in all 20 of the city's middle schools. Each club focuses on a specific career pathway and is led by a teacher who receives a \$750 stipend per academic semester. Individual teachers report to their school principals and to a staff person in the city agency that is most closely associated with that club's career pathway. For example, instructors for the Aviation Club report to the Denver International Airport. The city staff supervisors provide ideas, curriculum, and other support to the instructors.

El Segundo, California: City-School Libraries (Pop. 16,033)

Confronted with a major budget shortfall, the El Segundo Unified School District requested that the City of El Segundo's Library Department take over the administration of three local school libraries. The city council and school district forged a joint affiliation agreement that specified the terms and conditions for operating the

school libraries. This partnership has resulted in a better quality of library resources for the students of El Segundo, the elimination of duplicate materials in local libraries, and the sharing of books through a joint database. The city purchases and processes all library materials with school funds, supplements new materials for school library collections, and maintains a shared online catalog, including all computer equipment needed to support the system. The school district is responsible for all building maintenance and improvements, including facility remodeling and capital equipment.

Fort Lauderdale, Florida: The Education Advisory Board (Pop. 152,397)

The City of Fort Lauderdale established the Education Advisory Board (EAB), comprised of 20 community residents appointed by the City Commission to serve as a conduit for the interests and concerns of parents and educators. The City Commissioners work with the EAB to address broad issues related to youth and schools, and to take action on targeted issues. The City has funded selected EAB initiatives, including an Education Summit and the publication of a Guide to Fort Lauderdale Schools. The EAB also serves as an advocate for the public schools and has been actively involved in issues related to educational equity and quality in terms of facilities, programs and resources.

Martinsville, Virginia: City-School Education Retreat (Pop. 16,162)

The City of Martinsville retained a management consultant who specializes in strategic planning to lead a one-day retreat for city councilmembers and school board members. The goal of the retreat was to improve communications and foster teamwork. Participants sought to understand how education and community needs are inter-related and to identify ways in which the city council and school board could improve their working relationship. Each group's responsibility for policy, budget, salaries, and other matters were identified. Following the retreat, a brief report was produced to summarize recommendations for improved collaboration.

New Haven, Connecticut: School Construction Program (Pop. 130,474)

In cooperation with the school district, the mayor developed a major initiative to help fund new school construction and renovation projects. The city's Board of Aldermen approved a School Construction Trust Fund, which holds \$17 million in city tax lien sale proceeds. These proceeds, along with the city's own capital projects bond funds, are used to generate the 20 percent local share for the new construction and substantial renovation of the city's public schools. The State Department of Education School Construction Grant program matches the remaining 80 percent. A citywide school building committee, composed of representatives from the board of education, board of aldermen, the city administration, parents and others, manages the volume of projects funded under this initiative. The



Committee oversees and coordinates the planning, selection, funding and timing of projects, and makes recommendations regarding the selection of architects and other professional services.

Overland Park, Kansas: Tomahawk Ridge Elementary School
(Pop. 111,790)

The City of Overland Park and the Blue Valley School District built a shared facility that is an elementary school by day and a community center during after school hours and on weekends. Faced with an increasing student enrollment, Blue Valley district officials worked in partnership with the city to build Tomahawk Ridge Elementary School on city-owned land. However, in anticipation that enrollment would level, the district signed a 30-year lease for the school, and when it expires, the City of Overland Park will regain control of the building. During non-school hours, community members use the facility's gymnasiums, exercise equipment, and meeting rooms.

Phoenix, Arizona: School-Based Program for the Delivery of Social Services
(Pop. 1,321,045)

The City of Phoenix established the School-Based Program, a partnership between the City of Phoenix Human Services Department and various schools throughout the city. The program enhances social and academic success for students and their families through a coordinated delivery of services, using the schools as the focal point to serve students whose problems interfere with their learning or place them at risk of dropping out. The School-Based Program also has strong ties with a number of community agencies. School coalitions meet regularly to share information, address systemic barriers to service delivery for youth and families, and provide updates on community-based programs and services. One unique example is the School Safety Team, which is a partnership between school officials, police, juvenile probation, and school social workers.

Portland, Oregon: Schools Real Estate Trust
(Pop. 437,319)

The Schools Real Estate Trust was established to acquire the rights to Portland Public Schools (PPS) properties and prepare them for redevelopment. PPS owns several properties that are either no longer needed or that are larger than needed to meet its educational mission, draining school finances. By delegating the responsibility to develop properties without granting title, the Portland Board of Education maintains control of the property and secures any future facility needs. A board of community leaders with expertise in development governs the Trust and advises on redevelopment and reuse

issues. The City of Portland was instrumental in leading the effort to establish the Trust and saw the project through its completion. Innovation Partnership, a non-profit organization that was formed to identify and bring innovative solutions to persistent community problems, housed the effort to establish the Trust, and two senior city officials sit on its Board of Directors.

San Antonio, Texas: San Antonio Education Partnership (SAEP)
(Pop. 1,144,646)

The San Antonio Education Partnership (SAEP) strives to increase high school graduation rates and college enrollments through the use of scholarships and support systems. The partnership includes the City of San Antonio, private sector corporations, school districts, local colleges and universities, and community organizations. In 2001, the City provided over \$1 million in support, including \$650,000 in scholarship monies. To be eligible, students must attain a B average, achieve a 95% attendance rate, and graduate from a participating high school. Students who meet the requirements are awarded a scholarship valued up to \$4,000 to attend local community colleges and universities, both public and private. The San Antonio Education Partnership also provides students with support services that include stay-in-school activities and pre-college preparation. To date, over \$5 million in scholarship monies has been awarded to almost 6,000 students.

Tukwila, Washington: Tukwila Equity and Diversity Commission
(Pop. 17,181)

The Tukwila Equity and Diversity Commission is a unique partnership of the Tukwila School District and the City of Tukwila. Its goals are to (1) promote understanding that accepts, celebrates, and appreciates cultural diversity within the community; (2) serve as a resource for the community by providing information and educational forums that will facilitate a better understanding and acceptance of cultural differences; and (3) provide recommendations to the mayor, city council, and school board that would identify opportunities to address cultural diversity issues and promote cultural diversity programs. The commission is made up of nine members who are appointed by the mayor and confirmed by the city council. Three members represent the city, including a member of city council; three members represent the school district (either district employees or school board members); and three members represent the community, two of whom may be representatives of the business community.

10 Questions to Ask About Your Local Schools

- ? What proportion of: (a) middle school students never make the transition to high school; (b) students who enter the 9th grade graduate from high school four years later; and (c) high school graduates go on to some form of postsecondary education?
- ? What percentage of students at various grade levels score at or above the proficient level on national and state tests?
- ? How have graduation rates and achievement levels changed over time?
- ? How do graduation rates and achievement levels for poor and minority students compare to those for non-poor and white students?
- ? Have achievement gaps between these groups widened or narrowed over time?
- ? What proportion of teachers are either uncertified or teaching subjects in which they have not been trained?
- ? Are poor and minority students more likely to be taught by inexperience, uncertified, or untrained to teach the subjects to which they are assigned?
- ? What percentage of all students, and of poor and minority students, take a college preparatory or similar, more rigorous academic curriculum?
- ? Are there individual schools within the community that have been particularly successful in raising academic achievement despite serving high proportions of poor and minority students?
- ? Are there specific programs or school improvement initiatives operating within the school district that have been effective in improving student achievement?

Key Facts About America's Schools

- When asked about six critical factors affecting the future well being of America's cities, nearly four in five responses from city officials cited the quality of education as a "major" or "moderate" problem area.
- As many as 60 percent of all middle school students who are identified as "at-risk of failure" going into high school will not graduate with their class.
- Only half of all students entering urban high schools graduate four years later, and minority students educated in city public schools are less than half as likely as other children from low-income groups to enter four-year colleges.
- Low-income African-American, Hispanic, and non-Hispanic immigrant children are half as likely as upper-income students to score at or above the basic skill level on National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) tests.
- Teachers who participated in some form of professional development training for more than eight hours were more likely to report that their teaching improved significantly (41% vs. 12% of those teachers who participated in 8 or less hours of training).

- In every subject area, students attending schools with high proportions of poor and minority students are much more likely than other students to be taught by teachers without academic training in the subjects they teach. In 1999, only 41 percent of all 8th graders nationally had a mathematics teacher with a major in mathematics.
- An estimated 25,000 schools throughout America need major repair or outright replacement, and 60 percent of all schools report at least one major building feature that needs replacement or extensive repairs. Nearly half of all schools lack the basic electrical wiring to support computers, modems, and other modern communication technology.
- Americans recognize that public schools are the heart of their communities. They are at least five times more likely to cite public schools than churches, hospitals or libraries as their most important local institutions.
- 96 percent of voters expect all communities to have quality public schools, and 91 percent agree that every child in America should be guaranteed a quality public education.

Key Terms and Definitions

Standards: Subject matter benchmarks to measure students' academic achievement. Standards typically describe what students should know and be able to do in core subjects at critical points in their education.

Accountability: State or district policies related to holding districts, schools, and/or students responsible for performance. School and district accountability systems typically include efforts to assess and rate schools or districts based on student performance and other indicators, to publicly report on school or district performance, and to provide rewards and sanctions for schools or districts based on performance or improvement over time. Student accountability generally refers to efforts to hold students responsible for their own performance by requiring students to pass a test to be promoted from grade to grade or to pass an exam to graduate from high school.

Assessment: An exercise – either a written test, portfolio, or experiment – that seeks to measure a student's skills or knowledge in a subject area.

High-Stakes Testing: Tests that lead to high-consequence decisions for students. Such testing typically determines whether students are promoted to the next grade level, attend summer school, or even receive their high school diploma. High school exit exams, which a student must pass in order to graduate, are a prominent example.

Comprehensive School Reform: Holistic reform that is focused on reorganizing and revitalizing entire schools, instead of isolated piecemeal reforms. Comprehensive school reform models typically integrate nine key components: effective, research-based methods and strategies; comprehensive design with aligned components; professional development; measurable goals and benchmarks; support within the school; parental and community involvement; external technical support and assistance; evaluation strategies; and coordination of resources.



Additional Resources

NLC's Institute for Youth, Education, and Families assists municipal leaders in their efforts to improve the quality of public education, providing them with a reliable source of advice and an array of ideas on how to use their municipal resources and roles as civic leaders to promote school improvement. Contact: NLC, 1301 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20004; (202) 626-3000; www.nlc.org/iyef.

A number of national organizations have also developed materials that might be of assistance to local elected officials:

Afterschool Alliance is a coalition of public, private, and nonprofit organizations dedicated to raising awareness of the importance of afterschool programs and advocating for quality, affordable programs for all children. Contact: Afterschool Alliance, PO Box 65166, Washington, DC 20035; (202) 296-9378; www.afterschoolalliance.org.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation has worked to build better futures for disadvantaged children and their families in the United States. Its Technical Assistance Resource Center provides a list of publications and tools to help strengthen families, communities, and schools. Search its online resource bank for publications under "Building More Effective Community Schools." Contact: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 701 St. Paul Street, Baltimore, MD 21202; (410) 547-6600; <http://www.aecf.org/tarc/>.

The Brookings Institution, Brown Center on Education Policy conducts research on topics in American education, with a special focus on efforts to improve academic achievement in elementary and secondary schools. *It Takes A City: Getting Serious About Urban School Reform* (Paul T. Hill, Christine Campbell, James Harvey), *Fixing Urban Schools* (Paul T. Hill, Mary Beth Celio) are highly recommended readings available for purchase from its online bookstore. Contact: The Brookings Institution, 1775 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20036; (202) 797-6000; http://www.brook.edu/gs/brown/brown_hp.htm.

The Council of Great City Schools (CGCS) is a coalition of nearly 60 of the nation's largest urban public school systems and serves as the national voice for urban educators, providing ways to share promising practices and address common concerns. *Beating the Odds: A City-by-City Analysis of Student Performance and Achievement Gaps on State Assessments* is a publication from CGCS. Contact: CGCS, 1301 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Suite 702, Washington, DC 20004; (202) 393-2427; <http://www.cgcs.org/>.

Cross-City Campaign for Urban School Reform is a national network of school reform leaders from nine cities that promotes the systemic transformation of urban public schools, resulting in improved quality and equity. The nine cities include Baltimore, Chicago, Denver, Houston, Los Angeles, New York, Oakland, Philadelphia and Seattle. Its report, *Communities Working for Better Schools* is a call to action for community organizations, reformers, and funders to ensure that communities have the information and resources to create sustainable school-community partnerships. Contact: Cross City

Campaign, 407 South Dearborn Street, Suite 1500, Chicago, IL 60605; (312) 322-4880; <http://www.crosscity.org>.

The Education Trust is an organization dedicated to raising the achievement of poor and minority students. Resources on its website include publications that address the achievement gap, including *Dispelling the Myth Revisited: Preliminary Findings from a Nationwide Analysis of "High-Flying" Schools*. Contact: The Education Trust, 1725 K Street, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20006; (202) 293-1217; <http://www.edtrust.org>.

The Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) builds the capacity of individuals and organizations in education and related fields to work together via three program areas: Developing Leaders, Strengthening School-Family-Community Connections, and Connecting and Improving Systems that Serve Children and Youth. Available publications include *Education and Community Building: Connecting Two Worlds*, and a series of reports on *School Leadership for the 21st Century*. IEL also houses the Coalition for Community Schools; additional information can be obtained at www.communityschools.org. Contact: IEL, 1001 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 310, Washington, DC 20036; (202) 822-8405; <http://www.iel.org/>.

Public Impact is an education policy and management-consulting firm that focuses on public elementary and secondary education. Its work includes forging new models for the governance of America's school systems, supporting comprehensive school reform in the nation's public schools, and generating greater public engagement in education. The *Holding School Accountable* toolkit is available on their website. Contact: Public Impact, 423 Hermitage Court, Charlotte, NC 28207; (704) 370-0357; <http://www.publicimpact.com/hsat>.

Public Education Network (PEN) is the nation's largest network of independent, community-based school reform organizations. Dedicated to increasing student achievement in public schools and building broad-based support for quality public education, PEN works to educate the nation about the relationship between school quality and the quality of community and public life. *Communities at Work: A Guidebook for Strategic Intervention for Community Change and Quality Now: Results of National Conversations on Education & Race* are available publications on the PEN website. Contact: PEN, 601 13th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20005; (202) 628-7460; www.publiceducation.org.

U.S. Department of Education produces publications on education topics, including information on the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program. Regional Educational Laboratories are technical assistance resources available from the Department; for more information visit www.nwrel.org/national. Contact: U.S. Department of Education, 400 Maryland Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20202-0498; (800) 872-5327; <http://www.ed.gov>.

Audrey M. Hutchinson, Program Director for Education and Afterschool Initiatives at NLC's Institute for Youth, Education, and Families, authored this kit and supervised the research upon which it is based. Denise Van Wyngaardt drafted several sections of the kit and provided valuable research support, taking a lead role in preparing summaries of city examples and key facts related to school improvement. Pedro Noguera, Wendy Puriefoy, Mark Ouellette, and John Kyle reviewed drafts and provided numerous helpful suggestions. Cliff Johnson, the Institute's executive director, provided overall editorial direction, and Jan Hammett was responsible for the kit's design and layout.

The Institute's work on school improvement and municipal leadership in education is made possible by a grant from Carnegie Corporation of New York. The Annie E. Casey Foundation provides financial support for many aspects of the Institute's work, including the action kit series of which this publication is a part.