

AN APPEAL TO ALL AMERICANS

The National Commission on

Civic

Investment

IN

Public

Education

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**W**e, the members of the National Commission on Civic Investment in Public Education, present the narrative of this report along with a set of recommendations regarding increased civic investment in the nation's public schools to the President of the United States, the Secretary of Education, the United States Congress, and the American people for their consideration.

The case for civic investment is clear. Schools in America today face greater challenges than ever before: students arrive at schools with the broadest range of needs; schools and districts face financial pressures not seen in over six decades; and, in the face of these challenges, schools are expected to meet higher standards and better prepare students than ever.

The 15 members of this Commission met throughout 2009 and 2010 to:

- **Develop a new narrative about civic investment in public education and reinforce the fundamental value of public education to our democracy,**
- **Examine the work and impact of public education assistance organizations and offer standards and practices to guide their growth, and**
- **Recommend ways that ordinary people with busy lives can fulfill their basic obligation to improve and support our children's education.**

Fundamentally, this landmark report calls upon the nation to increase its civic investment in public elementary and secondary education so that every child in America receives an excellent public education.

Non-profit, community-based public education support organizations represent one compelling expression of America's support for its public schools. For over 25 years, they have provided billions of dollars in private funds to support local school projects and implement systemic reform strategies in school districts. Today, there are more than 19,000 such organizations across the nation.

As states and local communities face extreme budget cuts, or seek innovations to improve the quality of local schools, public education assistance organizations are growing at a rapid rate. The framework provided in this report demonstrates how these organizations can operate in a transparent and ethical manner, and describes what school districts, prospective donors, and the public can expect from them. We outline a set of common operating standards to guide their work and allow community members to hold them accountable.

Finally, we address the broader accountability of governments for the current state of public education and discuss the kinds of things our public policymakers can and ought to do to ensure that public schools are educating all students equitably and well. Civic investment in public education in the twenty-first century must have two goals: to ensure quality public education as a civil right for every child, and to elevate public education to an unequivocal status as a fundamental institution of democracy.

Just as the colonial settlers  
recognized the **inextricable link**  
**between education and civic**  
**society**, so too must Americans  
in 2011 engage with public  
schools to ensure that they  
**can meet the demands society**  
**now places on them.**



# Preface

Since the earliest days of the Republic, Americans have committed themselves to civic investment in public education, recognizing that equal educational opportunity is the foundation for democracy. Today, however, the ideal of equal educational opportunity is in peril. The nation's schools face two serious challenges: first, the number of students who have historically been ill-served by the education system is increasing rapidly. At the same time, the demands for higher and higher levels of performance are intensifying. American public schools thus must do a better job than ever before with a student population the schools have historically educated inadequately.

To face these challenges, the nation must redouble its civic investment in public education. This does not necessarily mean that schools need an infusion of funds, although resources should be provided adequately where they are needed. Rather, this means that citizens must strengthen their commitment to public education and ensure that they provide a high-quality education for all young people. Women and men from all walks and stages of life must commit to making public schools effective, build the public will for policies and resources necessary for equitable educational opportunities, and hold political leaders and school officials at all levels accountable for ensuring equal opportunity and outcomes for all public school children.

This is a realistic goal. In cities such as Bridgeport, Connecticut; Mobile, Alabama; and Seattle, Washington, community members have mobilized public support through Local Education Funds (LEFs) and Public Education Funds (PEFs) to lead school-improvement efforts that have produced dramatically better outcomes for youths. This kind of energy needs to be replicated throughout the country.

This report offers a vision for a redoubled civic investment in public education. The National Commission on Civic Investment in Public Education was created by Public Education Network (PEN) and charged with making the renewed case for civic investment, highlighting the work of organizations that can build and channel that investment, and developing standards for these organizations. The goal was to promulgate standards that organizations could embrace to demonstrate their effectiveness and hold themselves accountable to their communities. Over the past year, the Commission conducted and analyzed research and deliberated in in-person meetings and between-meeting communications. These discussions left us more convinced than ever that the need for a redoubled civic investment is urgent. Yet at the same time, we are

filled with hope: we are confident that Americans can summon the political and civic will to make equal educational opportunity more than an ideal, but a reality.

## THE CENTRAL ROLE OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Central to the American experience are public schools. For generations they have ensured that young people develop the skills and values they need to become effective citizens in a democracy. And they have cultivated the entrepreneurs, artists, and engineers who create and recreate the American industrial, commercial, artistic, and civic landscape. The nation has no greater task than to maintain public schools to the highest standard, and to insure that all our children can and do take full advantage of them.

To fulfill that goal, Americans of all stripes and stations have worked to establish, define, and provide a system of public education that will benefit people individually and the nation collectively. Underlying these efforts is a resolute belief that an educated citizenry is the bedrock of our democratic way of life, and that public education is the critical link between individual advancement and a citizenry loyal to the nation's democratic ideals and values.

**The nation has no greater task than to maintain public schools to the highest standard, and to insure that all our children can and do take full advantage of them.**

This belief was evident in one of the earliest laws enacted in the United States, the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, which predated the ratification of the US Constitution in 1788. That statute confirmed that land in the new territories must be set aside for schools, and stated: "Religion, morality, and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged."

To be sure, reality has often failed to live up to the ideal of equal educational opportunity. Most notably, the corrosive effects of segregation and its legacy denied education opportunities to millions of African Americans, and gaps in

opportunities remain substantial between schools that serve advantaged students and those that serve students from less-advantaged families.

Nevertheless, there is a consensus that these gaps are unacceptable and that education is vital to the success of each individual and the country as a whole. The sustained effort at education reform over the past few decades shows clearly that Americans remain committed to the ideal. And concerted action by community members organized and dedicated to public education has time and again demonstrated that civic investment can pay large dividends.

The challenge of meeting the goal of improving student outcomes and closing gaps in opportunity and achievement is particularly acute. Schools in the second decade of the twenty-first century are now asked to do something never before accomplished: to educate all students to a higher standard than ever before, one that will be necessary for all young people to succeed and thrive in a global society and a dynamic economy. But just as the colonial settlers recognized the inextricable link between education and civic society, so too must Americans in 2011 engage with public schools to ensure that they can meet the demands society now places on them.

**The challenges schools now face require a much greater investment by communities to ensure that schools do in fact live up to a community's aspirations.**

Civic engagement in education can take many forms. At its most basic, citizens vote in elections for school board or for mayors who appoint members of the board. These efforts are fundamental, yet the low turnout in school board elections suggests that many Americans fail to achieve even this level of civic engagement. Moreover, in many school districts, the traditional governance

arrangements have created and perpetuated the inequities that remain in American education, so voting in school board elections has done little to create equal educational opportunities.

A deeper level of civic engagement can bring community resources to bear to benefit schools and ensure that the interests of communities who have been ill-served by schools remain at the policy making table. This deeper level of engagement focuses on three areas: creating a demand for excellence for all schools, holding public officials accountable for achieving equity and excellence, and ensuring that educational resources and assets are allocated equitably.

## **PUBLIC EDUCATION FUNDS AND LOCAL EDUCATION FUNDS**

Over the past three decades, community members in more than 2,300 communities have formed organizations to engage their fellow citizens in public education. These non-profit citizen groups are at the forefront of efforts to restore and build the capacity of the nation's public education systems. Some 74 of them are members of PEN and are known generically as "local education funds" (LEFs). LEFs channel public resources to support public schools, often by performing functions to augment school districts' capacity in areas like public engagement. The rest of these organizations are known as "public education funds" (PEFs); more than 900 of them are members of the National School Foundation Association. PEFs typically generate private dollars to supplement public funds. These organizations are prime vehicles for civic investment in public education.

However, these organizations can only function effectively if they adhere to standards that ensure that they achieve the goal of fostering equity in educational opportunity. These standards are intended to increase organizational effectiveness, ensure ethical conduct and accountability and, thereby, to sustain public confidence in their capacities to enhance the education of the children and schools they support. LEFs and PEFs will remain useful only as long as they remain faithful to their own standards of practice.

Simply and plainly, community members in a democracy must constantly assess and renew their critical civic institutions. If public investment in them diminishes, or attention is diverted away from their critical missions, they cannot fulfill the charge that communities place on them, and the fabric of the community is torn. Together, community members must mobilize the energy, resources, and intelligence to restore these institutions. So it is today

with America's public schools. To that end, PEN, a leading public education support network that reaches 8 million low-income children across 34 states, has created this National Commission on Civic Investment in Public Education to do four things.

First, PEN asked us to **re-state the case, with new urgency, for increasing the nation's civic investment in public elementary and secondary education.**

For PEN and for us, civic investment means higher levels of community engagement in public schools. The goal is clear—to achieve and maintain high performance public education for all children in public schools.

What compels us now is a deep concern that the severe challenges facing public education today, absent renewed, greatly expanded and coordinated citizen action, threaten to seriously harm the life prospects for millions of young children. It is true that most of the public schools serving middle and upper income families across the country remain strong. The unfortunate reality is that too many of our schools serving moderate and low-income communities are not performing to the standards required for success in the information age. And altogether too many more schools fail to serve well all of the students for which they have responsibility. Even so, many of the schools which are performing fairly well are severely strained and in need of resources that an engaged community can provide. As we shall explain in the next section, the mounting facts, which we've only hinted at here, suggest that the depth of the crisis is severe. The only hope is for community members to come to the aid of public education for the sake of all children and generations to come.

PEN also asked us to **introduce Americans to the relatively new field of more than 2,300 non-profit citizen education-support organizations** across the nation. Although in many communities these organizations have been integral parts of the landscape for decades, in others they are relatively new and they are little known throughout much of the nation.

Third, PEN asked that we **develop public accountability standards for these public education support organizations** and define strategies for implementing those standards. The goal is to create standards that are shared by the organizations and can serve as guidelines for their work and enable community members to hold the organizations accountable for meeting them.

Finally, the Commission was asked to **address the accountability of governments for the current state of public education** and for the kinds of things our public policymakers can and ought to be doing to ensure that public

## LEFs & PEFs

### Local Education Funds (LEFs)

- channel public resources to support public schools
- often to augment public engagement
- 74 are members of Public Education Network (PEN)

### Public Education Funds (PEFs)

- typically generate private dollars to supplement public funds
- over 900 are members of the National School Foundation Association (NSFA)

schools are educating all students equitably and well. It is certainly true that community engagement on behalf of reform is critical. Reform that works for children requires, and calls upon, the energy and commitment of community members who send their children to public schools, volunteer in public schools, serve on public school boards, and belong, in increasing numbers, to the growing ranks of public education support organizations. Community action builds the will upon which government policies are fashioned, altered, and implemented; an alert citizenry holds public figures and institutions accountable. It is the public servant, however, who must take responsibility for translating what is never entirely clear in the marketplace of ideas into meaningful public commitment. Of course, public servants, too, are community members. They have both a professional and a personal stake in supporting equitable and effective public schools. They need the strength of community support to act accordingly.

Clearly, this Commission is not an advocacy group for public schools as they currently exist. Rather, it is composed of people who are ardent advocates for the historic mission of public education—universal, equitable and publicly funded elementary and secondary schooling. Substantial progress along those lines has been an American achievement. We are very concerned that this legacy is in danger. While we do not seek to advance a particular platform of school reform, we do suggest avenues that should be explored to ensure equal opportunities and outcomes. Our primary objective is to endorse the overarching importance of sustaining and advancing the mission of public schooling that works for each child, whatever her or his circumstance.

## Section A: The Case for Greater Civic Investment

### THE TWIN CHALLENGES FACING PUBLIC EDUCATION

The Commission takes up its duties with a great sense of urgency, only partly driven by the very difficult economic conditions which Americans face these days. The economy has sustained shocks not experienced since the 1930s. Unemployment and underemployment have devastated many families. Economists warn that the recovery will be protracted. State and local governments everywhere face severe budget deficits. Many citizens and experts worry about the levels of public debt. The temptation is and will remain strong to cut services. Outlays for public education are not likely to be spared; indeed, in many places, cuts of the most serious nature are being made—teachers are being laid off, and some school districts are moving to a four-day week.<sup>1</sup>

Yet beyond the immediate economic crisis, the nation's education system faces severe challenges, both from internal and external factors. These challenges expand the role of public education and create a demand for greater support from the public.

**Bridgeport's "First Day" reading enrichment program annually engages more than 100 community volunteers on the first day of school. They distribute books to first graders in order to encourage them to read and to start up their own personal libraries.**

The internal challenge reflects the changing student population. Currently, there are about 50 million children in public elementary and secondary schools, the largest student population in American history. This expanded population includes record numbers of students with significant needs. Most notably, one in five children under age 18 was in poverty in 2009, the highest rate in more than a decade.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, the number of students in U.S. schools who speak a language other than English at home has nearly tripled in the past three decades, to nearly 11 million,<sup>3</sup> and the number of students with

disabilities has nearly doubled, to 6.6 million students, over that period.<sup>4</sup>

The student population is also more diverse racially and ethnically. In large part because of immigration and variations in birthrates among ethnic groups, the Hispanic population in the U.S. is expected to double over the next four decades, while the Asian population is expected to increase by 89 percent over that period. By 2050, the U.S. is expected to become a "majority-minority" nation, a distinction several states and numerous counties have already achieved.<sup>5</sup>

Make no mistake: the increasing diversity of the student population, in race/ethnicity and income, is enormously beneficial. All students benefit by knowing students from different backgrounds, who bring with them a range of experiences that enrich learning and social development. However, students from low-income homes and those with language and other special needs create additional demands on schools, which traditionally have ill-served such students. Teachers and school administrators are often ill-equipped to deal with students from different racial and cultural backgrounds.

The responsibility of schools is particularly acute because the U.S., in contrast to most other industrialized countries, provides much lower levels of social support to individuals in need. For example, 10 percent of children under 18—7.5 million children—lacked health insurance in 2009, a level far higher than in other nations, where health insurance is a national right.<sup>6</sup> Yet health problems, particularly if they go untreated, can severely affect students' ability to learn well. Most obviously, sick children are more likely than healthy children to be absent from school, and differences in the availability of health care are a primary reason why low-income children miss 30 percent more days of school, on average, than more affluent children.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to the changes in the student population, schools also face new demands from the global economy. For decades, schools could succeed by educating a minority of students well, because young people could earn a respectable living with a high school diploma or even by dropping out of school. No more. Since 1970, the number of jobs requiring routine manual or cognitive skills has declined, while the number requiring complex or expert abilities has increased sharply.<sup>8</sup> By 2018, two-thirds of jobs will require some college, compared with 56 percent in 1992 and one third in 1973.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, because of the rise of economic powers throughout the world and globalization, U.S. companies can eliminate or outsource low-skilled jobs that once paid well.

Taken together, these two trends—the increasing proportion of students whom schools have traditionally served poorly, together with the greater demands to educate all students to higher levels—results in what Linda Darling-Hammond, the co-chair of this Commission, points out is an unsustainable situation. As she writes:

*The United States finds itself in a catch-22 situation from which it cannot long sustain the healthy democracy and high-tech economy it needs to create a strong standard of living for most citizens. The failure of many states to invest adequately in the education of low-income children and new immigrants, to provide them with effective teachers and the necessary curriculum and learning materials, results in growing numbers leaving school without the skills needed to become part of the economy. While the highest-achieving nations are making steep, strategically smart investments in education, the United States is squandering much of its human capital.<sup>10</sup>*

The answer is clear: the United States must step up its investment in public education if its schools will meet the increased demands now placed on them. Fortunately, the nation has a substantial reserve of social, political, and financial capital that can be brought to bear to support the education system. Whether or not the nation can muster the political will necessary to marshal these resources is a test the United States will face in the next few years.

## PUTTING THE PUBLIC IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

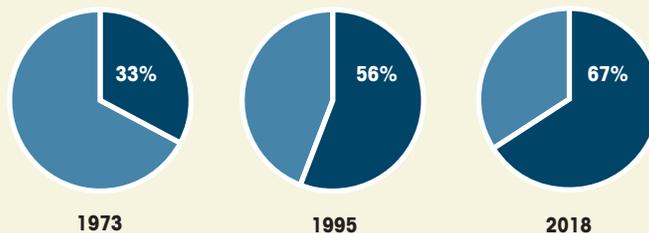
Despite abundant criticism of the public schools, Americans exhibit a rich and enduring wellspring of support for them, at least notionally. Opinion polls over the years, including recent ones, have shown that the overwhelming majority of Americans consistently place public education at or very near the top of national priorities. Americans love their schools for solid reasons. These are, after all, the institutions that educated this generation's parents and grandparents, as well as this generation, and that will be counted on to educate generations to come. They hold a special place in the hearts and memories of many Americans, who see them as the means by which they made their place in the world.

At the same time, the public schools are the public's schools. At their best, they embody the values and aspirations each community holds for itself, and provide a means of enabling a community to shape its future. They are the places where the values of the community are passed to the next generation, and the glue that binds a community together. Regardless of the goals a

## THE COMPOUNDED PROBLEM

### CAREER READINESS

Since 1973 the number of jobs requiring routine manual or cognitive skills has declined, while the number requiring complex or expert abilities has increased sharply.



THE PERCENT OF JOBS REQUIRING SOME COLLEGE

### BY THE NUMBERS

There are 50 million children in public elementary and secondary schools

This includes a record number with significant needs who the system has historically served poorly:

- 1 in 5 children under age 18 was in poverty in 2009 (highest rate in more than 10 years)
- nearly 11 million students speak a language other than English at home (nearly triple 30 years ago)
- 6.6 million students have disabilities (nearly double 30 years ago)

## THE ROAD TO A SOLUTION

### SCHOOL FUNDING

Adequate and equitable resources for students are associated with high levels of student performance.

Education Quality Counts 2011 looked at both spending and equity, states with high letter grades are ones that rate high in both.



Massachusetts



Maryland



Arizona



Mississippi

Letter grade indicates the score each state received from 'Quality Counts Data: K-12 Achievement vs. School Finance' for school financing while percentage reflects K-12 achievement.

### LEF & PEF SUCCESSES

There are numerous examples where community involvement through LEFs and PEFs has produced positive results

Some places where civic investment has begun to make a difference:

- **Bridgeport, Connecticut** The Mentoring for Academic Achievement and College Success (MAACS) program was developed in 1988 in response to the high dropout and low college attendance rates among Bridgeport, Connecticut public high school students. To date, MAACS has mentored over 3,800 students and employed over 800 college students.
- **Mobile, Alabama** From the inception of the public engagement initiative, Mobile county public schools increased from 25% (2001) to 90% at or above proficient (2008). And, over 15,000 people in the county had become involved in the school change process and remain involved today.
- **Chattanooga, Tennessee** Public Education Foundation's Schools for a New Society Initiative supported a new High School (2004) to serve students who had fallen behind or dropped out. As of May 2008, Hamilton County High School has graduated 682 students, most of whom would have otherwise dropped out.

community has for itself, there is widespread agreement that public schools are essential for attaining those goals.

Of course, these ideals are not realized in every community or by every family. Many adults' experience with school is less than positive, and in communities that have been ill-served by public schools, these institutions have failed to live up to the community's expectations. Moreover, the challenges schools now face—the demands for far higher outcomes with a growing population of students who have been poorly served by schools—require a much greater investment by communities to ensure that schools do in fact live up to a community's aspirations.

LEFs and PEFs can be the cornerstone for this renewed civic investment. These organizations have a substantial track record of mobilizing public resources and support on behalf of young people. They represent community involvement that makes a difference.

There are numerous examples where community involvement through LEFs and PEFs has produced positive results in improving educational opportunities and outcomes. These communities have not yet reached the point where all achievement gaps are closed and all students are learning what they need to learn to succeed. But the civic investment has made a difference.

In Bridgeport, Connecticut, for example, one of the poorest cities in the country, the Bridgeport Public Education Fund (BPEF) annually engages more than 250 people from the Bridgeport community as volunteers for the schools and its own activities. These activities include the signature "First Day" reading enrichment program, which annually, on the first day of school, engages more than 100 community volunteers in distributing books to first graders in order to encourage them to read and to start up their own personal libraries. At the other end of the learning spectrum is BPEF's 21-year-old Mentoring for Academic Achievement and College Success program, which in 2009 paired 320 students from the system's three high schools with college mentors from six area colleges and universities. Students in that program who complete their freshman year in college, and who maintain regular contacts with program staff across the year, become eligible for several kinds of financial assistance to continue their undergraduate work.

In Mobile, Alabama, meanwhile, the Mobile Area Education Foundation (MAEF) designed and managed the "Yes We Can Initiative" (2001-04) to build an informed coalition of citizens that would demand higher standards for and greater accountability from the school system. The Initiative started

with pulling together an advisory team of parents, educators, and leaders to study school reform success stories around the country. Out of those discussions came a process that engaged some 1,400 citizens in nearly 50 structured and recorded two-hour “community conversations” (in homes, churches, community centers, and five open public forums) throughout the county over a 14-week period. The conversations focused on the connections between schools and community, common goals for education, and the challenges faced in achieving a more responsive school system. Then, a panel of 50 citizens representing the demographic patterns of the county sifted through the information to find patterns of agreement in the earlier citizen dialogue in answer to several critical aspirations regarding such matters as what citizens want for the community and for public education, the current situation regarding

## **Civic investment should be directed toward ensuring that all students in all kinds of schools have the opportunity to learn at high levels.**

both, what needs to happen and how it can be planned. On the basis of these ideas, MAEF and these engaged community leaders developed the “Yes We Can Community Agreement,” which the Mobile County School Board endorsed in 2003. That agreement has been translated into an on-going school system plan called the “Passport to Excellence.”

MAEF continues to translate this basic understanding into programmatic reality. It fostered the Mobile Math Initiative, which uses proven learning strategies to help elementary students at all levels in meeting math requirements. Over the last decade, MAEF has sponsored thousands of hours of professional development for Mobile teachers focused on sharing “best practices” from around the country.

Research suggests that efforts like these to mobilize community resources on behalf of students can improve opportunities and outcomes. In addition, adequate and equitable resources for students are associated with high levels of student performance. A recent study of state funding systems, for example, found that states with relatively high levels of funding and distribution systems that provide more resources to those with the greatest need, such as Massachusetts and New Jersey, also have fairly high levels of performance and greater equity in outcomes. Those with low levels of funding and inequitable distribution systems tend to be those with lower and inequitable outcomes.<sup>11</sup>

The good news is that community members throughout the country are already taking action on behalf of schools and children, in a wide variety of venues. Consider charter schools. In less than two decades, the idea of allowing parents to organize public schools with substantial autonomy has spread to forty states and the District of Columbia. Currently, there are 5,453 charter schools serving 1.7 million students.<sup>12</sup>

These efforts, while laudable, are limited. Charter schools, despite their rapid growth, still only educate less than 4 percent of the public school population in the United States. And their outcomes are mixed; fewer than one in five charter schools outperform comparable district schools.<sup>13</sup>

The goal for an increase in civic investment, then, must be to improve opportunities and outcomes for all students, especially those who have traditionally been ill-served by public schools.

### **THE PROMISE OF CIVIC ACTION**

Just as Alexis de Tocqueville described more than a century and a half ago, Americans continue to band together in their communities in civic organizations to support local schools. Through Parent Teachers’ Associations (PTAs), community organizing groups, public education funds, local education funds, and other organizations, community members have worked together on behalf of children in impressive ways.

These organizations represent powerful examples of civic engagement, and suggest that reports of Americans “bowling alone” and refusing to get involved in their neighbors’ lives might be overblown.<sup>14</sup> However, in some cases, these efforts have produced the unintended consequence of exacerbating the inequities in American education. Too often, the schools with the greatest resources and the most advantaged students tend to be the ones with the most active civic support behind them. The rich indeed get richer.

For us, the members of the Commission, civic investment should be based primarily on the value of ensuring equality in educational opportunity and outcomes. Those with the least advantages and most need have the greatest claim to civic support. Civic investment should be directed toward ensuring that all students in all kinds of schools have the opportunity to learn at high levels.

## In order to keep faith with the community they represent and from which their support derives, LEFs and PEFs must demonstrate that they meet clear, high standards.

In large part, the imperative for such an approach is a moral one. Basic fairness demands that all children should have equitable opportunities for a high-quality education. The imperative is especially great now, since children's futures depend so much on educational attainment. By denying any young person a high-quality education, society cuts off that child's prospects for a fulfilling, productive life. That is unacceptable.

At the same time, all of society benefits when every young person receives a high-quality education. The current levels of inequality, exacerbated by inequitable educational opportunities, threaten to tear apart the social fabric. A democratic society cannot survive when a large proportion of a nation is ill-educated. To ensure the continued functioning of democracy, then, community members must band together to ensure equality in educational opportunity.

Moreover, improving educational opportunities also enhances the economic well-being of the entire community. Because youths who drop out of school or who receive an inadequate education earn lower incomes than graduates, strengthening education systems so that all students graduate prepared for the future will yield higher earnings and tax revenues, and create jobs and investment—not to mention reduce the costs associated with crime and social services. According to one estimate, halving the dropout rate from one matriculating

class in the fifty largest metropolitan areas would add \$4.1 billion in additional earnings, boost spending by \$2.8 billion and investment by \$1.1 billion, and create 30,000 new jobs.<sup>15</sup> Thus addressing those in need benefits the entire community. Communities are interdependent.

What does civic investment mean? How can community members get involved to support public schools? There are three things community members can do:

- **Take an informed interest.** The most basic level of involvement is becoming informed and interested in the public schools. For many Americans, particularly the majority without school-aged children, education is “somebody else’s problem,” and they pay little attention to their community’s schools. By taking an informed interest, community members can build an understanding of the issues facing local schools and make knowledgeable choices at the voting booth. There are many ways to become informed. Although newspaper coverage of education is scant, many newspapers are creating substantial web sites on local schools that provide a wealth of information to interested community members.<sup>16</sup> In addition, school districts and individual schools have substantially increased the amount of information they provide about school performance and contexts.
- **Put in time.** At the personal level, citizenship on behalf of public education includes volunteering, perhaps directly for a particular school or for the school district where the needs are starkest. The possibilities include but are not limited to serving as a tutor to individual students, helping out in a school library, being a teacher’s or a coach’s aid, and lending expertise to a school or a school district. Each of these, and many more, are very real “civic investments” in public education.
- **Get political.** A deeper level of engagement involves taking part in the political process. Community members work for candidates and ballot measures that support improved education, and some run for office themselves. In addition, engaged community members contact elected and appointed officials to express their opinions, directly or through organized community groups. Elected officials pay attention to the people who helped put them in office.

In many communities, local education funds and public education funds provide vehicles for community members to engage with the public schools in these ways. These organizations represent their communities, and their boards include community leaders. They function as a way for these leaders to generate community support for public schools and to channel that support in concrete ways.

In many cases, these organizations provide resources directly to schools. By collecting contributions and securing grant funds, LEFs and PEFs can make grants to schools and teachers to augment school programs and back innovative practices. They also provide critical expertise that can enhance a school or district's capacity to support teaching and learning. For example, the Public Education Fund in Chattanooga has been a vital partner to that district, helping educators collect, analyze, and use data to improve instruction.

PEFs are more numerous. As defined in the Urban Institute's study, PEFs are primarily public school foundations, whose primary purpose is to raise private funds for either an individual school or an entire school district. PEFs tend to work closely and cooperatively with school principals, district superintendents, and donors to determine how those funds should be allocated. Typically, they direct their resources to enriching and enhancing educational programming—adding learning opportunities for students in particular curricular areas.

As important as the direct support is, LEFs play critical roles as advocates for the public schools. These education support organizations build the public will necessary to hold school boards and districts accountable for equitable learning opportunities and outcomes via effective, responsive, and transparent governance systems. Systemic reform is crucial: Additional funding will not yield improvements if the system in which those funds are invested is unhealthy.

**Standards also set aspirations for these organizations and provide a clear guide for members of the public to hold organizations accountable.**

## ENSURING THE PUBLIC'S TRUST THROUGH ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

Just as public institutions require transparency and accountability, so too do LEFs and PEFs. In order to keep faith with the community they represent and from which their support derives, these organizations must demonstrate that they meet clear, high standards. Meeting these standards will ensure that they serve their mission and that the community can continue to trust them to do so.

Because public education support organizations are such critical conduits for the kinds of civic investment we encourage, it is imperative that they operate at the highest levels of efficacy and accountability. Independent Sector, the nation's pre-eminent nonpartisan voice on behalf of the nonprofit sector as a force for building private initiative for the common good, set standards for nonprofit organizations. As that organization put the case:

*Public trust is the most important asset of the nonprofit and philanthropic community. The rights and responsibilities that the independent sector enjoys are a result of the trust afforded to the organizations in this sector. Donors give to and volunteers get involved with charitable organizations because they trust them to carry out their missions, to be good stewards of their resources, and to act according to the highest ethical standards. Most fundamentally, voluntary and philanthropic organizations must abide by the highest ethical standards because it is the right thing to do.<sup>17</sup>*

Standards for LEFs and PEFs are important for a number of reasons. First, such standards make clear what these organizations intend to achieve. Not all organizations that support schools share the goal of ensuring equal educational opportunity, particularly for students who have been poorly served by the education system. By spelling out their mission, standards can state boldly to the public what they stand for. Organizations must make clear whether they intend to abide by these standards or not.

Standards also set aspirations for these organizations and provide a clear guide for members of the public to hold organizations accountable. Just as standards for student performance spell out learning goals that students, parents, and teachers can use to monitor children's and schools' progress, standards for LEFs and PEFs offer clear statements of what is expected of these organizations. Members of the public can see whether they are meeting these expectations and hold them accountable.

## Section B: The Standards

The following standards for Local Education Funds and Public Education Funds are based on standards for nonprofit organizations developed by Independent Sector.<sup>18</sup> While education support organizations have a wide diversity of purposes and circumstances, these standards are intended to apply to all such organizations. The goal is for Public Education Network and the National School Foundation Association to take steps to gain members' active acceptance of the standards.

### I. STANDARDS ASSOCIATED WITH MISSION AND PROGRAMS

#### A. Mission

**The Principle:** The mission of Public Education Funds (PEFs) is to provide external support to the school(s) and/or district(s) with which they work. The mission of PEN Local Education Funds (LEFs) is to support whole-school and system reform on a single or multi-district basis, and to engage the public, in districts with a high proportion of children from low-income families.

**Good Practices:** Each PEF and LEF has a mission statement; it is clearly stated and approved by the board of directors. The mission is responsive to constituencies and communities served by the organization.

#### B. Programs

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

#### Good Practices:

A PEF/LEF ensures that its programs:

- Are aligned with the mission of the organization
- Are aligned with the needs of the community it serves
- Seek to produce measurable metrics of systemic impact
- Support the organization's sustainability
- Are guided by priorities set through consultation between board and staff, informed by systematic visioning and strategic-planning processes every three to five years; and the resulting plans are monitored regularly by the organization's board of directors to ensure alignment between and among the needs

which the organization is attempting to meet, its mission and operations (its own fundraising, its programs; its internal and external expenditures; its staffing), and the results of its work

- Are, to the extent feasible, carried forward in clearly defined partnerships or collaborations with other organizations and constituencies—arrangements in which the goals and both operating and financial responsibilities are clearly defined—in order to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of its work
- Are evaluated regularly against mission and against the full set of standards to which the organization agrees (*also see Section II below—Standards Associated With Evaluation and Transparency*)

#### Example:

PEN's Local Education Funds annually report to the community prospectively about their intended theory of change and impacts, and retrospectively about their actual impacts, successes and challenges in reaching their goals.

#### C. Resource Allocation Guidelines for making gifts to schools or school districts

**The Principle:** A PEF's/LEF's gifts or grants in support of the school and/or district are made for purposes consistent with the mission of the organization. All decisions about use of resources raised by the organization are made by the organization's board and staff; and, to the extent feasible, they are made in consultation with the organization's own funders, appropriate representatives of the district or school and of other major constituencies (*such as unions, parents, and students, where feasible, who are intended to benefit from the allocation*)—in each instance depending on the purpose(s) and intended recipient(s) of the allocation.

### Good Practices:

In their gifting role, PEFs:

- have constructive relations with giftseekers, based on mutual respect and shared goals
- communicate clearly and on a timely basis with potential beneficiaries of the allocations
- treat those who are seeking and those who are beneficiaries of allocated gifts fairly and with respect
- respect the expertise of those seeking gifts in their fields of knowledge
- seek to understand and respect the organizational capacity and needs of organizations seeking support
- respect the integrity of the mission of those organizations
- award student scholarships through a process that is clear about the goals and selection criteria for each type of scholarship and that is transparent and fair in its execution

## II. STANDARDS ASSOCIATED WITH EVALUATION AND TRANSPARENCY

**The Principle:** PEFs and LEFs are committed to ensuring that they are serving the schools and communities with which they work as effectively as possible. All information about the organization fully and honestly reflects its policies and practices.

### Good Practices:

#### *External Organization Review*

Each organization periodically (every 4-5 years) conducts an “external organization review” in conjunction with its periodic visioning and strategic planning processes, so as to receive

input from constituents and partners about the performance of the organization as to whether it effectively addresses the needs of the schools and communities with which it works.

#### *Program Evaluation*

The organization regularly reviews program effectiveness and has mechanisms to incorporate lessons learned into future programs. The organization is responsive to changes in its field of activity and is responsive to the needs of its constituencies.

The organization ensures that its programs:

- Demonstrate alignment with the organizational mission
- Demonstrate appropriate and measurable results in relation to the funding supplied
- Produce evidence of sustainable outcomes

#### **Example:**

PEN LEFs report annually on the impact of their work on (1) student achievement (*including college and career readiness metrics*) and (2) the public’s commitment to ensuring a quality public education is available to every child in the district(s) served (*such as, citizen and parent involvement in the schools, support for bond issues, etc.*) As part of this disclosure, PEN LEFs engage in community dialogue about program effectiveness, lessons learned, and measurable impact.

#### *Financial Management*

The board and staff of the PEF or LEF manage the organization’s funds responsibly and prudently to ensure that resources spent are having the desired impact consistent with the mission of the organization. This includes consideration of the proportion of the budget spent on program, administrative expenses, staff compensation, fundraising, and building an endowment. The

board authorizes an external annual financial audit or review, and ensures that all financial reports are factually accurate and complete in all material respects.

#### *Investments*

The board and staff of the organization, aware that investment funds exist because of the good will and kindness of donors, invest in ways that not only increase the organization’s assets but protect their donors’ investments in the organization. They act in good faith and consider such issues as the duration and preservation of endowment funds, the purposes of the institution, general economic conditions, possible effects of inflation or deflation, the expected total return from income, and the appreciation of investments.

#### *Financial Disclosure*

Each organization ensures that:

- Basic informational data about the organization, such as the Form 990, reviews and compilations, and audited financial statements will be posted on the organization’s website or otherwise made available to the public
- All solicitation materials accurately represent the PEF’s policies and practices and will reflect the dignity of program beneficiaries
- All financial, organizational, and program reports will be complete and accurate in all material respects
- Annual reports are prepared and distributed to all stakeholders annually
- The organization reports to the public information about significant contributions to the community using the charity’s funds and programs, and strongly evidences commitment to ethical behavior

- The organization is prepared to disclose to any potential donor who requests it the costs of fundraising in comparison to the amount of funds raised
- Organizations that raise funds from the public or from donor institutions are truthful in their solicitation materials, respect the privacy concerns of individual donors, and expend funds consistent with donor intent and in consultation with the governing board, staff, and constituencies to be served

#### *External Communications*

Board members, staff and school personnel are constant and vigilant public advocates for the organization, using frequent and clear communications to attract and retain donors, and establish public consciousness about the needs and values of the organization as it seeks to strengthen public education for the community's children and families.

#### *Websites and IT Services*

The board and staff of a PEF/LEF adopt and carry out measures to ensure the confidentiality of the organization, its donors, its board and staff in the uses of its website, email communications and associated IT information and the integrity (including reliable recovery measures) of the IT system and its data.

#### *Governance and Organizational Practice Disclosure*

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

### III. STANDARDS ASSOCIATED WITH RESPONSIBLE STEWARDSHIP

**The Principles:** The organization has an active governing body that is responsible for setting its mission and strategic direction. The board is accountable for and actively exercises oversight of the finances, operations, policies, and programs of the organization. It represents a diverse array of experience, perspectives, and communities. It is able to tell the organization's story in terms of investments and outcomes. In the case of PEN LEFs, to be effective, the board of each must 1) maintain their independence from the school districts with which they interact and which they hope to strengthen; and 2) must ensure that their perspectives on issues of equity and related matters draw from, as well as contribute to, the communities they serve.

#### **Good Practices:**

##### *The Governing Body:*

- Sets the strategic direction and policy for the organization
- Annually reviews the mission and strategic direction to ensure programs align
- Ensures that the board membership reflects community, understands the issues the community is trying to address, and has the skills, experience, content and policy knowledge to address them
- Selects the executive director
- Has a policy of promoting inclusiveness and its staff, board and volunteers reflect diversity in order to enrich its programmatic effectiveness. It ensures that the organization takes meaningful steps to promote inclusiveness in its hiring,

retention, promotion, board recruitment and constituencies served. PEN LEFs' governing bodies have the additional responsibility to ensure that their own compositions are diverse, that is, reflective of the diverse racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, experiential, and professional communities they serve

- Is responsible for the hiring, firing, and regular review of the performance of the chief executive officer, and ensures that the compensation of the chief executive officer is reasonable and appropriate
- Ensures that minutes of board meetings are detailed and broadly disseminated, and that "executive sessions" are used only for a limited number of sensitive matters
- Has a conflict-of-interest policy that ensures that any conflicts of interest, or the appearance thereof, are avoided or appropriately managed through disclosure, recusal, or other means
- Ensures that the CEO and appropriate staff provide the governing body with timely and comprehensive information so that the governing body can effectively carry out its duties
- Ensures that the organization conducts all transactions and dealings with integrity and honesty
- Ensures that the organization promotes working relationships with board members, staff, volunteers, and program beneficiaries that are based on mutual respect, fairness and openness
- Ensures that the organization is fair and inclusive in its hiring and promotion policies and practices for all board, staff and volunteer positions

- Ensures that policies of the organization are in writing, clearly articulated and officially adopted
- Ensures that the resources of the organization are responsibly and prudently managed
- Ensures that the organization has the capacity to carry out its programs effectively
- Participates in fundraising activities in a variety of ways and makes an annual financial contribution according to personal means to assure the organization has adequate funding to fulfill its mission

*The Chief Executive Officer (CEO):*

- Carries out the policies, procedures and strategic plan adopted by the governing body of the organization
- Is effective in the use of the organization's assets, human resources and program delivery and assists the governing body in setting high goals for the organization to achieve
- Assures compliance with legal, financial, accounting and ethical requirements of the organization

#### IV. STANDARDS ASSOCIATED WITH LEGAL COMPLIANCE

**The Principle:** The organization's stewards are aware of and comply with all laws, regulations and applicable conventions.

**Good Practices:**

Each organization:

- Has a lawful purpose for its existence.
- Practices respect and complies with the regulations and oversight of the IRS, which grants and administers tax exempt status, including timely completion of IRS form 990, and audits
- Ensures that its Articles of Incorporation include provisions essential for federal tax exemption eligibility, restrictions on legislative advocacy, prohibit private financial distributions to individual members except as reasonable compensation for service rendered and address directors' immunity from liability to the corporation.
- Secures appropriate risk management for its organization by:
  - Purchasing appropriate Directors and Officers liability insurance to cover all risks
  - Passing appropriate policies and procedures to protect the staff, donors, board and assets of the organization
- Complies with any and all applicable State Department of Education (DOE) guidelines relating to education foundations
- Where applicable, has a timely and mission-justified Memo of Understanding (MOU) outlining the working relationship between the organization and the school(s) or district(s) it serves

#### V. STANDARDS ASSOCIATED WITH PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL INTEGRITY

**The Principle:** PEFs and LEFs promote a working environment that values respect, fairness and integrity.

**Good Practice:**

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

## Section C: Implementing the Standards

Adopting strong standards is one thing. Translating them into standard operating procedures—into habitual organizational conduct—is another, very critical matter. We therefore encourage PEFs and LEFs to:

- Conduct and report to their stakeholders (including the associations of which they are members) a) the results of periodic (annual or biennial) “ethical audits” and b) the actions their respective boards of trustees have adopted to overcome any deficiencies such audits uncover.
- Take advantage each year of “best practices” training and seminars, many of which are regularly available to them by organizations like NSFA and PEN.

Further, the Commission urges that educational membership organizations of all types, and PEN and NSFA in particular:

- 1) Make adoption of and adherence to the Standards we have recommended (or as each association has amended them in accord with its purposes and powers) a requirement of membership. At the very least, this could take the form of annually requiring organizations that are already members and those seeking membership for the first time to indicate that they subscribe to the association’s Standards of Practice. This may be the most that some associations can reasonably expect. Other associations, in particular those that provide financial support and/or a broader array of services to members, may be able to require evidence that members (and their boards) are effectively instituting and monitoring compliance with the Standards.
- 2) Regularly provide or refer members to “best practices” information, training and technical assistance, including the conduct, response to and reporting of periodic ethical audits.
- 3) Regularly document best practices adopted by consenting member organizations (and by other not-for-profits); disseminate such information to core constituencies (including other members, funders, donors, the public schools supported by them, and the public in general); and use such information to build, update or acquire relevant training materials.
- 4) Develop and implement ways to recognize publicly—perhaps through awards and/or stamps of approval—member organizations that demonstrate that they have met or are continuing to meet the Standards.

## Section D: Getting Priorities Straight

The Commission is confident that Americans will affirm the commitment to a public education that works for all. Both for reasons of justice and self-interest, Americans will pursue equal educational opportunity for all as a critical step for building a more secure future for current and future generations.<sup>19</sup> The alternative is perfectly predictable: if Americans do not pull together, what is now a near-term crisis in our system of public education will have immense negative consequences for generations.

At this time of financial crisis in nearly all states, public officials must make some difficult choices. The road they choose will show clearly their priorities. Unfortunately, there is some evidence that the priorities in many states are misguided: a 2009 study found that spending on corrections was the fastest-growing segment of state budgets, outpacing spending on education, and that over the past two decades spending on corrections has grown faster than any other state expenditure except Medicaid.<sup>20</sup>

Setting policymakers' priorities straight will take public will. Policymakers must see that their constituents demand equity and excellence in education opportunities and outcomes. LEFs can lead the advocacy efforts necessary to make that demand clear to elected and appointed officials, and PEFs should consider doing the same. But these organizations can only do so effectively if they have the strong support of the public they represent and who work as part of these organizations.

Such support can only build if PEFs and LEFs demonstrate their commitment to the principles Americans share. The standards this Commission is now promulgating can stand as a statement of this commitment. By announcing their adherence to the standards, and by living up to them year after year, PEFs and LEFs can lead the way toward equity and excellence in American education.



# Appendix A: Profiles of Representative PEFs and LEFs

## Decatur Public Schools Foundation (DPSF)

Decatur, Illinois



### Key Facts

**Founded:** 1997

**Mission:** Acquire and distribute resources to Decatur Public Schools District 61 to enhance, enrich, and encourage learning opportunities for its students, staff, and community.

**Board:** 15

**Staff:** 1 FT, 1 PT

**Annual Fundraising (2009):** \$181,000

**Annual Fundraising:** \$260,000  
(Total over 3 years)

**Eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch Program:** 74%

**Website:**

[www.dps61.org/foundation](http://www.dps61.org/foundation)

### Major initiatives or accomplishments over the past three years:

- **Creative Science Investigations:** A science initiative designed to stimulate student interest in science, increase student achievement, and build scientific literacy through sustained professional development, inquiry curriculum and lab materials, and a traveling science van staffed by college science majors. Results to-date include a 12% increase in 4th grade ISAT scores a 9% increase in 7th grade ISAT scores, and increased teacher proficiency in conducting guided and independent inquiry science lessons.
- **Promethean Boards:** the DPSF piloted the first digital classrooms in District 61 during the past three years, initiating at least one classroom at each school into the use of digital technology through the installation of a Promethean board and student responders. The school district, leveraging this foundation pilot, has since applied for and received over 3 million dollars in federal grants for promethean technology in all elementary classrooms.
- **Musical Instrument Library:** Established in 2009, this project provides loaner instruments to low income 4th and 5th grade students. Participation in band/orchestra increased by 26% in 2009–10. Over 80 instruments have been collected or purchased to-date, with another expected rise in participation during 2010-11.
- **Donor-directed Projects:** These have increased significantly in the last three years and include hospital-funded classroom healthcare grants, corporation-funded Earth Day grants, and several endowments created for specific purposes such as grants for classroom supplies, grants for low-income athletes, etc. Donor-directed projects foster a closer relationship between schools and the community as well as providing much needed resources for teachers and students.

## The Carroll County Public Schools Education Foundation (CCPS)

Westminster, Maryland



### Key Facts

**Founded:** 2006

**Mission:** Provide financial support for innovative programs that enhance the quality of education for students in Carroll County Public Schools.

**Board:** 21

**Staff:** 1

**Annual Fundraising (2009):** \$112,000

**Eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch Program:** 14.4%

**Website:**

[www.ccpsfoundation.org](http://www.ccpsfoundation.org)

### Major initiatives or accomplishments over the past three years:

- **CCPS School Readiness Camps Program:** In spring of 2008, the Foundation announced a partnership with the PNC Foundation to support a readiness camps program. In the past two summers, \$25,000 from the PNC and \$10,000 from the CCPS Foundation has enabled the Carroll County Judy Center to provide camps to increase the school readiness of identified youth so they have the best possible start to succeed in school. The camps have served approximately 191 four and five-year old children at five locations in Carroll County during a four-week period each summer.
- **National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration:** In January 2010, the Foundation was awarded funding for a grant titled “Developing and Implementing a K-12 Environmental Literacy Course of Study.” Funds totaling \$252,000 over three years will be used at CCPS’ Outdoor School. These funds will support the continuance of a multi-year process that engages all Carroll County students at all levels in meaningful watershed educational experiences. These experiences will be tied to classroom instruction and will culminate in school yard habitat enhancement and watershed mitigation projects.
- **American Chestnut Jamboree:** In February 2010 the Foundation partnered with the CCPS Department of Curriculum’s Science Department, Hashawha’s Environmental Center and the Maryland Chapter of the American Chestnut Foundation to promote awareness of the American Chestnut blight. Two grants totaling \$15,000 were given to the Foundation to fund the American Chestnut projects throughout CCPS. As a result, the Foundation established 16 American Chestnut orchards throughout Carroll County, with another 14 being planned. In addition, the science curriculum was rewritten for grades 6-12 to include the history of the American Chestnut blight. This project will result in 100% of district students learning about the blight and the re-establishing of the tree’s life.

## Hillsborough Education Foundation, Inc.

Hillsborough County, FL



### Key Facts

**Founded:** 1988

**Mission:** Invest community resources to help students achieve academic success.

**Board:** 40

**Staff:** 20

**Annual Fundraising (2008):** \$4.7 M

**Annual Fundraising:** \$260,000  
(Total over 3 years)

**Eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch Program:** 52%

**Website:**  
[www.educationfoundation.com](http://www.educationfoundation.com)

### Major initiatives or accomplishments over the past three years:

- **Career & Technical Education:** The Foundation has 3 programs focusing on Career & Tech Education—SUCCESS Fund (Career Academies), Project SUCCESS (Career Centers) and INVEST (Postsecondary education). Three high-tech Career Centers in Hillsborough County receive funding to assist at-risk students with academic expenses to encourage them to stay in school. Currently 70% of students enrolling in Career & Technical Education programs are considered low-income.
- **Excellence In Education Recognition Programs:** Showcases to the community those educators and school personnel who consistently bring forth their best effort and utilize their talents to ensure the students they serve receive the best education possible. Foundation recognizes excellence through 5 core programs:
  1. **Ida S. Baker Diversity Educator of the Year:** Honoring those educators who serve as outstanding role models through their job as an educator; and their influential work in diversity they perform within their classrooms, schools and within their community.
  2. **Instructional Support Employee of the Year:** Showcasing the many supportive areas school personnel play in ensuring the county's students and schools have the care and services they need to ensure their environment is one of enrichment and safety.
  3. **Teacher of the Year:** Schools nominate a teacher for their dedication to their students and their support of academic achievement. Winners move on to compete at the state, and potentially the national, levels.
  4. **We Deliver Award:** the 'best of the best' of Hillsborough County Public Schools' teachers is selected by the Superintendent of Schools. This individual embodies spirit, idealism and educational achievement, and communicates those same qualities to their students and peers.
  5. **Excellence in Education Awards:** recognition program honoring the 700 nominees selected in the county as the Ida S. Baker Diversity Educator of the Year, Instructional Support Employee of the Year, and Teacher of the Year for their school or site. From these nominees, the county's winners for each award are selected and announced at the awards ceremony.
- **Hillsborough Reads:** an early literacy program for at-risk students that began in 1997. In 2009–2010, 273 struggling readers in grades K-3 received more than 14,000 hours of one-on-one tutoring. Overall, 81% of the tutored students raised their reading grade by 2 or more diagnostic reading levels. 13 Title-1 schools are currently being served by program.
- **Teaching Tools For Hillsborough Schools:** Provides basic school supplies to students in the county's Title I schools, at no cost to the teachers. Schools with at least 59% of students on free or reduced-cost lunch utilize surplus materials from the community to stock the Supply Store with school supplies. The total value of supplies distributed to date: \$7.1 million
  1. Average value of distributed supplies on a daily basis: \$8,000.00 to \$10,000.00.
  2. Average value of monthly shopping per teacher: \$250
  3. Currently serving 100 Title I schools and instructional sites, with a waiting list of 55 more.
  4. Program receives assistance from more than 300 volunteers.
  5. Distributed \$1.4 million worth of materials during 2009-2010 school year.

## The Mobile Area Education Foundation (MAEF)

Mobile County, Alabama



### Key Facts

**Founded:** 1986

**Member of PEN since:** 1995

**Mission:** Build community responsibility for improving public education outcomes in Mobile County.

**Strategy:** Systemic reform of the Mobile County public school system serving 65,000 students.

**Board:** 29

**Staff:** 16

**Annual Budget:** \$1.5 million

**Eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch Program:** 67%

**Website:**  
[www.maef.net](http://www.maef.net)

### Profile

The mission of MAEF is “to build community responsibility for improving public education outcomes” across the county, based on the beliefs that “the citizens...own the public schools,” “change is possible and progress is taking place,” “all children can achieve at high levels,” “what happens in the classroom matters most,” and that “great schools made a great community.” MAEF’s scope is systemic reform.

In service of its mission, beliefs and scope, MAEF has consistently pursued a process of broad citizen engagement and engagement of stakeholder institutions with one another and with the School District and of tracking and disseminating research-based best teaching practices. Both pursuits are keyed to improving educational performance and learning outcomes and to ensuring accountability of the school system to the public.

The enduring highlight of the public engagement process was the “Yes We Can Initiative” (2001-04) MAEF designed and managed for building an informed coalition of citizens that would demand higher standards for and greater accountability from the school system. The Initiative started with pulling together an advisory team of parents, educators and leaders to study school reform success stories around the country. Out of those discussions came a process of engaging some 1,400 citizens in nearly 50 structured and recorded two-hour “community conversations” (in homes, churches, community centers, and five open public forums) throughout the county over a 14-week period. The conversations focused on the connections between schools and community, common goals for education, and the challenges faced in achieving a more responsive school system. Then a panel of 50 citizens representing the demographic patterns of the county sifted through the informa-

tion to find patterns of agreement in the earlier citizen dialogue in answer to several critical aspirations regarding such matters as what citizens want for the community and for public education, the current situation regarding both, what needs to happen and how it can be planned. On the basis of these ideas, MAEF and these engaged community leaders developed the “Yes We Can Community Agreement” which the Mobile County School Board endorsed in 2003. That agreement has been translated into an on-going school system plan called the “Passport to Excellence.”

MAEF continues to translate this basic understanding into programmatic reality. It fostered the Mobile Math Initiative, which uses proven learning strategies to help elementary students at all levels in meeting math requirements. Over the last decade, MAEF has sponsored thousands of hours of professional development-training for Mobile teachers focused on sharing “best practices” from around the country. Through MAEF, Parent Organizers work across the county to encourage parents to get personally involved in the learning process. Through working with local churches that have established after-school tutorial programs and some 700 other Mobile County businesses and organizations that now serve as active Partners in Education, MAEF links thousands of parents, educators, retirees, faith-based groups, business and community leaders in a common effort to improve opportunities for the County’s children.

As a result, MAEF notes, test scores are improving, students are developing the knowledge and critical thinking skills that are necessary for success in today’s world, graduation rates are improving, and more students are going on to college.

## The Bridgeport Public Education Fund (BPEF)

Bridgeport, Connecticut



### Key Facts

**Founded:** 1983

**Member of PEN since:** 1991

**Mission:** Develop programs and mobilize the community for quality public education in Bridgeport.

**Strategy:** Systemic reform of the Bridgeport school system serving 20,500 students.

**Board:** 35

**Staff:** 5

**Annual Budget:** \$403,000

**Eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch Program:** 95%

**Website:**  
[www.bpef.org](http://www.bpef.org)

### Profile

One of PEN's charter members, BPEF subscribes to PEN's vision that "every day, in every community, every child in America benefits from a quality public education." BPEF's mission is to develop programs and mobilize the community to achieve that result in Bridgeport's public schools. That system is the second largest in the state, second lowest among the state's seven largest school systems in terms of per capita income and the lowest within that group in per pupil expenditures. To meet the special needs of the system and its students, BPEF annually engages over 250 people from the Bridgeport community as volunteers for the schools and its own activities. Equally important for ensuring that the District meets the needs of its students, BPEF works actively with and through other influential community partners. These organizations include the School Volunteer Association, United Way-Community Impact, Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition, The Bridgeport Regional Business Council, Bridgeport Higher Education Alliance and the Mentoring Institute of Coastal Fairfield County.

BPEF's programs span the continuum of primary and secondary education. Among them is the signature "First Day" reading enrichment program, which annually on the first day of school engages 100+ community volunteers in distributing books to first graders in order to encourage them to read and to start up their own personal libraries. At the other end of the learning spectrum, BPEF's 21-year-old

Mentoring for Academic Achievement and College Success program, which in 2009 paired 320 students from the system's three high schools with college mentors from six area colleges and universities. Students in that program, who complete their freshman year in college and maintain regular contacts with program staff across the year, become eligible for several kinds of financial assistance to continue their undergraduate work.

And along the continuum, BPEF encourages instructional excellence through its Grants for Bridgeport Teachers, which annually underwrites several hands-on student learning projects (grades K-12) designed by teams of teachers; its underwriting of an annual teacher recognition and celebration in which eight outstanding teachers, nominated by their colleagues are selected, given awards (including up to \$1,000 each in support of professional development activities) and feted; and its STAR99 Math and Science Achievement Awards in recognition of seventh grade students (28 of them in 2009) who achieve above the norm in those disciplines.

Most recently, BPEF played a critical role in supporting the work of The Kettering Foundation which selected Bridgeport as one of twelve sites of its national demonstration project, "Too Many Children Left Behind – Closing the Achievement Gap." BPEF gathered information through structured conversations with 300+ students, which will be highlighted in the final Kettering Report (2010).

## The Alliance for Education

Seattle, Washington



### Key Facts

**Founded:** 1995

**Member of PEN**

**Mission:** Help every Seattle Public School student achieve academic success.

**Strategy:** Systemic reform of Seattle Public Schools serving 46,000 students.

**Board:** 29

**Staff:** 12

**Annual Budget:** \$7.5M

**Eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch Program:** 41%

**Website:**

[www.alliance4ed.org](http://www.alliance4ed.org)

### Profile

The Alliance's vision is "a city unified in helping all children fulfill their potential as learners." The core of this belief is "the idea—one that is backed by ample research—that raising the bar for all students benefits all students" because high achievers and struggling students both respond positively to rigorous expectations. To ensure that every child in Seattle's Public Schools achieves academic success, the Alliance works to secure seed capital for learning innovations and to foster city-wide support for educational excellence.

The key values that guide Alliance investments are accountability to its goals; collaboration with partners (especially the school system); equity among all students in access to great education and to opportunity to achieve their full potentials; innovation via bold ideas for advancing academic achievement; and transparency and candor about whether the outcomes it seeks are or are not met.

Essential to the Alliance's effectiveness are three relationships. One is with school authorities—through a collaborative but independent interaction—to address the difficult issues related to school accountability, expectations and performance. The organization has developed a very positive relationship with the office of the Superintendent of schools and with its previous and current Superintendents.

The second relationship is with the city's various communities—in particular families and citizens—to hear their concerns about public education and to get them involved as individuals and through community organizations the Alliance partners with to tackle issues such as the achievement gap and high dropout rates. The Alliance created the Community Engagement Task Force, composed of representatives of communities and partnering organizations, as a formal vehicle translating concerns and interests into action-oriented support of effective public education.

The third set of relationships is with local and national philanthropies focused on improving educational outcomes. Indeed, the Alliance is, arguably, best known for developing an effective, consistently structured model for linking private philanthropy to public education to achieve its vision and goals. Over the years it sought and administered a set of endowments and associated awards for outstanding teachers, administrators, and students in the school system. Most recently, the Alliance was critical in securing nearly \$9 million in grants from local and national foundations announced in March 2009. Nearly all of these grants and donations are dedicated to realizing the district's five-year strategic plan, "Excellence for All." More specifically, they are directed primarily to five areas of development: college readiness; community engagement; data, assessment and performance management; school board development; and staff development.

## ENDNOTES

1. See for example, the American Association of School Administrators' national survey of prospective cuts (May, 2010, [www.aasa.org/PressReleases.aspx?id=13246](http://www.aasa.org/PressReleases.aspx?id=13246)), A report on U.S. Department of Education's advice to use stimulus funds to alleviate expected cuts (July, 2010, [www.thompson.com/public/newsbrief.jsp?cat=EDUCATION&id=2999](http://www.thompson.com/public/newsbrief.jsp?cat=EDUCATION&id=2999)). For a counterview, see Charles Lane's June 2010 blog in the Washington Post at [http://voices.washingtonpost.com/postpartisan/2010/06/myths\\_about\\_the\\_teacher\\_layoff.html](http://voices.washingtonpost.com/postpartisan/2010/06/myths_about_the_teacher_layoff.html)
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17. Obedience to the Unenforceable: Ethics and the Nation's Voluntary and Philanthropic Sector, 1991 & 2002, Independent Sector. See [www.independentsector.org](http://www.independentsector.org) for the full document, for information about IS, and for two more recent companion documents: Principles for Good Governance and Ethical Practice (2007) and The Principles Workbook: Steering Your Board Towards Good Governance and Ethical Practice (2009).
18. Adapted from Statement of Values and Code of Ethics for Nonprofit and Philanthropic Organizations; Independent Sector, 2004, and other reputable standard-bearers, recommended for all 501(c)(3) organizations.
19. A national poll commissioned by the Alliance for Excellent Education found widespread support for the need to upgrade public education. The poll found that improving the quality of public high schools is a voting issue for over eight in ten voters and that only one in four give the nation's high schools a good or excellent rating, while 42 percent give them a "C," and one in five a poor or failing grade. Alliance for Excellent Education. "Voters Want Federal Action on High School Reform, According to New National Poll." Press Release. Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education. July 14, 2010.
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The value of their work, expertise, and commitment to public education cannot be overstated. The deliberations of the National Commission were conducted throughout 2009 and 2010 and facilitated and executed by Lance C. Buhl, Center for Leadership & Public Values at Duke University and Amanda R. Broun, Senior Vice President at Public Education Network. The Independent Sector (IS) provided the framework for the standards recommended by the National Commission on Civic Investment in Public Education. Lance Buhl worked on the initial writing of the report and Robert Rothman, Alliance for Excellent Education, conducted the final writing and editing of the report. Rebecca Letsome, Member Associate, and Jeanette Vaughn, Director of Operations at Public Education Network, supported the logistics for meetings and travel. The Blank Page of New York City is responsible for the layout and design of the report. The work of the National Commission was supported by the following foundations and corporations: the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Prudential and Wells Fargo Foundations.

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### CO-CHAIRS

**Linda Darling-Hammond**

*Charles E. Ducommun Professor*

Stanford University School of Education

**Hon. Richard W. Riley**

*Former U.S. Secretary of Education*

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*Philanthropic Consultant*

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Department of Political Science

Stanford University

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Commonwealth of Massachusetts

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