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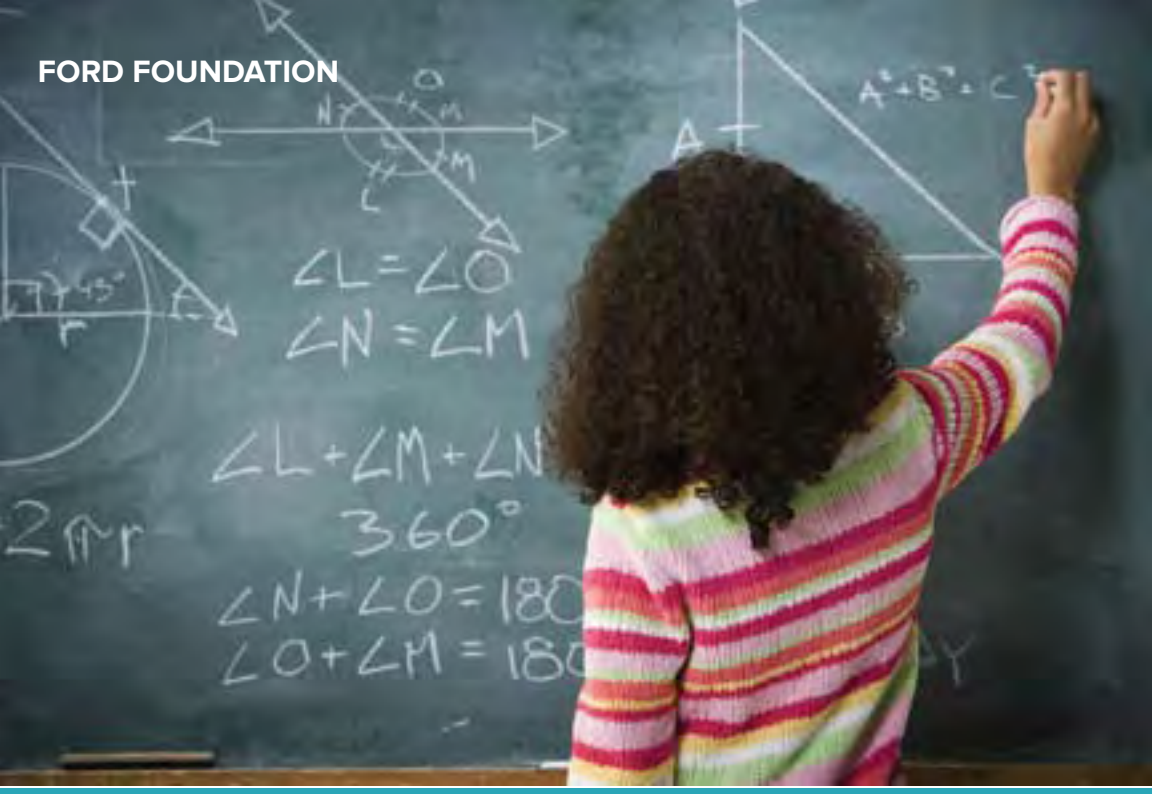

A FOUNDATION RETURNS TO SCHOOL

Strategies for Improving Public Education

By Janice Petrovich
Ford Foundation
Director of Education,
Sexuality, Religion

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Author's Note

Strategies for Improving Public Education analyzes a major Ford Foundation initiative to improve public schools from my point of view as its principal grant maker. The initiative, called Constituency Building for Public School Reform (CBPSR), began in the mid-1990s and was aimed at promoting democratic participation by an informed public to advance high-quality education for all students. In sharing what we have learned from the Ford Foundation's 13-year, $45 million investment, I hope to shed light on the relative value of different strategies.

Foreword

The Ford Foundation has been supporting efforts to improve public schools since the early 1950s. During Ford's early years, it was rather uncommon for philanthropic organizations to undertake and publish examinations of the strategies or results of their education activities. In an effort to expand knowledge of what works, Ford began to employ independent observers in the 1970s to evaluate its education initiatives. One early example, published in 1972, is "A Foundation Goes to School." Written by Paul Nachtigal, the report analyzed the results of the Comprehensive School Improvement Program (CSIP), a decade-long initiative to improve public schools. Though out of print, this publication continues to be downloaded from the Ford Web site.

At times, Ford staff members also produced their own reflections, such as Edward Meade Jr.'s "Philanthropy and Public Schools: One Foundation's Evolving Perspective" (1979). These reflections shared the lessons learned by the grant makers themselves in support of school improvement.

This new report, written by Janice Petrovich, director of Education, Sexuality and Religion, also is a grant maker's reflections. It reviews the activities of a 13-year-old initiative—Constituency Building for Public School Reform (CBPSR)—to once again share the lessons learned. CBPSR grantees endeavored to build coalitions of informed constituents who would collaborate and mobilize to bring about needed changes in schools.

Over Ford's nearly 60 years of funding school improvement, the strategies we have employed and the activities we have funded have varied. But we have consistently believed that every child should have an equal opportunity to obtain a high-quality education. We have sought to ensure that there is a good teacher in front of every student. And we have come to understand that achieving these goals will require both the development of teachers and school leaders, and of the policy and funding environments to provide the resources

As donors, we invest in different approaches to realize ambitious aims. We hope this report will be of interest to others who, like us, want to advance effective schools for all children.

they need. The CBPSR initiative aimed to promote the latter—a supportive environment that advanced high-quality education for all students.

As donors, we invest in different approaches to realize ambitious aims. And we try to learn through honest and analytical reflections on the results of what we have supported. We hope this report will be of interest to others who, like us, want to advance effective schools for all children.

Alison R. Bernstein
Vice President
Ford Foundation

Why Constituency Building to Improve Public Schools?

Public education has been compulsory in the United States for 100 years. However, the education provided by public schools has been far from equal. Public schools have typically become more inclusive, but equal access to high-quality education remains a challenge. The factors that improve school quality—well-qualified teachers, modern buildings, adequate funding, effective leadership and comprehensive curriculums—are less prevalent in schools serving predominantly poor or minority students. Given these resource inequities, it is not surprising that achievement gaps persist between low-income, African American and Latino students and their higher-income and white counterparts. Building quality schools for all students requires a public commitment and a broad, active constituency able to challenge the status quo and create the conditions for change. The CBPSR initiative was founded to help build such a constituency.

Public Support for Quality Schools

The initiative did not endorse any particular model of reform. Its purpose was to help communities advocate for equitable and excellent schools. At the heart of this initiative is a conviction that civic participation is essential to a healthy democracy in general and to public school improvement efforts in particular. The initiative was based on two premises. First, that low-income communities—those most likely to benefit from school improvement—are typically excluded from the school reform arena and need to assume a more active role. This is particularly important given that the issue of educational equity often takes a back seat to concerns about educational quality. Second, that successful reform depends on well-informed and inclusive coalitions capable of mobilizing a broad cross sector of the community. Only an engaged public can generate the political energy to initiate and sustain reform and hold public officials accountable.

With that in mind, the foundation supported several strategies:

- **Constituency Building and Coalition Building**
  To organize grass roots support for educational equity and excellence. Ford sought to help build inclusive, multi-sectoral coalitions and networks involving school personnel, parents, civic leaders, political leaders, the business community and ordinary community residents. We also supported organizations that gave special attention to engaging populations on the margins of the school reform debate: low income, inner-city, minority, immigrant and English-language learners.
- **Policy Research and Evaluation**
  To measure and understand student achievement gaps and policies devised to close them.
- **Strategic Communications**
  To convey research findings, increase public understanding and support for public schools, and build consensus on reform goals.
- **Networking and Learning**
  To share information and promote debate and consensus building among researchers and activists.

This initiative was developed with the conviction, based on research evidence, that equity and excellence in schools are unlikely to be achieved or be sustained without the active involvement of broad local constituencies working in concert.[1] Initiative grantees shared a commitment to the principle of equality of opportunity. They recognized that schools often have difficulty responding to students who are poor, minority or English-language learners. They realized that schools in poor neighborhoods typically face greater challenges, including fewer funds, inadequate school facilities and insufficient teachers with the skills and commitment to be effective with underserved students.

This initiative was developed with the conviction, based on research evidence, that equity and excellence in schools are unlikely to be achieved or be sustained without the active involvement of broad local constituencies working in concert.

For the first six years, all initiative grantees were brought together twice a year at the foundation's offices to promote networking and information exchange. The sessions provided the time and space for grantees to discuss progress, barriers and opportunities in their work. Wide-ranging policy discussions addressed issues such as school vouchers, academic tracking, segregation, school finance equity, charter schools and high-stakes testing. Eventually, grantees began managing their own networking meetings.

The next section examines the evolution of the foundation's strategies as our understanding of the political, cultural, social and economic context of public schools also evolved. (A number of publications cited in the references section offer a more detailed review of Ford's prior K-12 education initiatives.)

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[1] Clarence N. Stone, Jeffrey R. Henig, et al. *Building Civic Capacity: The Politics of Reforming Urban Schools* and Marilyn J. Gittell, ed. *Strategies for School Equity: Creating Productive Schools in a Just Society*

Ford's Support for Public School Improvement: 1950–1990

From the beginning of the 20th century, the debate on public education reforms has emphasized either excellence or equity. Ford has never accepted the implication that these two concepts are somehow in opposition. Instead, convinced that equity and excellence together are required to improve public schools, the foundation typically has awarded grants that addressed both goals.

Early Reform Efforts

Before the 1950s, the Ford Foundation provided modest support to a few educational institutions but did not undertake any strategic initiatives to improve public schools. In 1954, the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision mandated school desegregation, launching schools across the country on a decades-long struggle to comply. However, as the postwar baby-boom generation swelled public school enrollments, some worried that *Brown*'s demand for equity would undermine the quality of the curriculum as schools sought to serve increasingly diverse students. The Soviet Union's launch of the first satellite in 1957 underscored those concerns, transforming debate over schooling into a single-minded drive for national competitiveness. Schools were urged to help the country regain its scientific edge and international prominence, accelerating the push for educational excellence.

Writing about Ford's education program during the 1950s, former program officer Edward Meade Jr. noted that the increasing student population and the demands for excellence led to a focus on "three F's": funds, faculties and facilities.[2] During this decade, the foundation made grants to the National Citizens Commission for the Public Schools to build public support for increasing funds for public schools. The foundation also supported the Teacher

[2] Edward Meade Jr., *Philanthropy and Public Schools: One Foundation's Evolving Perspective*

Education Breakthrough Program, which provided $30 million in grants to train liberal arts graduates to be teachers through master's degree programs, supervised internships and technology, including educational television. Finally, the Educational Facilities Laboratory was created by Ford to develop school building designs and appropriate spaces and environments. These activities, including special programs in low-income and minority communities, were part of the foundation's education arm, the Fund for the Advancement of Education. They were funded over a decade primarily as short-term pilot programs, with grants totaling $50 million.[3]

The school improvement efforts of the 1950s were largely focused on changing schools from within by working with teachers and education leaders. As Meade noted, "Most of the innovations were based on premises about changing the use of basic resources—time, space, facilities—" to improve the quality of the interaction between teacher and child.[4] The projects were successful in helping to change the traditional practices and habits of schools by promoting activities such as team teaching, flexible use of time and more student involvement in learning. In addition, new and modernized facilities created educational spaces suitable to different forms of education, including educational television.

In a 1979 article, Meade reflected on factors that may have inhibited Ford from having a larger impact with its grant making in the 1950s:

> ... sometimes, perhaps often, plans for these innovations failed to take into sufficient account the effects on other aspects of the schools in the broader sense—the school context, the clients, and the general community. [5]

Comprehensive School Improvement

During the 1960s, some of the educational innovations previously funded by Ford were institutionalized or attracted public funding. These included the Master of Arts in Teaching, which began to be offered by various higher educa-

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3 Paul Nachtigal, "A Foundation Goes to School"
4 Meade, op.cit., p.3
5 Ibid., p.6

tion institutions, and some of the mathematics and science curriculum models that received public support through the National Science Foundation. However, the Ford staff remained concerned about the limited impact of innovations based in individual schools. A new strategy was developed to implement a variety of innovations—curriculum designs, teaching methods, uses of technology and scheduling of the school day—in a set of schools through a Comprehensive School Improvement Program (CSIP). The program awarded more than $30 million to some three dozen projects implementing innovative, comprehensive approaches, with the goal of achieving a "critical mass" of schools in each city that could overcome the school systems' inherent inertia.[6]

In his assessment of the CSIP, "A Foundation Goes to School", Paul Nachtigal observed that change occurred more rapidly in smaller schools. However, reform in these schools tended to be more dependent on a charismatic leader, making it less likely to survive the leader's departure. More lasting innovations occurred in midsize suburban schools where innovation was supported by a broader set of stakeholders. Yet Nachtigal found that even those projects generally did not lead to widespread or sustainable changes in the quality of the education programs. The full complexity of creating change in schools was becoming apparent.

Commenting on Nachtigal's report, Meade wrote:

> The report brought into sharp focus the effects of the broader community on the affairs of the school. It also showed clearly that changing school programs cannot be accomplished effectively—or in some cases at all—without attention to the political, social and economic forces that make up the greater school community.[7]

The attitudes, activism, and support of community leaders and parents often affected what could happen in the school, how it could happen, or, in some cases, whether it could happen at all.[8]

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6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid., p.8

Community Involvement

In the late 1960s, after a decade of supporting school improvement driven largely by education professionals on the "inside" of schools, the Ford Foundation turned to an approach that promoted reform from the "outside"—through parent and community involvement. In 1966, McGeorge Bundy, Ford's new president, won board approval to make racial equity the foundation's top priority. In a 1966 address to the National Urban League, he spoke of the foundation's commitment: "We believe that full equality for all American Negroes is now the most urgent domestic concern of the country."[9] The gaps in educational opportunities between boys and girls, whites and minorities, and poor and affluent students were widening. Educational opportunity became a pillar of the burgeoning minority rights and women's rights movements.

In New York City, where Ford headquarters is still located, tensions around the continued segregation of city public schools and low levels of academic achievement among minority students pitted the black and Puerto Rican communities against school authorities. In 1966, however, the minority groups changed tactics from calling for desegregation, as required by *Brown*, to demanding that the Board of Education allow them to run their own "ghetto" schools.[10]

Community control of schools appeared to be a promising approach to some at the Ford Foundation. By increasing parent involvement, they thought schools might become more responsive to student needs. That same year, Bundy headed a panel created by New York Mayor John Lindsay to present a plan to decentralize the city's schools. The panel's report promoted decentralization as an antidote to the "spiral of decline" of big city schools and envisioned a new regime in which "parents, teachers, supervisors, governing boards and students can stop blaming each other for failure and start working together for better schools."[11]

The Ford Foundation began providing modest grants to some school districts in 1967 to experiment with community control of local schools.[12] A bitter battle over school decentralization ensued between the Ocean Hill-Brownsville

9 Tamar Jacoby, "McGeorge Bundy: How the Establishment's Man Tackled America's Problems with Race."
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.

demonstration district in Brooklyn and the Central School Board and the United Federation of Teachers. A crippling teachers strike followed, prompting the New York Board of Education to abolish the demonstration districts. The decentralization plan that was ultimately approved fell far short of the Bundy panel recommendations. In the wake of the failure of school decentralization in New York, the Ford Foundation withdrew support for these efforts and largely stopped funding major initiatives in big cities.

School Finance and Equity

Continuing the pursuit for equal education opportunity, a major Ford Foundation investment in the 1970s was school finance reform. During this period, the civil rights movement, Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty and the legal mandates to desegregate schools inspired efforts by education reformers to achieve equitable access to an excellent education. As Richard Magat explained in The Ford Foundation at Work, wide disparities in school finance were considered a major cause of inequity.[13]

Ford provided support for fellowships for research on school finance and for national and state groups working to reform discriminatory school finance plans. School finance litigation continues across the country today. (Later in this report, I'll discuss a major case in which Ford played a role.) Important court decisions in many states have ordered more funding for schools and districts that have been shortchanged. Many people and organizations supported by Ford in the 1970s continue to be leaders today in the school finance equity arena.

Also during the 1970s, Title IX of the Education Amendments called for an end to sex discrimination in public schools. Ford supported data gathering, training, curriculum revision and school programs to address this discrimination. In addition, the foundation continued to focus on educational quality by funding in-service teacher training and the creation of independent staff development centers. These programs demonstrated that helping children learn required more than we originally thought. While confirming the vital importance of teachers to student learning, they helped us understand the equal importance of the social context of public schools.

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[12] *Time*. "Decentralization Dilemma."
[13] Richard Magat. *The Ford Foundation at Work: Philanthropic Choices, Methods, and Styles*

Excellence for All

In the 1980s, a push for "excellence" in education once again dominated school reform.[14] The Ford Foundation continued to support innovations to improve the quality of education with a special focus on groups least likely to have access to high-quality schools. After three decades of funding K-12 school improvement, foundation staff approached the 1980s seeking to improve teachers' capacities, increase public support for public schools and promote more "bottom-up" approaches.

From 1980 to 1998, the Ford Foundation made $35 million in grants to improve middle- and secondary-school mathematics, a subject in which achievement correlated with college entrance and success. Programs in urban school districts and community-based groups sought to improve mathematics achievement among girls and minorities, both of whom were underrepresented in postsecondary education.

While some argued that lower mathematics achievement among girls and minorities was due to "innate" characteristics, Ford-supported research refuted this theory, demonstrating that all children could learn high-level mathematics.[15] In addition, through the Urban Mathematics Collaborative, the foundation sought to improve the skills of math teachers. Collaboratives comprised of teachers, college math faculty and professionals in business and industry were organized to enable teachers to further their development by learning real-life applications of mathematics.

The Urban Schools Dropout Prevention Collaborative Program was another collaborative formed in the 1980s. Participating cities worked together to develop programs, policies and practices to keep students in school. Collaborative members typically included school leaders, social service and government agencies, religious and business leaders, community groups, the media and representatives of higher education institutions. As with many school reform collaboratives today, the goal was "building an informed public will." Reflecting

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[14] Janice Petrovich and Amy Stuart Wells, eds. *Bringing Equity Back: Research for a New Era in American Educational Policy*, p.7

[15] Jill Ross, *Solving the Math Problem: the Ford Foundation's Work on Reforming Middle- and Secondary-School Mathematics, 1980–1998*

on the impact of the program, Ford staff concluded that stakeholder collaboratives were necessary to marshal the leadership, resources and resolve to act on problems, like high dropout rates, that extend beyond the realm of education.[16]

Teacher Diversity

During the 1980s and 1990s, Ford also focused on increasing the number of minority teachers, seeking to stem a shortage at a time when more minority and immigrant children were enrolling in schools. The impetus for this approach was a belief that children from minority communities would benefit from role models of their own racial and ethnic backgrounds. In addition, Ford supported efforts to provide clinical settings for new teachers within public schools as part of the foundation's continued interest in improving teaching skills.

It had become clear that developing, sustaining and expanding reforms required good teachers, the involvement of diverse actors reflecting the student body, the engagement of a broad set of well-informed stakeholders and a supportive policy environment.

Two other initiatives merit mention. Ford's City High School Recognition Program celebrated the progress of individual public schools in reducing the dropout rate, raising academic achievement, engaging parents and improving the learning environment. The program inspired other recognition programs. Ford also spurred the development of local education funds that provided small innovation grants to teachers. Over the past 25 years, these funds multiplied and diversified into a national network, gaining influence in the education improvement arena and encouraging citizen involvement in public schools around the country.

By the beginning of the 1990s, many of the reforms developed by Ford grantees were helping groups of students to succeed academically. It had become clear that developing, sustaining and expanding reforms required good teachers, the involvement of diverse actors reflecting the student body, the engagement of a broad set of well-informed stakeholders and a supportive policy environment.

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[16] Meade, op.cit., p.456

Constituency Building for Public School Reform

In 1995, the Ford Foundation launched the Constituency Building for Public School Reform (CBPSR) initiative. At the time, the initiative's approach to improving public schools was unique among national foundations. Other national foundations were focused on the development of education standards, professional development for teachers and education leaders, and comprehensive school reform models backed by the corporate sector. Ford aimed to create an environment conducive to reform by enhancing the capacity of individual communities—particularly low-income and ethnic or racial minority communities—to promote change.

An Informed and Engaged Public

One of the largest single investments in reform was Ambassador Walter Annenberg's $500 million commitment to improve public schools, which he announced in late 1993. By 1995, these funds supported the development of "break the mold" schools through the New American Schools Development Corporation and district-wide reform collaborations in big cities around the country. The strategy enlisted key actors inside the schools, including teachers, principals and superintendents. Experts from universities and capacity-building organizations often provided technical and development assistance to school personnel. District policy makers were called upon to develop means to facilitate reforms.[17] Boards were populated with volunteers from the business sector, along with community leaders to support specific education reforms. In this and most other foundation initiatives of the era, parents were relatively marginal actors. Similarly, grass roots groups had to fight for a place at the school reform table.

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[17] Within CBPSR, Ford supported the RAND Corporation to evaluate the New American Schools. See *A Decade of Whole-School Reform: The New American Schools Experiment* by Sheila Nataraj

Notable exceptions to this trend included the Annie E. Casey Foundation's support for increasing stakeholder involvement in schools in Kentucky and the MacArthur Foundation's support for school decentralization and community and parental involvement under the auspices of the Chicago Education Initiative. In 1995, MacArthur transferred this initiative from the Education Program to the Community Initiatives Program, and the foundation's school reform efforts were largely refocused to target school "insiders."[18]

Experience in school reform has shown that no matter how well crafted or well intentioned reforms may be, they will not endure without community support—and that community support is won not through public relations campaigns, but through active participation.

In launching the Constituency Building for Public School Reform Initiative, Ford staff drew on research evidence demonstrating that for educational equity reform to succeed, a well-informed and engaged public is required.[19]

Researchers studying school reforms and school reformers themselves have noted the difficulty of sustaining school-based efforts in light of frequent turnover in school leadership, particularly principals and superintendents.
We argued that public schools will not show lasting improvements unless low-income and minority populations understand the choices involved in school reform and acquire a strong voice in making decisions.

Although many efforts have aimed at long-term school improvement, progress has been elusive. Experience in school reform has shown that no matter how well crafted or well intentioned reforms may be, they will not endure without community support—and that community support is won not through public relations campaigns, but through active participation. This Ford initiative sought to strengthen community-based organizations, including efforts by such organizations to educate themselves about policy options and mobilize to promote change. By affording them access to information and opportunities to participate, CBPSR brought into the process people who until then had often been at the margins of school policy making.

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[18] Annual Reports, Annie E. Casey Foundation and MacArthur Foundation
[19] Gittell, op.cit.

The CBPSR initiative did not champion or recommend a particular reform proposal or model. Rather, grantees built civic capacity to improve public schools by building coalitions, engaging the community and providing access to information. This approach was premised on a few core beliefs about public education:

- Public schools are a vital institution in a democracy and, like democracy itself, require inclusiveness. Business and community leaders, teachers, parents, students, elected leaders, and youth and community service associations should be involved in the discussions that influence public education. Low-income and minority communities need a strong voice in these debates.
- All children deserve high-quality, high-performing schools.
- Public schools are a community asset that is vitally important to everyone in a community—not just to families with children.

CBPSR aimed to promote systemic change by supporting groups to overcome three principal shortcomings of efforts focused on improving individual schools or districts:

- First, the survival of school reform models depended on a small group of people, usually at the direction of an instructional leader such as a principal or superintendent, whose position was subject to frequent turnover. Once the leader had departed, the reform model typically faded away.
- Second, programs supported by philanthropic dollars too often ended once those funds dried up.
- Third, although there were examples of schools achieving excellent results with students from diverse backgrounds, these successes were hard to replicate.[20]

[20] See, for example, Glennan, Bodilly, et al. *Expanding the Reach of Education Reforms: Perspectives from Leaders in the Scale-Up of Educational Interventions*

Historical evidence on social movements, as well as more current research on school finance reform, has demonstrated that strong and active community groups are necessary to realize and sustain reform. Consequently, staff sought to facilitate the building of relationships and trust and the establishment of common ground among low-income and minority parents, teachers, school leaders, businesses, researchers, advocates, the governmental sector, nongovernmental organizations and individuals. In other words, they sought to enhance civic capacity, which enables diverse sectors of a community, including the most marginalized, to engage in problem solving.[21]

We identified four kinds of activities in need of support:

Constituency and Coalition Building. We supported groups that worked at the grassroots, state, regional and national levels to develop their capacity to organize cross-sector coalitions, build knowledge regarding educational disparities and press for high-quality education for all students.

Policy Research and Evaluation. We supported collection and analysis of data on program models and policy reforms that could help inform education policies and practices.[22]

Strategic Communications. We sought to communicate research findings to broad audiences; create awareness of educational inequities and policy alternatives; and equip grantees with the strategic communications skills to enable them to engage in productive dialogue, debate and consensus building.

Networking and Learning. Ford staff hosted semiannual meetings of all grantees, bringing together researchers/academics, national nongovernmental groups, media experts and grass roots activists to share information and develop networks. These meetings attempted to bridge the distance between academics and activists and provide a forum for challenging assumptions and approaches. We found that even the groups pursuing constituency-building

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[21] Stone and Henig; Iris Marion Young

[22] For examples of research supported, see Petrovich and Wells, *Bringing Equity Back: Research for a New Era in American Educational Policy*; Glennan, Bodilly, et al., op.cit.; and Hirota, Jacobowitz and Brown, *Pathways to School Reform: Integrating Constituency Building and Policy Work*

strategies differed in their approaches. The discussion of these differences is captured in a publication entitled "Vital Voices: Building Constituencies for Public School Reform."[23]

The Donors' Education Collaborative of New York City (DEC)

Another important development of CBPSR was a collaboration among New York-based philanthropies that shared goals and strategies. In the mid-1990s, as Ford was developing its CBPSR initiative, a group of foundations with headquarters in New York, including the JP Morgan Charitable Trust, the New York Community Trust and the Rockefeller Foundation in addition to Ford, agreed to work together to aid New York City, which was in the midst of a fiscal crisis. After considering alternatives, the presidents of these foundations identified the city's public schools as a possible focus of joint action and assigned education staff to identify potential funding strategies.

At a meeting of these education program officers, Ford staff presented an outline of Ford's nascent constituency-building work on behalf of public school reform. After a robust discussion, donors agreed to a funding strategy in line with Ford's CBPSR initiative. At the time, New York City public schools suffered from high turnover among schools chancellors—there was a new hire almost every year—along with widespread concern over the declining quality of city schools. This contributed to the donors' sense of urgency. In addition, the donors agreed on the importance of community action to urge public officials to address the school system's inequities and inadequacies.

Ford launched the effort with a sizable grant of $1 million, which encouraged other donors to ante up. By mid-1995, the **Donors' Education Collaborative of New York City** was established as a five-year effort. Over a dozen local and national funders were part of the initial DEC launch; nearly $2.5 million was pledged in amounts beginning at $25,000; and hundreds of individuals and organizations throughout the city, were invited to request grants, with encouragement for collaborations focused on building constituencies to create systemic change. Applicants were also asked to identify a research source that supported their policy goals and to produce a communications plan.

[23] Academy for Educational Development (AED), Hirota and Jacobs

The CBPSR Initiative at Five: A Shift in Strategy

Five years into the CBPSR initiative, the Ford Foundation had invested nearly $10 million, including $2.3 million as part of DEC. Ford staff had encouraged evaluations of the work of grantees, including a study of the value added from the Ford-hosted meetings of grantees.[24] The report identified early successes in building partnerships and networks among grantees. Years later, many of those relationships endure. For example, some CBPSR grantees serve as directors on each other's boards and continue to collaborate on issues of joint concern.

In 2000, Ford staff, aided by independent evaluations of grantees' work, site visits and reviews of grantee reports to the foundation, reflected on the impact of the CBPSR initiative. Assessments revealed that a number of grantees had successfully mobilized constituencies and instigated change that benefited public schools with large proportions of low-income and minority students. The successful strategies included those originally identified by the initiative: constituency building across sectors, data analysis, strategic communications and partnerships. Among the most successful institutions were the 21st Century School Fund, the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence and the Campaign for Fiscal Equity.

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[24] AED. "Value-Added Study"

Learning from Success (and Disappointment)

21st Century School Fund

The **21st Century School Fund (21CSF)** was founded in Washington, D.C., in 1994 with the goal of increasing the public will and capacity to improve public school facilities. The previous year, the District of Columbia Public School (DCPS) system had placed the James F. Oyster Bilingual School on a list of 40 schools in danger of closing or consolidation. The 1926 Oyster building was overcrowded and in need of modernization and repairs.

The potential loss of the school galvanized the school community. 21CSF obtained a planning grant from Ford to develop a model public/private partnership to modernize Oyster, and the group led efforts to engage teachers and parents in developing the building specifications. The strong community engagement and the expertise of the staff of 21CSF persuaded DCPS to allow the renovation to go forward. The new school building was finished and occupied in 2001.

The Oyster model has become a national model in facilities planning. In 2001 it received a Project Award from the National Association for Public/Private Partnerships, and it has been cited as a successful case study by a number of organizations, including the Urban Land Institute.

Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence

The **Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence** was founded in the 1980s to advance the cause of improved education for all Kentucky students. In its first decade, the committee pressed for legislative change to improve schools. State-by-state comparisons showed Kentucky near the bottom in student achievement and per-pupil expenditures. The Prichard Committee was instrumental in getting state legislators to act.[25]

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[25] Robert F. Sexton, "Engaging Parents and Citizens in School Reform."

The committee assisted in drafting the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) of 1990, which mandated sweeping changes in the education system, including reallocating school funding to reduce large disparities among schools. It also established an important role for parents in school governance. As Robert Sexton, the executive director of the Prichard Committee, explained to Ford staff, passage of the legislation changed the participation of Prichard volunteers from activism to promoting implementation of the law.

Ford's first grant to the Prichard Committee under CBPSR aimed to help develop new strategies for sustaining momentum and citizen commitment after the KERA victory. A second grant, a few years later, helped create the Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership (CIPL) to expand parent participation in school governance. CIPL is now a national resource for parent training and has become self-sustaining by delivering the parent training program to other school systems around the country.

The Prichard Committee organized a powerful constituency of parents, citizens and the business community out of a belief that an engaged and knowledgeable public is essential for successful reform. It also has dealt ably with the media through articles, press releases and the effective use of data to make its case. It keeps the public focused on the big picture and the long term.

Campaign for Fiscal Equity

The **Campaign for Fiscal Equity** (CFE) was founded in 1993 by a coalition of education advocacy groups and organizations that joined together to mount a legal challenge to New York State's school funding formula, which dramatically shortchanged New York City Public Schools. (The per-pupil expenditure for NYCPS was $1,200 below the state average.) In addition to the lawsuit, CFE mounted a statewide campaign, supported by the Donors' Education Collaborative, to engage the public in discussion about the litigation and its ultimate goals. CFE successfully used data to demonstrate to the public and the courts that a number of school districts were underfunded.

Michael Rebell, then CFE's executive director and counsel, described the public outreach in part as an effort to maximize consensus. One result was a widely shared definition of a "sound basic education," the minimal standard

pursued by the plaintiffs.[26] Public feedback also prompted a change in CFE strategy, which initially had sought to redistribute existing education dollars from wealthy schools to poor schools. CFE was persuaded by parents' groups that no child should be penalized with decreased funds and that the campaign should instead push for an overall increase in state funding for public schools.

In the course of a long legal battle, coalitions supporting the CFE case grew larger and stronger and more vocal in their appeals to close the school funding gaps. A combination of powerful data, organized constituencies and strategic communications supported the legal strategy. In January 2001, the presiding judge ruled in favor of CFE and ordered the state to reform its funding system.

DEC supported additional work on reform by many of the grass roots groups that had backed the litigation. Dozens of organizations, including low-income and minority parents, children's advocates, immigrant groups, schools, teachers, clergy, labor unions and business leaders, came together in 2000 to establish a statewide coalition called the Alliance for Quality Education (AQE), which advocated high-quality education with fair funding and smarter spending. AQE also became a DEC grantee.

Of course, not all grants of CBPSR were equally successful. Disappointments included a national coalition of equity-minded groups. Although most of the member groups had strong local constituencies and local impact, they failed to achieve collaborative outcomes, funds were spread too thin, no clear consensus developed on joint priorities and the combination of national groups and local groups failed to develop a workable, systematic approach.

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[26] Michael A. Rebell, "Adequacy Litigations: A New Path to Equity?" in Petrovich and Wells, eds., op.cit.

Revising the CBPSR Initiative

The success of other CBPSR grantees validated Ford's decision to fund independent, external organizations to build support for reform. In analyzing the most successful of the initiative grantees, a common trait was apparent: They incorporated all of the strategies: building and mobilizing broad-based coalitions; promoting dialogue, debate and consensus building; conducting research and using data to support defined policy agendas; and communicating strategically with key constituencies. Ford staff confirmed these observations in conversations with the grantees.

Advancing Multipronged Strategies

As a result, the initiative was revised. Grantees were invited to apply for support to advance the coordinated, multipronged strategies that had proven successful. The second phase of the CBPSR entailed more sizable grants to many fewer grantees. This fostered further collaboration among groups with complementary expertise in research, constituency building and communications.

For example, the **21st Century School Fund** partnered with organizations that were also interested in improving school facilities. With Ford support, they created a national coalition, Building Educational Success Together (BEST).

The **Prichard Committee** sought to capitalize on its success and ensure long-term sustainability by tapping longstanding corporate and business partners and wealthy committee members to build an endowment. Ford aided the endowment drive by providing fund-raising support and a $1 million grant, which was subsequently matched.

After the **Campaign for Fiscal Equity** won the lawsuit against New York State, years of legal and political haggling ensued. However, a new governor, elected in 2006, pledged to move the state Legislature to make good on the court decision. By 2007, billions of additional dollars were on their way to underfunded districts, including New York City's. With Ford support, CFE also developed an online database of fiscal equity litigation around the country as part of a national network called ACCESS. Now located at the Campaign for Educational Equity at Teachers College, Columbia University, ACCESS brings together lawyers and activists to share strategies for obtaining fair school funding and achieving optimal targeting of funds to promote learning.

The Donors' Education Collaborative has continued beyond its original five-year plan. It was still going strong at its 12th anniversary in 2007. To date, more than $11 million has been invested in New York City groups. As a result, there is more citizen engagement and oversight of the funds won in the CFE case and greater civic activism promoting equal opportunities and high-quality education in New York City and statewide.

Encouraging Other Funders

The CBPSR initiative helped to stimulate other work in the foundation as well. First, a group of Ford program officers recognized their common interest in building constituencies to promote social justice. We aimed to strengthen the capacity of a significant number of grassroots organizations around the country to educate and organize constituencies around their policy concerns. Together, we developed the Fund for Community Organizing and pooled $9.3 million over five years to fund particular geographic locations, including Chicago and Los Angeles. Ford program officers, who usually recommend grants in a specific field (education, human rights, governance, civil society, etc.), agreed to contribute to a fund not knowing if the money would end up going to organizations in their respective fields. The action was based on the premise that funding grassroots constituency building would help create civic capacity to benefit all fields of work.

Pursuing Shared Goals

In addition, Ford staff wanted to encourage other donors to support community organizing. Ford's support went to coalitions of donors who pooled their own funds to match ours and then dispensed grants to local community groups. Local donors also helped create opportunities for these organizations to become familiar with each other's work in the hopes that it might encourage the groups to act together in pursuit of shared goals. Ford's experience with DEC helped to structure this initiative.

An evaluation of the **Fund for Community Organizing** concluded that the initiative had achieved:

- A growth in civic capacity in the city as evidenced by a significant increase in networks and collaborations among grantees, and strategic alliances with policy makers and other education stakeholders.
- An increase in local donor support for community organizing.
- Significant growth in donors' understanding about the practice and impact of community organizing.
- Increased involvement of organizations in promoting policy change that crossed issue areas.[27]

Ford education program staff in other parts of the world also took an interest in promoting public participation in education. They began supporting civil society groups such as Synergeia in the Philippines, Haki Elimu in Tanzania, Innovación y Apoyo Educativo in Mexico and Foro Educativo in Peru. While each of these groups targeted particular sectors (teachers, parents, policy makers, business community), their approaches included research, constituency building and communications. Because of the many similarities among these organizations and others in CBPSR, a grant was made to the Public Education Network (PEN) to bring them together. Their subsequent meetings enabled the organizations to share strategies and begin to network. PEN, a longtime grantee of the Ford Foundation, is a national network of independent local organizations working to raise private-sector funds to improve schools and build constituencies in support of quality public education for all children.

Finally, the success of the Donors' Education Collaborative in New York City helped inspire others to form local donors' collaboratives, such as the Boston Parent Organizing Network. DEC served as a model for the development in 2006 of a national funders' collaborative to support community organizing to improve public schools. To date, about 40 donors are collectively providing about $4 million per year for a "Communities for Public Education Reform" (CPER) initiative.

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[27] Gittell, Price, Ferman. Ford Community Organizing Initiative Evaluation Project

What Makes Success? Lessons for Donors

After 12 years of operation, punctuated by external and internal reviews of the various elements of the CBPSR and other Ford initiatives with similar goals, we have learned important lessons that may be useful to other grant makers working to improve schools, as well as to all those wishing to increase the impact of the constituency-building organizations they support.

Selecting Effective Organizations

The most successful civil society organizations share a set of competencies. Donors seeking to build civic capacity on education issues should target organizations possessing the following capacities or should help promising organizations to develop them:

- Leadership that is committed to the issues, strategic, inclusive, knowledgeable, innovative and a powerful voice for marginalized groups.
- Inclusiveness that is reflected in the composition of the staff and board of the organization, and in their efforts to incorporate and represent marginalized groups.
- An operational style that encourages broad and respectful dialogue, debate and consensus building.
- The ability to clearly identify research questions and data needs, to find ways of obtaining these data and to use research evidence effectively to bolster their arguments.
- The capacity to develop and maintain strategic alliances and to expand networks. Organizations need to recognize that local policy victories often require alliances with the business sector and statewide organizations and networks.
- An ability to focus on sustainable strategies for education improvement through policy change, citizen monitoring and accountability.
- Effective use of strategic communications to attract public interest and generate support for issues.
- Experience working locally on a focused set of policy issues on which the organization develops expertise.
- Ability to mobilize broad groups of stakeholders to press for change.
- Commitment to both equity and excellence in public school reform.
- Recognition that change requires power shifts and that civic mobilization is a democratic and political act.
- Persistence and a commitment to the long haul.

Supporting Capacity Development

Most organizations building constituencies to improve public schools benefit from targeted assistance in developing one or more capacities. Organizations that were part of CBPSR were shown to benefit from the following:

Strategic communications training and assistance. CBPSR grantees received media training to handle interviews, support for the use of focus groups to inform their communications strategy and analyses of their Web sites.

Research and data analysis. Some organizations have in-house capacity to conduct research but others don't and may have to hire research services. Either way, donor support is essential for gathering, analyzing and effectively using evidence.

Networking. Networking is a time-consuming and difficult task that involves building trust among people. That is why one of the most valuable services a foundation can provide is bringing people together to share information, learn and build relationships. Ford held semiannual meetings of all grantees. DEC provided support to an intermediary organization that brought grantees together. Over time, a number of large networks was formed in New York City comprising independent organizations such as the Alliance for Quality Education and the New York Immigration Coalition.

Because educational change requires support from broad constituencies, funders should create incentives and opportunities for collaboration among grantees. However, donors should be careful to avoid "forced marriages" that require grantees to work together when they are not ready. In the first round of DEC grants, donors encouraged two groups with complementary strategies and priorities to work together. A joint grant was made. After several years of tension, the two groups parted ways.

Networks among civil society organizations are more easily developed at the local level because people's proximity facilitates more frequent interactions, which are a building block of trust. Statewide and national networks are more difficult to develop and maintain, but they can help move agendas forward across states and regions.

Collaborating with Other Donors

Collaboration improves the effectiveness of both organizations and donors. It provides opportunities to tap the multiple talents, experiences and knowledge of a group of colleagues. For large national and international donors such as Ford, collaborating with local donors can provide insights into local actors, issues and politics.

Experience with numerous funders' collaboratives during the past decade has taught us that effective collaborations require:

Coordination. Donors who contribute to large pools of money should be mindful that someone must effectively manage a multi-donor initiative. Such management need not be expensive. At the Donor's Education Collaborative (DEC), a highly effective manager was retained for only about 0.5 percent of the pooled funds. To be effective, a coordinator or manager should:

- Be available for the entire length of the initiative. At the very least, minimizing turnover limits the loss of institutional memory.
- Be knowledgeable of education issues generally and of the relevant players and politics.
- Demonstrate impartiality and fairness when donors are evaluating proposals. Collaborative coordinators often have valuable knowledge of potential grantees; effective coordinators don't play favorites.
- Value and seek the input of all the donors in the collaborative.
- Develop workable agendas and assist in managing meetings effectively.
- Help donors reach consensus and offer suggestions to improve the collaborative and joint grant-making process.

One foundation, one vote. The size of foundation budgets vary greatly. As a result, members of a donors' collaborative may be in a position to contribute very different amounts of funds. For collaborative members to see themselves as equal partners, a policy of one vote per foundation, regardless of the amount of its contribution, helps maintain a spirit of collegiality and equality.

Diversity. A mix of philanthropic organizations—national, local, multi-issue, education specific, private, corporate, family foundations—provides a diversity of

perspectives that enriches the analysis of education strategies. Diversity within and among the organizations being supported is likewise important, with an emphasis on ensuring that the interests of the most disadvantaged students are represented.
Active participation. Collaboration cannot be successful if people aren't present. Lack of full participation at meetings weakens a donors' collaborative.

Additional targeted support. Working in a group allows individual members to target support to specific grantee needs that arise. For example, some DEC members were not able to fund lobbying; as a result, DEC opted not to. However, when lobbying by one grantee proved useful, a member donor provided funds for it under a separate grant.

Flexibility. Organizations evolve through leadership transitions or in response to contextual changes. A collaborative should be able to assist grantees through these changes by supporting a new leader or a different set of organizational strategies.

Attention to emerging needs. As grantees achieve their goals, new needs emerge. For example, when new funds became available for New York City schools, the attention of grantees turned to ensuring the fair use of the funds. Accountability became a new priority for DEC.

Commitment for the long term. Equity and excellence in public education is a long-term goal requiring extensive efforts by coalitions. Donors also need to commit to a long-term process. DEC began as a five-year effort of more than a dozen donors; it is now in its 12th year with 27 donors that have contributed more than $11 million. The continued presence of some DEC founding members helps maintain a sense of history and provides institutional memory and continuity that have strengthened the collaborative.

Learning. Gains in education reform must be monitored, maintained and extended. Independent evaluations help donors and grantees adjust tactics and fine-tune strategies. They also provide valuable knowledge to others interested in success.

Conclusion

From 1995 to 2007, while we ran this initiative, we also invested in a number of other strategies to improve public schools. These included support for model programs, such as Project GRAD, for site-based school reform partnerships through the Collaborating for Education Reform Initiative and for teacher capacity building. All of these initiatives have also been assessed to build knowledge to improve the work of school reformers and donors. Ford and many other foundations invest in multiple strategies because we recognize that school improvement requires both equity and excellence; both external demand and internal accountability and improvements.

The past decade has witnessed a significant shift in the funding priorities of foundations in the education sector. Many foundations are now supporting constituency building, sometimes also referred to as community organizing or public engagement. The Ford Foundation's Constituency Building for Public School Reform initiative has demonstrated that civil society organizations can provide platforms for education issues, inform the development of appropriate interventions, educate the public, increase transparency and accountability, and enhance democratic participation. We hope that some of what we have learned will be useful to others seeking to advance equitable and excellent public schools.

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"From the beginning of the 20th century, the debate on public education reforms has emphasized either excellence or equity. Ford has never accepted the implication that these two concepts are somehow in opposition."

A FOUNDATION RETURNS TO SCHOOL

Strategies for Improving Public Education

Over nearly 60 years of funding school improvement, the strategies the Ford Foundation has employed and the activities we have funded have varied. But we have consistently believed that every child should have an equal opportunity to obtain a high-quality education. We have sought to ensure that there is a good teacher in front of every student. And we have come to understand that achieving these goals will require both the development of teachers and school leaders, and of the policy and funding environments to provide the resources they require.

This report, written by Janice Petrovich, director of Education, Sexuality and Religion, is a grant maker's reflections on a 13-year-old initiative—Constituency Building for Public School Reform. The initiative's grantees endeavored to build coalitions of informed constituents who would collaborate and mobilize to bring about needed changes in schools. As donors, we invest in different approaches to realize ambitious aims. And we try to learn through honest and analytical reflections on the results of what we have supported. We hope this report will be of interest to others who, like us, want to advance effective schools for all children.

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