VUE

Annenberg Institute for School Reform | *Voices in Urban Education*

Spring 2005

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Expanding Opportunity: Partners for Learning

Robert Rothman

When President George H. W. Bush unveiled an education plan in 1991 known as "America 2000," he focused one plank on what he called "the other 91 percent." Noting that an eighteen-year-old will have spent only 9 percent of his or her life in school, the President's plan included a proposal for building "communities where learning can happen," in addition to the proposed initiatives for strengthening schools and school systems. This proposal was essential, the plan noted, because even if all the other plans were enacted, "we still will not have done the job."

In recent years, educators, policy-makers, and community leaders have paid renewed attention to "the other 91 percent" and to forging links between schools and agencies or organizations outside of schools. There appears to be a growing recognition that improving schools is not enough; learning at high levels requires support for students that schools alone cannot provide.

Schools have long had links with businesses, museums, and other organizations, and students have been participating in after-school programs at YMCAs and Boys and Girls Clubs for decades. But not everyone has had access to these resources, and the inequitable distribution of out-of-school learning opportunities follows a predictable pattern. Those who have advantages that enable them to perform well in school – educated parents, books in the home, and so forth – also tend to be the ones who engage in stimulating after-school programs, attend museums, and know adults in professional jobs. Those who

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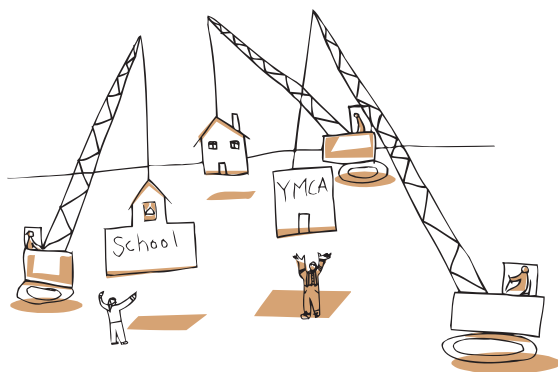
lack the in-school advantages lack the out-of-school resources as well. The gaps in opportunity widen.

Consider the two children whose days are charted in Dennie Palmer Wolf's article in this issue. One child spends her time after school at home, attending to her family. The other spends her time in a community center, practicing with a choir, and in a library, seeking books on "courage." Both are good students who do well in school. But which child is likely to have a brighter future?

To ensure that *all* children have the learning opportunities that can enhance what schools can provide, schools, school systems, and communities have begun to forge systematic links between schools and other agencies and organizations. These partnerships take many forms. In some cases, schools and private organizations are working together to build curricular programs that draw on the resources and talents of the partners. In others, municipal leaders are spearheading efforts to place schools at the center of learning communities, in which a variety of civic agencies and organizations support student learning and the schools stimulate economic and community revival.

This issue of *Voices in Urban Education* spotlights some of these efforts. In an introductory essay, Hal Smith lays out a vision for an "education system" that includes, but is not limited to, schools. Such a system looks more like a web, with multiple connections among the partners, than a wheel with schools at the hub.



Other authors describe local attempts to create such systems. Elana Koropkin describes the Urban Assembly School for Law and Justice in Brooklyn, New York, where the school has formed a partnership with Cravath, Swaine & Moore, one of the nation's most prestigious law firms; a law school; and a community court complex to develop a curriculum designed around law and social justice.

Giselle Antoni writes about a partnership between the City of Dallas, the Dallas Independent School District, and local cultural institutions to ensure that all students have equitable access to the wealth of arts and cultural resources in the city.

Laraine Duncan and Donna Loomis describe the successful effort by Mayor Donald Plusquellic of Akron, Ohio, to secure public approval of a tax increase to rebuild schools as community learning centers. They also discuss the challenges of forging a partnership between the city and the schools.

Dennie Palmer Wolf outlines a plan by officials and community leaders in Birmingham, Alabama, to rebuild a neighborhood by creating a learning zone centered around historic Philips High School.

Early evidence from some of these efforts suggests that they are paying off in improving results for students. Whether they will reach their more ambitious goals of revitalizing communities remains to be seen.

If they are successful, though, these kinds of community partnerships will also do something else: redefine "education" and who is responsible for it. At a time when schools are accountable as never before for improving academic achievement, those who have made a commitment to create education systems are challenging us to recognize that we all have a stake in the success of our youth, a role to play in ensuring that success, and a duty to hold ourselves accountable for the results.

Using Community Assets to Build an "Education System"

Hal Smith

The imperative to raise achievement for all students provides an opportunity to go beyond a school system and create an education system: a web of connections between schools and community partners that provide the support children and youth need.

Education reformers increasingly speak of "the community." Sometimes the attention to this mythic group comes from a desire to garner additional resources to enhance teaching and learning. Other times the desire is much more focused on building support for a specific reform approach.

Yet few people can articulate just who the "community" is. Is the community a geographic designation, referring to a surrounding neighborhood or set of neighborhoods? Is the community the individual parents and students of a district? Is it the larger municipal and business elite responsible for the civic life of a given locale?

This lack of specificity has led to a number of approaches and rationales for involving communities in school reform, with mixed results. But the instinct to involve the community in education reform is right. There is a pressing need to identify new opportunities where all of a community's assets can be brought to bear on the positive academic, social, and vocational development of its children and youth. At the same time, increased accountability must be married to deep and widespread ownership of educational policy and practice to ensure successful outcomes.

To realize the promise of education practice, therefore, it is necessary to reframe the relationship between schools and communities. Only a set of fully articulated relationships and robust connections – in fact, a *system* – can create educational excellence and opportunity. Through the system, practices and policies that previously were isolated become a coherent and intentional network of pathways that provide both expanded and enhanced opportunities for young people. Perhaps a look at preceding generations' framing of the connections between public schools and communities can offer insight into the possibilities of the system I propose – an *education system*.

Communities and Education: Historical Perspective

In their earliest incarnations, public schools were tightly tied to the cities, towns, and villages that sponsored them. Absent any centralized direction, schools and their curricula were representations of locally defined morals, interests, and desired outcomes. Over time, schools grew into larger, more independent systems, under the leadership of professional educators, and began to innovate and differentiate in

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ways unimaginable at the outset of public education.

Beginning in the 1930s, the community school movement sought to use schools to knit together disparate individual and institutional parts of a city into a community. For the educators involved in this movement, community represented the highest functioning of a democracy, whereby schools became the engine for creating and maintaining deep connections, shared vision, and a collective identity.

But the reformers of the 1930s also had another reason for knitting schools to the community. Because of the economic hardship brought on by the Great Depression, individual resources and abilities were insufficient to address the growing poverty and hopelessness of the day. The connections between schools and the community could serve schools by bringing community assets to bear on their needs, and could enable schools to serve the community as well.

In these communities, there developed an emphasis on "service to the entire community, not merely to the children of school age; and discovery, development, and use of the resources of the community as part of the educational facilities of the school" (Seay 1974, p. 21). For example, Esau Jenkins's Citizenship Schools in South Carolina in the 1940s and 1950s functioned as the developmental and educational engines of their communities.

Although the development of community education and community-based schools continued in subsequent decades with the creation of Freedom Schools in Mississippi (1964) and the Liberation Schools of the late 1960s and early 1970s, community-based approaches have never been universally embraced. Tensions around community education have always been present, in part because of the belief among some educators and policy-makers that education is primarily a private good, providing benefits to the individuals who are educated, rather than the broader community. For example, recent efforts to expand community-based education, such as "full service" schools, the federally supported 21st Century Community Learning Centers, and the re-emergent community schools movement, continue to fight for legitimacy in education reform.

Today's Promise: Developing Education Systems

The current demand for ensuring that all students achieve at high levels offers a new opportunity for *school systems* to evolve into *education systems*. As I define it, an education system encompasses both the range of assets available to community members and the set of opportunities and outcomes their participation represents. Such a system knits together disparate interests, resources, and processes in ways that build upon the collective (individual and institutional) assets of a community to produce networked opportunities and supports for young people.

Ensuring that all students achieve at high levels offers a new opportunity for *school systems* to evolve into *education systems* encompassing both the range of assets available to community members and the set of opportunities and outcomes their participation represents.

In an education system, the community is not a part of the school; schools are, rather, *one* of the educative mechanisms of communities. An education system also requires a number of other conditions, which are described in this section.

A web of connections

An education system implies connections not just between the larger community and schools, but also between the various members of the community (including schools) and other members. Rather than a wheel, with schools as the hub, it is best described as a web, with connections and relationships that relate to the center without all contacts running directly through the center.

A child and youth focus

The academic achievement and positive development of young people should be the focus of all practice, reform, or innovation in an education system. The imperative is to educate each student successfully. Doing so may require differential supports to ensure that all young people have equitable opportunities.

Reciprocal accountability

Putting school and community resources, assets, and capacities in service to the larger goal of improving student achievement fosters a sense of shared responsibility. Everyone in an education system – not just the school personnel – has a role and stake in the success of students. And with this shared responsibility comes shared accountability for providing needed opportunities.

An expansion of opportunity and supports

Expanding the quality and quantity of supports and opportunities for learning in museums, laboratories, hospitals, and other community-based settings means creating meaningful internships and apprenticeships, but it also means more. It requires that adults construct identifiable pathways to success. Currently every community has these kinds of resources, but not all young people have access to them and they are not always connected to schooling. An education system would provide pathways that allow all young people to take advantage of community assets that expand their learning opportunities.

An educative culture

Beyond developing the education assets of students, an education system, ultimately, must also build the capacities of *all* partners. Too often, the burden of learning and development is placed solely on young people. All adults in the system must also be educated to be full participants. A spirit of collective learning and continuous development and

improvement pervades all the various interactions and relationships that make up an education system.

Beyond Engagement: Partnering

There are thousands of school systems (districts) across the country, but very few education systems. Pieces of such systems exist, as do instances of burgeoning practice in places such as Flint, Michigan, and Multnomah County, Oregon, but their presence is neither widespread nor widely appreciated. Too often, they are viewed with skepticism – as more experiment than initiative or more isolated project than genuine reform.

Creating an education system is a challenge. Blame, rather than collective responsibility, often characterizes school-community relationships. Accountability focuses on test scores rather than wider opportunities or outcomes. The legacies of race and class in shaping opportunities, power differentials (individual and institutional) based on discrepancies in status and access to resources, and preconceptions around appropriate roles and accountability all complicate partnering and the shared vision that makes an education system possible. Moreover, despite the best intentions, schools and other institutions often lack the capacity to form effective partnerships or lack clarity on the nature and purpose of those relationships.

I propose five questions, outlined in this section, that a school community should ask, when it first starts developing an education system and as the education system operates, to strengthen the indispensable relationship between communities and their schools.

Partner with whom?

Too often the term *community* is used comprehensively, with little sense of the particular individuals or institutions on which the effort focuses. A high-functioning education system requires the full, active, and sustained participation of all partners, but an education system needs to be specific about which partners are involved. There are four groups of potential partners to consider.

CONSTITUENT PARTNERS

These include all children and youth, nonaffiliated parents and families (those not affiliated with organizations such as PTA or PTO), and all other individual citizens and education stakeholders.

SCHOOL PARTNERS

These include all school-system-based stakeholders – administrators, central office personnel, union members and leadership, individual teachers, counselors, and other staff. School partners also include formal parent and student structures and institutions.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

These include all locally based and focused education associations, agencies, social service providers, community-based organizations, community development corporations, and outside-of-school-hours education providers.

CIVIC PARTNERS

These include the staff and leadership of government agencies or departments, foundations, institutions of higher learning, businesses, cultural and arts agencies, museums, public and private developers, and reform support organizations such as local education funds.

In what ways?

Individual stakeholders will enter the partnership in ways that make sense to them, according to their capacities, interests, assets, and desired outcomes. As a result, each must be allowed to negotiate both the nature and work of any partnering relationship. For some, the donation of computers or construction of a playground will suffice, while others will wish to develop and implement changes in curriculum and instruction.

It is of paramount importance that all partners are explicit about their expectations as they establish relationships and design collective work. In an education system, the terms of partnership shift as partners collectively develop and construct innovations, instead of simply responding to school-system-defined priorities, as is currently typical.

Partners' involvement ranges from sharing information to engagement, including contributions to public forums, to full participation through advocacy, program development, and representation on decision-making committees and teams. At its most fully developed, a partnership involves cooperative leadership, such as site-based management or school leadership teams, or, in some cases, shared governance, including community-led oversight, policy setting, management, and strategic planning.

Whatever the level of involvement, information sharing is critical. Proceeding without a robust infrastructure of information and evidence severely undermines the relationships, because there are no effective ways to negotiate disagreements without data. Failure to properly construct supporting processes and structures is the most likely cause of partnership breakdowns, yet they are often wrongly attributed to inherent flaws in involving partners in education, much to the detriment of innovation and reform.

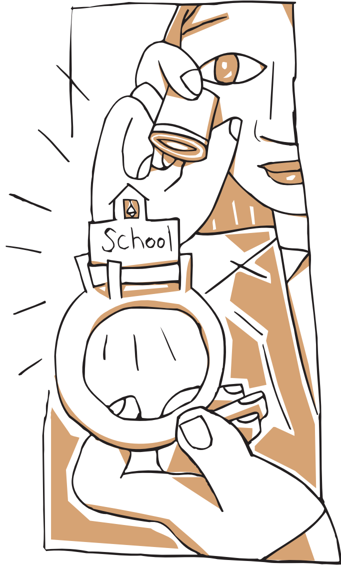
Toward what ends?

Positive developmental and achievement outcomes are the central focus of an education system. But, given the real tensions of available resources (time, financial, material), differential power (personal, institutional), and competing priorities and desires, relationships in an education system should focus on three themes.

> Creating an education system is a challenge. Blame often characterizes school-community relationships. Accountability focuses on test scores. The legacies of race and class in shaping opportunities complicate partnering and the shared vision that makes an education system possible.

DISTRIBUTION OF EXPERTISE

Each community has a wealth of expertise and capacity, but it is widely dispersed and unevenly distributed. It is important to work across political, institutional, and historical boundaries in order to bring all of a community's expertise to bear for children and youth.



> Over time, it should become as impossible to imagine a successful education reform without community partners as it would be to imagine the reform without principals and teachers.

EVIDENCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Data from the public health, youth, community, and economic development sectors hold great potential for education reform, since these sectors bring diverse resources, tools, and perspectives to bear on successful outcomes for children and youth. For example, policy-makers could measure the impact of an initiative to reduce teen violence not only through the use of police reports and juvenile justice records, but also through changes in attendance and suspensions, consumer spending in targeted areas, and the teen employment rate in the city. Similarly, an increase in the graduation rate should be measurable not only in school data but also in the decrease in risky behaviors among teenagers, a reduction in feelings of social isolation, and an increased ability to retain and attract businesses and industries.

DISTRIBUTION OF LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENTAL OPPORTUNITIES

Students should have access to numerous and varied opportunities to enhance their learning and achievement. The civic, or community, life of a city is one of its greatest resources and should be utilized in the service of young people. Again, while school is a *central* education setting, it is not the *exclusive* education setting for children, youth, and families. "Education" is teaching and learning wherever it might take place.

For what duration?

In carrying out the functions of an education system, some work will be finite, with a culminating product (report, set of recommendations, etc.) or event that sets the stage for additional work or changes in practice. Other efforts are more open-ended, and participants in these efforts are more likely to have a role in the implementation of any proposed changes in practice or policy. Partners need to make sure that the length and intensity of their projects are appropriate to their scope.

Measured how?

In the past, community partnerships have been measured sketchily, if at all. At times, simply *having* partners counted as a measure of success. But effective measurement is essential to gauge success and to inform partners about avenues for improvement.

Some possible indicators of success include the development of comprehensive data warehouses and

systems of analysis, significant increases in graduation and achievement rates, increased alignment of systems and practices, and the construction of a partnering infrastructure (committees, roundtables, offices, and initiatives).

There are also intangible indicators of success that allow participants to understand that something different has occurred or is ongoing. Often these indicators are not readily apparent to those outside the effort, but could include changes in perspective, increases in public will and support for public education, feelings of connectedness, or similar modifications in behavior and outlook. For an education system, this might translate into an increase in issue ownership; additional traction for a reform effort; the development of collective efficacy; or the belief that conditions can improve through relationships, collective vision, and communal work.

Conclusion

Developing an education system requires a new covenant between communities and their schools. This is more than a semantic shift. The creation of an education system, ultimately, means forging new relationships, building a multiplicity of connections, and developing new capacities to collaborate, in order to expand educational and developmental opportunities for all students.

Over time, it should become as impossible to imagine a successful education reform without the full participation of community partners in its shaping and implementation as it would be to imagine the reform without the full participation of principals and teachers. Current examples of burgeoning education systems include Big Thought in Dallas, the Harlem Children's Zone and New Visions for Public Schools, both of New York City, and the Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools (BayCES) of Oakland. They are deserving of careful review, since they may offer insight into the necessary supports, essential elements, and complexities inherent in the development of a new system.

Preliminary observations of these and similar efforts suggest that they have fostered a new spirit of connectedness and collaboration, along with the concrete tools, structures, and processes that make that spirit manifest. They are relatively young, though, and the long-term effects of these collaborations are not yet clear. But it is evident that, without strong connections between communities and schools, little of what we imagine and aspire to in school improvement is likely to occur. The tasks are simply too complex, the gaps too vast, the promise too nearly realized for schools to go it alone.

Reference

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It Takes a City to Build a School: A Community Partnership in Brooklyn

Elana Karopkin

A partnership that includes a prestigious law firm, a law school, a community court complex, and a high school is creating a dynamic educational experience for students in Brooklyn.

Maria, a member of the first class of students at the Urban Assembly School for Law and Justice (SLJ), had gotten off to a rocky start.[1] *Unlike most of her peers, she did not attend Accepted Students' Night in June or any of our orientation meetings over the summer because her mother did not intend to send her to the school. Maria had had a difficult time in middle school – frequently cutting school, getting into fights, and being, by her own description, generally disrespectful and disruptive. Her mother had reached her wit's end and had made plans for Maria to relocate to Puerto Rico, where she could start fresh with her strict grandmother.*

When we finally met Maria in early September, she expressed a seemingly authentic interest in coming to SLJ. Maria felt that the school's structured atmosphere and focus on law would help her be more successful than she had been in her previous school. Because she had accumulated over thirty absences in eighth grade, Maria was significantly behind, particularly in math. Together, Maria, her mother, and the school made a commitment to Maria's success in high school. Six months into the school year, Maria is on the honor roll, has been in the school's production of Antigone, *participates in several school clubs, and has only been absent once. She says she loves high school and looks forward to being on the Mock Trial team next year.*

Jessica is another one of the founding students at the SLJ. Before coming to SLJ, Jessica had been in self-contained special education schools with classes of no more than nine students. When she found out about a high school opening in Brooklyn with a focus on law and justice, Jessica was determined to attend. SLJ has no self-contained classes; our school is inclusive and all of our classes are completely heterogeneous.

After extensive conversations with Jessica and her family about the services SLJ could and could not provide, we all decided that we wanted to try it and give Jessica this opportunity. Six months into the school year, Jessica is achieving her goals in completely mainstreamed classes and has had perfect attendance this year. Jessica was selected by her peers to be on Student Council and was chosen by the staff to be a representative of the school when we were visited by Bill Gates, Sr., who came to New York to see small schools that are succeeding. Even though Jessica is entitled to an IEP diploma, she is well on her way to earning a regular New York State high school diploma.

Elana Karopkin is principal of the Urban Assembly School for Law and Justice in Brooklyn, New York.

1 Students' names are pseudonyms.

Maria and Jessica are only 2 of the 108 students who entered the Urban Assembly School for Law and Justice in September, each with an individual history and an individual story of accomplishment since arriving at SLJ.

SLJ is a college preparatory public high school with a focus on law. We provide our graduates with the tools essential to a legal professional – strong reading and writing skills and the ability to think critically, question, and work collaboratively. Graduates of SLJ must be able not only to get into the competitive college of their choice, but also to succeed once they get there.

SLJ opened in Brooklyn, New York, in September 2004, with a student body as diverse as the city itself. Almost 70 percent of our students live in homes that are at or below the poverty level, and most of our students are below or significantly below grade level in English (60 percent) and in math (75 percent).

Already we have had impressive levels of success. Though the student populations are identical, SLJ claims 93 percent attendance rates, compared to the citywide average of 83 percent, and course pass rates at SLJ are at 92 percent, far higher than the 68 percent across the rest of New York.

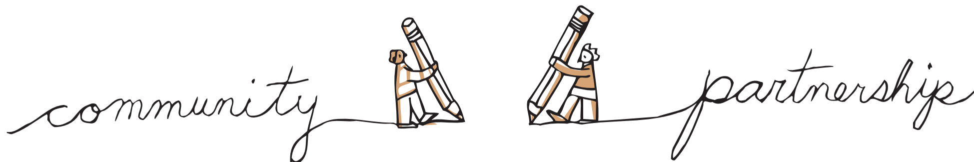
How has this happened? Certainly, there is no substitute for exemplary teaching, strong leadership, and systemic support. But SLJ's incredible network of partnerships is a major factor in the school's success. This network is the force that makes learning authentic and meaningful, while bringing resources and attention to a little school that is making a big difference in the lives of New York City's kids. We all know the famous proverb "It takes a village to raise a child." But there is an important corollary: Entire cities must unite to build a school.

Why Have Partners?

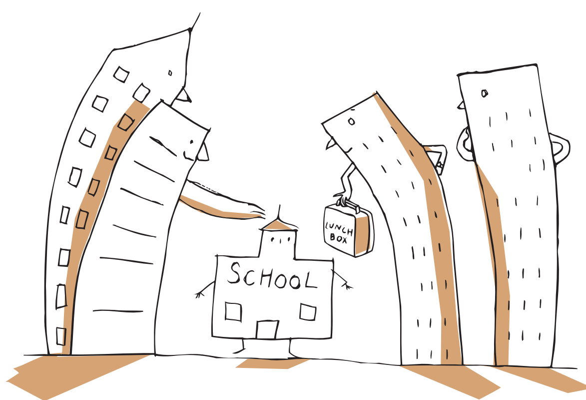
As Vito Perrone (1991) said in his book *A Letter to Teachers,* and as we at SLJ believe, school is not a rehearsal for life – it *is* life. Students need to understand the relevance of what they are learning – either because they see its value in their own lives, because they understand its utility in the professional world, or, most abstractly, because they realize it is part of the process of "becoming successful."

Through the partnerships our school has developed, our students interact with the professional world around a topic of interest, and all of those connections become clearer and more attainable. For example, both Maria and Jessica have mentors who help them to unpack their own desires and map out their own paths so that they have an explicit understanding from someone they have a relationship with about what they need to do in order to be successful. Simple conversations about college options and SATs raise expectations and consciousness.

People in the professional world can give students access and opportunities that simply would not be avail-



able to them at school. Our students, for example, have dozens of summer internship opportunities earmarked for them because of the relationships we have developed. These internships imbue our students with confidence and a sense of what is possible for them if they work hard. When students enter high school far below grade level, these two messages are equally important. Our partnerships allow us to say to our students: "You *can* do it. See, there are lots of important people who care about you and believe in you."



Just walking into Cravath, Swaine & Moore, the law firm that is our partner, for example, is an experience. When the staff of SLJ went for the first time, we confessed to each other that we felt a bit intimidated and out of place. In the ninth grade, our students are learning how to navigate these feelings and they are finding their confidence and voice. SLJ students won't have to wait until a job interview to have a conversation with a partner in a law firm. When they go to Cravath or to Brooklyn Law School, there is a palpable sense that they can and will succeed.

Just as importantly, our partners help us show our students why it's worth it to work hard. Students sometimes don't have a vision of what the future can hold for them; they don't always have an awareness of the options available to them or the unawakened passions or interests they have. Partnerships can help give underserved students the tools of access and exposure more readily available to their middle- and upper-class peers.

Public schools need friends and advocates in order to stay committed to their mission. Partners can help schools raise capital – both financial and political – that can be a vital support in troubled times when budgets

are cut or when schools are asked to accept more students than they can serve. Time after time, we have been in need of assistance and someone from our network of partners has come through. We knew that we had a network of friends who wouldn't let us down when we received a donation of eighty boxes of law books from a partner but didn't have a way to get them to the school. We broadcast an e-mail request for assistance and, for the next several days, responses poured in offering to lend a hand or a car or a dolly. This type of grassroots commitment is just as essential as the institutional support we have received.

Our partnerships allow us to say to our students: "You *can* do it. See, there are lots of important people who care about you and believe in you."

Finding Our Partners

SLJ was founded by the Urban Assembly, a small nonprofit organization in New York City that starts and supports small, theme-based schools. It was loosely modeled after the Urban Assembly's first school, the Bronx School for Law, Government and Justice, founded in 1997. The Urban Assembly understood the importance of connecting schools with outside organizations that could help infuse the theme into the daily life of the school. They also understood the importance of having someone at the school who would be responsible for developing and maintaining these partnerships once they were identified. Joseph Pinto, SLJ's partnership coordinator, is the direct liaison between the school and our partners.

Working closely with Richard Kahan, the founder and president of the Urban Assembly, and with Saskia Levy, its executive director, we identified SLJ's three main partners that would represent diverse segments of the legal professional world. Cravath, Swaine & Moore, one of the world's most prestigious law firms, introduces our students to the world of corporate law. Brooklyn Law School is a strong academic partner whose leaders have articulated a commitment to civic involvement. The Red Hook Community Justice Center, an innovative national court-complex model, melds the nonprofit and governmental sectors for the benefit of the community it serves. These important partners have come together to create a rich and layered educational experience for some of New York City's most historically underserved students.

The partners join us for various reasons. For some, it's about giving back. For some, the work we do directly coincides with their own articulated mission; partnering with SLJ just helps them to do it better. Red Hook's Youth Court, for example, functions especially well when many of their members are SLJ students, because we can support the work they're doing with our kids and vice versa. The Boys and Girls Club next door is another great example of a mutually beneficial relationship (though they're so good to us, we benefit most!). They get our great kids and we get their wonderful after-school programs, use of their gym, use of their camp in upstate New York for student field trips and retreats, and a great

A visitor spending a day at SLJ would see dozens of examples of partnership in action. But because these partnership activities are so seamlessly woven into our school life, visitors might not even realize it.

connection to the community. These partnerships also allow for clear and streamlined systems of communication in case a problem arises.

A Look at Partnership at SLJ

A visitor spending a day at SLJ would see dozens of examples of partnership in action. But because these partnership activities are so seamlessly woven into our school life, visitors might not even realize it. A visitor might see the Leadership and Government Advisory working with a member of the Red Hook Community Justice Center on the development of the school's Youth Court or watch a Brooklyn Law School professor mentor our students. Or, the visitor might wander into Lunch with Lawyers, where our students meet with lawyers from all sectors of the profession every two weeks for an informal lunch and discussion.

Cravath, Swaine & Moore is one of the school's most committed partners. Their involvement shows how our partners have dramatically contributed to our students' success. From the school's inception, two Cravath partners, Jeffrey Smith and Katherine Forrest, have committed themselves to involving the full firm in all aspects of SLJ. I knew that Cravath had incredible resources at its disposal and that our students were bound to benefit from a firm of Cravath's stature. What I didn't know was how quickly and completely the entire firm would become invested in SLJ. Our challenge then became making sure that all of those who were willing to give had ways to contribute.

Some of our needs and their talents were an obvious match. Cravath was able to help us, as a new school in a new facility, to establish our school's identity and professional culture. We share a building with an elementary school, for example, and Cravath's staff helped us make our space distinct by working with us to create a school logo and branding our school with it. Cravath's staff also worked to make sure that the school was technologically equipped by not only donating and setting up dozens of computers and printers, but also by bringing in electricians at their own expense to make sure the building had enough power to support these gifts. On June 30, members of the firm from every department headed to Brooklyn with logo-decorated balloons, welcome banners, and an ice cream truck to help throw a literal gala for incoming students. From the beginning, Cravath gave SLJ's students a sense of community, identity, excitement, and hope for the future.

It became clear, however, that there were others who wanted to get involved with curriculum development and with direct interactions with SLJ students. This enthusiasm and dedication were too good to pass up. But how could we design programs and activities that would meet the needs of the school and use the talents of our partner?

This is a question that we continue to return to as we seek new ways to work together, but our first collaboration helped set the tone. Over the sum-

mer, SLJ's teachers and planning team members worked closely with Cravath's associates to create a fictitious trial, affectionately known as "The Dog Bite Trial," about a pit bull in Brooklyn. During the first two days of school, our first graduating class opened the school and began working on the trial as part of their acclimatization to their new high school. Instead of attending regular classes, students met in their advisory groups of fifteen to eighteen students each and, in addition to learning the policies and procedures of the school, students tackled the Dog Bite Trial. Our six advisories took the side of either the prosecution or defense. Their charge was to prepare an opening statement that they would present at the law offices of Cravath, Swaine & Moore on the third day of school.

For the first two days of school, students worked vigorously and cooperatively to study the genre of the opening statement, deconstruct the witness statements they were given, analyze videos for qualities of strong public speakers, and create their own persuasive statements based on the textual evidence they had been given (witness testimony and stipulated facts). On their third day of high school, every SLJ student traveled to the forty-eighth floor of Cravath, Swaine & Moore, where they collaboratively presented their opening statements to a panel of professional lawyers.

The students were incredible. Though most had barely met one another, the students stood up in a large wood paneled room packed with their peers, teachers, parents, and lawyers and presented statements that were at once logical, clever, funny, bold, and persuasive. When each group finished, they received feedback from the panel of lawyers – specific comments that helped them to understand what they had done especially well. The day ended with students observing a professional lawyer deliver both opening statements – and being rewarded when she incorporated some of the students' concepts into her own arguments.

This experience set the tone for the year. Students felt impressed by what they had accomplished in such a short period of time. Teachers experienced the power of authentic, high-stakes instruction and the planning needed to produce high-quality outcomes. Teachers and partners had worked together to design the documents and lessons that led to these incredible products and students worked together to produce and perfect their arguments. The power of community and collaboration was clear to all; we were ready for our inaugural year.

Lessons Learned

SLJ is not even a year old, but we have already learned a number of lessons about partnerships that will help us work more effectively in the future.

Less is more.

Developing and nurturing partnerships takes time and energy – the most valuable commodities of any organization. Looking for depth, rather than breadth, in partners helps create long-term commitment to the school and makes the management of partnerships more fea-

sible. A challenge to schools is to find partners that have significant capacity and then to mine for the various levels of connection and compatibility.

Capacity means that there are both institutional, high-level support for the partnership and many potential layers of partnership and exchange. In our work with the Red Hook Community Justice Center, for example, the partnership is endorsed and supported by everyone from Adam Mansky, the director of operations of their parent organization, the Center for Court Innovation, to their presiding judge, Alex Calabrese, to their own project director James Brodick.

This extensive commitment has meant that the school can benefit from *all* the services of the Red Hook Community Justice Center, not only the ones we originally articulated in our partnership agreement. Not only have students benefited from their involvement in Red Hook's Youth Court program, but they have also had Red Hook's team of conflict resolution specialists at the school, been able to apply for special summer internships, have full access to the resources at Red Hook, and take advantage of other opportunities that we discover every day.

Partnerships can't be add-ons; they must be integrated into the existing structure of school.

If school partnerships are to be successful, they must serve a necessary function of the school and must be seamlessly woven into the fabric of life at the school. In addition to our three main partners, for example, SLJ has six collaborating partners. Working with an additional six organizations would be a lot to manage if it were not for the way they are built into the structure of our school.

Each of these partners is linked with one of our six themed advisories.

The partner and the advisor work together to define and execute a Cornerstone Project, which has the multiple purposes of bringing the advisory together around a theme of common interest and exposing students to an area of interest through their interactions with an expert in this area.

Our Media Advisory, for example, is working closely with DC-TV, an organization that believes that expanding public access to the electronic media arts invigorates our nation's democracy. Together, the advisor, the members of the advisory, and DC-TV's professional filmmakers have selected foster care as a topic of interest and importance and are working on the development of a documentary that will eventually be shared with the entire school community. The expertise that DC-TV brings to this endeavor is essential to its success. In addition, working with public school students is an articulated part of DC-TV's mission. The goals, therefore, of both organizations are interdependent. As a result, doing the things that make a partnership work – working collaboratively and communicating frequently – are in the best interests of everyone involved.

Take it slow, define clear goals, and build from year to year.

When passionate people who are invested in improving the lives of New York City's most underserved kids get together, ideas can flow quickly and idea after idea for projects can emerge. Areas of intersection and opportunities to collaborate can seem limitless, and they probably are. But it is important for the school leader to make sure that the initial purposes of the partnership are fulfilled before moving on to other projects. Clearly and collaboratively defining the parameters of the partnership is a good way to start. Clear benchmarks for success should also be developed to help avoid misunderstandings and false expectations on all sides.

Once the school and the outside organization have developed a strong relationship based on a limited, but successful, project or event, other opportunities can be explored. As both organizations have successful experiences with one another, trust will be built and people on both sides will be willing to invest more time and energy in the collaboration. People in outside organizations who have had positive experiences with school administrators and students will become champions for the partnership, pulling in the organization's resources and doing much of the legwork that might have otherwise fallen, less effectively, to school personnel. In addition, having a slew of small but positive interactions means that both sides can have a bit of a cushion with the confidence they have developed should there be a miscommunication or slip-up.

Honest and frequent communication is essential for continued partner commitment and investment.

Though our partners are incredibly committed to our school and to our students, we must maintain their investment and enthusiasm so that the work

When passionate people who are invested in improving the lives of New York City's most underserved kids get together, ideas can flow quickly and idea after idea for projects can emerge.

we've done bears fruit for years. One of the most effective ways that we are able to connect and expand our network is by the newsletter that the partnership coordinator puts out every month or so. This newsletter highlights the triumphs of our students and of the school and reminds people how important it is to get involved and how simple it can be. The newsletter includes updates and all kinds of ways that interested people can get involved – from curriculum development teams to ushering at the school play.

Another thing we did that was extremely important was that we had midyear conversations with each of our main partners and, together, we took stock of the partnership. These conversations and our partnership surveys have helped us to engage in a dialogue with our partners. From the outset, the school's planning team was clear that we were not interested in having partners for partnership's sake; these relationships would have to directly benefit our students and our school.

Making sure that the partnership has concrete benefits to the school requires everyone's vigilance and honesty. Organizations need to develop systems of communication so that the administrators of the partnerships have a great deal of information about how the people in their organization feel about the way the work is going. It can be difficult for people on both sides to bring concerns to the table. But unless schools and partners are honest, problems cannot be fixed and people will opt out of participation in these programs rather than address the issues at hand. Once issues are identified, both parties need to have enough information, or must bring the right people around the table (students, teachers, volunteers) so that solutions can be developed collaboratively.

Our partnership at SLJ has worked well because the goal is clear: the mission of all of us is the success of our students. For this reason, we do not see the need to "manage" the partnership. Our partners have never clashed, nor do I expect they ever will. The three partner organizations complement each other rather than compete: one is corporate, one is academic, and one is nonprofit and governmental. They all have their own clearly marked areas of expertise within the school community, so we are able to manage these varied partnerships well. No one steps on anyone's toes.

And, most of all, our partners understand what the partnership is really about. Each partner knows its contributions are invaluable. But our partners are prepared, in the event of a disagreement, to defer to the school's vision and mission. They know that, ultimately, what unites us is the hard and rewarding work we do together of making a difference in the lives of our city's young people.

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Sharing the Banquet: Linking Schools and Cultural Institutions in Dallas

Giselle Antoni

To increase learning opportunities for all young people in the city, an organization of cultural institutions in Dallas teamed up with the city and the school system to enhance arts education – and student achievement – in the city's schools.

The challenges facing urban schools to provide more than basic academic skills to all children are fueling the realization that education is a community endeavor. As communities, we must share the civic responsibility to educate our youngest citizens by bringing together government, nonprofits, businesses, and other partners in a unified effort. Forging these types of partnerships is an increasingly important strategy in cities across the country. School districts, mayor's offices, health providers, libraries, and museums are trying to develop a better understanding of how to organize to meet the challenges of coherent partnership.

Every urban area has an array of valuable resources and systems that includes parks, churches, youth services organizations, cultural institutions, and families. Members of each institution have enormous hopes for children. In most cities, these community resources are already involved in public education. But they tend to act in isolation, without much coordination. Few communities have forged formal systemic partnerships between large systems that address shared values and agendas. While these isolated groups may do good work, they aren't yet leveraging their individual strengths to build a fully integrated system of learning opportunities across a community that can serve whole student populations. And without a centralized infrastructure to pull the systems together and capitalize on their individual strengths, their impact is limited. They do not address the needs of all children, particularly those who are underserved by the education system.

In this respect, Dallas is like many other cities. It has a wealth of resources for children and youth, but those resources are not organized into a public network of opportunities. If a child is lucky enough to have a caregiver with knowledge of those resources, access to people who know the resources, and disposable time and money for transportation and fees, that child can enroll in after-school programs, vacation camps, library reading contests, a summer chess or soccer program at a city park, and more. But Dallas, like other cities, is home to many families who work several jobs, grandparents who are raising children, and very young parents who have grown up with few chances to experience the city's resources.

Thus, the inequalities that exist in public education (within and across

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schools) are magnified by children's differential access to other learning opportunities. In many ways, the city is a banquet, but only some children have a knife and fork. However, some of that is changing, due to a concerted effort by large community organizations with a common agenda to integrate their services and help ensure that all young people in the city have access to resources they need to learn at high levels.

Evidence of Inequalities

The Dallas effort began in the mid-1990s, when city leaders began to ask how well arts and cultural institutions that were receiving city subsidies were serving the city's schoolchildren. In 1997 the Dallas Cultural Affairs Commission Long Range Planning Committee hired Big Thought (then Young Audiences of Greater Dallas) to gather data to determine the availability and accessibility of educational outreach programming offered by the city's arts and cultural institutions. After reviewing reports from the Office of Cultural Affairs, Dallas Independent School District (DISD) and Dallas's PACE (Partnership for Arts, Culture, and Education), Big Thought determined that, first, there was no existing coordinated, efficient system for collecting such data, and, second, that no one agency was overseeing the quality and distribution of the city's cultural education services.

The data they did collect indicated significant inequalities in access to cultural services. While some district schools received multiple performances, residencies, master classes, and field trips, an estimated 75 percent received none. In essence, the majority of students could finish high school without *ever* having attended a school-sponsored cultural field trip or live professional performance. And since 82 percent of DISD students come from low-income families, the likelihood of these children experiencing a professional arts program outside of school was very small. The Cultural Affairs Commission advocated the creation of a partnership to address this disparity.

Response: Dallas ArtsPartners and Big Thought

In response to the inequalities revealed by the data, in 1998, the City of Dallas, DISD, and a consortium of arts and cultural organizations formed just such a public-private partnership, known as Dallas ArtsPartners. Dallas ArtsPartners currently operates to guarantee the equitable and high-quality delivery of existing educational outreach services from sixty diverse cultural institutions to each of Dallas's 101,000 public elementary school students and 6,000 general classroom teachers. A funding partnership with the Ford Foundation (which featured Dallas ArtsPartners in its most recent Foundation report) is helping to further extend the collaboration to include Dallas parents as education advocates.

The programs offered by Dallas ArtsPartners' cultural partner agencies include school-day performances, field trip performances, artist residencies, master classes, workshops, and guided tours. These motivating and complex learning experiences incorporate dozens of arts and cultural disciplines, ranging from a wide array of classical and culturally specific visual arts, dance, music, and theater to those based in science and history.

Dallas ArtsPartners integration specialists work closely with educators to help them design plans to integrate these arts experiences into their curricula. The plans are as diverse as the campuses themselves. Take Reinhardt Elementary, where 72 percent of the racially diverse student body is economically disadvantaged, and a significant population of special education students is served. There, the principal is deeply committed to infusing the arts throughout the school and curriculum. She and her staff worked with Dallas ArtsPartners representatives to design a school plan that integrated ArtsPartners programs with the school's main curriculum topics at each grade level.

For example, to support the Texas History portion of the fourth-grade curriculum, students attended a theater program, "The Life and Times of Sam Houston." To help prepare for the writing portion of the state accountability test, fourth-graders took part in "Storyweaving" – with a professional storyteller as facilitator, students created interactive stories, then incorporated the group's ideas into a single tale. Sixth-grade students – also focusing on language arts – participated in a five-day theater residency on mythology, working with a professional actor to create a play based on the myths they had read. The teacher continued to use the drama techniques she had learned to incorporate theater into this unit throughout the remainder of the semester.

Not only are these opportunities engaging, but there is also growing evidence that such experiences can make a measurable difference in students' behavior as learners and in their academic skills in areas like literacy. In 2001 we partnered with Dennie Palmer Wolf of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform to undertake a three-year longitudinal study of the effects of Dallas ArtsPartners on students, schools, and participating cultural organizations. Overall, the findings show that high-quality and sustained opportunities to learn from cultural partners can make substantial contributions to children as learners, both behaviorally and in terms of academic achievement. Thus, we're beginning to demonstrate the results of a civic partnership around children's learning.

Recognizing the impact of these findings and the powerful role of community-centered action, in 2004, Big Thought, a nonprofit organization that manages Dallas ArtsPartners, was organized from a cluster of established programs. Big Thought now houses a web of seven distinct initiatives that

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In essence, the majority of students could finish high school without *ever* having attended a school-sponsored cultural field trip or live professional performance.

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provide school-day and after-school programming for children, from pre-K through high school. The programs are designed to inspire, empower, and unite children and our community to ensure that our young citizens become successful and productive adults. Each initiative is a collaboration with one or more of seventy community agencies, including school districts, library systems, juvenile detention systems, child-care centers, arts and cultural institutions, and recreation centers, to deliver these programs.

Vital Steps for Reform

Through its success with Dallas ArtsPartners and other systemic, collaborative initiatives, Big Thought has identified several steps that are vital to creating the kind of community-wide support that can lead to true reform.

Aligning agendas

Building a community network that supports children's learning and system-wide educational reform is fraught with challenges. Among the most difficult, but ultimately rewarding, is that of understanding and reconciling the community's values into a common perspective and finding the overlap in the agendas and missions of potential stakeholders. The challenge comes in helping a diverse group recognize the value of working together for a greater impact.

In the formative stage of Dallas ArtsPartners, Big Thought first convened a series of discussions among key stakeholders from the three potential partner groups to address vital questions about the place of arts education in the community's values. Among those questions were: Does this community value the arts and arts education? What kinds? What amount of arts education is the community willing to support? Does the cultural community have a place

in the public classroom? Answering these questions created a common set of views that revealed the desire and support to collectively venture into a community partnership.

Like their counterparts in many communities, the primary stakeholders that would form Dallas ArtsPartners had their own specific goals and agendas; the challenge was finding common ground among them. The City of Dallas's Office of Cultural Affairs was primarily interested in equity, ensuring that its investment in Dallas's cultural institutions extended to all the city's children. The city was particularly interested in implementing an organized system that would meet the Texas Education Agency's educational requirements, through community arts agencies, and increase the effectiveness of service distribution.

DISD was concerned about both achieving equity and increasing the academic achievement of its students. The district was also looking for a way to provide sustained arts learning in classrooms at a time of budget constraints. The arts and cultural community, meanwhile, sought better access to schools and teachers, ways of generating new and different audiences, and a method of evaluating the impact of its outreach programs.

To move forward, we had to coordinate these agendas. For example, in order to secure the buy-in of the school district, the arts and cultural organizations had to move beyond the idea of educational outreach programs as simply audience builders or revenue streams and move toward joining schools in teaching important skills. In return, the cultural agencies received an integrated delivery system to coordinate their programs. Furthermore, the creation of Dallas ArtsPartners provided additional revenue streams, lessened the burden of additional marketing to schools by individual agencies, and provided collaboration with DISD to develop any new programs based on an already-identified need.

Creating authenticity and shared accountability

Although common values and shared agendas provide a foundation for collaboration, the ultimate viability of a community network depends on the authenticity of the partnership. To create authenticity, every partner must share an equal place at the table; every voice must be heard and integrated; and each partner must be held accountable for its role in the network.

The grass-roots governance structure of ArtsPartners helps ensure that every partner participates, setting a policy of deliberate and repeated communication so nothing takes place behind the scenes. Our strategy was to provide as broad a base of personnel and support as possible for committees, working groups, and funding sources. As a result, ArtsPartners gained insight and input from a diverse and knowledgeable constituency while designing, implementing,

Among the most difficult but ultimately rewarding challenges is that of understanding and reconciling the community's values into a common perspective and finding the overlap in the agendas and missions of potential stakeholders.

and funding the program. Governing and advisory partners included representatives from arts and cultural organizations of all disciplines; more than twenty-five school-district personnel at all levels; and more than thirty-six civic, community, and business leaders. Teachers (including fine arts specialists) and principals served on ArtsPartners committees, including the Advisory Council and the committees for assessment, professional development, educational services, programs, and policies and procedures.

Finally, each partner must make a significant investment of time, money, people, and expertise in order to maintain balance. All three of ArtsPartners' primary partner groups and the managing partner share administrative, programmatic, and financial responsibilities. The school district funds direct services for children, the city supports the arts and cultural organizations and helps underwrite administrative expenses, and the managing partner raises private funds for administration, professional development, and technology. This balance of power keeps partners engaged and ensures accountability.

Building capacity

If all the parties around the table are to operate effectively, they must each fully understand the project, both in philosophy and practice. A shared understanding and common language both within and among partner groups are as essential as shared values and agendas. This can best be accomplished through hands-on experience, training, and skills development delivered through a comprehensive system of professional development.

First, all stakeholders within the partner groups must be educated and engaged. To build capacity among educators, ArtsPartners created a complex system of professional development experiences and tools geared toward the informational needs and practices of DISD's teachers, principals, administrators, and school board members. Training sessions range from broad, two-day symposiums to one-on-one teacher meetings with curriculum integration specialists. Educator tools include model curricula, best practices, integration handbooks, and a searchable database. We also build community capacity by providing professional development for arts and cultural providers, and for the greater public, including funders, civic leaders, and parents.

The second step is to transfer skills and knowledge among the partner groups. Arts and cultural providers now know how to integrate Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills elements – the state educational standards – within their programs in order to meet teachers' needs. Teachers have gained a clearer understanding of how an artist in the

classroom can support, rather than detract from, their lesson plans. The city's cultural affairs office understands the value of arts education and integration, in addition to the intrinsic value of the arts. All partners now recognize the powerful role of the arts in helping children learn.

Managing constant change

Change is a given when working with large systems and bureaucracies. For example, since Dallas ArtsPartners' genesis in 1998, we've worked with four different general superintendents at DISD and two different directors at the Office of Cultural Affairs, not to mention the myriad changes among cultural partners. Big Thought, as managing partner, has had to engage stakeholders at every level many times over.

This issue was anticipated and addressed during ArtsPartners' earliest planning stages and during the initiative's five-year pilot phase. In addition to establishing an authentic partnership, our grassroots governance served to secure buy-in from stakeholders at many different levels throughout the community. District representatives ranged from classroom teachers and principals to school board members and administrative staff from a wide variety of departments. City representatives included city council members, cultural commissioners, and cultural affairs staff members. Arts and cultural institutions were represented by a wide array of administrative and artistic professionals. Because people throughout the community were knowledgeable about ArtsPartners and personally engaged, there were people in place to carry the initiative forward as inevitable personnel turnover within agencies occurred.

A critical key to maintaining consistency and forward momentum among a community network is the existence of a centralized infrastructure. Just as each partner brings to the table a specific agenda, each also brings a unique and specialized set of skills, knowledge, and expertise to create a stronger whole. In order to capitalize on these strengths, a civic partnership must have a central entity to facilitate communication, organize fundraising efforts, and manage the complexities inherent in bringing together large and varied groups of stakeholders. A managing partner serves as the hub of a wheel. Community members have one place to go for information – and the information that's distributed is consistent, since it's managed by a single source.

Just as each partner brings to the table a specific agenda, each also brings a unique and specialized set of skills, knowledge, and expertise to create a stronger whole.

Evolving to meet community needs

A successful community network is one that acknowledges the reality of dynamic systems. Big Thought continues to work hard in responding to ever-evolving community needs, which often translates to reevaluating the way we communicate with stakeholders and finding solutions for program processes or tools that no longer work. Even in a system that's designed to allow for change, hard questions and challenges remain.

Perhaps the biggest challenge Dallas ArtsPartners has faced during institutionalization is remaining vigilant against

a slip into bureaucracy – an unwieldy, inflexible, and unnecessarily complex administrative machine. To avoid this, we have instilled a sense of ownership among all our partners and begun transferring leadership to ground-level program implementers. We continue to work to understand the needs, challenges, and limitations of our partners by maintaining direct contact with them at all levels. By including them in broad decision making and reminding them verbally and with tangible rewards that their investment is critical, we attempt to eliminate the feeling of being taken for granted. Finally, we continue to investigate how we might use technology in innovative ways to reduce paperwork and improve communication.

Sustainability presents its own challenges. Funding is the primary roadblock, but other considerations are equally critical. For example, even the most well-considered endeavor could neglect a key stakeholder group; Dallas ArtsPartners failed to materially involve parents during its beginning stages. We now recognize that they are critical to maintaining a stable and successful community education partnership, and we have created an initiative, funded by the Ford Foundation, to educate and engage parents as programmatic partners, financial resources, and political advocates. Over the next year we will begin to implement new strategies that address the particular needs of this important group and draw them in as equal stakeholders in our community endeavor.

Our next challenge is to explore how the existing tools and infrastructure we've built can be extended to address the needs of our community beyond schools. To be sure, schools are important venues for engaging children. But we know that children spend much more of their time outside the classroom, in neighborhoods with their friends and families. As our community evolves, we're investigating new ways we can connect young people and fully engage them in community life, not only as learners but also as architects of the community.

At the same time, we are looking at ways of engaging older children and adolescents. We can see a myriad of opportunities to create extended infrastructures and programs that meet the needs of young people and their families on many levels. Together we can create opportunities for mentorship, apprenticeship, and service learning. We can use the intrinsic power of learning in and thorough the community to empower young people to lead, create, and shape, not only their future but also ours.

Community-centered education reform happens in schools, libraries, recreation centers, theaters, homes, and churches. It takes educators, parents, civic leaders and all others who understand the importance of investing in the future. In thousands of cities and towns just like ours, individual people and agencies are working night and day to make their communities stronger and richer. Imagine what could happen if they all worked together.

Funding and Rebuilding Schools as Community Learning Centers: Akron, Ohio

Laraine Duncan and Donna Loomis

After the mayor and the community successfully navigated the political shoals of raising taxes and gained access to state matching funds, the city and the school district became partners in the challenging task of rebuilding schools as community learning centers.

In May 2003, the voters of Akron, Ohio, voted overwhelmingly in favor of Issue 10, a measure that raised the city income tax from 2 percent to 2.25 percent to fund a fifteen-year plan to rebuild and remodel schools and convert them into "community learning centers." The measure was sponsored by Mayor Donald Plusquellic as a way of raising matching funds for a state school-construction grant, while also providing an opportunity to create community centers in school buildings and redevelop neighborhoods.

Voices in Urban Education editor Robert Rothman spoke with Laraine Duncan, Mayor Plusquellic's education policy advisor, and Donna Loomis, a retired deputy superintendent of the Akron Public Schools, about the campaign for Issue 10 and the benefits and challenges of implementing it.

Laraine Duncan is deputy mayor of Akron and education policy advisor to Mayor Donald Plusquellic.

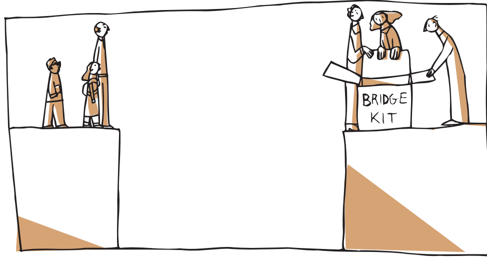
Donna Loomis is a retired deputy superintendent of the Akron Public Schools.

How did Issue 10 come about?

LARAINE DUNCAN: There was a huge pot of state money that would go to, first, urban schools, to refurbish all the schools in the system. That meant a sizeable amount of money for Akron. We had to match 41 percent of it.

At the initiative of the mayor, we put a sales tax on the ballot [in November 2002]. In Ohio, a sales tax has to be countywide. There was a lengthy process to go through the county council, and then the city council, to get the issue on the ballot.

It was a hard, expensive campaign. It went down in flames countywide. It passed the city easily. People in the city understood it. The way it was going to work, proceeds from the sales tax would have been divided up among all the seventeen school districts in Summit County, per student. All school districts could spend money for capital improvements they deemed worthy. But, by law, we had to form a monitoring committee, and there was resentment of that. The attitude was: Akron would be telling us how to spend our money. That wasn't the issue at all. The committee would essentially be a rubber stamp. Our feeling was: If a school board wants to spend money on bleachers, that's their choice.



There were a couple of other school issues on the ballot in the county, and that hurt us. We tried to demonstrate to school districts that they would get more money from the sales tax than from a levy, but most didn't understand that, and they worked against it. It got pretty nasty. A lot of it was anti-Akron. But we lost, and we lost the chance for the match money.

Our mayor is not a person who gives up easily, and he didn't want to give up $800 million over fifteen years. He found something obscure in the Ohio revised code that allows a municipality to pass an income tax for community learning centers. He wrote a ballot measure, had it looked at by attorneys, and it passed muster.

The beauty of it was that it would be levied on anybody who works in Akron, not on pension income, Social Security income, or investment income. The second time around, it passed with 64 percent of the vote. The taxes began collecting last January. With the income, we are purchasing bonds, and the proceeds go to the Akron Public Schools as the district's match.

DONNA LOOMIS: This is an opportunity we could not afford to pass up. If the state gives you money, you don't pass it up. The mayor was trying to be creative and thoughtful and benefit everybody in the best way possible. The schools and the community receive new buildings, and the local economy prospers.

Nobody likes higher taxes. Why did this pass so overwhelmingly?

LARAINE DUNCAN: Because of the campaign we waged. People realized what we were trying to do. The average [school] building [in Akron] is seventy-five years old. We have buildings standing that were built in the late 1800s.

There was also pride of place. People accepted our platform – that we would put new schools in neighborhoods and re-create neighborhood schools. In one neighborhood, there is not a neighborhood school. It's an inner-city, minority neighborhood. The [original] school was decommissioned by the Akron Public Schools, and it became a haven for drug dealers and crime. The city bought it, tore it down, and built new houses on the land. They sold like hotcakes. We put in a community center, playing fields, a new library. Students who used to go to the school that was torn down are now bused all over the city. They will once again be able to go to school in their own neighborhood.

We also emphasized in the campaign that these new schools have to be community learning centers. They will be open to the public in off hours and the summer. If a group wants to use the auditorium, they can. During the day, they will be learning centers. We want to keep young people safe. But people wanted facilities in their neighborhoods.

DONNA LOOMIS: [Another factor that led to support for Issue 10 was support from seniors.] On a city income tax in the state of Ohio, anybody who is retired is not taxed. Our senior citizens

support education and know how important it is. This was a tremendous opportunity for them to be supportive of our schools, and it's affordable for them. Property taxes, the usual funding mechanism in Ohio, are not affordable for senior citizens.

Was there significant opposition to the plan?

LARAINE DUNCAN: There were rumblings from people who work here but don't live in Akron. But it didn't materialize into anything serious.

There was opposition [to the sales tax], although not organized. A lot of talk. People out in the suburbs said, "Oh, this is only for Akron. That's Akron's problem." But it was really never organized.

DONNA LOOMIS: Clearly the people of Akron saw Issue 10 as an exciting opportunity. People outside the city who work in Akron will have to pay the taxes. But when we build the new community learning centers, they will be able to use them as well. For example, there are future plans to place a YMCA in one of the buildings. The Y will service anyone in the community.

Is the idea of community learning centers a new idea for Akron?

LARAINE DUNCAN: The city has quite a few programs in the Akron schools after hours. The city started an after-school program four years ago and has put $150,000 into that. The wife of a former city councilmember, in her own school, had started an after-school enrichment program. No tutoring, no homework, just activities. The mayor visited it and was very impressed. He got money and started programs in four schools. We put in a homework component and hired certified teachers to work with students. They spend one

The mayor was trying to be creative and thoughtful and benefit everybody in the best way possible. The schools and the community receive new buildings, and the local economy prospers.

hour of hard-core time with a tutor working on homework that's coordinated with the school. Then they can do enrichment things. It's amazing – everything from puppet making to a nature club . . . dozens of activities.

The Akron Public Schools also got a 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant. That has a huge tutoring component that has to be a lot more rigorous than what we were offering. We're now partnering with the Akron Public Schools [in the 21st Century program] in ten schools. The tutoring is designed by the Akron Public Schools rather than what we were doing. We serve about a thousand students.

There's been some resistance to ideas the city brings to the table. We all realize we're partners now, and we'll work hard to make the community learning centers a big success for Akron.

We signed a memorandum of understanding with the custodians' union so that we could use the buildings. We'll have issues to work out with them in managing the community learning centers, but we all want this to work for the community, and I'm confident that we'll reach an agreement.

DONNA LOOMIS: Any time you start a new program, you'll have issues. Who is in charge of an activity, and what time of day will it occur? Who comes first, the children who are in the building at 5:00 or the community group that wants to use the building at 5:00? Some scheduling issues will come up, but these will be ironed out. I hope the Joint Use Agreement is communicated as positively as it can possibly be. All of us simply need to get used to working under it. I'm sure it will work out and we'll make decisions that are good for the city and good for our students.

Under the agreement established by Issue 10, the community learning centers will be operated in partnership by the city and the school district. Have there been tensions in forming that partnership?

DONNA LOOMIS: Like everything else you step into, you have obstacles to overcome and problems to work through. With anything new, there are issues to resolve. At first, it was awkward. Schools get capital funding from the state. But if it were not for the city, we would not have the money for our local match. We know that.

LARAINE DUNCAN: Before anybody knew the city would be a partner, the school system had to write a master plan. It's now four years old. Now we're full partners, and there are things the mayor wants in some neighborhoods [that might not reflect the master plan]. There's been some resistance to ideas the city brings to the table. We all realize we're partners now, and we'll work hard to make the community learning centers a big success for Akron.

DONNA LOOMIS: One of the stories from Issue 10 is that the school district and the city worked so hard together on the campaign, everybody was in the same place from the start. We had some good times together, and we had some tough times together. That's been healthy. We got to know everybody. Our working relationship filtered into

the Joint Use Agreement. Yes, we had disagreements and discrepancies, but we worked together to resolve those.

Are there other issues you foresee that you will have to resolve as you move forward?

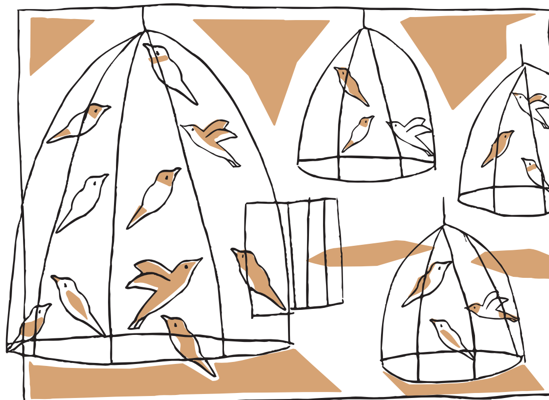
LARAINE DUNCAN: There will be some financial issues. We will have buildings open quite a bit. The city hasn't worked out staffing. We have to manage the buildings in the evening.

As we're planning the new buildings, we go to each neighborhood to determine what kind of programming they'd like to see once the community learning center opens. In the first eight [buildings], we made some mistakes. People got the impression they would design buildings. We had painful meetings – people wanted grandiose buildings. It couldn't be. Every one came in way over budget.

We changed our approach. Now we tell people up front, here is what the state will allow us to spend. What programs do you want? What community partners do you want? We hired a consultant [who was part of the campaign for Issue 10 and knew the issues]. He's already out talking to the principals of the next eight schools. We're getting a lot of good ideas.

DONNA LOOMIS: There will be issues to define how use [of the community learning centers] is established. We will need to decide what's appropriate. That will be determined at a later date.

LARAINE DUNCAN: As in all urban districts in Ohio, enrollment has dropped significantly since the original Master Plan. It's going to get ugly. Our Issue 10 campaign message promised that we'd all have all new schools. [But since the state share is based on enrollment, declining enrollments mean less funds and] some people are not going to



have a school in their neighborhood. Since the state is paying 59 percent of the funds, we're going to have to live with fewer schools.

There's been some controversy; some say the numbers the state used to project enrollments are way off. Who knows what to believe? [The school facilities commission has revisited the enrollment projections.] Enrollments have dropped significantly, though, but they may come back up. Students have been leaving for charter schools in significant numbers, but that's starting to trend back. And the birth rate is up. At some point those children are going to go to school.

Beyond the new buildings, how do you see the community learning centers benefiting the community?

DONNA LOOMIS: The centers give the community an opportunity to come into our schools. Schools are great places. This will put the public closer to our programs. My hope is that our students will benefit. The public will

come and be a part of us. I hope they become part of the reading program, the athletic program, the tutoring program, etc.

We've also had conversations with Boys and Girls Clubs and the YMCA. Instead of building a gym, either group could use our gym. If an organization has money for a swimming pool, our students will be able to benefit from that. It's a good, solid fit for everybody.

LARAINE DUNCAN: Another part of the campaign was: This is money coming into the city. This is economic development. There was a commitment by the superintendent, the mayor, and the president of the city council to ensure as many local jobs as possible and to hire minorities.

Before the campaign, we had meetings with trade unions and black organizations. We held career fairs with the Urban League. We're doing everything we can to funnel people in that direction – to get them onto a job site and get training. We hope these are lifelong jobs. The city also put $400,000 into a program we call *capacity building*. We start with ten small minority-owned companies and help them get over the hump so that they can become subcontractors on the project.

What the city is doing is looking at this as a huge economic development package. We're going to rebuild neighborhoods. For example, one school moved across the street and was converted to a city recreation center. We want to build a new school there and create a "learning corridor." And in the land vacated by the old school, we can put thirty to forty houses. We've done this before. Where we've done it, the houses sell fast. People will live in the city when we build houses at a reasonable price. We have a good track record.

In general, this is seen as a big economic boost for the city.

DONNA LOOMIS: It is also seen as a very special opportunity for children and the community in general.

Expanding Education Opportunities in Birmingham: A New Kind of Urban Community

Dennie Palmer Wolf

With a federal grant, community and education leaders in Birmingham, Alabama, have developed a bold plan to revitalize a twelve-block neighborhood in the city's center by expanding educational opportunities in the area.

Throughout the nation, advocates for children and youth are describing the guarantee of high-quality public education as a civil right. All children, regardless of who they are or where they live, deserve the kind of education that ensures they can live productive lives as individuals, family members, workers, and members of a community.

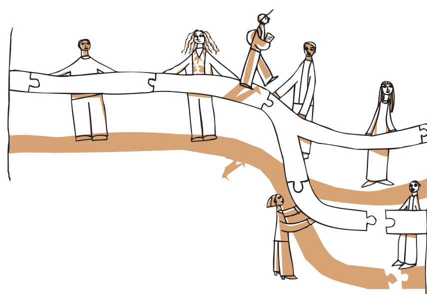
But, even as we have gained clarity about the absolute necessity of equitable schooling, we have come up against a second realization: it is unlikely that schools alone, powerful and important as they are, can provide the full range of opportunities to learn that all children need. To meet increasingly high standards, to understand how to gain and apply knowledge in the world outside the classroom, and to learn how to pursue an interest, talent, or gift, regardless of circumstances, children also need extended learning opportunities of the kinds that occur in after-school programs, clubs, teams, apprenticeships, and supervised free time.

Dennie Palmer Wolf is director of Opportunity and Accountability at the Annenberg Institute for School Reform.

Rethinking Equitable Opportunity to Learn

When it is of high quality, extended learning can be a major source of the cultural and social capital that often divides historically underserved children from their more privileged peers. But, like access to high-quality public schools, extended learning opportunities are often unevenly available to children.

Most cities have a substantial number of learning opportunities to offer: after-school programs, clubs, libraries, science centers, museums, Boys and Girls Clubs, Y's, parks and recreation programs operating year-round, all-city band and orchestra, church youth groups, and more. But these supplementary programs, while technically available, can be hard to actually participate in – unless some-one in a family has disposable time, connections, a car, and the money for fees and materials. If a child gets excited about science or music or athletics, linking him or her to opportunities to



develop interests and skills demands know-how, grit, and resources. As one city parent put it, "Oh, there's opportunities all right, just try getting to them."

To understand how this system plays out, it is helpful to look at "diary days" (see opposite page) from two fourth-grade girls growing up in typical large city in the United States.[1] The girls live in the same neighborhood and both attend public school. Both are capable and energetic. Either could grow up to be a doctor, school board member, theater director, or mayor – depending on the opportunities she has.

To be sure, this snapshot of two girls' lives does not tell us all we want to know about the resources available to them or how they are used. But even a cursory reading of the two diary days makes a strong case that these two girls – both potential parents, workers, jury members, and voters in their community – are growing up with very different opportunities. The two girls' experiences differ in:

- the range of adults who know and can support them;
- the frequency of their interactions with those adults;
- the ratio of investment to instrumental activities (i.e., ratio of lessons, clubs, and practices to meal preparation, baby-sitting, etc.); and
- the time spent in the roles of agent versus more passive roles of witness or consumer.

These differences are far from trivial. They occur in precisely those areas we know to be critical to youth development: respect for one's own identity and agency; the ability to form relationships; and the courage to take constructive risks (e.g., seek new opportunities outside an established community, attempt crossing the barriers of race and class).

It is easy to imagine a skeptic, or a strong proponent of a free-market or "ownership" society, rejecting the proposition that there is any kind of broad public responsibility to equalize children's extended learning, much less out-of-school paths for their interests and talents. In the market view, such paths are up to individual families. Those who have the capital are entitled to spend it as they will. Those who lack that capital should be willing to do the work of piecing together the necessary connections and scholarships, put in the hours of travel, and save up for the fees.

But there is another perspective. If cities want to address their increasing bifurcation along lines of race and class; if cities want citizens disposed to vote, volunteer, and "give back"; and if cities want diverse knowledge workers who understand what needs to be improved in schools, social systems, parks, or products; then an education system, composed of strong public schools and equally strong and available extended learning, is the investment to make. As one city planner remarked, "Young people are twenty percent of our population, one hundred percent of our future."

1 The development and evolution of this diary day methodology as a way of examining students' opportunities to learn has been funded through a range of projects focused on in- and out-of-school learning. The funding has come from the Packard Foundation, for its School Arts Program; the Ford Foundation; and a grant from the U.S. Department of Education to Dallas ArtsPartners.

To create these diaries, an interviewer worked with an individual child as that child narrated her activities from the previous day. The students dictated the information. They also coded the value of the experience for them (1 – none, 2 – necessary or important, 3 – helps me to become the adult I want to be), following a discussion of the categories with the interviewer.

One-Day Diary, Student 1				
Time	**Value to Me**	**Setting**	**Activity**	**Comment**
7 am	1	Home	Get up, dress, eat	Have to do
8	1	Bus	Look out the window	
8:30	1	School	Reading class	Practice with questions
10	3	Outside	Recess	Four-square with my friends, played good
11	1	Math	Doing problems	Hard, didn't understand
12 pm	3	Lunch	Outside	With my friends
12:30	1	Social Studies	Doing questions in the book	About Indians
2	1	Tutoring	Reading practice and questions	
3	1	Bus		
3:30	1	Home	Take care of my brother, watching his baby TV programs	Boring
5	2	Home	Watching my programs	He was bothering me
6	1	Home	Help with dinner	Setting, washing
7	1	Home	TV	My sister's programs
8	1	Home	Do some homework reading	OK
9	1	Home	Go to bed	Sleep

One-Day Diary, Student 2				
Time	**Value to Me**	**Setting**	**Activity**	**Comment**
7 am	2	Home	Breakfast, watch the news with my mom	
8	3	Bus	R. and me work on our choir songs	We learned the words
8:30	3	School	Reading	We work on our interviews of somebody with courage; read Jesse Owens story.
10	3	Recess	Stay in to work on courage	R stays in to do hers too
10:30	3	Math	Measuring problem of the week	How to measure how much water in jar
12 pm	2	Outside	Lunch	OK
12:30	2	School	Science	Reading about rocks
2	3	School	Free Reading	More Jesse Owens
3	2	Bus	Tired	
3:30	3	Community center	Choir	With R, it was good because we know all the words
5	3		My mom's choir	Stay to listen
6	2	Home	Dinner	Eat and help
7	3/2	Library	Choose more courage books Do homework	Library person helped
8:30	2	Walk home		
9	3	Bed	Read new books some	

Birmingham: A Potential Site for Building an Education System

In Birmingham, Alabama, a story is unfolding that illustrates both the importance – and the complexity – of building an educational system that embraces both in-school and extended learning.

New housing is going up only blocks from the main library, the downtown Y, the art museum, and the courthouse. It consists of low-rise townhouses linked by shaded "green" streets reserved for pedestrians. At one side rises historic Philips High School with its gracious entryway, theater, and reading room. Just across the street is the Y's new citywide youth center.

This is the site of Park Place, a twelve-block stand of mixed-income housing squarely in the city's historic and cultural district. The effort is widely acknowledged to be a major investment of private and public dollars in the possibility of mixed-race, mixed-income neighborhoods in a city where this has yet to be achieved.

This new community could also be the city's first instance of what Hal Smith (see the article "Using Community Assets to Build an 'Education System'" on pages 5–11) has called "an education system": a community-based web of learning opportunities for children and families that focuses its activity and resources squarely on the development of the human capital of all of its residents. This includes the well-being and curiosity of infants and preschool children, the academic achievement of its students, the job skills of its young adults, and the cultivation and sharing of its elders' wisdom and history.

Energized by a $35-million grant from the federal Hope VI program to rebuild distressed public housing in the downtown area, a local real estate developer, a cluster of cultural and civic organizations, and presidents of the relevant neighborhood councils began to discuss ways to support and enrich the public schools that would serve the new housing and its integration into surrounding neighborhoods. Participants in these discussions also included the superintendent of Birmingham City Schools, his staff, representatives of the School of Education at the University of Alabama, Birmingham, and other Birmingham educators.

In the fall of 2002, staff of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform joined this group to support their process of planning not only a school, but also a larger network of learning opportunities for children, youth, and families. Throughout the 2003–2004 school year, this coalition of individuals and organizations met to envision a blueprint for their collective efforts.

The result is the Birmingham Learning Initiative – a plan to create a broader education system, incorporat-

The Learning Initiative is envisioned as a public-private partnership in which both streams of funding create a new kind of community. In this community, education is the engine.

ing school-based and extended learning opportunities for the children and families in the neighborhoods around Park Place.

Like the housing at Park Place, the Learning Initiative is envisioned as a public-private partnership in which both streams of funding create a new kind of urban mixed-race, mixed-income community capable of generating and supporting equitable living, working, and learning opportunities. In this community, education is the engine.

Major elements in the envisioned education system include:

- an early day-care facility built and endowed by a local foundation, with care for newborns to three-year-olds and supports for families;
- a connected set of small public schools housed in the former Philips High School, including an early-learning center for children aged three to five, a small elementary school, and a middle school designed to serve equal numbers of students with and without disabilities;
- a pre-K–8 curriculum enriched by the staff, methods, and content of a network of participating cultural institutions, including the Birmingham Museum of Art, the Jazz Hall of Fame, and the Civil Rights Institute;
- family learning programs that occur in each of these institutions;
- community schools programs offering extended learning opportunities for children, youth, and adults, operating 7 am to 7 pm six days a week;
- professional development for educators, from principals through paraprofessionals, provided by area universities;
- community-based skills and job training for youth (as tutors, mentors, apprentices, etc.);
- family support services (including degree programs for adults, finance

and educational planning, and job training);
- the use of the auditorium and library in Philips High School as venues for community meetings and cultural events;
- creation of a model to be duplicated in other areas of the city.

The goal is that, by 2008, the children and youth of Park Place and the surrounding neighborhoods will be living in an educational system where both their schools and their extended learning opportunities guarantee they will have the critical and creative skills to become contributing members of their immediate and broader communities.

An Urgent and Fragile Vision

Through an initial planning process, the architects of the Learning Initiative have come a long way in thinking through the kinds of strategies that will be necessary for realizing its vision. They have also articulated some of the most difficult issues, outlined in this section, in taking such a plan from blueprint to reality.

Facing, not erasing, history

Park Place is bringing new residences, pedestrian streets, and reconfigured families to what was once a block of low-income units. But this is new construction on top of old history – history too long and too discriminatory to be paved over. It is history that surfaces in every decision.

Many people have searing personal memories of the costs of "separate, but equal." The wide steps of Philips High School, the handsome building that flanks one edge of Park Place, were the site of violent attempts to keep Black students from integrating what had long been the city's premier White high school. The community and schools at Park Place could be a starting point for a different chapter in that history.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the discussion for the attendance zone for the schools to be housed in Philips. Some voices in the planning process urge that the schools should be open to any family that lives or works in downtown Birmingham, arguing that this is the only strategy that will guarantee integration. Other voices argue that integration is less important than quality for neighborhood children. They argue that the schools must serve the immediate and adjacent neighborhoods well, preparing students for entry to high school, including being able to enter selective high schools and compete for scholarships to area independent schools. Looming large in the debate is the fact that the institutions created by Black residents during the Jim Crow era no longer exist.

Any plan that concentrates resources in a single neighborhood raises deeply rooted concerns about historic and current inequalities. Board of Education members want guarantees that Park Place and its schools won't

create a one-neighborhood enclave with special privileges and services that will never be available to children and families throughout the city.[2] Long-standing residents of the North Side communities, for their part, want to know whether their neighborhood, long ignored by downtown interests, and their children, will benefit from the plan, or whether the initiative is simply designed to attract two-income middle-class families to a renovated downtown.

The initiative offers Birmingham a chance to face its history directly. Are the city's leaders and residents willing to do so? Will the entryway at Philips be redesigned to tell the story of the struggle for equal education? Will it feature the personal histories of North Side families? Will the new schools teach the Civil Rights Institute's curriculum on human rights? Will middle school students, mentored by high school students and community members, become actively involved in researching how their education and opportunities measure up?

Balancing innovation and equity

The designs for the schools and programs proposed in Birmingham build on research demonstrating the effects on student outcomes of early education, challenging and enriched curriculum, and extended learning. More specifically, cultural partners, Annenberg Institute planners, and educators from other communities like New York and Chattanooga have encouraged Birmingham to invest in an enriched curriculum that includes history, art, and music; learning outside the classroom; and community-based projects where students apply their learning.

> This is new construction on top of old history – history too long and too discriminatory to be paved over. It is history that surfaces in every decision.

But none of that research was conducted in Birmingham or in Alabama. Who is to say that the approach will work for the children of Park Place and the nearby neighborhoods? In light of the mounting accountability pressures of No Child Left Behind and the numbers of Birmingham schools struggling to make adequate yearly progress, realists are right to ask whether the schools ought to feature a clear focus on reading and mathematics and laser-like attention to the basic skills featured on standardized tests, rather than the broader program the planners envision. After all, it is the children, the schools, and, ultimately, the status of the Birmingham system, not outsiders, who will feel any consequences from state and federal mandates.

The best way to address this issue is through the use of data. Data that follow the children and their siblings and families, looking at a wide range of indicators (health, attendance, grades, scores, the use of outside activities, engagement with school, investment in learning outside of class, etc.), need to

2 It is important to note that Alabama has no legislation allowing for charter schools.

There is an urgent need to plan to avoid these inequitable outcomes with the same level of intent and investment that goes into parking and plumbing.

be discussed regularly with families and with providers. Midcourse corrections to improve outcomes for children have to be at the center of those discussions.

Designing engines, not amenities

Residents returning to or entering Park Place and their North Side neighborhoods include large numbers of African American families, including some who have been able to build comfortable lives and others who have not had the educational and employment opportunities they deserve. While holding the highest expectations for their children and grandchildren, many residents are very clear that they want schools that can, as one grandmother put it, "yield something you can count on, given that college isn't going to be for everybody." They want the initiative to serve as an engine for equitable opportunity for all.

Many of these residents are less convinced that the amenities planned for Park Place – a parking structure, a landscaped park, pedestrian streets and the like – will lead to equitable outcomes. They are fearful that young, middle-class families will come for the downtown conveniences and the early day care and then leave once their children reach school age. They worry that the surface diversity might actually mask segregation within schools and classrooms.

There is an urgent need to plan to avoid these outcomes with the same level of intent and investment that goes into parking and plumbing. In short, the community has to be "wired" for equity. Although there are ideas on the table, Birmingham could learn from the experience in other cities, such as Chicago, that have faced similar dilemmas.

Creating civic support

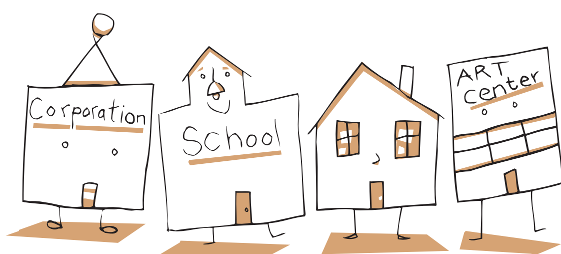
Park Place is a HOPE VI project, funded by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development and supported by the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit program. Those funds provide one-time dollars for the replacement of distressed, low-income public housing with mixed-income units.

But there are no dollars for the ongoing programs, staff, or materials of the kind required by the dual-focus education system that is envisioned for the families and children in Birmingham's North Side neighborhoods. At the same time, Alabama's tax code dramatically underfunds public education; even existing community-school programs in Birmingham are being cut back. Unless the Birmingham Learning Initiative can build substantial and ongoing public and private support, the program proposed for Park Place and the surrounding neighborhoods faces the same threat as landscaping in public sites in times of budget cuts – a beautiful plan, an initial burst of color, then dry grass.

The challenges are clear. While there could be an initial wave of support from local and regional foundations, possibly even from individual local donors, such funds do not consti-

tute an ongoing stream of support. Institutions like the art museum, the university, the McWane Science Center, or the Civil Rights Institute can make an initial donation of expertise, but their own budgets could not sustain year after year of staff time. If the dual school day and extended learning programs are to carry all the attending children to successful entrance into high school, the programs will have to be of high quality, improve continuously, and stay consistently coordinated. This is not the work of volunteers; it demands skilled staff over and above what schools can usually provide.

What would convince the mayor and his successors to step forward with public funds? What would convince county commissioners that an investment could spark educational improvement throughout the region? Without these kinds of commitments, it is hard to imagine the proposed education system thriving and enduring.



Birmingham Is Not Alone

In the 1960s, at the height of the civil rights movement, it was easy to think of Birmingham as an outlier – and outcast – city where it took violent struggles to desegregate public schools. Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth tried to escort his own children through the doors at Philips High School, only to be beaten back. Then it turned out that Birmingham was not unique. Boston, with its century of abolitionist and Underground Railway history, also erupted over busing plans designed to integrate public schools.

A quarter of a century later, keenly aware of their history, Birmingham residents are thinking through strategies that could equalize additional opportunities to learn.

A quarter of a century later, keenly aware of their history, Birmingham residents are thinking through strategies that could equalize additional opportunities to learn – this time, the kind of learning that occurs after school, on weekends, and in the summer. Again,

Birmingham is not alone. In cities across the country, on any given afternoon, some girls wait out the hours while others go on learning, whether it is in choir or libraries or lessons. The Learning Initiative is an effort to name and to change these differences in children's opportunities. Translating the Initiative from a blueprint to lived fact will be charged, hard, and imperfect, but absolutely crucial in Birmingham – and everywhere else.

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