

Philadelphia
Education Fund



**Bringing School Reform to the Public:
Public Engagement Initiatives in
Philadelphia from 1995 to 2000**

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Philadelphia Education Fund

April 2000

This report was funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts through a grant to the Philadelphia Education Fund. The opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Pew Charitable Trusts. Permission to duplicate this report is granted by the Philadelphia Education Fund. Assistance on this project was provided by Rochelle Nichols Solomon, Betsey Useem, and Karen Goldman.

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2000

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In order to make the revolutionary changes proposed in this Action Design, we need the public's permission. The schools belong to them -- as citizens, as taxpayers, as parents. Community after community across the United States has learned, often when it was too late, that schools will not improve without sustained public understanding and support.

(Children Achieving Action Design, VII - 1, 1995)

This report describes the public engagement efforts in education that have taken place in the School District of Philadelphia since 1995, the year that Superintendent David Hornbeck launched a comprehensive set of reforms across the public school system. These reforms, called *Children Achieving*, included outreach to parents and the public as one of their key objectives. In order to catalog and consider the impact of the ensuing public engagement efforts of the School District and community groups, we conducted an extensive review of documentary evidence, interviewed 21 leaders of the engagement initiatives, and observed a subset of the activities.¹

The public engagement activities of this period (1995-2000) generally aimed at either *getting information out* to people, including teachers, parents, and the larger community, or *bringing people in* to reform efforts. "Getting information out" included various methods of informing the public about reform efforts and included soliciting their input and support. Approaches aimed at "bringing people in" included galvanizing parents and community residents to work as agents for change in schools and in the system, encouraging them to advocate for public schools in broader policy arenas, and facilitating the provision of services of public and private agencies to school children and their families.

Setting the Scene: The Background of the *Children Achieving Agenda*

The history of public engagement since the implementation of *Children Achieving* really begins in April 1994 when, as a result of her decision in *Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission v. the School District of Philadelphia*, Judge Doris A. Smith of the Commonwealth Court appointed an educational team to investigate the Philadelphia public schools. For four months, the educational team consulted with thousands of citizens about the problems facing Philadelphia's schools. Those consulted included students, teachers, parents, the Board of Education, superintendents, and neighborhood community action groups. The team conducted site

¹ The authors were interns at the Philadelphia Education Fund during the 1999-2000 school year. They conducted their research during the winter and spring of that academic year.

visits to over sixty schools, and fielded over 1,000 written recommendations from citizens. The team also participated in a series of four regional meetings for parents and community members, organized by an independent and loose coalition of education activists and advocates in order to build grassroots community involvement “around the Judge Smith ruling to improve... schools.”

In its final report, the educational team reported a dismal portrait of the Philadelphia school system. They cited “an overall attitude of helplessness and resignation” among school staff and citizens around aspects of Philadelphia’s public education system including ineffective teaching and learning practices and policies, dysfunctional organization, lack of an accountability system, and failure of public will. The educational team’s recommendations for the School District stressed the need for an overhaul of the school system:

The team proposes a massive reconnection of the City--and its citizens, agencies, and institutions--to the public educational system. Such a fundamental reorientation required a major increase in the public's investment in education and in its expectations for students, and needs a level of commitment, energy, attention, and resources unprecedented for urban public education.²

With regard to public engagement, the team recommended the publication of an annual listing of all of the Philadelphia institutions and agencies providing services to the District, the formation of local school councils, and the creation of a city-wide assembly from the membership of those local councils. The findings from this report were released to the public and, soon after, the Parents Union, an independent group, organized community meetings to discuss the findings. This report, the result of substantial efforts at public engagement, set the scene for the Hornbeck administration’s *Children Achieving Action Design*.

The *Children Achieving Action Design* itself drew heavily on extensive public engagement efforts. When the plan was in its formative stages, input was solicited from well over one thousand administrators, teachers, and parents from the city’s schools, as well as the city’s general citizenry. The planning of the *Action Design* was the District’s first effort at public engagement and signaled its commitment to community outreach.

The *Action Design* outlined a comprehensive vision for reforming Philadelphia’s schools and included the recommendations coming out of 22 public meetings independently sponsored by the emerging Alliance of Public School Advocates. Using a listening campaign design, these meetings focused on parents’ and communities’ *compliments of and concerns about* public

² Valerie Swaim-Cade McCoullum et al., A Philadelphia Primer: The School District of Philadelphia Educational Team Report, submitted to Judge Doris A. Smith, Commonwealth Court, Philadelphia, PA, September 15, 1994, p. 21.

education. Findings emphasized a need for strong and effective public engagement and contributed to the *Action Design*'s five-point plan to "engage the public in shaping, understanding, supporting, and participating in school reform." The five key strategies were to:

- Continue listening closely to what the community wanted and expected from its schools and its children;
- Develop accountability tools to help the public assess the District's performance;
- Develop messages and strategies that clearly explained to people what Philadelphia's schools were doing and why;
- Provide support for the [Alliance for Public School Advocates'] efforts to mobilize and organize the community in support of high-quality public education;
- Build the capacity of all District staff to be better ambassadors for educational excellence.

Although public engagement was only one piece of many in the *Action Design*, it was emphasized as an essential component to successful school reform.

Public Engagement Initiatives: 1995-2000

The public engagement efforts that have taken place since the official launching of *Children Achieving* have been incredibly diverse. They have both supported the Hornbeck administration's original vision and added to it. They have been initiated by the District and by organizations outside of the District. They have intended to reach anywhere from a handful of people to all citizens of the Philadelphia metropolitan area. What follows are summary descriptions of these efforts, highlighting the most important initiatives and offering a representative sample of the less extensive efforts. We have classified the initiatives into the following specific categories:

- Publications
- Public information campaigns
- Community forums/town meetings
- Parent and community educator institutes
- School governance and volunteer efforts
- Parent organizing initiatives at the school level
- Citizen advocacy for policy change

Within those categories and where possible, we note the following information about the initiative: whether it was District/non-District initiated; its objectives and target audience; its time span; and the number of people reached. We also offer some preliminary comments about the apparent efficacy and challenges faced by each of the initiatives.



I. PUBLICATIONS

A variety of publications have attempted to raise awareness about school reforms in Philadelphia since 1995. Publications have had multiple purposes, including one-shot attempts to inform the public about issues, regularly published newspapers, and annual reports on all schools in the District. Target audiences have included teachers, business leaders, parents, community organizations, and the citizenry at large. Some publications have sought only to transfer information while others have hoped to solicit action from the readers.

Below we describe the major publications, along with a sampling of the less visible one-time-only publications.

The *Philadelphia Inquirer* has been a source of information about the state of Philadelphia's schools since October 1994 when it published its first "report card" on the public schools. The first report card, largely in response to the findings of Judge Smith's educational team, sounded an alarm to the public. Subsequent report cards have been less alarming in nature.

Original Report on District Data, 10/23/94, "District in Distress: By Almost Any Measure, Philadelphia's Public Schools are Failing In Their Mission Of Educating Children. And The Problems Are Getting Worse"

Description: This was the first report of its kind on the state of Philadelphia's public schools. Published as a special supplement in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* with the District's consent, this report was written in response to the findings of Judge Doris Smith's educational team. It contained comprehensive data about the Philadelphia schools including the number of children on welfare in schools, the diversity of languages in schools, student performance on the SATs, drop-out rates, and teachers' salaries. It depicted a school district truly "in distress."

Audience: General public.

Distribution Information: Distributed to entire readership of the *Inquirer*.

Annual Report Cards in the Philadelphia Inquirer

Description: These yearly report cards present data from the District on individual schools' performances on a variety of measures including achievement test scores, teacher salaries, teacher-student ratio, and graduation rates. They are included in the newspaper as a special supplement.

Audience: General public.

Distribution Information: Distributed to entire readership of the *Inquirer*.

Publications used as public engagement pieces have also taken the form of regularly published newsletters or newspapers. These outlets appeal to a variety of audiences, from the community-at-large to teachers to business leaders.

Philadelphia Public School Notebook (1994-present)

Description: The *Notebook* is an independent publication in Philadelphia that reports on needed changes in the schools and that highlights the progress of specific reforms. It is published quarterly and includes a Spanish translation. The *Notebook* staff is engaged in an effort to publish issues in partnership with other organizations.

Audience: Parents, teachers, and community members.

Distribution Information: The *Notebook* prints 40,000 copies of the paper quarterly. One hundred copies go to each of the 260 schools in Philadelphia and the 22 cluster offices. The rest of the copies are distributed through the Free Library branches and to 100 to 150 community drop-off sites that include everything from the offices of the Alliance Organizing Project (AOP) and the Eastern Philadelphia Organizing Project (EPOP), to video stores and unemployment offices.

FRNetworker

Description: This publication is a monthly newsletter published by the District to report

on the activities of the Family Resource Network and other information related to social and health services.

Audience: Parents, educators, community members involved with or interested in the Family Resource Network.

Philadelphia Teacher (1995-1999)

Description: This monthly publication was published by the Greater Philadelphia First/*Children Achieving Challenge* and was mailed to the homes of all teachers in the Philadelphia public school system. It addressed current school reform issues from the perspective of the School District and the Challenge.

Audience: Teachers.

Straight Talk

Description: The Greater Philadelphia Urban Affairs Coalition published these informational pieces with the intention of debunking some of the main myths about Philadelphia education (i.e. achievement, how budget is made).

Audience: Opinion leaders: newspaper reporters, government offices, heads of organizations, community leaders.

A host of small informational pieces have been published by the District or through the *Children Achieving Challenge* (1995-2000), run by Greater Philadelphia First. These publications have often focused on specific reform issues and been used as encouraging updates to parents about the successes of school reform. What follows is a sampling of some of these publications.

Annual Reports on the *Children Achieving Challenge* (1996-2000)

Description: The District's partnerships and accomplishments were described in these reports issued by the Greater Philadelphia First/*Children Achieving Challenge*.

Audience: Business leaders, opinion leaders, foundations that have given or might give money.

First and Second Year Evaluation Reports of *Children Achieving*: Philadelphia's Education Reform, 1995-96 and 1996-97 by the Consortium for Policy Research in Education; Research for Action; OMG Center for Collaborative Learning, for the *Children Achieving Challenge*.

Description: These candid research reports summarized data on the progress and effectiveness of the implementation of the *Children Achieving* reform program. The research was conducted as part of a national effort to evaluate the five-year grants from the Annenberg Foundation to selected school districts. Final reports will be released in December 2000.

Audience: Business leaders (particularly those contributing to the matching funds required by the Annenberg grant), public policy makers, researchers, the School District, the general public.

Citizen's Guide to the Philadelphia School Budget

Description: This catchy guide, published by the Greater Philadelphia Urban Affairs Coalition and the Greater Philadelphia First, explained for the average Philadelphia citizen how budget decisions are made, the ways in which funds are allocated, and why additional funds are needed from the state for Philadelphia's schools.

Audience: All citizens, especially parents of school children.

Reaching Higher: New Requirements and Supports for Promotion and Graduation

Description: This pamphlet, published by the School District, explained the promotion and graduation requirements that were to take effect beginning in the 1999-2000 school year. It was distributed to parents before parent-teacher conferences and was to be discussed at those conferences.

Audience: Parents.

"Tell them we are rising": SAT-9 Results

Description: This one-time 10 page pamphlet from the School District reported on trends in students' standardized achievement (SAT-9) scores since the inception of

Children Achieving. This piece highlighted the positive impact of the reform on student achievement but cautioned about the need for greater improvement.

Audience: Intended for broad audience.

Up Close

Description: Published by Greater Philadelphia First/*Children Achieving Challenge*, this publication gave readable one-page descriptions of the components of the *Children Achieving* reform.

Audience: General public.

Finally, the School District's informative web page has been developed since the beginning of the Hornbeck administration and serves as a communication tool that reaches the public, District employees and partner groups, and the national education community.

COMMENT: In general, these publications have reached wide and diverse audiences but it is difficult to measure the effectiveness of the publications in imparting their messages.



II. PUBLIC INFORMATION CAMPAIGNS

From 1996-2000, Greater Philadelphia First/*Children Achieving Challenge* ran multiple issue campaigns in collaboration with the School District of Philadelphia. These public information campaigns were intended to raise awareness about changes in school policy. For example, they encouraged parents to be sure that their children were well rested and fed before they took the SAT-9 test, and they explained the new graduation and promotion requirements. Each issue campaign lasted for several weeks. Although the campaigns reached the general public, they were aimed at parents and families. The campaigns usually included the following components:

- Brochures translated into seven languages and distributed at the school site;
- Radio advertisements on both Spanish and English channels;
- Billboards around the city;
- Advertisements in newspapers across the city;
- Rallies in schools.



Non-profit organizations, such as the Philadelphia Campaign for Public Education (PCPE), have also used city-wide advertising campaigns to garner support for school reform. In late 1996, PCPE launched an advertising campaign to raise public awareness and support of school reform issues and the need for increased state funding for Philadelphia schools. They used media outreach, advertising, direct mail, and special events to reach this goal. In general, however, large-scale public information campaigns have been limited to District efforts, presumably because of their cost.

COMMENT: Public information campaigns are a questionable method of public engagement for transferring information about reform to a large number of people. They appear to have been somewhat successful when centered on a specific issue. For example, many more children have been taking the SAT-9 test, perhaps because of the effort to notify parents of its importance.



III. TASK FORCES AND COMMUNITY FORUMS/TOWN MEETINGS

Community forums and town meetings seek input from individuals or groups with an interest in the schools, and they have been an integral part of public engagement efforts since the beginning of the Hornbeck administration. Community forums have been held for a variety of reasons. Some forums have been intended to address specific issues, such as school funding inequities, whereas others have been held to gather a general impression of the public's attitudes towards the schools. Some were meant to provide opportunities for debate and discussion while others were meant to solicit public opinion and expertise in order to formulate new guidelines or policy decisions.

Academic Standards Development (1995)

Description: The District recruited parents, teachers and community members through community organizations to give input on the development of English, Math, and Science standards, and to review standards after they were developed. All participants were compensated for their time although parents were compensated at a lower rate.

Participants: Parents, academics, business and community members.

Number of Participants: Approximately twenty citizens were involved in the writing process in each standards area, and 30 participated in the review process per standards area.



Length of Initiative: The process lasted several months and required a substantial time commitment of participants.

Strengths and Challenges: The community members involved were able to influence the development of the standards. This process also prepared a cadre of messengers who were able to talk about the standards in their individual communities. However, some felt that the tension between parents and educators around issues of teaching and learning and the lower rate of pay for parents tempered parents' influence.

Don't Miss the Bus (1996-1998)

Description: Eight school bus tour events called "Don't Miss the Bus" were held June between June 1996 and May 1998. The tours were organized by the School District to help visitors observe first-hand the changes occurring in Philadelphia schools. Riders received school demographic profiles, fact sheets about reform and data regarding the funding disparities between city and suburban public schools.

Participants: More than 300 individuals participated in the tours.

Length of Initiative: The tours took place over a two-year period.

Strengths and Challenges: The tours resulted in more volunteers and contributions of equipment and other resources by organizations whose representatives participated. New alliances were formed between suburban and city organizations. These events also garnered extensive television and print coverage.

Philadelphia Education Summit (1997)

Description: The Summit, organized by the Philadelphia City Council, aimed to stimulate broad discourse on public education issues. Televised forums covered areas of interest, focus groups, and town meetings in all clusters. There were several meetings for each cluster, held at varying times to increase access. Participants met in small groups and talked about changes they wished to see.

Participants: The general public was involved via televised forums and town meetings in clusters. A variety of stakeholders participated in the major conference in February

1997, including parents, educators, civic and community leaders, government and elected officials, students, the faith community, and corporate leaders.

Number of Participants: Over 400 people participated in the Summit's major conference.

Length of Initiative: The initiative became public in June of 1997 and lasted until December of 1997.

Community Forums: Metropolitan Christian Council (1998-2000)

Description: The Metropolitan Christian Council, an independent interfaith organization, has held 6 community forums in cooperation with local congregations centered on the issue of fair and adequate funding for Philadelphia's schools. The Episcopal diocese organized five of these forums in the spring of 1999 and asked each of its parishes to become active in the fight for fair funding. The sixth forum was held in June 1998 in cooperation with the AAUW and the League of Women Voters. The Council is continuing its outreach work on fair funding.

Participants: The majority of participants have been teachers or administrators in the Philadelphia schools, despite publicity for the forums that reached over 22,000 people.

Number of Participants: Approximately 20 to 25 individuals attended each forum, totaling approximately 120 to 150 participants.

Length of Initiative: The forums began in 1998 and the group remains active in the fight for fair funding. The Council works to encourage denominations to take action on issues of school reform. The Council is providing support services, such as sample letters and a speakers bureau, for the faith community.

Strengths and Challenges: The Metropolitan Christian Council's activities have the potential to appeal to a broad audience and there is no letup in their commitment. They have encountered difficulties in reaching people who are not already concerned about Philadelphia's schools.



Mayor John Street’s “Friends of Public Education” Community Meetings (February-March 2000)

Description: Mayor John Street held community meetings about education issues in all 22 clusters soon after he assumed his position as Mayor. He warned those attending that a genuine fiscal crisis in the District loomed and that they should demand an adequately-funded high quality school system from elected officials, particularly at the state level. The meetings appeared to be part of what will be a long-term campaign for fair funding for the school system.

Participants: Community members, parents, employees of the District.

Number of Participants: Attendance varied from several hundred per meeting to overflow crowds.

Length of Initiative: The meetings were a one-time initiative held over a two-month period.

Strengths and Challenges: The Mayor succeeded in publicly demonstrating the intensity of his involvement in education issues and the high priority he will place on securing funding equity from the state. Attendance at some of the meetings was poor but, overall, the Mayor succeeded in getting his message out to a large number of people.

COMMENT: Community forums and task forces have demonstrated some potential to bring parents and community members into the school reform process. They have encountered difficulties with attendance and disputes among people representing groups of different interests. According to those interviewed for this study, they have been most successful when centered on a specific goal, such as standards development, or when they have been well-publicized and highly organized, such as the Education Summit.



IV. COMMUNITY ORIENTED LEARNING INSTITUTES

While community forums have been an opportunity for parents and community members to shape the reform process, learning institutes have been a training ground for parents and educators. Learning institutes have provided opportunities to teach parents and community members about school reform policies so that they can learn how to be more effective actors in reform efforts. The institutes put school reform into comprehensible terms so that parents and educators can translate reform talk into reform action. They have often worked in cooperation with existing school reform organizations.

Public Meetings on Standards (Early 1996)

Description: The District held evening meetings in each cluster to inform parents about the standards and what they meant.

Participants: Parents.

Number of Participants: Attendance varied from cluster to cluster.

Length of Initiative: A one-time involvement for parents.

Strengths and Challenges: Poor outreach efforts led to low attendance. Facilitators faced the challenge of how to make a complex body of knowledge accessible and relevant to parents.

PEF Parent Institutes (1997-2000)

Description: The Philadelphia Education Fund (PEF) held two day-long Parent Institutes annually from 1997-2000. The Institutes aimed to increase parents' understanding of teaching and learning strategies so that they could better support their children's learning. They also were designed to increase parents' understanding of school reform efforts. Institutes addressed topics such as the SAT-9 standards, new graduation requirements, constructivist learning, and the college preparation process.

Participants: Parents. Many parents who participated were involved in other organizations or programs such as the Alliance Organizing Project or Home and School Associations.



Number of Participants: Approximately 100 parents participated in each Institute.

Length of Initiative: Parent Institutes began in November of 1997 and continued until Spring 2000.

Strengths and Challenges: Parent Institutes appeared to be effective at getting information out to parents and bringing them into schools to make change. The Institutes complemented the work that parents were already doing with other organizations. One of the Parent Institute's challenges was to reach a larger and more representative group of parents.

PEF Community Teacher Institutes (1998-1999)

Description: PEF also held ten Community Teachers Institutes between 1998 and 2000³. The goals of these Institutes were to build support for the school reform agenda from within the community and to help community teachers in out-of-school programs for youth link their own programs to the District's standards and curriculum frameworks. PEF provided Teaching and Learning Mini-Grants to these groups as well. Through this program, PEF awarded \$1,000 to community teachers to incorporate their learning from the Institutes into their programs.

Participants: Community teachers, including after-school teachers, and Sunday school teachers.

Number of Participants: 183 community teachers representing 79 community-based organizations.

Length of Initiative: The Institutes began in May 1998 and continued through the 1999-2000 school year.

Strengths and Challenges: The Community Teachers Institutes provided an important link between school reform in the formal school system and among community educators. This link meant that school reforms reached children at a more comprehensive level. Another strength of the Institutes was the support offered by the mini-grants. These grants enabled participants to following up on the ideas learned at the Institutes. To be more effective, however, the Institutes needed to reach a larger number of community teachers.

³ PEF found a great deal of interest and overlap between the audiences separately targeted for the Parent and Community Teacher Institutes. In response, beginning in the Fall 1998, PEF convened joint Institutes for Parents and Community Teachers.

School to Career Community Institute (2/98)

Description: The District's Office of Education for Employment organized a four-day Institute to support the implementation of school-to-career opportunities, including Cluster Resource Boards of business and community partners.

Participants: Students, teachers, administrators, business leaders, members of community organizations, academics.

Number of Participants: Approximately 250.

Length of Initiative: One-time institute.

Strengths and Challenges: The School to Career Community Institute (STC) provided an opportunity for key stakeholder groups to learn about the District's STC vision and to begin to establish Cluster Resource Boards. Since that time a number of these Boards have been established and operate with varying degrees of successful collaboration.

COMMENT: Learning institutes have been an effective means for engaging a small sector of the public in school reforms. They have been most successful when linked to the work of other public engagement initiatives. For example, PEF's Parent Institutes have attracted participants through outreach to other organizations that are actively working to support leadership development among parents in support of school reform. In this way, the Institutes serve as a support for already existing organizational work. The challenge remaining, however, is to include parents who are less connected to reform.



V. SCHOOL GOVERNANCE AND VOLUNTEER EFFORTS

Efforts to bring parents and community members into schools to participate in governance and to provide services at the school level have been part of the *Children Achieving* reform agenda. The formation of Local School Councils (LSCs) and the 10,000 Volunteers program was a deliberate attempt to connect the public with the life of the schools.



Local School Councils (1995 to present)

Description: Each school in the District is supposed to have a Local School Council, with four elected parents out of 12-15 members. Parents have a decision-making role in LSCs on issues concerning facilities, security, and transport, and an advisory role in budget and teaching and learning decisions. In addition, the LSCs are supposed to inform the wider community about school-related issues. The District offers training workshops for Council members.

Participants: Parents, teachers, community members. Parents are chosen by election to two-year renewable terms.

Number of Participants: 185 schools had certified councils as of the 1999-2000 school year.

Strengths and Challenges: While Local School Councils are meant to weigh in on selected areas of decision making, their effectiveness is spotty. Schools with less active Home and School Associations tend to have trouble starting councils. Overall, LSCs have dropped from view as a key component of the reform.

10,000 Volunteers (1995 to present)

Description: This program is an initiative of the District's cluster-based Family Resource Network. Volunteers are recruited to work in all the District's 22 clusters.

Participants: Eighty percent of the volunteers are parents of school children. Volunteers choose the length and time commitment that they desire.

Number of Participants: Fourteen thousand people have served as volunteers in the city's schools. Recruitment efforts include local advertising, citywide TV and radio announcements, and contacts with community organizations.

Strengths and Challenges: Supporters of the program contend that the experience of volunteering leads citizens to become advocates for public education, and they point to the high incidence of volunteers in advocating for funding equity. Training for the

volunteers apparently lags in some clusters, however, and rigorous evaluations comparing numbers of volunteers before and after the implementation of the initiative have not been conducted. It is difficult to measure the intensity of the commitment of the volunteers.

COMMENT: The effectiveness of Local School Councils and the extensive use of school volunteers have not been evaluated in any systematic way. Implementation and activity levels appear to vary significantly from school to school. Data from the 1999 Teacher Survey conducted by the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) as part of the *Children Achieving Challenge* evaluation show that half of the teachers believe that Local School Councils had “no effect.”



VI. PARENT ORGANIZING INITIATIVES AT THE SCHOOL LEVEL

The Alliance Organizing Project (AOP) and the Eastern Philadelphia Organizing Project (EPOP) carry out grassroots community organizing efforts. These groups function outside of the framework of the existing school reform initiatives led by the District and partner groups. They develop parents’ leadership skills with the explicit goal of equipping them to push for the school reforms they want.

Alliance Organizing Project (AOP) (1995 to present)

Description: The Alliance Organizing Project works directly with groups of parents to build power and partnerships with the schools and the District. The AOP develops parent teams at the school level and the city level. School-level teams address problems within individual schools and often energize school-level Home and School activity or act as a catalyst for the formation of a local Home and School group and/or Local School Council. Citywide teams address more policy-oriented issues.

Number of Participants: 20 to 24 schools in Philadelphia currently have teams in some phase of the organizing process. Local teams are composed of anywhere from 8 to 30 parents.

Strengths and Challenges: The AOP has won several victories including beefing up security at Hunter Elementary school, saving a bilingual teaching position at McKinley Elementary and addressing the teacher vacancy issue in Fall 1998 at the citywide level. These victories, however, have often met resistance at the school and District’s Central



Office levels. Several of the respondents for this study suggested that AOP might benefit from a stronger partnership with the central leadership of the Home and School Council.

Eastern Philadelphia Organizing Project (EPOP) (1991 to present)

Description: EPOP is a faith-based and school-based multi-issue organization. The organization has parent leadership teams in five schools in the Olney and Kensington clusters. Parent leadership teams have successfully worked on issues such as the lack of libraries in some schools, new reading programs, bilingual staff and technology to name a few. EPOP also works closely with Youth United for Change (YUC) which organizes students in four high schools.

Number of Participants: Each of the five parent teams is comprised of 10 to 20 parents.

Strengths and Challenges: The parent leadership teams have been successful at achieving some school-level changes, but their effect usually does not extend beyond individual schools.

COMMENT: Many of the people that we interviewed cited the AOP and EPOP's work as one of the most successful public engagement efforts that have taken place in recent years. Interviewees described the AOP as an organization that has truly involved and empowered parents in reform. While the AOP and EPOP have had some success in organizing parents, both organizations are still seeking to strengthen and sustain their efforts, in part by forging stronger alliances with other community organizations. An example of such efforts is EPOP's contribution to raising the issue of education during the recent Mayor's Campaign with two forums drawing 2000 citizens from across the city and AOP's recent work designed to get broader parent input into the Teachers' Contract through a citywide listening campaign.



VII. CITIZEN ADVOCACY FOR POLICY CHANGE

Not all public engagement efforts have concentrated at school-level reform; some have explicitly attempted to involve the public at a broad policy level. **The Pennsylvania Campaign for Public Education** (PCPE) has been the primary organization involved in engaging the public around the question of equitable funding from the state for Philadelphia's public schools.

Petition for Fair and Adequate Funding (1998 to present)

Description: PCPE has gathered 10,000 signatures for a petition that demands fair and adequate funding for Pennsylvania's schools. Many of the signatures were gathered at events associated with school opening in September.

Participants: The Campaign appeals largely to parents.

Number of Participants: 10,000 people statewide have signed the petition. Ten percent of the signatories have attended meetings held by the Campaign. Another 25 to 50 people have met with state legislators through the Campaign.

Length of Initiative: This effort has been continuous since 1998.

Rally in Harrisburg (11/16/99)

Description: PCPE organized a state-wide rally in Harrisburg to show support for the KEEPS bill aimed at creating fair funding levels for public school systems across the state.

Participants: Similar to the petition, parents have been the main supporters of this effort.

Number of Participants: Approximately 450 people participated in the rally in support of KEEPS bill.

Length of Initiative: One-time event.

COMMENT: The PCPE's initiatives have had success in terms of the numbers of parents involved, but, overall, such efforts often hold less appeal for parents than involvement in efforts that have an immediate and visible impact on their children's schools.

Summing Up

The public engagement initiatives profiled in this report have aimed at boosting public understanding of, support for, and involvement in the *Children Achieving* reforms that centered on raising Philadelphia public school students' academic achievement. Since the onset of the reform, District officials have aggressively disseminated information describing its components, trends in students' achievement levels, school performance indicators, and descriptions of new requirements and supports. Funding for the District's overall operating budget is now explained in a highly readable document. District researchers have collaborated with external evaluators to produce candid evaluations of the progress of the reform. Parents are included in Local School Councils and were part of the standards-writing and review process. The District's cluster offices recruit school volunteers. The District has been joined by the City government and partner groups to mount community forums and lobbying efforts in the struggle for fair funding from the state. Community-based organizations have organized parents to fight for changes in their children's schools and in selected education policies.

The varied nature, timing, and sponsorship of the public engagement efforts described in this paper help explain why it is so hard for parents, politicians, and the public to have a coherent grasp of the public engagement campaign for Philadelphia schools that has been underway since 1995. In fact, a great deal of activity has taken place. The compendium of activities described in this report show that the District, its partner groups, and independent groups have conducted a sustained effort to reach multiple audiences. While it is difficult to evaluate the efficacy of some activities or initiatives, when they are viewed in total, they constitute an impressive outreach effort.

At the same time, public involvement has not yet reached the point where an aroused citizenry is loudly demanding quality education for the city's children, nor are Philadelphia's residents using the power of the ballot in state elections to express their concerns. Parents have not formed a highly visible and well-organized constituency in support of the *Children Achieving* efforts. At the school level, parents when organized can have power to change egregious problems (e.g. an incompetent teacher or principal, a succession of substitutes in a child's class), but end up spending enormous energies getting buy-in and support from principals and teachers for ongoing partnerships. To date, much of the public engagement effort has remained focused on *getting information out*, with little attention paid to the dynamics and readiness of schools to support parents as active leaders in helping to remedy problems that would be considered intolerable in nearby suburban districts.

The condition of public education, however, has now become a front-burner issue in the city. It was a major focus of debate during the 1999 mayoral campaigns, and the new Mayor, John Street, has made the issue one of the centerpieces of his new administration. Media coverage of the fate of the reform has escalated in 2000. Religious groups have stepped up their efforts to fight for fair funding for the District from the state. In short, education in Philadelphia is now being debated more vigorously in the public square. Whether this is propelled by immediate crises in funding or the result of the long-term efforts of the Hornbeck administration and other community groups to raise consciousness about education issues, or both, is debatable. There is no question, however, that education reformers in Philadelphia have taken seriously their commitment to reach out to parents and the general public as they pursue much-needed changes in public education.

	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
PUBLICATIONS										
District in Distress				X						
Annual Report Cards in the <i>Philadelphia Inquirer</i>				X						
Philadelphia Public School Notebook				X	X	X	X	X	X	X
FRNetworker				X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Philadelphia Teacher					X	X	X	X	X	X
Straight Talk					X	X	X	X	X	X
Annual Reports on the <i>Children Achieving Challenge</i>					X	X	X	X	X	X
1st & 2nd Year Evaluation Reports of <i>Children Achieving</i>								X		
Citizen's Guide to the Philadelphia School Budget									X	X
Reaching Higher: New Requirements & Supports for Promotion & Graduation								X		
"Tell Them We are Rising"; SAT-9 Results								X		
Up Close								X		
PUBLIC INFORMATION CAMPAIGNS						X	X	X	X	X
TASK FORCES AND COMMUNITY FORUMS/TOWN MEETINGS										
Academic Standards Development					X					
Don't Miss the Bus						X	X	X		
Philadelphia Education Summit							X			
Community Forums: Metropolitan Christian Council								X	X	X
Mayor John Street's "Friends of Public Education" Community Meetings										X
COMMUNITY ORIENTED LEARNING INSTITUTES										
Public Meetings on Standards						X				
PEF Parent Institutes							X	X	X	X
PEF Community Teacher Institutes									X	
School to Career Community Institute								X		
SCHOOL GOVERNANCE & VOLUNTEER EFFORTS										
Local School Councils					X	X	X	X	X	X
10,000 Volunteers					X	X	X	X	X	X
PARENT ORGANIZING INITIATIVES AT THE SCHOOL LEVEL										
Alliance Organizing Project (AOP)					X	X	X	X	X	X
Eastern Philadelphia Organizing Project (EPOP)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
CITIZEN ADVOCACY FOR POLICY CHANGE										
Petition for Fair & Adequate Funding								X	X	X
Rally in Harrisburg									X	

Public Engagement Overview

I: Public Engagement Interview Questions

1. What is your definition of public engagement?
2. To your knowledge, what have been the major public engagement initiatives since 1995?
3. Which of these initiatives were you involved in or have a good deal of knowledge about?
4. Who was the target audience for the initiative(s)? Can you give estimates of the size of the target audience and how many and what categories of people were reached by it?
5. What were its goals? What level of the School District was involved (school, cluster, districtwide)?
6. What was the time span of the initiative? Was it a one-time, episodic, or continuous effort?
7. In your view, what was the outcome/impact of each initiative?
8. What do you consider to have been the most successful public engagement initiatives? Why?
9. What do you consider to be the most important categories of public engagement for the next five years? Why are these important areas?
10. Other comments?

Appendix II: Interview Participants

Sue Becker, Director of Education, The Partnership for School Reform, Greater Philadelphia First

Erdeen Britt, Parent Organizer, Philadelphia Education Fund

Andrea Brown, Program Operations Manager, Philadelphia Education Fund

Shereese Williamson Carlisle, Program Associate, formerly with Philadelphia Education Fund

Jim Clements, former William Penn Cluster Leader, School District of Philadelphia

Kelly Collings, Assistant Director, Alliance Organizing Project

Helen Cunningham, Executive Director, Samuel Fels Fund; School Board member

Ellen Foley, former Research Staff, Consortium for Policy Research on Education, University of Pennsylvania

Ed Geiger, Executive Director, Metropolitan Christian Council

Jan Gillespie, Fels Cluster Leader, School District of Philadelphia

Steve Honeyman, Director, Eastern Philadelphia Organizing Project

Leroy Howell, Program Director, Greater Philadelphia First

Pat Knapper, Office of Leadership and Learning, School District of Philadelphia

Rosemary Matthews, former Community Organizer, Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth (retired)

Joseph Meade, Family Resource Network, School District of Philadelphia

Ruth Curran Neild, Associate Research Scientist, Johns Hopkins University

Vicky Phillips, former Executive Director, Children Achieving Challenge; Superintendent, Lancaster (PA) Public Schools

Ros Purnell, Assistant Director, School and Community Partnerships, Philadelphia Education Fund

Len Rieser, Co-Director, Education Law Center

Gail Tatum, Communications Director, Greater Philadelphia First

Shelly Yanoff, Executive Director, Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth

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