



NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES
Institute for Youth, Education, and Families

The Numbers Tell the Story: Using Data to Build an Accountability Framework for Your Schools
November 17, 2005

Moderator: **John E. Kyle**, Program Director
Institute for Youth, Education, and Families
National League of Cities (NLC)

Speakers:

Stephanie Robinson, Principal Partner, The Education Trust, Washington, D.C.
Philip W. Rhoades, Professor of Criminal Justice, Texas A&M University, Corpus Christi,
Texas

KYLE: Good afternoon. This is John Kyle at the National League of Cities' Institute for Youth, Education and Families. I say afternoon because I'm in Washington, where it is afternoon, but I know that some of you across the country, it's still the morning. We welcome all of you to the call. This is one of several dozen audioconferences that we've sponsored over the past couple of years. And we've got a series of monthly calls established through June of 2006. And if you're a first-time listener, you might want to go to our website at www.nlc.org/iyef and look at our schedule of upcoming calls, because you're welcome to register for any or all of them that are coming up during the next eight months.

Today we're talking about how "Numbers Tell the Story," how data can influence and help you as local leaders, affect education and local school reform efforts in your communities. We have with us two speakers to help us talk about this and participate in the conversation with us. First we have Stephanie Robinson from Education Trust, based in Washington. I think she is in California today. Welcome, Stephanie.

ROBINSON: Thank you very much. And I am in Sunny San Francisco.

KYLE: Great. And in Texas, we have Phil Rhoades, who is with Texas A&M at Corpus Christi, if I believe. Is that correct?

RHOADES: That's correct, yes.

KYLE: Welcome to both of you, and I appreciate you taking the time to join us today. I think that one of our reasons for wanting to get in to this topic was to help municipal officials and other community leaders know how data can have an impact on having successful education in public school programs in their communities. I'd like to start with a question to each of you,

and perhaps you can give us an example or story of where you've seen data put to use to help in a particular community, either your home community or a community you worked with, or even just one you read about or know about. Phil, could you give us an example of where you've seen data being -- just go to the story of some community where data has been helpful in advancing an education or school reform agenda.

RHOADES: Okay. It's essentially our community here in Corpus Christi and the actual county -- Nueces County. We started a number of years back in a strategic planning process to prevent juvenile delinquency. And in that construct, a risk factor for delinquency was academic failure. So we're collecting data concerning school performance, dropout, truancy, test scores, that type of thing.

We found in that also in collecting data on resources and assets that we had no afterschool programs in any of the 22 middle schools scattered throughout the county, across 14 school districts. And so using the data to, one, identify problems, and, two, identify service gaps. We began writing grants. And one of the first grants was a 21st Century grant across four school districts who had never cooperated before for \$3.5 million across five years to put in afterschool programs at middle schools. And we've also done several other such grants cooperatively between organizations and place them at the elementary level, the middle school level, the high school level, all aimed at improving academic performance through afterschool support programs. So that's the type of direct application, both in identifying what is the immediate problem, what is the hole or gap in our community's services, and then an ability to use that same information to roll into grant writing.

KYLE: Great. Stephanie, a companion story to that?

ROBINSON: Sure -- one on a school-based scale, and one, a community group in a fairly large Midwestern city organized students in a high school to gather data and to push for school reform. The students were organized into groups. They interviewed students. They interviewed teachers. They looked at test scores -- the data that was publicly available. And they assembled a report, which essentially said that students were failing at unacceptably large rates. The dropout rates were unacceptably large. The instruction in the school from the students' point of view was low level and not interesting. And their report, which was submitted to the school board and to the school staff about two years ago, triggered an ongoing school improvement effort. The school staff are now working hard to improve the instruction and to increase attendance, to lower the dropout rate and generally improve conditions in the school. So were it not for those students gathering the data -- with the help of a community-based organization, I might add -- I don't think that school would have pushed into the kind of reform that is going on there right now. So that's an application of data to push school reform.

KYLE: And I think it's interesting that -- we'll come back to this -- I think in that students were key participants in collecting data.

ROBINSON: Yes. And I just want to say one thing to that. This whole idea of data isn't any use unless it's turned into information that people can use to do something, as Phil just indicated. It points to solutions to problems. Although we're talking about numbers, data isn't always numbers either. So we'll talk about that.

KYLE: Good. Let me backtrack a minute here. I want us to start that way, but Phil and Stephanie, each of you -- start with Phil -- briefly, what is the work you're doing? And why are you or why is Texas A&M at Corpus Christi interested in focusing so much time and energy on measuring educational outcomes and progress? What is your organizational base and why are you so interested in doing this?

RHOADES: There are multiple ones. One is our university is committed to the concept of engagement. That means not just the students, but the faculty, the staff, the university as an entity, engaged with the community. We are one of the schools in the United States -- about 160 -- involved in the American Democracy Project [<http://www.aascu.org/programs/adp/about/default.htm>], which is improving the civic engagement of institutions and their staff, faculty and students.

We started actually before that project began. We've always had a very close connection with our community. And in this strategic planning process, there were five or six of us faculty members. I wound up with, because of a background in my discipline of data analysis related to crime and delinquency, on a committee that started collecting the data as volunteers. And over a period of a couple years, we found funding for that. And so now our social science research center that I direct has a grant that is for the non-profit activity. But the grant is received by the Chamber of Commerce. The non-profit is kind of co-chaired by the city, the county, the United Way, the Chamber of Commerce and our local workforce agency. So those are the five lead agencies. We have about 70 involved. The University is one of them. We go for grants to support then my hiring of students and our production of the data on an ongoing basis. We produce reports and do presentations. We have data tables. We convert those tables into graphics and slides, put all of this on a CD and hand that CD out as often and as many times as we can so that the data is readily available to anyone involved in planning or grant writing or decision making.

A major theme inside this more comprehensive process is academic improvement and improving commitment to schools and to education.

KYLE: I want to underscore one thing you said -- and we'll come back to this later -- but you each have now mentioned what I think of as more unusual partners in this. Stephanie mentioned students as a partner and you've mentioned the Chamber of Commerce as one of the key partners. And I think most people thinking about data are not used to thinking of those folks being key partners and getting this done. Stephanie, tell us a little bit about why you and the Education Trust's part of this.

ROBINSON: The Education Trust [<http://www2.edtrust.org/edtrust>], as you know, is a non-profit organization. We're in Washington, D.C., and Oakland, California. And our mission is to work to close the achievement gap that exists between students of color and students from low-income families and their peers. We work nationally and some of them (inaudible) director Kati Haycock speak about this issue.

We use data to pinpoint the problems within the institution -- the schools and the institutions that teach kids -- those problems that we have control over. And to focus people's attention on those issues that we can control, like teacher quality, teacher qualifications, teacher distribution, the quality of the curriculum and the quality of instruction, support for students. We

gather data on all of those points. We know there are factors outside the school that contribute to students academic functioning, but our organization functions are what we can fix within the system.

And we use data to change people's perceptions of why the gap exists and how it can be fixed. For example, we examine -- as part of the data, we look at student achievement, but we also look at exactly what lessons the students get to learn. What kind of assignments do students get from their teachers? If I get an assignment that has in it a lot for me to learn, if I get to write an essay in my English class and my friend in another English class gets only to draw some pictures -- which students do a lot of in some of our schools -- or they only get to read synopses of books instead of reading books, those two kids get very different educations, if people follow me. Do you follow me, John?

KYLE: Yes.

ROBINSON: So what we do is gather data to document the fact that there are inequities in and among classrooms. And there are inequity involving what students get to learn. And those inequities contribute to the gap. I'll come back to some of that.

KYLE: Good. I just wanted folks to have a little bit of sense of where you guys were coming from.

I think one of the questions I want to get to is what kinds of data and information do you think municipal officials and other community leaders need to have in order to talk about these issues? In NLC's action kit on improving public schools [<http://www.nlc.org/content/Files/Improving%20PS%20Action%20Kit.pdf>], we listed ten questions that we thought local leaders should ask about their schools. I'll give a couple of examples and then ask Stephanie and Phil to add a couple of things that they would put in their list of ten questions that folks should ask for. For instance, what percentage of all students and of poor and minority students take a college prep or similar more rigorous academic curriculum? How have graduation rates and achievement levels changed over time? What proportion of middle school students never make the transition to high school? -- things like that that we suggested were among the top ten questions that they should ask. Are there particular questions -- Stephanie first, and then Phil -- that you would put on such a list that you think local leaders should know more about?

ROBINSON: I think first of all, all data should be disaggregated -- that is, sliced and diced, as we call it -- sliced in terms of race and socioeconomic status, English language learners and socioeconomic status. That is because if you get an average performance, if you say, oh, 90% of our kids in this school are proficient, and they're African-American kids and Latino kids and White kids in that school. But when you break down the data into how Latino and Black and White kids score, there are gaps between how those kids score that the average proficient in one group is a lot higher than the average proficient in another group, then you've got a problem. So numbers tell the story when they're disaggregated in those buckets, we call them.

Number two, the areas you cite, the graduation rates, are very important. That should be broken down by race. And the graduation rate should look at who is in school in ninth grade four years ago and who is in school this year in the twelfth grade. And that's called sort of like "promoting power." Who is in school in ninth grade and who graduates four years later

should be the definition -- that's how you should begin to look at the dropout rate. That gives you a very different figure from who is in the twelfth grade and graduating this year.

Your point about looking at the transition, because the transition from eighth to ninth is a very important one, too. And if you get who is in the ninth grade and graduating four years later, another data point is who is in the eighth grade and graduates five years later. So all of those are good data for municipal people to have.

Data on teacher quality is another very important data point. One of the qualifications as a teacher is what kind of experience do they have and what are their major areas of study? Do you have math teachers who are teaching math? Do you have science teachers who are trained in science and teaching science? That's very important.

Data on where those teachers are teaching. If you look at a school and see the academic performance is poor and you look at the teacher quality and you look at the teacher qualifications in that school and see that in this school, most of our teachers are inexperienced and they're teaching the students who are most in need of assistance, then you get a reason for why the performance of students is low. So teacher quality, teacher qualifications and teacher distribution -- who is teaching where and what students -- are very important pieces of data. And I might add that this data is available. It's public data. It's data now because of No Child Left Behind that has to be available to the public.

KYLE: Let's get a couple of suggested additional questions for our list from Phil, and then let's talk a little bit more about this accessibility issue. If you had to list the top ten, are there a couple of key questions you'd want on that list of what local officials should go looking for, Phil?

RHOADES: Yes. In fact, we need to go beyond what is available at the school to understand any specific school or any specific school district. Either of those is embedded in a community and environment that has influence on what can occur and what does occur in a school. And we should be looking for information across at least three-, if not a five-, year time span so we can look at trends. And we have found and can demonstrate repetitively in different data sets that we've collected that there is a clear connection between school performance on the school indicators related to the amount of domestic violence or family violence in the community around the school, the level of poverty, unemployment, the level of crime in that neighborhood that the school serves. So you want to look beyond the school.

Stephanie mentioned some additional information concerning the students as they progress through grades. We're finding that in all the school districts, our greatest loss is between the ninth and the tenth grade. And so dropout rates are being created seventh to eighth or at some other point in time, it misses the critical year, at least for this community, at the ninth grade.

We're finding that students involved in extra-curricular activities -- more than one -- are more likely to remain in school and have higher test scores and higher grade point averages. So some look at what is the availability of extra-curricular activities and what proportion of youth at the school are actually participating, and how do you increase that kind of bonding to school and bonding to activities at the school?

We know that student's sense of safety affects absenteeism and dropout. The more the student believes that they are not safe at school, their personal safety, the less likely they want to attend. And so looking at what is the discipline level, disciplinary referrals at a

particular school, and what are those for? Are they for violence? Are they for disruptive behavior? And how does that relate to an absentee rate or attendance rate? And then that sense of safety, which might be only attainable through some kind of survey questionnaire. So there is a variety of additional kinds of data beyond those that are collected by the school that give you a much better picture of the whole nature of that ecology or environment of the school. It may tell you that it's not a problem at the school, but a problem in the community that has to be addressed.

ROBINSON: I agree wholeheartedly with the fact that there are certainly external factors that create academic problems for kids. And the extra-curricular activities and the climate are two very important factors. I do think though that unless we improve instruction that you can have the greatest climate, you can have the safest school. And if the teachers aren't teaching what they need to teach, the kids won't learn it.

RHOADES: I don't think we could disagree with that. That's correct, yes.

KYLE: You began to touch on it, Stephanie, about getting access. In addition, some listeners out there are saying, "This is great data. I would love to find this. But I'm really not sure where I need to go to find out this kind of information." And surely we can't give a source for every little item that the two of you have been mentioning. But try to come up with a couple of key sources that most communities have, and perhaps a couple of more or less non-traditional sources that people may not have thought about as being a good place to go get some of the data they need. Do you have some suggestions?

ROBINSON: Every school, every school district in every state are now required to publicly report every year data on achievement by race and by socioeconomic status and by English language and disability. They're required to report teacher qualifications. And if they're required to let parents know if the school is Title I school -- receiving Title I funds -- the child is being taught by a teacher who is not "qualified" -- that means teaching in the field for which he or she is trained. So the school and district and state report cards are sources of data.

State websites are sources of data. States report test scores. They report graduation rates, but you have to find out how they're calculating them. (inaudible) And the state websites have data. So those are two sources. And of course, organizations like the one I work for collect and report data on schools and school systems.

KYLE: Suggestions, Phil, on what people can turn to?

RHOADES: All of those, and the websites have become a primary thing. Beyond that, if the state agency is not producing a website with the data, they have probably produced a paper report that's in a state document's library. And there is likely to be one at the nearest university. You could get a paper copy if it's not showing up on the websites.

But I mentioned the idea of multiple indicators, I believe. And for example, on truancy, we're tracking truancy through the Juvenile Probation Department. Tracking truancy also through the Municipal Court, through police and sheriff's department arrest records. So you're getting multiple views. And then we found that what was happening is there was some shift in the community. And students were not being referred for FAIR to attend school or

truancy, but for daytime curfew violations. So we had to go back and collect data not just from those sources, but also from all of the justices of the peace in the community. And by doing this, we got a much better picture of what is the actual absence -- unauthorized absence -- kind of phenomenon in our community, because no one data source was good for that.

We look at information from non-profits that provide services to see if their services suddenly see an increase, a spike that might be related temporally and in the same part of the community to something going on in and around the school. So we attempt to collect information from non-profit agencies that provide services that would be supportive of academic success. So be creative with looking not just at county and city sources of data, state websites. But also you've got different phenomena in the community that collect information that could be very informative.

ROBINSON: John, also as you were talking, three other important websites come to mind. I think people need to find out whether there is data out on schools that are succeeding in educating students of color, students of low-income families to high levels. And one important piece of data is where are those schools and how can we learn from them.

There are two websites. One is the NCEA -- National Center for Education Accountability -- NCEA [<http://www.nc4ea.org/index.cfm?pg=home>]. And they have schools listed that are -- you can search the database for schools that are demographically like schools that you're concerned about, but are performing at high rates, where students are performing at high levels of proficiency.

Another website where you can search for high performing schools -- and these are, again, schools that serve high levels of African-American, Latino and poor and other minority students. And that's the Standard and Poor's website [www.schoolmatters.com]. It's the big financial company. But they have a website where you can search for -- you can put in data parameters -- if your school is a high school with 1,200 kids and predominantly African-American and socioeconomic status is 70% (inaudible) reduced lunch or something like that, then you can search for schools just like that school, but where kids are performing. And more and more we're using that kind of data to say to teachers and communities, "These schools can work. Let's learn from the schools that are working." So that's another source of data.

KYLE: Great. Those are all helpful ideas, and some of them I hadn't thought about before. So hopefully that's helpful to listeners.

I wanted to ask a slightly different kind of question, and shortly we'll get to some questions from the audience. Tell me about what you think the most common -- perhaps the top two or three areas of confusion or misunderstanding when it comes to measuring educational outcomes and progress over time. Are there predictable -- to you, at least -- traps that city, school or community leaders fall into? What should our listeners be watching out for? We're getting people telling us -- and I think you began mentioning this a little bit earlier of the caveats of disaggregation and so forth. But pick a couple of your top three areas that lead to misunderstanding and that our listeners should be looking out for and trying to avoid.

RHOADES: One is one we mentioned before, and that is that essentially the reported dropout rate is probably the least accurate pieces of information that may be out there. And so one needs to look at alternative ways of looking at what your success rate in getting students through high school actually is. And so one can begin to look at census data that is not just the census year,

but those websites that estimate then from 2000, where are you in 2005? And with things like completion of high school among those 25 or older. And if that number is dramatically different from what could be because of the dropout rate being reported, then there is an inaccuracy there. And so we need to be looking at those graduation rates, completion rates. We need to be looking at what is the availability of GED programs and what number of people are getting through those? And that whole complex of information to be able to look at what is bandied about much of the time -- just merely the dropout rate.

ROBINSON: Yes, important point. I would just add to that that another important piece of data -- if you get graduation rates, college-going rates and college completion rates. Now those are harder to find because the data are not in one place and schools and school districts don't know have mechanisms to track that data. But that's no reason why communities can't organize to say we want those data and we want to figure out how to find out how many of our students are going to college, how many are staying to complete. Because what we find is that students in many cities only go to local colleges many times. So it's doable to track large groups of students. Some of course go to colleges that are not local. But many do. So we can start there.

KYLE: When you get data from these sources, what are the ones most likely to lead to confusion or misunderstanding? What should we be watching for? I use the word "traps." The sources tell us one thing, but you would tell us, "Watch out for that. That's a trap that you can fall into." The dropout is a good one. You've talked about that. Are there any others?

RHOADES: Things like standardized test scores -- Texas has changed from one type of test to another type of test. And then two or three years into the new test, just last year, they changed the rigor of the test. And so if you're following test scores or proportions of students passing the test, reaching the criteria to pass the test, successfully master the subject matter, and you see these strange either dramatic increases or decreases, it may not be what's going on with the students, but with the test. The test has changed, and so your results are going to change. And so one needs to be aware of those points in time where the measuring device, the data itself, has changed, not the performance has changed.

ROBINSON: I think that's a very important point. And one of the things I would watch out for is -- this is hard, but the difference between what causes something and what's related to something. Student performance is related to a lot of things. But what actually causes students to learn are some factors that our organization -- and I go back to the level of instruction and the quality of instruction. And so I think people have to really bear down on schools and try to be aware of the factors that influence inside the school, the factors that influence the results that we get from students.

KYLE: Operator, remind me again how somebody can ask a question, because in a minute or two, I want people to queue up if they want to do that.

FACILITATOR: At this time, I would like to remind everyone, if you would like to ask a question, press "*1" on your telephone keypad.

KYLE: And if you want to get out of line because your question has already been asked or you're just tired of waiting?

FACILITATOR: Press the “#” key.

KYLE: So folks, that's how to do that. And you can start doing that. Another question I was going to ask my speakers here, and then the operator will let me know when I've got questions coming in.

Okay, so you collected, Phil and Stephanie, all this great data. And you have it. How are you going to use it? What are some of the creative ways that you've seen communities use data? Reports to the community or with the media or behind the scenes? What are the things that you've seen, and any stories in particular that you can mention, the better. But if you were recommending four or five ways that somebody could use data in creative, different way, what would be on that list? What were the things that you'd be pointing out?

RHOADES: Well, we've done a number of things. And one is again to identify those areas of greatest need where there is little or no community resource available. That then permits us to write targeted grants.

A second is to examine the data in relation to the system across non-profit to school, government agencies. And how is that set of systems and linkages working? And is there a failure there to share information, to deal with cases in the particular? Or is there simply a system that has a block in it. And finding that, we actually then caused our city to create a municipal juvenile court, which is dealing with those issues of truancy, dropout and curfew violations during the day when the students should be in school. Instead of spreading those cases out across multiple judges, concentrating them into a skilled and trained judge's courtroom and attaching it to a new program created by the city -- a juvenile assessment center. So juveniles would be brought to the assessment center, perhaps referred to the court. And the assessment center then goes through an assessment of the juvenile's conditions -- family -- and works with the particular school district on that particular child. So the creation of our assessment center and municipal juvenile court has had some dramatic affects on attendance rates and truancy rates in the community. So in terms of looking at -- do we need a change in ordinance or law? Do we need a change in the system of how agencies interact? Do we need a change in perhaps funding -- shifting existing funding or finding new funding?

KYLE: Can you give an example, Phil, in terms of how you think data made a local official want to introduce an ordinance or made an agency or an agency chief want to eliminate a bottleneck of some kind? And who made the call? I mean, if you discover that among the various local agencies that ought to be collaborating, one of them has got a bottleneck of some kind in it, who makes the call to that agency chief and say, “You know, there's a bottleneck. And we can see it in this data. And here are some solutions.”

RHOADES: Yeah, that's the great thing about having a coalition, because within that coalition there is perhaps the individual or the agency that can communicate to that person who must make the decision. Or you can go as a committee. You can go as a group. We're finding that one data is powerful, when you can lay it out in front of the person with power and say, “Look at this. Look at this here in our community, compared to XYZ Community or compared to the state.

Why are we like this when others are not?" It's hard to deny data. It's hard to say, "Well, that doesn't happen here any more."

And then you come up with a best practice -- something that has been found from the Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention [<http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/>] outfit, or a major non-profit organization or the CDC, that they have models out there, and you suggest and that you see. This is the model way that has been suggested, the best practice that has worked in multiple communities. Why don't we do this? It's then very hard for anyone to say no. It's been very helpful for us in this to have a kind of vision you might say. We have a vision statement. A vision statement has been used in this community now for almost 20 years. And we return to this vision statement and say, "You have committed to this. And this is a way to support that vision that you have." And this has been again very, very powerful to break down barriers, to deal with turf issues between agencies, to get people to actually move where there has been resistance.

ROBINSON: Ditto -- the power of data. And it forces attention to those factors that are creating the problem, therefore some solutions that might be also available.

I think also the power of groups of people dealing with data -- our organization coalition -- we call it K-16 Council. These are civic entities where K-12 education leaders, higher education leaders, business, community and anybody else in the civic leaders and the -- as I said, business leaders and municipal leaders come together and look at data. We had one situation where the school district was reporting one dropout rate, and when they looked at the cohort dropout rate, as we've been talking about, there were vast differences. I mean, they've been reporting a dropout rate of, say, 8%. And when they looked at the cohort dropout rate, it was more like 50%. The superintendent in this district was frantic about reporting these data. But because it had been a community effort -- this K-16 effort -- the leaders on that have been instrumental in gathering the data. When they reported it in the public meeting and reported the vast differences, the media were there, and they were getting ready to pounce on the school district. But the other leaders in the group said though, "This is our problem. So data can help everybody own the problem. They had already identified some of the things they were going to do to address it. And they found that the dropout rate was not the same when they did the cohort study of all schools, and in those schools that the dropout rate was higher. All of the things I mentioned before -- there were teachers who lacked experience, teachers who lack qualifications. There were courses that were not available to kids. They didn't have the college level courses in that school. So they used the data. They publicly reported the data. But because it was public gathering of the data, and more than one -- it wasn't just the school district. The community owned that problem, so they owned the solution. And things are better there now for that.

KYLE: Do we have any questions, Operator?

FACILITATOR: At this time, we have no questions.

KYLE: I have a question that I got by e-mail, and it goes back to this item you brought back into the conversation, Stephanie, about teachers. And one of the listeners in New York State noted that "it's nice to suggest that teachers should have equal capabilities throughout the system, or even that better qualified teachers should be directed to the students with the greatest needs. But sometimes collective bargaining, for instance, seniority, gets in the way. Have you

seen any examples of what folks at the local level can do about that? Is there a way to take that kind of problem and apply your information and data to that?

ROBINSON: I think that the e-mailer identified one of the greatest impediments to improving schools that we have. But I think that communities shedding light on the bargaining agreements. And are those agreements really good for kids, number one? I think I am not anti-union, but I am anti-unions getting in the way of school improvement. And I think some bargaining agreements create impediments. And I think that the more communities discuss what those bargaining agreements are and are they good for kids, we can address that.

That said, I know of school districts and principals that have, in spite of the seniority and in spite of agreements and in spite of the other factors have really equalized teacher expertise and have done this by not reassigning teachers wholeheartedly, but sharing teachers with high expertise with kids who need it. In other words, maybe a teacher has only AP and honors classes. Well, that teacher may continue to teach AP and honors classes, but also teach a class of struggling students because those students need that expertise. It doesn't mean the teacher has given up the honors or AP classes, but is sharing the expertise with those kids. And those strategies I've seen work successfully in schools. But you have to have inspired leadership in the schools to pull that off, too.

FACILITATOR: Mr. Kyle, we have a question from Debbie Finch.

QUESTIONER: I'm calling from the City of Green, Colorado. I'm the truancy officer for our school district. And I just wanted to know if you have any location of a community where they have been successful with truancy? If you can just name one or two, and is there a place where we can find out what they're doing?

RHOADES: Yes, again, that's one of the things that we seem to have been successful with here in Corpus Christi. And you might want to contact the director of our juvenile assessment center, Mariah Boone, and get her to describe a process over a number of years of holding truancy summits and holding working meetings and doing some strategic planning, leading to the development first of our Truancy Reduction Impact Program. And finally converting that eight hour a day program to the 24 hour a day juvenile assessment center, and then integrating it with the municipal court, connecting it more closely to all of our justices of the peace. She can be contacted at (361) 826-4000. And our assessment center effort toward truancy and curfew violations has been recognized by a number of agencies nationally as a model program. And Mariah would be aware of others in the country that she could refer you to.

QUESTIONER: Thank you. And I have one other question. You were talking about the schools and the teachers and their qualifications. Are there studies and data available that would speak to the cultural proficiency of those teachers and how that has affected the success rate?

ROBINSON: When you say "cultural factors" do you mean the race of the teacher --?

QUESTIONER: Culture -- not like sensitivity, but cultural awareness, cultural competence.

ROBINSON: The National Board of Professional Teaching Standards -- the NBPTS -- if you look on their website [<http://www.nbpts.org/>], you may find studies of relationship of cultural competency to achievement. We have done more studies that link teacher capability, teachers' knowledge of subject matter, teachers' knowledge of pedagogy and teachers' experience -- those things seem to be very linked with student achievement.

KYLE: Are you aware of anything about cultural competency as an issue, Phil?

RHOADES: I'm aware of it. We deal with it here at the university. We have various seminars and workshops for our own faculty. And we are a Hispanic-serving institution. Somewhere approaching 40% of our students are Hispanic, 5 - 6% Black. We've got 2% Asian -- quite a variety. And even beyond that, most of our students, regardless of ethnicity, are first-generation students as they arrive. And so we do quite a lot among our own faculty concerning being able to communicate in appropriate ways and have understandings.

We have participated in what are called trans-culturation processes, where one attempts to gain greater understanding of cultures not one's own. This is systematic through the school districts, K-12, here. And I know that there is considerable literature -- it's not a literature that I am familiar with, but we deal with this in our College of Education as it prepares teachers and administrators in its academic programs. That subject matter is present. Again, I can't give you a citation, but I know it exists, and should be findable in database sources in libraries.

ROBINSON: Also the U.S. Department of Education Office of Bilingual Education (www.ed.gov) has information on cultural competency.

QUESTIONER: Thank you.

KYLE: We're coming to the end of our hour. And I want to thank you all for being part of it and give Phil and Stephanie an opportunity to kind of come up with one or two sentences of things that they were dying to say today that I haven't yet asked them the right question. So if there was something that you missed, put your notes together and I'm going to come back to you for a minute to give a closing comment. And also if there is a website or resource of any kind that you want to make sure our listeners know about.

I want to make one comment about the requests for information about truancy. And I'm not aware of whether our Examples Database has it or not. But I would at least suggest looking -- the National League of Cities has an Examples Database of about 5,000 examples that are working on all kinds of issues -- not just affecting children and families, but affecting the environment at the local level and the transportation, etc. But a good many of these have to do with education and children. And you can access that through the main NLC website at www.nlc.org and look for the Examples Database or look for the Municipal Reference Service and could contact them directly to see if there are any searchable examples about truancy prevention and reduction efforts that cities have reported on to us.

I also want to take this one more opportunity to remind folks that our next audioconference is on December 15 at 4 p.m. EST. We try to vary the time of day occasionally so that different people are able to get away to listen. And the topic of this next call is about youth mapping, how you can determine the assets for youth in your community and once you determine them, what you can do about that in terms of planning for youth in your community.

Phil and Stephanie -- last parting comments, and any referral that you want to give. Stephanie, can I ask you to go first?

ROBINSON: Yes. We haven't talked specifically about the role of low expectations, such as student performance. And that's a huge one. The power of data to shift people's expectations from "The students can't" to "The students can learn." All kids can learn, but unfortunately that belief is not deeply embedded in our education system. And data can be used very effectively to change people's attitudes about who can and can't learn and how they can and can't learn.

And what we call "learning from the frontier" -- learning from schools that are getting results with the kids that we sometimes believe can't learn -- is I think one very important role that communities can play. And look for those schools and identify those schools, and hold them up as beacons, as examples. So many times we find in communities schools that have beaten the odds are really not held up in any real regard in their communities. It's very interesting. So we have to do more of that in the community, I think.

And for further information about how you can do this and help with that, you can go on the Education Trust website. It's www.edtrust.org. And my name is listed there. E-mail me -- Srobinson@edtrust.org -- for further questions, and I can help you. And that's it for me.

KYLE: Phil -- parting comments?

RHOADES: Yes, I'll get to a comment. Let me give some of the websites. There are two of them from the Department of Justice. One is the National Criminal Justice Reference Service -- ncjrs.gov. And it's searchable. You can search by dropout, by truancy, by violence in schools, and get to model programs and good analysis of things.

The other one is the Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention -- that's ojjdp.ncjrs.org. It's an .org ending. And again, searchable website on their publications and research with model programs, model planning processes, both short and long term, action planning and comprehensive planning like we've done available on that website.

We're connected with a group called the Family and Community Violence Prevention Organization that has 22 sites across the United States. And reducing juvenile violence through the application of academic processes. And we have a local school here with an afterschool program for middle school. That's fcvp.org. And you can look there at the different kinds of programs at 20 sites across the country. Ours is in a middle school afterschool mentoring base. We use college students to go and mentor and tutor and assist at-risk youth there at the middle school, and seem to have pretty good success.

Success is the final comment I wanted to make. We have spent a lot of money locally on a grant writer in my office, the Data Collection office. But we can show that for every dollar spent over the last seven years, we've brought in about \$45 dollars -- about a 4500% return on the effort to collect the data and to put coalitions together to write grants. Much of this has been targeted to preparation for school, support of schools and programs afterschool/in-school. And there is not a businessman in town, there is not a politician in town that can argue with success. So you can show that if you put a buck in, you're going to get \$45 back. You put some effort in, you get graduates back in a mentoring program. It's very effective to demonstrate your success, be able to prove it and show it with your own data.

KYLE: That's great, and that's a good note to end on -- you put a dollar in and get \$45 back. I see lots of folks out in the audience scrambling to do that. And we hope again that you've found this to be useful. Feel free, those of you in the audience, to contact us further. I referenced the action kit on improving public schools. That's available in the Publications section of our website at www.nlc.org/iyef. Go to that section, click on Publications, and our various action kits are available. And if you want to know more about what we say there about using data to frame the challenges, improving public schools and the others of our top ten questions that officials should ask about, that's where you'll find them.

I want to thank everybody for listening, and thank Phil and Stephanie in particular for sharing with us and being with us for the hour. And Stephanie, I know there's some sun outside, but I know you've been hunkered down in a phone booth, and I appreciate you doing that. We're over and out. We're completed for the day. I hope many of you will join us on December 15. Bye-bye. Thanks.