



**OPEN FORUM  
FOR  
PEER EXCHANGE**

**2005 SUMMER MEETING  
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NETWORK  
(EPAN)**

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## **What's in a Title: The Role of the Education Policy Advisor**

A panel of four EPAN members described the current state of education in their cities. This session uncovered issues such as: the varied and diverse roles of the Education Policy Advisor; the challenges and opportunities that come with the position; specific strategies for advancing a city's education agenda; and the important lessons learned throughout their tenure. A question and answer period followed.

*John Madrid, Mayor's Education Officer, Office of the Mayor, Fresno, California*

Mr. Madrid was appointed four and a half years ago to Mayor Autry's staff to focus on the role of education in revitalizing neighborhoods and to explore if education has any civic impact. Initially, Mr. Madrid focused his work externally and met with large constituencies within the community. He found that there were serious truancy issues affecting schools and student academic performance. Through collaboration, the city was able to pass a daytime curfew that helped curb this problem.

After the Mayor's appointment of an education officer, the Mayor's Cabinet began focusing on how education affects all departments and how all city departments affect education.

As a result of its education focus, the city was selected by the Broad Foundation to receive financial and technical support for mayoral involvement in education. Fresno sees schools as the centers of community with extensive ties to economic development and public safety. Current education work is focusing on how Fresno will develop the next generation of educated workers and foster a high quality workforce.

Future city education work will focus on workforce development and disconnected youth. The city is also looking at pre-school and parent education, shared use of facilities, and afterschool councils to improve access and quality of out-of-school learning time. Fresno is also involved in a regional initiative which is focused on coordinating all the human service organizations that are working in a single neighborhood.

Mayor Autry is looking ahead in order to protect the education initiatives that the city of Fresno has implemented. To help create sustainability and reduce the likelihood that the education officer's position will be eliminated with the next municipal administration, the mayor has moved the position into the City Manager's office. This move also connects the advisor more closely to the actual implementation of the city's education work.

Mr. Madrid stressed that the development of youth should never rest solely on the shoulders of one person, or office, or program.

*Avo Makdessian, Deputy Director, Office of the Mayor, San José, California*

San José is the 10<sup>th</sup> largest city in the nation and has over 19 different school districts, serving 184,000 students. Mr. Makdessian is the only education advisor at the city level and is responsible for coordinating efforts, collaboration with the school district, and broader neighborhood revitalization and safety issues. Mr. Makdessian oversees management of all youth programs in the city, all neighborhood programs, as well as policy and practices related to affordable housing production within the city of San José.

In San José, the mayor does not have a formal role in education and found it difficult to engage the school district in serious conversations about how the city could be of assistance. Mr. Makdessian sees the city's lack of formal authority over the school districts as an opportunity to influence issues and policies that affect school districts. Therefore, the city's role in education is varied; it is that of a convener, a parent, or a community, civic or government organization.

When Mayor Gonzales started in office, he asked every department to identify how they help youth or work on youth related issues. Mayor Gonzales also asked every city agency to discuss what challenges they observed that were affecting youth or youth programming. From this survey the city tailored its education reform focus. For example, the city housing department said that teachers are having a hard time finding affordable housing in San José. The city, therefore, created a teacher homebuyers assistance program that helps San José teachers secure \$40,000 no interest loans to go toward the down payment of their first home.

The city of San José is also working to change the lexicon of *all* city departments. Currently, every document that comes from the Mayor's office has "All Children Achieve" printed on the footer. The message that all children achieve is now infused throughout all city work and departments, not just the mayor's initiatives. As a result, San José has seen the development of an extensive gang safety and gang prevention program, it has expanded afterschool programs, and created a citywide focus on high schools. In 2005 alone, 2,000 more preschool spaces have been created.

Mr. Makdessian said that one area in which the city is still working is tracking data on students. Currently, the city only has a limited database of the city schools; Mr. Makdessian is working to expand and improve the amount of school and student data available for the city.

*Maria Guajardo Lucero, Executive Director, Mayor's Office for Education and Children, Denver, Colorado*

Ms. Guajardo Lucero said that Mayor Hickenlooper had no previous government experience. Before the mayor took office, he made beer and owned a restaurant. However, he has over a 90% approval rate within the community. And, he is very involved in and supportive of education initiatives in Denver.

As the Executive Director of the Office for Education and Children, Ms. Guajardo Lucero manages a staff of twenty. The number of staff has increased by 1/3 in the last 24 months. The salaries for five of her staff members come from foundations.

The focus of her office is on “the first two decades of life.” This means that the office concentrates on anything that has to do with a child’s life from birth to twenty years of age. “Everything at any age is about school readiness, academic achievement and career or college success,” said Ms. Guajardo Lucero. For example, during birth through five years of age, the focus of the office is on quality child care.

Ms. Guajardo Lucero discussed the power of the bully pulpit in moving initiatives forward. Through this, her office had a citywide summit on early childhood education. It also had a summit on Latino students, in which 60% of attendees were students. Currently, it is pushing an upcoming ballot initiative to have high quality preschool for all four year olds.

In his election campaign, Mayor Hickenlooper said that he would visit every school in the city. He is fulfilling that promise and has been to over eighty schools (one a week) since the beginning of his term. He also promised all the students in one middle school that they would have the money to go to college, because he feels that money should not be an obstacle. He then extended this promise citywide.

Denver has also successfully reached out to the business community. The city of Denver has 50,000 children under the age of five. The Office for Education and Children wanted to open up the city to all these young children. In order to do this, it has created a “5 by 5” initiative. This allows parents to take their children to the aquarium, zoo, and other places at no cost for the children and families.

One lesson Ms. Guajardo Lucero is still learning is how to bring all the agencies together, to work together to fully open the city up for the children.

*Michelle Walker, Senior Advisor for Education, Executive Office of the Mayor, Washington, District of Columbia*

Ms. Walker explained that her role as education policy advisor has evolved, both behind the scenes and as the public face of education for the city. There has been a lot of internal and external brokering in order to get to the point at which it is now.

The city serves 80,000 children. It has one local education authority. Each of the city’s fifty charter schools receives the same per pupil expenditure and a facilities allowance through the local authority. Last year the city was in a school governance debate, questioning whether the mayor should take over the school board. There was an agreement, however, to keep the structure the same. Currently, the mayor can appoint four board members and it will go to an all-elected board in 2007.

Ms. Walker explained how financial distribution is handled differently in D.C. than in other cities. The money for the school system comes from the District of Columbia. It goes through the Congressional budget process. Once it is appropriated, the city has no control over any line items in the school district budget.

Ms. Walker has found that the bully pulpit has been powerful in D.C. However, the education agenda has been difficult to shape. The office has decided to focus only on things that Mayor Williams can achieve.

The office has an early-childhood education initiative, and has seen a lot of success in that area. The mayor's executive office wants to do a "Sandbox Summit" with a focus on early childhood. Its goal would be to bring providers together and encourage a set of common standards and goals for all providers. The office is starting to look more at out-of-school time issues. It is currently looking for investments to support these upcoming initiatives. It is also pushing for a tuition assistance program for every District resident who wants to go to college. This would allow every resident to receive in-state tuition at any state college in the United States. School security has also been a focus for the office. The metro police department has now taken over school security.

Ms. Walker sees two specific challenges for the mayor's office and education. First, she recognizes that the office is still in, what she calls, the honeymoon phase with new school leadership. This will probably end soon, and thus, may lead to a revisiting of governance issues. Second, data collection and reporting needs to be improved within the school system.

The number one lesson learned that Ms. Walker stressed is relationships. She has seen the biggest successes and failures because of relationships. For example, the former superintendent and mayor did not have a good relationship, and so they were always on different pages. However, the new superintendent is different and has a good relationship with mayor. Relationships at the staff level are as equally important and key to many successes.

## **Questions and Answers**

*Question: Does your job have any boundaries?*

- *John Madrid:* The only boundaries we have are the ones we set for ourselves. Right now our focus is on strengthening the city offices internally and to integrate initiatives within the city departments so that there is lasting change.
- *Avo Makdessian:* We don't have any boundaries, just "No-Nos." For example, we can't talk about taking over the school system. However, any program or policy that Mayor Gonzales proposes has to be long-term and sustainable.
- *Maria Guajardo Lucero:* In our office boundaries come from competing interests, both from inside and outside of the city. There was a lot of territorialism when I came in, and we had to deal with that.

- *Michelle Walker:* There are no real boundaries. However, D.C. still has a relatively new government and there are a lot of competing priorities for the mayor. It's easy to focus on things that the mayor does have control over.

*Question: Have you noticed flash points over the years when your mayors are more visible or involved in education?*

- *John Madrid:* My office has already migrated into the City Manager's office. We are also moving towards an office of Youth Development and Workforce Development. For us, bringing the workforce piece into youth and education work is the key to getting more people involved.
- *Avo Makdessian:* For us, budget time is an important time for the mayor's involvement. Election is a key time too; for example, it shows who has the mayor's endorsement, etc. Before the mayor leaves the office, he can draw attention to issues that are high on his priority list. This creates significant visibility.
- *Maria Guajardo Lucero:* Definitely around campaign issues. This fall we have an issue on the ballot that deals with a new way to handle teacher compensation. To gain visibility on the issue, we are doing a press conference next week. Though it's many months out, we are trying to move on it now.
- *Michelle Walker:* For us, the budget is a huge deal. The mayor has to propose the budget to Congress. This is really the only opportunity for him to broker any direct impact on education.

*Question: For Maria, where do you get the money to pursue everything you do?*

- *Maria Guajardo Lucero:* Our budget is just over \$13 million. It breaks down like this: \$8 million is from Head Start, \$800,000 is general fund money, and the rest is grant dollars. We spend a lot of time getting money and services from other places. The "5 by 5" initiative didn't cost the city a dime. All the services were donated by other organizations. Even a design firm produced the brochure that we gave to all the families.

*Question: How do you change the culture of how your city looks at youth overall? The mayor doesn't have control over city staff, though the City Manager does. How can you have influence over staff when you don't have the authority over them?*

- *Avo Makdessian:* When Mayor Gonzales began his term he talked to the City Manager about key departments that could be connected to education. Our City Manager ran with that. It definitely helps that the mayor and city council have the authority to hire and fire the city manager.
- *Maria Guajardo Lucero:* Previously in Denver, Parks and Recreation and the city services both had afterschool services but weren't communicating together very

well. We used a technical assistance opportunity from the National League of Cities to submit collaborative application and began working from there. The best way to change the city culture, though, is building relationships over a cup of coffee.

*Question: Do any of your cities' education initiatives have linkages to higher education?*

- *John Madrid:* Mayor Autry's office has developed a strong working partnership with Fresno State University. The mayor's office sits on the university's Commission on Teacher Preparation, and the mayor's office is working with the university to develop a charter school. We are also working with the university president on workforce development issues.
- *Avo Makdessian:* All the charter and alternative high schools that we support are college-prep schools with college partnerships. For example, schools partner with San José State University. Recently, we have been working with higher education to create a city-wide education fund.
- *Maria Guajardo Lucero:* We are doing everything we can. We have early college high schools. The city will forgive \$1500 of school loans for any Denver Public School student who goes onto Denver area colleges. We are also trying to shift the city focus from K-12 to P-16. We are doing a lot of cross-communication and having partnership conversations with the deans and presidents of colleges.
- *Michelle Walker:* D.C. Public Schools have some isolated partnerships with a few universities. We've recently developed a D.C. Compact – it's much like the Boston Compact – and there is a higher education component of that initiative.

### **Open Forum for Peer Exchange**

*Question from St. Paul, MN: As our community becomes more diverse, we have a lot of high school students that can't receive federal money for college because they are undocumented, how can we address this fiscal challenge?*

- *Denver, CO:* The Community College of Denver partners with the local high school and so the district pays for the students who have dual enrollment. We have nearly 200 students taking community college classes while in high school.
- *San Antonio, TX:* There is an education partnership between the city, higher education institutions, the business community, and community organizing groups that provides scholarships to high school students regardless of documentation.

*Question from Seattle, WA: Our school district is putting together a committee of school and business leaders to address financial issues. How can we best use this committee to influence education reform?*

- *Saint Louis, MO:* We formed a business partnership to cut money out of the school budget by looking closely at spending and streamlined services and tightened administration to create savings. The school district and city then used the savings for new school programs and outsourced some school services, like janitorial duties and cafeterias to local St. Louis Union companies for savings.

*Question from Louisville, KY: What do you do about ego problems in communities where there is one strong, unified district? How do you make constructive criticism not seem like condemnation?*

- *Tampa, FL:* Our mayor pushed for an ordinance for city employees to take 90 minutes leave from work to volunteer in schools. The city has over 200 employees participating. The mayor strategically chose an educator (former teacher and principal) as the city liaison to the schools. In addition, the city hires local teachers to work in their Parks and Recreation reading programs.
- *Canton, OH:* We never told the district that this is what you should do, but this is what you can do. We have created a tone of inclusiveness by having a representative from the mayor's office attend all board meetings. Plus, at any major city event, the schools are invited.
- *San Francisco, CA:* We focus on common goals (achievement needs) to eliminate distractions. The Mayor attempts to listen to stakeholders and hear all sides, and he does not take a side. He also openly and visibly supports children, youth and family issues.
- *Nashville, TN:* There is no substitute for the visibility and attention a mayor brings to schools and education through school visits. It shows the personal commitment of time and resources and the strength of the mayor.

*Question from Riverside, CA: Our mayor has tried to promote high schools as the "signature" of community, highlighting community service outreach, sports, academic successes, etc. What are other ways to engage the community around high schools?*

- *Denver, CO:* We have a student recognition program called "Mile High Scholars". One student from every school is selected by teachers. It is a big event to promote the students' successes. This year we added the "Mile High Teachers" program. We had a huge recognition ceremony with the mayor and superintendent. Our piece is nominal and costs virtually nothing, but the public recognition is priceless.
- *Berkeley, CA:* We have a program called Youth Zone in which 30 city staff work with high school students. The students have the opportunity to receive tutoring and mentoring from the staff and learn about the different city departments. The

program creates a great exchange and informs the city about the students concerns, such as the achievement gap and drop-outs, nutrition and literacy, and trust and relationships.

- *Atlanta, GA:* We have a great partnership between the superintendent and the mayor. We have an extensive high school outreach program where the Mayor meets with every graduating senior and asks them what their goals are and how they could achieve them. She then offered her personal help to every student to make those dreams come true. After identifying a \$2 million shortfall in financial aid for Atlanta students to attend college, she began a massive fundraising campaign.
- *Milwaukee, WI:* We have worked with local businesses and city agencies to create summer jobs. Some of our students have worked with companies all over the country. We also created Safe Summer Guidelines, a small book which has a number of ideas and activities for kids to do throughout the summer.

*Question from Charlotte: We are in the process of hiring a new superintendent with no direct control from the mayor. What are some ideas on how the mayor's office can support or influence the search process?*

- *St. Louis, MO:* We just completed a search. Our mayor said that this hiring process is the role of the school board. However, we spoke with the search committee and school board throughout the process. Each finalist met with the mayor for 15 minutes to ensure that s/he understood the importance of education within the city and the involvement that the mayor would like to have with the schools. This process also helped sell the city to the finalists.
- *Providence, RI:* We are in the middle of a search. Our mayor and outgoing superintendent identified a search committee. The school board and mayor will pick the final choice. Also, Brown University funded the national search.
- *Miami, FL:* Our mayor got directly involved in identifying incentives to encourage the new superintendent to accept the job offer.