



PEER EXCHANGE TRANSCRIPT

**2004 FALL MEETING
MAYORS' EDUCATION POLICY ADVISORS NETWORK
(EPAN)**

**NOVEMBER 30 – DECEMBER 1, 2004
THE OMNI SEVERIN HOTEL
INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA**

**A PEER NETWORK OF THE INSTITUTE FOR YOUTH, EDUCATION, AND FAMILIES
NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES**



SUPPORTED BY THE BILL & MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION

Open Forum for Peer Exchange

The open forum provided an opportunity for EPAN members to seek advice and gain their peers' perspective on the pressing educational challenges they are faced with in their local communities. A transcript of the session, which was moderated by Hannah Dillard of Columbus, Ohio and Robbyn Wahby of St. Louis, Missouri, follows below. Please note that the transcript is segmented by topic and the ensuing city responses.

I. Role for Mayors in Public Education

San Francisco, CA: I'm looking for concrete suggestions around what cities can do, especially when the mayor does not have control of the schools.

Peer Responses

Annenberg Institute: Incubate district-wide redesign in neighborhoods; start with a neighborhood.

Phoenix, AZ: Look at your mayor's specific objectives city-wide—where they align with school superintendent and school board president—so they can work together.

St. Paul, MN: Go back to the relationship between the mayor and superintendent. There has to be a respectful relationship, built on common values, economic development. If you have an antagonistic relationship, it's not going to happen.

Detroit, MI: Think about the things cities are responsible for that can help the school district—the “low hanging fruit.”

Denver, CO: Back to concept of low hanging fruit, utilize city resources to support school districts.

District of Columbia: Do joint planning and include schools in the planning. Have schools at the table as a decision-maker.

Milwaukee, WI: Establish an education partnership. In my city, the superintendent is part of the mayor's cabinet.

Louisville, KY: We had the Brookings Institute do a review of educational attainment in our city. We got the business community involved and launched a reading initiative. Also, engage outside partners.

Indianapolis, IN: It's difficult to engage in “our” ideas versus “the district's ideas.” We decided to help them pursue their goals—their ideas. We focused our city efforts on things they were doing already. In addition, on a monthly basis, the mayor gives out an education excellence award and a character award.

Nashville, TN: We have regular meetings between the superintendent and the mayor, and we also meet with the school board on a regular basis. Mayor Purcell meets with them quarterly.

II. NCLB and AYP

Louisville, KY: I'd like to get some feedback regarding the NCLB (No Child Left Behind Act) effect of failing to meet AYP (adequate yearly progress). I understand there is the option of getting supplemental services. We just got the letter on Friday. It's being treated as a Herculean task and is not being given its fair due.

Peer Responses

U.S. Conference of Mayors: It is a problem. There is not enough notice, which goes back to the issue of communication.

Phoenix, AZ: As part of high school reform project, we've developed a high school referral program that provides information to parents about the options available to them. You might want to consider something similar to that.

Denver, CO: The mayor uses his bully pulpit. Great cities are built on great neighborhoods, which are built on great schools. My mayor has been in over 5,000 classrooms.

III. Problem Identification

Charlotte, NC: Is there a success where we've appropriately identified the problem?

Peer Responses

Annenberg Institute: I would nominate Portland.

Portland, OR: We do have success in engaging the public when things are really bad. The local education fund really took the lead in hiring organizers to put things in place. The community has come together via the Leader's Roundtable—around student success. A current initiative is focused on 3rd grade reading. Issues are identified by community leaders and then the rallying occurs around that.

Toledo, OH: In identifying the problem, the mayor asked everyone to take ownership. We all have a problem—not just a school problem. Businesses and the faith-based community got involved. Businesses gave their employees time off to mentor; churches opened their doors to provide afterschool programming. These have helped to alleviate and minimize the problem.

Lansing, MI: We incorporated parent development, student achievement, and student attendance into one of our education initiatives. The police chief was assigned to work with the school district attendance officer.

Columbus, OH: We did a community scan that included not just Columbus Public School but all other school districts located within city limits. We convened a summit of more than 200 people

with our partner, Batelle for Kids. We demonstrated that achievement gaps existed in both our urban and suburban school districts. As a result of the forum, task forces formed on 1) sharing staff development, 2) looking at data and research, and 3) deciding how these gaps are identified and addressed.

Denver, CO: We have an initiative specifically focused on Latino student achievement. We convened stakeholders to see what the players can do and are meeting 100 days later to see how to move forward with task forces and committees.

Portland, OR: Going back to Warren's presentation and the level of change that is required. It seems really tough to accomplish, and I can think of ways that mayors might sabotage.

Annenberg Institute: It requires cross-sector plans—even if you're starting with a neighborhood. It also requires the capacity to collect local data so you can have a solution-based approach. It needs some entity that supports cross-sector leadership development.

IV. School District Types: County-Wide vs. Single vs. Multiple

U.S. Conference of Mayors: The various characteristics of school districts—county-wide versus multiple versus single. How are they different?

Peer Responses

Fort Worth, TX: We have one large district and a number of other smaller districts. We're starting to do more with the smaller school districts.

San Jose, CA: San Jose has 19 school districts. We held an all-day retreat and talked about the things cities provide. We're in the process of creating a 10-year work plan with strategic and long-term goals. We plan to have the city council approve it and also the various school boards approve it.

Corpus Christi, TX: We have two initiatives going on. We have a quarterly forum of city and district leaders, and the mayor has challenged the community to deal with a rampant dropout problem. We have developed a 15-point plan to implement.

V. Sharing Data Across School Districts and City Agencies

San Francisco, CA: We have a particular district dealing with a large immigrant population. I'm looking for suggestions on how to share data across school districts and city agencies?

Peer Responses

Charlotte, NC: In Charlotte, we created the Children's Alliance, which serves as a neutral depository of information. The University of North Carolina at Charlotte will house the data.

St. Louis, MO: It's a real issue for us in St. Louis. It started with immunizations. Now, we have a huge issue with lead testing. It's been dealt with by shifting resources from family court to schools, and we're starting to look at things like truancy.

Annenberg Institute: With regard to data, there are two references on our website: data warehousing and the National Neighborhood Indicators Project, which is housed by the Urban Institute.

NLC: Our work on disconnected youth has a heavy focus on cross-system strategies. Data sharing has been a major focus of that. Cities like San Diego and Philadelphia have made a lot of progress. NLC will be documenting these cases.

VI. Charter Schools and School Choice

District of Columbia: My question is about charter schools and school choice. How much is too much, and how are mayors involved?

Peer Responses

San Francisco: It's something that San Francisco is grappling with. The mayor supports school choice. It's very complicated, but helps drive school reform system-wide. It also addresses certain pockets of need that the school system is not addressing.

Milwaukee, WI: We have the oldest charter schools. The Department of Instruction put a cap on the number of students, and the maximum is a student population of 15,000 in the charter schools. The city is now trying to increase the cap

Phoenix, AZ: Our mayor supports public school charters but also has a very strong relationship with the superintendent. We are not directing children and families one way or another, but we are providing them with information about the attributes of strong, quality learning communities.

Indianapolis, IN: We need to determine what "too many" are. My mayor is able to grant charters. We look at whether the charter school fills an unmet need. We currently have two Big Picture charter schools, as well as a 50% dropout rate in two of our high schools.

Nashville, TN: We haven't touched upon the negative impact of charter schools: money leaving the system, declining school population, closing schools. In essence, you're taking dollars away from the public school system.

Detroit, MI: That's a real nightmare in Detroit. The children that leave do take money out of the system.

District of Columbia: It hasn't been a problem for DC. The DC school budget continues to grow because of a growing student population. We have 45 charter schools and one large school district.

Phoenix, AZ: We prefer having families staying in the central city using charter schools, rather than leaving the school system altogether for the suburban school districts.

Milwaukee, WI: In Milwaukee, it's a matter of the teacher union. Many of the schools that are charters do not employ union workers.

Portland, OR: The basis of NLC's interest is: what do we want our school systems to look like, so that the issue of charters and choice gets put into a broader context?

Fresno, CA: And also how to address the community's problem. What are the structures that are in place throughout the community to deal with the issues, and what is the structure that needs to be in place to address those issues?

St. Louis, MO: In St. Louis, we have something called the Vashon Education Compact. We took a particular geographic area and put resources into helping families live and work. The idea was to be able to replicate throughout the city. We've seen some success, and the school district has jumped ahead. (For more information, visit www.vashoncompact.org.)

Annenberg Institute: Annenberg has a partnership with NLC on public engagement. We're currently working on a document that will include some strategies and tools.

Charlotte, NC: I'd like to add that on December 11th, we are going to hold a community forum with the goal of ensuring that all children in Mecklenburg County are healthy, safe and well-educated. It's part of a three-year effort. We're going to look at poverty, education, child care. (For more information, visit www.unitedagendaforchildren.org.)