PUBLIC
EDUCATION
NETWORK

Memo

To: Bethany Little, Domestic Policy Council

From: Howie Schaffer, managing editor

Date: 01/21/00

Re: Letter of Support from Vice President Gore

Thank you for your willingness to review the attached draft copy of the Public Education Network's report on national town meetings with black and white parents talking about their public schools called, "Communities Speak from the Heart."

I would very much like a letter of support from the Vice President that we can use as an introduction to the report. I know that President Clinton and Vice President Gore are committed to open discussion and public dialogue on how our communities and public institutions can work for every citizen, regardless of race, gender, or sexual orientation.

Thank you for reviewing this report. Please call me at 202-628-7460 at your earliest convenience.

Thank you!

—Howie

Celebrating 15 Years of Local Education Funds

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

February 15, 2000

MEMORANDUM FOR WHITE HOUSE MESS MEMBERS

FROM: JOSEPH J. SIMMONS IV
DEPUTY ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT AND
DIRECTOR, WHITE HOUSE MILITARY OFFICE

SUBJECT: White House Mess Closing

The White House Mess will be closed Monday, February 21, 2000 in observance of Presidents' Day.

Archivists removed the following misfiled record from the folder [Education-Public Education Network] into OA 20519 on October 28, 2005

Calendar, 02/00 to 07/00

DRAFT (11/17/00)

PEN and Public Agenda Report and Toolkit for National Conversation Models on

Education & Race

Submitted to PEN by
Valaida Fullwood for Public Impact

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OVERVIEW

National Partners and Funders

[Note to Richard: These descriptions can be listed in the inside cover.]

Public Education Network

The work of the Public Education Network (PEN) impacts the achievement of over five million children in more than 275 school districts across the nation. Established in 1991, PEN's mission is to create systems of public education that result in high achievement for every child. As a national nonprofit network, PEN's member Local Education Funds (LEFs) are nonprofit, independent community-based organizations that engage citizens, parents and policymakers in the improvement of public education.

PEN believes that equal opportunity, access to quality public schools, and an informed citizenry are all critical components of a democratic society. It also believes high-quality public education is every child's right and not a privilege. To that end, it holds responsible parents, individual citizens, and whole communities for improving public school systems.

PEN's initiatives educate the nation about the relationship between school quality and the quality of community and public life. Students, teachers, and school districts all need to be held to high standards. The network advocates for changing the way school districts are funded, overhauling curriculum and assessment practices, ensuring authority and decision making at the school level, providing ongoing professional development for teachers, and engaging the public in building relationships between citizens, schools, and the communities they serve.

Public Agenda

Founded in 1975 by social scientist and author Daniel Yankelovich and former Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, Public Agenda works to help average citizens better understand critical policy issues and to help the nation's leaders better understand the public's point of view. Public Agenda's in-depth research on how citizens think about policy forms the basis for extensive citizen education work. Its citizen education materials, used by the National Issues Forums and media outlets across the country, have won praise for their credibility and fairness from elected officials from both political parties and from experts and decisionmakers across the political spectrum. Public Agenda also offer assistance – in the form of research -based models, moderator training, videos, and written guides – to communities for public engagement initiatives.

W.K. Kellogg Foundation

The W. K. Kellogg Foundation is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to apply knowledge to solve the problems of people. Through grant initiatives it helps people help themselves through the practical application of knowledge and resources to improve their quality of life and that of future generations.

Its founder W. K. Kellogg, the cereal industry pioneer, established the Foundation in 1930. Since its beginning the Foundation has continuously focused on building the capacity of individuals, communities, and institutions to solve their own problems.

C.S. Mott Foundation

The mission of the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation is to support efforts that promote a just, equitable, and sustainable society. Its grantmaking is organized into four programs: civil society, environment, poverty, and the city of Flint, Michigan.

The Mott Foundation believes a fundamental need of humanity is to understand how people can live together more effectively. Building strong communities through collaboration provides a basis for positive change. Through its work, the Foundation has found that the most effective solutions often are those devised locally, where people have the greatest stake in the outcome. For that reason, it believes strong, self-reliant individuals are essential to a well-functioning society, and moreover, individuals play critical roles in shaping their surroundings.

Rockefeller Foundation

The Rockefeller Foundation is a philanthropic organization endowed by John D. Rockefeller and chartered in 1913 for the well-being of people throughout the world. It is one of America's oldest private foundations and one of the few with strong international interests. From its beginning, the Foundation has sought to identify, and address at their source, the causes of human suffering and need.

In 1998, the Foundation organized its programs around eight core strategies. Together, these strategies constitute the Foundation's commitment to help define and pursue a path toward environmentally sustainable development consistent with individual rights and a more equitable sharing of the world's resources.

Surdna Foundation

The Surdna Foundation, Inc., a private, grantmaking foundation located in New York City, focuses on the environment, community revitalization, effective citizenry, the arts, and nonprofit sector initiatives. The Foundation states it is "Interested in fostering catalytic, entrepreneurial programs that offer viable solutions to difficult systemic problems."

Introduction

A strange chemistry

Race. Just the mention of the word can stir centuries-old suspicions, hostilities and prejudices. American history has polluted the topic of race for Americans. And as toxic as racial issues can be, when mixed with education they can alter and even corrupt the best of intentions. Despite continuous redefinition and mutable laws, education and race – alone or combined – remain potent in defining and dividing Americans. As a result, the strange chemistry of education and race has weakened healthy discourse and slowed national progress.

Analyzing the effects

Far too often the influence of education and race sets a predictable course for groups of American children. It can determine whether a child's path is broad, lit with high hopes and endless possibility, or simply dead-end, littered with broken promises and neglected potential. With identities, long-held beliefs and futures at stake it's not surprising that Americans find it difficult, and sometimes painful, to engage in open and honest conversation about education and race.

The Public Education Network and Public Agenda observed the absence of this necessary dialogue. In 1996 they joined forces to conduct an in-depth examination of education and race. Probing the views of citizens from across the country, they set out to find what impedes honest talk and clear the way for healthy public discourse about this complex American issue. They conducted a random survey of African-American and White public school parents to explore their perspectives on education and race. And they made it possible for eight community-based organizations to engage local citizens in dialogue about education and race.

Solutions for the future

The urgent need to move on – despite our past – intensifies each day. While the nation grows more ethnically and racially diverse, will we erase the lines that divide us? Or, will we be kept apart by fear? And as schools raise the bar with higher standards, will we lift *all* children to reach their potential or rest on familiar excuses?

This report highlights communities and organizations that are moving on. They know racial diversity and public education hold unlimited power to unite and strengthen our nation in ways not yet seen. Their public conversations on education and race created opportunities to voice past trespasses, identify current challenges and envision future solutions. With a new era upon us there's hope – through deep, honest discussion – we'll soon dilute the troubling effects of race in education.

A National Conversation: A Joint Project of PEN and Public Agenda

The Education and Race Initiative is a joint venture of the Public Education Network (PEN), a national nonprofit network of community-based organizations and Public Agenda, a national research and policy organization. Funded by the Kellogg, Mott, Rockefeller and Surdna foundations, the initiative examines the impact of Americans' racial attitudes on public education.

PEN and Public Agenda have undertaken this initiative to develop national models for conversation about education and race that:

- Help people engage the issues in a deliberative and productive way
- Structure deliberative and productive communication about race
- Build bridges between racial groups that can lead to improved education for all children in a community.

Because of sensitivity surrounding the topic of race, the initiative unfolded in four main phases to thoroughly probe and uncover the complexities and subtleties of views. Each phase built upon previous work and will inform future work.

Phase One: Conducting research and publishing *Time To Move On* (April 1998 – February 1999)

After listening to the voices of over 1600 parents and educators, Public Agenda created *Time To Move On: African-American and White Parents Set An Agenda For Public Schools*, a report of its findings about education and race. Using in-depth telephone surveys, focus groups and individual interviews, Public Agenda probed the personal experiences of parents, their views on broad social and political issues, their support for educational change, and finally, the role of race in influencing their views.

The research for *Time To Move On* focused sharply on measuring the views of African-American and White parents of children now in school. This initial focus on only two racial groups allowed for full exploration of intricate views and relationships, and Public Agenda is interested in conducting similar research with Hispanic, Asian American, and other minority parents.

Six key findings from Public Agenda's research are outlined in *Time To Move On*. The findings, presented in separate sections of the report, describe the views of the parents on issues of education and race. Here are excerpted summaries of the findings detailed in *Time to Move On*. Contact Public Agenda for the full report.

Excerpts from *Time to Move On*, Public Agenda's report of its research findings:

Finding One – The Message From Black Parents: Academics First And Foremost

For African-American parents, the most important goal for public schools – the prize they seek with single-minded resolve – is academic achievement for their children. These parents believe in integration and want to pursue it, but insist that nothing divert attention from their overriding concern: getting a solid education for their kids. And despite jarring experiences with racism over years, their focus is resolutely on the here and now. They want to move beyond the past and prepare their children for the future.

Finding Two – The Current Political Agenda: Time-Honored Or Timeworn?

African-American parents are firmly committed to promoting diversity in the schools, by the voice serious doubts about policies commanding center stage in political and media debates. The see approaches such as affirmative action in school hiring as double-edged swords: They accomplish some goals, but they also have the potential for negative consequences and can often distract schools form their main task. Most African-American parents also accept standardized tests as valid measures of student achievement, and most say community discussion about education might be improved by less emphasis on race.

Finding Three – Black Student Achievement: An Educational Crisis

African-American parents' laser -like focus on academic achievement reflects deep anxiety about how their children fare in the nation's schools. They believe far too many Black children are not learning enough, and far too many of the schools they attend are unacceptably deficient. In their minds, the problem is at crisis point. White parents also believe African-American youngsters attend poorer schools and are less likely to do well academically, but they see the problem as limited to poor, urban areas and do not call the situation a crisis.

Finding Four – White Parents: Will My Children Have to Pay The Price?

The views of White parents on race and the public schools are complex and often ambivalent. They want African-American children to receive a good education that will allow them to succeed and build strong lives for themselves. White parents often voice a sense of pride that their children's educational experience is far more diverse than their own. But they also have anxieties: They have often had to struggle to find good schools, and are concerned that their

quality is tenuous. Many White parents fear that an influx of African-American students into a school would bring social and academic problems. Most say it is not the students' race, but the socioeconomic status of their families that concerns them. And they are deeply uncomfortable admitting what troubles them.

Finding Five – Integration: It's All In The Details

Both Black and White parents say integration is valuable, but on closer examination White – and to some extent, Black – fears emerge. Both groups believe integrated schools improve race relations and enhance their children's ability to thrive in a diverse world. But they are also wary of associated costs: that schools will be distracted from academics, that bitter disputes will emerge, that their own children will end up paying the price. Whites are fearful that integration will bring troubled children into local schools; Blacks fear their children will be thrown into hostile and contentious school environments. Most parents want integration to occur naturally and are optimistic that things can improve. Ironically, relatively few have direct experience with efforts to achieve school integration.

Finding Six – Of Like Minds: African-American And White Parents Set An Agenda For Public Schools

Despite many difference in their experience and concerns, White and African-American parents have strikingly similar visions of what it takes to education kids: involved parents, top-notch staff and schools that guarantee the basics, high academic expectations and standards, safety and order. White and Black parents also share considerable common ground over how to help Black children and failing schools improve.

Phase Two: Developing the town meeting framework (December 1998 – February 1999)

Using its extensive research as background, Public Agenda created a model – a town meeting framework – to engage both urban and rural citizens in conversations on education and race. The conversation model, called *Helping All Students Succeed In A Diverse Society*, includes a video, script, and written guides to stimulate conversations and to generate ideas for taking action. The report findings and other insights from producing *Time To Move On* enabled Public Agenda to create a model that responds to citizens' concerns about and need for discussing education and race in public forums.

Public Agenda conducted six focus groups in six cities across the country to develop and test the town meeting framework and video before releasing it to community-based organizations.

Public Agenda's town meetings are designed to:

- Promote rich and productive dialogue among a broad cross-section of the community that clarifies area s of common ground, areas of disagreement, and concerns and needs for further information
- Help educators become more aware of the community's perceptions, misconceptions, questions, and values
- Help establish lines of communication so that new issues can be better addressed as they arise
- Build local capacity to create more – and even better – community conversations in the future
- Explore possible steps, beyond the first town meeting, to engage the community at large in ways to improve education.

The Public Agenda materials provide detailed instructions for each phase of a community conversation from planning and assigning tasks to selecting moderators, recruiting participants and evaluating results. Town meetings are structured to run for three to four hours, including a meal, orientation, moderated small-group discussions and a wrap-up session.

Phase Three: Awarding grants and engaging citizens (December 1998 – December 1999)

Eight LEFs received grants of up to $25,000 to plan and conduct conversations on education and race. With support from PEN and Public Agenda, the representative LEFs sponsored community conversations, throughout 1999, to stimulate honest, civil and deliberative dialogue. The grant initiative supported the use of the town meeting framework as well as other models for public engagement. The Public Agenda framework allowed sites the flexibility of using it as a stand-alone conversation model and in conjunction with other models, such as study circles, *Standards in Practice*, and "fishbowls."

Spanning the country and representing its vast cultural and racial diversity, the eight LEF sites that organized the conversations are:

- Fund for Educational Excellence – Baltimore, Maryland
- Forward in the Fifth – Berea, Kentucky
- Education Fund for Greater Buffalo – Buffalo, New York
- Public Education & Business Coalition – Denver, Colorado
- Partners in Public Education – Grand Rapids, Michigan
- Hattiesburg Area Education Foundation – Hattiesburg, Mississippi
- Marcus A. Foster Educational Institute – Oakland, California
- Paterson Education Foundation – Paterson, New Jersey

Collectively, these community-based groups and their partners brought together over 850 individuals for more than 70 public forums to discuss education and race. The conversation models varied and accordingly the public forums ranged in size, from 5 up to 79 participants. Their efforts generated serious discussion among residents about what kind of communities they would like to inhabit, what kind of education they feel their children need, and what changes in the status quo they will support.

This report captures the initial experiences of the eight LEFs as they broach and probe sensitive topics with community residents. The conversation models they used are not intended as one-time events, but rather as the first round of voices in a continuous public dialogue. The public discussions are designed to spark interest, better inform citizens, and spur people into action to improve their community's schools.

Phase Four: Disseminating tools and "lessons learned" to a national audience (Throughout 2000)
PEN and Public Agenda have created a comprehensive plan for sharing the results of their research and the outcomes of community conversations with policymakers, educators, community groups, and funders across the country. Through conferences, briefings, videos and publications, the partners will present the outcomes of the initiative, highlight the issues of concern among citizens, and seek policy changes that have a positive and long-lasting impact on the quality of public education for all children.

As part of the comprehensive dissemination plan, PEN has produced this toolkit to encourage and assist other communities, interested in holding similar conversations on education and race. By sharing the challenges, lessons learned and outcomes from the eight initial conversation sites, PEN and Public Agenda hope to amplify and sustain the national discussion.

About the Toolkit
Divided into two main sections, the toolkit is designed to help you understand the experiences of other communities and carry out public conversations in your neighborhoods and schools. You may recognize the racial history and educational issues from other cities as familiar context in your own community.

Section One: Stories from the Field chronicles the experiences of eight communities, which while geographically and demographically different, confront remarkably similar educational issues. The LEFs offer insight into their conversations by sharing information on:

- Community Context: Introducing the conversation site
- Local Partners: Sharing the work
- Goals and Objectives: Stating the purpose
- Planning Process: Setting the stage
- The Facts: Gathering and sharing student achievement data
- The Conversations: Engaging the public (topics, themes, findings and community voices)
- The Future: Sustaining the conversation, taking action and producing results

[Note to Richard: Perhaps icons – marking tools found in Section Two – can be used in the margin of pages covering the sites.]

Section Two: Tools and Lessons Learned presents actual materials developed and used by Public Agenda, PEN, and LEFs to plan and conduct effective conversations. It also offers lessons learned from organizers and participants who want to improve on the experience. Most of the tools included in this report support the Public Agenda town meeting framework.

- *Getting Started* – shares ways to establish a clear and measurable direction, timeline and budget to achieve results.
- *Planning the Conversations*– outlines step-by-step measures to coordinate a well-organized and broadly supported initiative.
- *Researching Your Schools and Community* – identifies types of data on schools and students to better inform your community and how to collect it.
- *Engaging the Public* – details strategies to attract diverse participants and elicit honest responses to critical school and community issues.
- *Publicizing Your Work* – presents ideas and examples for getting the word out.
- *Evaluating Your Conversations* – offers survey instruments and strategies to measure effectiveness.
- *Moving On* – gives concrete examples of what communities can do to sustain the conversation and create progressive change.

Section One

STORIES FROM THE FIELD

Baltimore, Maryland

Berea, Kentucky

Buffalo, New York

Denver, Colorado

Grand Rapids, Michigan

Hattiesburg, Mississippi

Oakland, California

Paterson, New Jersey

Concluding thoughts based on experiences in the field

BALTIMORE

Local Education Fund: Fund for Educational Excellence

Founded in 1984, Fund for Educational Excellence is a partnership of businesses, parents, educators, and neighbors working to improve public educational opportunities for children in Baltimore City public schools.

Local Project Title: Building Models for National Conversations on Education and Race

Community Context: Introducing the conversation site

Much like other large cities across the country, Baltimore is grappling with a loss of its middle class to the suburbs and flux among remaining city residents – many living in poverty. Unlike most areas in Maryland, it is struggling to meet the educational needs of largely poor, African-American children.

With a student enrollment of 108,000, Baltimore City's public schools are nearly 90% African-American, and well over half of students are eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch. State assessments have exposed dramatic achievement gaps between students in Baltimore City and elsewhere in the state, and between African-American and White students. Astonishingly high rates of students – 84% of third graders – in Baltimore City cannot read on grade level. Such dismal test results have focused state policymakers and local education advocates on improving minority achievement.

At the forefront of local efforts is the Fund for Educational Excellence, which sponsors *Achievement First*, a whole-school change initiative centered on high educational standards. Holding public forums that examine the intersection of education and race seemed a fitting extension of its work on standards, expectations and student achievement.

Local Partners: Sharing the work

Assembling a group of partners it deemed credible and valuable, the Fund drew on their respective expertise and ability to reach out to a cross-section of the city's residents.

- *Advocates for Children and Youth*, a statewide research and policy group, framed student data in jargon-free language and recommended policies to remedy problems.

Baltimore Education Network (BEN), a coalition of parents and grassroots organizations, helped design the conversation model and promoted involvement among its constituents.

Education Trust, a Washington-based nonprofit organization, introduced national data and resources to help parents and community advocates understand standards, raise expectations, and take steps to close the achievement gap.

School, Family, Community Partnership, a Johns Hopkins University program, brought trained, school-based facilitators to lead conversations and disseminate project results.

Baltimore Sun and *Baltimore Times*, local newspapers, publicized the initiative through articles on student achievement and school reform issues.

Goals and Objectives: Stating the purpose

Integrating the public conversations into their core work, the Fund set out to:

- Identify and analyze the achievement gaps between children in Baltimore City and children in the state of Maryland
- Convene groups of parents and community partners to discuss the achievement gaps, their beliefs about teachers and school expectations, and their ideas about improving student performance
- Provide information for parents and community advocates about the roles of standards, how student work can be used to measure a school's expectations of students
- Support and implement initiatives and policies that will help to close the gap.

Planning Process: Setting the stage

The Fund knew conversations about difficult topics – like education and race – require considerable planning and strong facilitation. Fund program officer Jennifer Economos-Green managed the overall project, while an eight-member planning committee – comprised of partners, district administrators and parents – developed a script and public engagement format for the conversations. A cadre of 25 experienced facilitators, recruited by partners, lay essential foundations with stakeholders in schools and across the community.

To keep connections to its core work, the Fund decided to conduct two types of public engagement. Its own model, modified from the Education Trust's *Standards in Practice*, was used in 20 school-based sessions and remains an integral element of its *Achievement First* initiative. Two town meetings, using Public Agenda's framework, were used to for discussions in the broader community.

Economos-Green says, "It was more intensive than any other project I've ever worked on." Planning the conversations took the Fund into uncharted territory – convening new and diverse community collaborators, finding facilitators with appropriate skills and experience, and exploring ways to reach audiences at the grassroots level – which consumed considerable staff and volunteer time over several months.

The Facts: Gathering and sharing student achievement data

The Fund's early work on standards "revealed that very little is expected of students." And believing concrete evidence about teacher expectations should drive conversations the Fund used actual student work and assignments from local teachers in some of its sessions. During these sessions, groups of teachers, administrators and parents used citywide standards and rigorous state test requirements to develop rubrics, define excellent work, and then assess the quality of local teacher assignments and student work. The exercise increased participants' understanding of the links between high expectations, rigorous standards, and increased student achievement.

CONVERSATION MODELS

Public Agenda Framework
2 town meetings
41 participants (total)
Urban League office and a local church
October 1999

Standards in Practice
20 school-based sessions
324 participants (total)
Public schools across the city
October – November 1999

The Conversations: Engaging the public

In Baltimore, the Public Agenda town meeting model enabled a diverse mix of city residents, which included students, to delve into the question of why expectations and performance are so low. Well-trained moderators elicited participants' views on race in a non-threatening way. The *Standards in Practice* sessions used assessments of quality work to provide a clear direction for parents and educators on how to take an active role in improving student achievement.

A participant observed that conversations "were fairly open about needs and problems." The first town meeting – held in the heart of the city – attracted more African Americans and was more diverse than the second meeting on the outskirts of town. Organizers found that the more diverse the group – race, gender, economics, experience, and age – the better the conversation.

Acknowledging the city's high rate of adult illiteracy, organizers took special measures during meetings to encourage full involvement from all participants. Facilitators read aloud written materials and

instructed participants to work as a group on writing assignments. Organizers report, "While it was clear that some participants were largely illiterate, it did not seem to impact their participation."

Topics, themes, findings

The sessions, involving residents from across the city and using different formats, yielded remarkably consistent concerns. Among the most common were inequitable funding, low expectations for students, lack of quality education in urban schools, and insufficient involvement by parents. Organizers report one notable disagreement: "In one group there was a clear division between people who felt that teachers were most accountable, and those who believed that parents are ultimately responsible for their children's education."

Economos-Green observed a generation gap during the discussions. "Students and middle-aged people had different opinions and perspectives." She believes education should be examined through the "generational lens" too.

Community voices – a partnering organizer

Tru Ginsberg, on staff at the Baltimore Education Network, a Fund partner, served as an organizer as well as a participant and then facilitator for the conversations. With a well-rounded perspective, she found the involvement of community partners a crucial element. "Publicity alone is not effective." Members of the partner organizations made a lot of personal appeals for their constituents to attend. As a result, she says, "I heard voices I'd never heard before."

Another organizer told how parents – many feeling cheated by public schools – recalled, "having graduated (from city schools) with A's and B's, enrolling in college, and being told they were only fit for remedial courses." One parent shared that on the morning of the session her daughter had cried over breakfast from worry she'd do poorly on the SAT because of easy high school assignments.

<u>The Future: Sustaining the conversation, taking action and producing results</u>

The Fund has discovered their conversations are changing schools and partners, in intentional and unanticipated ways. "An unintended outgrowth of this initiative has been the opportunity to provide training in this model (*Standards in Practice*) to nearly every administrator (a total of 180) in the Baltimore City School system, and the city school board, " says Economos-Green. She reports that one influential participant was so impressed, he called a special meeting of the school board for a three-hour presentation on the model. She exclaims this degree of engagement with districtwide policymakers is "unheard of!"

The Fund's partners are also reshaping their work because of the conversations. The Baltimore Urban League is training its staff to use the Public Agenda video and framework for discussions on race. In schools, principals indicate an increase in the number of parents who are discussing standards and the quality of their children's assignments.

Baltimore's plans for sustaining new relationships and community interest include:

- Expanding the use of *Standards in Practice* by training school improvement teams and educating the broader community
- Using its completed data analysis in future town meetings and in reports to district administrators, principals, community organizations and funders of school initiatives.
- Publishing samples of "quality student work" in school newsletters and local newspapers
- Assessing the district's professional development resources and developing a more deliberate and relevant training system
- Encouraging local education advocates – partners in the conversation – to re-focus on standards.

BEREA

Local Education Fund: Forward in the Fifth

Founded 13 years ago by prominent newspaper publishers and editors in eastern Kentucky, Forward in the Fifth has a tradition of engaging the public around education issues. As a community-based, nonprofit organization, it works to bring communities and schools together to ensure all children have the educational opportunities they need for full and productive lives.

Local Project Title: Education and Race in Eastern Kentucky

Community Context: Introducing the conversation site

Talking publicly about education and race is virtually unheard of in the communities served by Forward in the Fifth. Set in rural, eastern Kentucky, a region of mostly poor White residents, the conversations sponsored by Forward in the Fifth offer a distinct perspective. The region includes 39 Kentucky counties, 55 public school districts, 150,000 students, and towns with few residents of color – less than 5% and most African-American. The relatively low number of minorities, however, belies the influence of race on the region's schools.

A topic of conversation in the African-American community for decades, problems of education and race include few minority teachers, low expectations for students of color, incidents of blatant racism, and a curriculum void of multicultural perspectives. The recent arrivals of a Japanese auto plant and Hispanic migrant workers have increased the number of minorities in the region. Pockets of all-White communities remain, but as new and diverse residents arrive, schools are seeking ways to teach tolerance, raise awareness about other cultures and races, and meet the needs of all students.

Upon learning of PEN and Public Agenda's Education and Race Initiative, Forward in the Fifth recognized the value of organizing the region's first multiracial forums to foster frank, yet productive, discussion about education and race.

Local Partners: Sharing the work

Experienced in education and public engagement, Forward in the Fifth selected a partner with roots in anti-racism and social change to complement its work.

Democracy Resource Center (DRC), a multiracial, grassroots organization, lent its reputation and experience in the region to plan public forums and reach out to community residents.

Goals and Objectives: Stating the purpose

By holding public forums in three communities, Forward in the Fifth and DRC aimed to:

- Set and achieve community-driven goals
- Cultivate leadership among county residents
- "Unveil racism" in schools
- Bring positive change in schools to combat racism.

Planning Process: Setting the stage

The partners began developing the initiative by identifying regional problems related to education and race. Deciding to hold town meetings – using the Public Agenda framework – in three targeted counties, they looked to their respective staffs and boards of directors to identify moderators and participants. They also posted a "call for moderators" on the University of Kentucky electronic listserve and publicized town meetings in monthly organizational mailings and through local newspaper coverage.

Designated community leaders in each county selected meeting locations and organized local logistics. DRC also held a series of pre-meetings with minority leaders in each county to spread the word about the conversations and to build trust among residents. Often kept on the fringe of their small, rural communities, African Americans know speaking out on sensitive topics could have serious repercussions. During the pre-meetings, organizers eased the concerns of community leaders and assured residents a "safe place to speak out." This extra measure helped draw strong African-American participation at the town meetings.

Public Agenda staff traveled to Kentucky to train fourteen moderators, who later held two practice sessions. One practice session was with students participating in a summer leadership camp and another was with the partners' boards of directors. Organizers found thorough training for facilitators and ample time to practice their skills essential for effective meetings.

The Facts: Gathering and sharing student achievement data

Organizers turned to the state department of education for student data. They comment that, at first, state officials seemed unsure of how to respond to their request for data. Efforts to collect data proved one of the greatest challenges, but their persistence paid off. The state and local school districts provided data on the racial breakdown of students, dropout rates, and the enrollment of White and minority students in gifted, special education and college programs. The low numbers of minority students in several districts prohibited the racial disaggregation of some data for fear it could violate student confidentiality laws.

Student data is not an integral component of the Public Agenda model and organizers decided to distribute "data packets" – containing student data as well as census data and newspaper articles on education and race – at the end of town meetings.

CONVERSATION MODEL

Public Agenda Framework
3 town meetings
90 participants (total)
Community meeting places across the region
August – October 1999

The Conversations: Engaging the public

Drawing people from all walks of life, Forward in the Fifth held conversations in three counties encompassing seven school districts. Organizers offered transportation to ensure residents of the rural communities had access to the town meetings.

The makeup of the participants influenced the conversation. The first two conversations included mainly African Americans – parents and grandparents, but few educators. The third was racially mixed, but heavily attended by educators. Forward in the Fifth organizer Beth Dotson observed that some African-American parents would not talk about race directly, even when moderators probed. When speaking about problems in schools, she says some used codes, like "those people." Other observers note that, in at least one session, African Americans were very direct and open in discussing race. Dotson remarks that the "personality of each group was different."

In the earlier practice session with all White participants, "Classism was discussed more than racism," Dotson reports, but they stated "both are issues that need to be addressed." And despite the coded language, participants broached sensitive and difficult topics and even disagreed at times.

Topics, themes, findings

Issues emerging from town meetings include:

- Lack of African-American educators in schools
- Racial incidents being ignored by educators and African-American community members
- Lack of student diversity in some schools
- Negative effects of racism, classism, and sexism on self-esteem and achievement
- Lack of sensitivity to Asian Americans, Latinos, Native Americans and other minorities
- Low expectations of all students, but even lower expectations of African-American students
- Need for more community forums – with those in authority present – to discuss education and race

Community voices – a town meeting participant

Ed Ballinger, an African American and recognized community leader, has long been concerned about education in his community. As a participant in one of the town meetings, he found the conversations effective. "There was open discussion. People stated what was on their minds. People did not back away from their opinions."

He found the student data and Public Agenda research particularly telling. "It hit right at home," Ballinger says, noting that local issues are common problems in other communities. "All kids are not getting the same educational opportunities."

Ballinger is disturbed by the high dropout rate among young Black men and asserts, "We need African-American counselors and teachers." He and others have actively pursued this and other issues from the town meetings with district administrators. After participating in a recent school forum with principals and parents, he believes the community's response to the town meeting has "opened the eyes of the people at the school system."

His advice to other communities facing similar issues: "Don't give up. Keep on struggling to do what's best for not only Black kids, but all kids. Keep on keeping on."

<u>The Future: Sustaining the conversation, taking action and producing results</u>

Town meeting participants and other residents are already leading the way for change. Both Forward in the Fifth and DRC are supporting local efforts by providing technical assistance and research, publicizing pertinent issues, and integrating the conversations into their future work. County residents are meeting with district administrators, church congregations, and parents to develop specific strategies for

overcoming problems of education and race. One group has established an "Expectations Agreement," which aims "to clarify the working relationship between the Democracy Resource Center (DRC) and community people working on issues of racism in the schools (in the county)."

Forward in the Fifth notes residents are investing considerable time and energy to improve the racial climate and educational outcomes in their communities. In Kentucky, the public conversations have led organizers to begin:

- Empowering county residents to take action to reach their goals
- Improving communication between schools and the community
- Changing how schools address the academic needs of White and minority students

BUFFALO

Local Education Fund: Education Fund for Greater Buffalo

Formed in March of 1998, the Education Fund for Greater Buffalo implements strategies to initiate school reform and help students with their social and academic needs by promoting strong relationships among schools, districts, and social service agencies.

Local Project Title: Community Conversations on Education and Race

Community Context: Introducing the conversation site

Ranked as one of America's most racially segregated cities in a University of Michigan study, Buffalo continually struggles with segregated housing patterns and racial tension over resources, politics, and schools. Fragmented neighborhoods in its urban center suffer high rates of poverty and economic decay, leaving significant numbers of school-age children – over 80% – eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch. While schools across the county average a student enrollment three-quarters White, Buffalo's public schools are starkly different. The urban district's 46,000 students are 54% African-American, 33% White, 8% Hispanic, 1% Native American, and 1% Asian/Pacific Islander.

Criticized for some time, Buffalo's city schools contend with a widening racial gap and eroding public support. Highly publicized divisiveness between school board members and a district superintendent has further undermined community support of schools. Unrest extends beyond the city to suburban schools, which also confront issues of race, equity, and student achievement. Increases in state standards have raised the bar for all students. With only 23% of students in Buffalo performing at the new levels and 44% across the county, concern about area schools – especially under-performing schools – is at an all time high.

Though recently formed the Education Fund saw an urgent need to address its escalating local issues and it turned to PEN and Public Agenda's Education and Race Initiative for answers.

Local Partners: Sharing the work

Buffalo's Education Fund recruited three types of partners to perform the range of functions required for its community conversations.

- Technical partners:
  WNED/Channel 17, a public television and radio station, publicized the conversations and the results.
  Mitchell, DeTine and Neiler, a public relations firm, prepared press releases and engaged the media.
  The Center for Regional Governance at the University of Buffalo provided performance data from its task forces on equity and education.
  Roll Call Against Racism, a faith-based coalition, brought its extensive experience with Study Circles.
  National Conference for Community and Justice (NCCJ), an antiracism group, assisted in planning public forums based experience from its National Summit.

- School Partners:
  Buffalo Public Schools, an urban district, promoted conversations and provided meeting space.
  Board of Cooperative Education Studies solicited participants from the suburbs and county districts.

- Constituent Partners:
  A broad range of organizations promoted the conversations among their members and constituents, recruited participants, and hosted conversations. These partners include: *New York State United Teachers* (the state's largest teachers union), *Erie County Association of School Boards, The United Way, United Neighborhoods* (a service agency for over 500 block clubs), *VOICE* (a faith-based group), and eight parent organizations.

Goals and Objectives – Stating the purpose

Buffalo set four main goals for its project:

- To increase mutual understanding and respect for people's experience
- To create consensus around expectations for both children and adults (toward high achievement)
- To create a set of solutions for local issues around education and race
- To create an environment where the community and the Fund can take action on these issues.

Planning process – Setting the stage

Education Fund project coordinator Dr. Adrianne Christmas held primary responsibility for planning the project while relying on local partners for community outreach. "Education was a heady topic at the time

of the conversations," states Christmas. As a result, the Education Fund looked for a model that was compatible with Buffalo's political climate.

The Fund decided on a combination of Study Circles sessions and Public Agenda town meetings. A partner, Roll Call Against Racism, developed the study circles curriculum by integrating its own conversation model with the Public Agenda framework. Organizers believed in-depth discussion – four two-hour study circles – was necessary given concerns over the community's racial tension. A town meeting format was planned for some groups and for a large culminating event.

Buffalo launched a broad public awareness campaign to publicize the conversations and recruit participants. The Fund produced letters and flyers and circulated them across the city, using its exhaustive list of partners: local nonprofit organizations, community centers, churches, schools and youth groups. A partnering public relations firm and media sent press releases and aired announcements on local radio and television station. The pool of 54 moderators, most with counseling backgrounds and past experience with study circles, also recruited participants.

"Relationships are critical," says Christmas. As a new LEF, the Education Fund had not established many of the relationships that are essential for collaboration. In planning the conversations, she says local partners "were seasoned and experienced in this type of work."

<u>The Facts: Gathering and sharing student achievement data</u>

Organizers found collecting local data disaggregated by race was more difficult than expected. A desegregation ruling led some districts to bar the release of recent student data. Efforts to collect data were also met with resistance from school staff. It seems some educators felt threatened by the idea of public discussions about student achievement, fearing they might be held accountable for inequities and their jobs might be at stake. With assistance from an area university and its partners, the Education Fund eventually collected some disaggregated student data but admits it was limited.

Collecting national data was easier. Organizers used research from the Education Trust and the Census Bureau to offer a baseline of information for conversations. They also used education research and newspaper articles provided by a local reporter.

Although they did not present as much data as hoped, organizers found it useful during conversations and report participants – especially parents – were shocked by the low achievement rates.

CONVERSATION MODELS

Public Agenda Framework
8 group sessions
67 participants (total)
Various meeting locations across the greater metropolitan area

Study Circles
8 study circle s
1 culminating town meeting
Groups ranged from 5 to 17 participants

The Conversations: Engaging the public

Conversations took place across the greater Buffalo area, in a variety of settings and with a broad range of constituents. Although the sessions drew fewer participants than expected, those who came reflected the ethnic and political diversity of the region and included urban and suburban residents. Students, many of them members of a Boys and Girls Club, and groups of grandparents played significant roles as conversation participants. In some cases students moderated discussions with their peers.

Parents' voices were absent from some discussions. "Local issues pulled parents away from conversations," reports Christmas. "Many parents have given up on public schools," Christmas says referring to some of the parents she and others contacted and who declined to participate.

During a series of four study circles, two facilitators, each a different race, led conversations using the national findings from Public Agenda's *Time to Move On*. The sessions were structured as follows:

1st session: Introductions, presentation of student data and discussion of the first two Public Agenda findings
2nd session: Three school viewpoints and more data
3rd session: Discussion of final two findings and brainstorming
4th session: Development of action plan

In the study circles format, Christmas reports that trust between facilitators and participants and among participants developed over time. The progressive sessions worked well for participants who needed time to air their concerns, reflect on new information, and voice their ideas for solutions. Christmas believes "the smaller the group, the more intimate the conversations – the more intimate the conversations, more honest." In some sessions, "People were cordial, but not really open," she observes. She also notes that "socioeconomic status" was often discussed in lieu of race, but in sessions with a majority of racial minorities discussions of race were more open.

Topics, themes, findings

Study circles and town meetings yielded several issues among residents.

- Lack of parent involvement in schools
- Parents feeling isolated, powerless, unwanted as decision makers in schools
- Lack of qualified and caring teachers
- Need to work with parents and their children inside and outside of the schools
- Racial prejudice and discriminatory practices by teachers, students and administrators
- Lack of suitable school resources for high student achievement

Community voices – a study circle participant

S.T. Jones, a college and career advisor for an after-school program, participated in one of Buffalo's study circles because of a personal invitation from an organizer. She saw relevance in the conversations and her work on urban education issues.

"In Buffalo, the gap is widening between those with influence and those without it. Students with potential often end up at schools that don't challenge them," says Jones. She believes communities should "spread the wealth" so all schools can offer the same opportunities to students.

Jones found the opportunity to learn more about student achievement and school practices the most meaningful part of her involvement. She laments that more parents did not participate. "There's a huge information gap between those in education and those outside education. Parents and the community should know more about schools and student performance. Parents often complain but many do not participate in events like this."

Jones was particularly impressed with the well-organized study circle sessions. "There was good information, outcomes – everyone achieved what they set out to – and good at keeping things on track." Her advice to other communities: Find a way to get parents involved.

<u>The Future: Sustaining the conversation, taking action, and producing results</u>

Believing changes in Buffalo are overdue, the Education Fund sees its conversations as paving the way for change. The Fund has discovered new partners and is introducing strategies focused on family involvement and support for youth to improve its public schools. Buffalo's plans include:

- Holding a youth initiative to address the issues students raised, including a lack of adult support, a need for afterschool programs with academic components, and a need for community partnerships
- Making educational standards understandable and accessible at the grassroots
- Integrating "lessons learned" from PEN and Public Agenda's Education and Race Initiative into all future initiatives.

DENVER

Local Education Fund: Public Education and Business Coalition

The Public Education and Business Coalition, founded in 1981, promotes academic excellence and success for students and professional excellence among educators in Colorado's public schools and communities. Its work is driven by the vision that "All public school students will achieve rigorous academic standards and will complete high school well prepared for post-secondary options and for life in a diverse world."

Local Project Title: Ethnic Collaborations on Educational Reform

Community Context: Introducing the conversation site

"Denver is a tale of two cities." This is how organizers in Denver describe the current climate in their city. Despite a thriving city economy, many communities suffer from high rates of poverty and decline. The "westside," a predominately Latino community on the outskirts of town, and northeast Denver, an area of historically African-American neighborhoods, are two such communities. Public school students in these communities are predominately Latino and African-American and well over half are eligible for free and reduced-priced lunches.

The litany of issues confronting Denver residents and school administrators is a familiar one. Schools are braving a widening achievement gap between the poor and affluent, and between White students and those of color, a dramatic shift in demographics after returning to neighborhood schools, a move to higher standards, a populace alienated by language and socioeconomic status, and an increase in fears about safety and violence.

Raising achievement levels among Denver's 67,000 students – despite community challenges – is at the core of the Coalition's work. Already involved in a collaborative Ford Foundation-funded initiative, it saw the conversations on race as perfectly aligned to local efforts already underway.

Local Partners: Sharing the work

The Coalition found PEN and Public Agenda's Education and Race Initiative an ideal place to build strategic community alliances.

Denver Education Network, an established Urban Partnership Project, brought the resources of 17 inner city schools, three colleges, and numerous community groups and businesses.

Metropolitan State College, an urban, four-year institution, convened statewide higher education institutions that provide pre-service professional development for teachers.

Latin American Research and Service Agency (LARASA), a national, community-based policy and technical assistance organization, coordinated plans for the conversations and provided access to significant numbers of Latino and Hispanic residents.

Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform, a national network of school reform advocates, lent its knowledge and resources on standards.

Latino Campaign for Education, local community advocates, co-hosted conversations.

Denver Public Schools assigned key administrators to participate in the planning process.

Goals and Objectives: Stating the purpose

The Public Education and Business Coalition's purpose for conversations was to:

- Engage community participants in discussions about standards
- Examine why minority children struggle to achieve the standards
- Explore ways for the community and schools to share responsibility in ensuring all children meet the standards.

Planning Process: Setting the stage

Bridging concurrent initiatives, the Coalition's planning committee involved individuals and organizations already working in the targeted schools and neighborhoods. Among the committee members were representatives from Cross City Campaign, Casey Foundation-funded neighborhood initiatives, Ford Foundation-funded education reform initiatives, and the Denver Foundation.

The Coalition researched several public engagement models – Study Circles and Annenberg – before deciding to use both the Public Agenda framework and *Standards in Practice*. Using two models required training for two sets of moderators. Organizers found moderators were "moving targets" and decided to pay stipends to ensure a pool of dedicated and well-trained community members to guide the conversations.

Coalition project director Jan Meck estimates that organizers spent three months on the initial planning, two months on organizing the events and recruiting participants, and then two months training moderators

and holding conversations. The planning process required more staff time and more money than expected. "We learned about true community organizing. We underestimated the resources required, but we tapped partners that were experienced organizers, like LARASA," says Meck

The Facts: Gathering and sharing student achievement data

Disaggregated student data was readily available in Denver. Organizers used school by school student data – disaggregated by ethnicity – to help parents understand where their children stand when compared with other students of the same grade within the school and school district.

During the planning stage, organizers questioned how to present data revealing achievement gaps with sensitivity and relevance. For example, should such data be introduced early on or brought out as parents begin to ask how their children compare with other ethnic groups? They decided to send materials in advance of conversations so participants would have time to thoroughly review data before the sessions.

The Education Trust provided national research on racial achievement gaps and disparities in students' taking advanced rigorous curriculum and in vocational education programs. To complement the data, organizers invited parents and educators from another Colorado school district where students had made phenomenal gains in achievement. The district, with a student profile comparable to Denver's, had moved its students from 13% proficiency to 87% proficiency in three years. The guests offered real-life examples of how a community – with significant numbers of poor and minority children – used rigorous standards to improve the academic performance of students.

CONVERSATION MODELS

Standards in Practice
1 school-based session
39 participants
West High School
September 1999

Public Agenda Framework
1 town meeting
79 participants
A neighborhood community center
October 1999

The Conversations: Engaging the public

The first conversation used *Standards in Practice* during a full Saturday session. An Education Trust consultant presented a train-the-trainer workshop on the use of the model. Parent liaisons from the planning committee had recruited parent-teacher teams of three to five members to attend the workshop and serve as leaders for subsequent conversations. Thirty-nine participated in the workshop and will go on to lead other sessions.

The Education Trust presenter used student work, data, and testimonies from parents and educators to educate participants about standards. Coalition organizers commented on their "powerful" national data, knowledgeable presenters, and helpful materials.

The second conversion, a Public Agenda town meeting at a community center, was held on a Tuesday evening. The group, 79 participants, was racially diverse and represented local stakeholders – parents, students, teachers, principals, school board members, community activists, and senior citizens.

The public engagement models used in Denver were designed for different purposes. Organizers say, however, their experience with the two models produced no notable differences in how participants responded to the issue of race. They note that the Public Agenda model requires skilled moderators who can tease out subtleties related to race. "The Public Agenda model relies heavily on the moderators to probe. You lose a lot if you don't have good moderators," says an organizer from Denver. The Education Trust model focuses on school data, educational standards, and student work and engages participants around these issues to map plans to improve student performance.

For both sessions, the Coalition and its partners took great care to draw strong participation and bridge potential communication gaps. Organizers served breakfast and lunch, provided childcare, and offered Spanish translations of materials and Spanish interpreters.

Working with LARASA was critical for the Coalition. "The conversations established real partnership for our future work," says Meck. The work is producing deeper relationships in communities and having a significant impact on the LEF's programming and outreach.

Topics, themes, findings

Conversations provided a rare opportunity for parents and other community members to discuss the barriers and issues in education. Among the issues raised were:

- Role of standards in student achievement
- Significant role of understandable and meaningful student data
- Questions about grade inflation, curriculum dilution and low expectations
- Need to build a "critical mass" of engaged parents and teachers
- Language as a barrier to high student achievement
- Challenges and benefits of bilingual education
- Need for more bilingual communication with parents
- Importance of parents in the standards movement

- Need for parent-teacher partnerships in student learning and advocacy for standards and higher expectations

Some groups acknowledged culture as a potential factor in student achievement. For example, some Latino parents won't question authority, and therefore don't challenge teachers and school administrators when it comes to their children's academic performance. Organizers report that participants believe the school and community must break down these cultural barriers.

Overall organizers found that during discussions the participants probed deeply and wanted to take on the tough issues. They offered no "excuses"– mobility, race, economics, and language – for low academic achievement. "They are willing to get in the trenches with their kids if they'll do better," says Meck. "It was apparent that standards offer a solution."

Community voices – a project coordinator

Jan Meck, the project coordinator in Denver says, "When we started I was anxious to get to the conversations and get to answers. But true public engagement percolates up. You can't impose conversation on people – it takes time," says Meck. "I realize that the process is part of the evolution."

The aftermath of the shootings at Colorado's Columbine High School, a school board election, and racially-charged headlines about gaps in student performance had catapulted education to forefront at the time of Denver's conversations. Given the heated climate, Meck says that organizers decided not to promote conversations with the media. She says that they did not want to attract the "activists," and instead "wanted the quiet voices for the first phase." Some residents do not want to talk at highly-publicized events. Looking back Meck thinks "Next time organizers should capitalize on these headlines and emphasize that the gap is not acceptable."

<u>The Future: Sustaining conversations, taking action and producing results</u>

Troubled neighborhoods and schools in Denver are attracting considerable local and national resources to improve conditions for residents and students. The Coalition and its partners are using their relationships and experiences from the conversations to bridge these parallel efforts and strengthen the work underway. Meck says, "The momentum is the most exciting thing." Denver's plans for the future include:

- Expanding *Standards and Practice* sessions and multiplying the cadre of local advocates for high standards: parents will train parents and teachers will train teachers
- Continuing the work begun by the conversations under the Coalition's "Collaborating for Educational Reform Initiative," funded by a two-year Ford Foundation grant

- Collaborating with LARASA on policy issues and on public engagement
- Partnering with organizers from an Annie E. Casey Foundation's neighborhood initiative on education projects.

GRAND RAPIDS

Local Education Fund: Partners in Public Education (PPE)

Partners in Public Education, established in 1986, envisions a strong Grand Rapids and seeks to raise student achievement levels in public schools by engaging the community in strong, mutually beneficial partnerships with schools.

Local Project Title: Grand Rapids Citizens Circles on Race and Education

Community Context: Introducing the conversation site

While the City of Grand Rapids and neighboring suburbs experience an economic boom, considerable numbers of the city's minorities and poor live in isolation. Unable to tap the rapidly expanding job market, minorities in Grand Rapids are three times more likely to be poor than are White residents. And despite some progress, housing patterns remain segregated by race and economics.

Closely linked to the economic gap is education. One of three African-American county residents does not have a high school diploma, less than 10 percent have bachelors degrees and fewer than a thousand have graduate degrees. Public confidence in Grand Rapids Public Schools has hit an all time low. Disproportionate numbers of minority and low-income students have teachers who expect too little of them, attend outdated and decaying schools, and have limited access to technology. They also are twice as likely to be placed in special education programs as are their White classmates.

Bearing witness to race riots, 30 years of insufficient "opportunity measures," and persistent racial gaps, several groups in Grand Rapids are aggressively taking action to bring about real change. They recognize these disparities threaten the area's prosperity and improving education is a primary strategy to eliminate gaps. Building on concurrent local efforts and its own work, PPE seized the opportunity to more closely examine the effects of race and racism on student achievement.

Local Partners: Sharing the work

Guided by a set of characteristics for successful partnerships, PPE selected three local partners.

Grand Rapids Public Schools, with a new focus on eliminating the gap, it provided indicators of student progress and success as well as achievement data disaggregated by race.

Grand Rapids Area Center for Ecumenism (GRACE) / Racial Justice Institute, a religious, nonprofit organization, brought expertise from prior work against racism.

Employer Coalition for Healing Racism, formed by a local CEO and the chamber of commerce, delivered a cadre of experienced moderators and access to policy groups.

Goals and Objectives: Stating the purpose

By convening thirty broad-based *Citizens Circles*, PPE set out to research and understand the racial gap in student achievement. Its aim was to allow citizens to:

- Explore student achievement data and other data from schools
- Form consensus on the factors that contribute to the student achievement gap
- Create recommendations for actions necessary to close the gap
- Establish annual goals or targets for reduction measured by educational performance and system performance
- Report progress toward reducing the achievement gap in the larger community.

Planning Process: Setting the stage

PPE project director Karen Ward held primary responsibility for the project, while a planning committee of partners supported the overall work. The committee decided to integrate the Study Circles model with the Public Agenda framework, by discussing issues in a series of four "citizen circles." Thirty-six moderators, most of whom were experienced at leading group discussions on race, received a full day of Public Agenda training. PPE assigned one White and one minority moderator to each circle, deeming biracial co-facilitation an effective measure for its public discussions on race.

Advance coordination of logistics helped moderators carry out effective and efficient meetings. For example, PPE set up agreements with local restaurants to cater the study circle sessions. Moderators ordered food by phone before sessions, meals were delivered to meeting locations, and bills were sent directly to PPE.

Participants were recruited through mailings and a media campaign including radio interviews, midday television shows, and articles in organizational newsletters and local newspapers.

The Facts: Gathering and sharing student achievement data

There was a deliberate use of data to provide participants with objective information for discussion and to offer a baseline for measuring progress over time. To collect data, organizers met in person with local superintendents. Four districts released data disaggregated by race, with the understanding that data would not be used to compare one district to another.

During sessions, participants received an introductory data sheet followed by bar graphs of cumulative grade point averages (GPAs) and by state assessment scores of 11th graders. Receiving only a snapshot of student performance and achievement gaps, some participants expressed interest in receiving more data.

CONVERSATION MODELS

Study Circles integrated with Public Agenda Framework
15 citizen circles
115 participants (total)
Sites across the city
August – October 1999

The Conversations: Engaging the public

Residents have been engaged in two years of community dialogue on race including annual race summits and leadership conferences on racism. Building on those discussions, PPE and its partners designed a sustainable model reflecting past and ongoing local efforts to explore race relations. As one organizer put it, "The climate in Grand Rapids set the stage for robust discussion."

The Grand Rapids Citizen Circles curriculum combined the Study Circles model and Public Agenda's framework. The adapted model included four two-hour sessions, each with a specific objective.

Session One: Getting to know one another
Session Two: Discussing issues guided by Public Agenda's framework and video
Session Three: Examining local student data, comparing scores and analyzing gap
Session Four: Identifying action steps to reduce the achievement gap

Asking for full commitment, PPE recruited 115 participants using the extensive networks of partners and a variety of other community groups. Fifteen circles, made up of seven to ten participants, convened at meeting locations across the city and at various times. Some circles even attracted participants from outlying communities, 20 to 30 miles away.

The circles generated rich discussion among a diverse pool of participants. "Dynamics of groups were positive, because they were small," believes one organizer. "The circles provided an opportunity for people to meet others they may not have met otherwise." One group has decided to continue group discussions on their own.

An elected official who served as a moderator remarked, "Being a city commissioner in Grand Rapids for so many years I thought I knew a lot of people. I was quite surprised that I only recognized two people in my circle. It gave me a whole new perspective – that's good."

Topics, themes, findings

In Grand Rapids, the Citizen Circles permitted residents to voice their opinions and solutions on a broad range of issues. Among the topics were:

- Gaps in student achievement based on race
- Role of poverty and single-parent homes on low student performance
- Low expectations for minority and poor students
- Need for increased expectations, rigorous standards, and parental and community involvement
- Need to integrate diversity and sensitivity training into staff development programs

Community voices – a facilitator

Carole Morgan Williams runs a pre-college program targeting African-American high school students in Grand Rapids. A past PPE volunteer, Williams became interested in participating in the education and race conversations upon hearing about the initiative. After facilitating a series of citizen circles, she says the most meaningful aspect was "the warm fuzzy feeling from having people talk about such an important topic."

Serving as one of two co-facilitators assigned to circles, Williams believes the biracial pairings work well for diverse group discussions. "Everybody needs somebody there that they identify with," says Williams. The facilitators took turns leading sessions and recording the conversation notes. She found that Grand Rapids' conversation model took a "subtle" approach to the subject of race, which required probing and "finessing" by facilitators. Race was often "alluded to" in the presentations and materials, but she believes that more "upfront" discussions of race are needed. She notes, however, that there was a risk some "people may have been frightened off…(finding the topic) too provocative and too deep."

Williams noted different perceptions and understanding of issues based on the race of participants. During sessions she says, "lights went on for Whites" and sometimes "anger came out in Black participants." Circle members carefully listened to the views of participants. People are "tired of dealing with symptoms," observes Williams. "They're anxious to deal with root causes."

The Future: Taking action, producing results and sustaining the conversation

After the discussion circles ended, an advisory group – made up of 24 moderators and participants – reported recommendations for action from their group. The recommendations are similar and there is strong interest in taking action to close the achievement gap. Among the recommendations are raising expectations for all students, setting rigorous academic standards, increasing parent involvement, requiring accountability from educators, and promoting cultural sensitivity.

PPE and its partners are seeking ways to integrate the recommendations and other conversation outcomes into ongoing local efforts and to launch new strategies to bring lasting change in Grand Rapids. Community plans include:

- Presenting Citizen Circle recommendations at the Racial Justice Institute planned for spring 2000
- Encouraging conversation participants, including teachers and school administrators, to enroll in ongoing public forums and institutes on race and on education
- Assessing how PPE will incorporate recommendations into its ongoing work in education
- Releasing a report to the community as the first in a series of annual progress reports on closing achievement gaps. The report will track progress using the following indicators:
  - implementation of rigorous standards
  - increased opportunities to learn for all students
  - rigor of courses begin taken by all students
  - high expectations for all students
  - higher test scores of minority students
  - reduced number of minority students referred to special education
  - increased teacher accountability
  - increased parent involvement
  - business /community organizations actively involved in the schools (work-based learning opportunities)

HATTIESBURG

Local Education Fund: Hattiesburg Area Education Foundation (HAEF)

The mission of the Hattiesburg Area Education Foundation is to promote the importance of public education, engender collaboration among diverse segments of the community, and develop and implement programs which encourage family and citizen involvement in education. Founded in 1986, it generates both private and community support to enhance public education for all children in the greater Hattiesburg area.

Local Project Title: Winning the Race: Student Achievement, Public Understanding

Community Context: Introducing the conversation site

The geographic boundaries that separate Forrest and Lamar counties' six school districts are just one of many factors that divide this southeast Mississippi community. As in many southern states age-old racial divisions persist today. Historic measures to desegregate schools, then a recent shift back to neighborhood schools, have split community interests. Local children attend schools with disparate demographics, needs, and achievement and in competition for limited resources.

A 1996 town meeting, part of the nationally heralded *Public Conversations about Public Schools*, brought together Hattiesburg-area citizens to set priorities for local education. The town meeting produced topics participants wanted to address in future conversations, one of which was the role of race and socioeconomic status on student achievement.

Two years later, widening achievement gaps and a district superintendent's resignation turned the public's attention again to issues of education and race. At the center of school reform and public engagement efforts, HAEF saw an opportunity to unite its divided community.

Local Partners: Sharing the work

HAEF turned to research-rich centers of the local college to find collaborators for their conversations.

> *University of Southern Mississippi's College of Education and Psychology* provided data on student achievement and an intern to assist in collecting additional data.
>
> *Mississippi Department of Education's Regional Service Center* linked local organizers to state resources and data.

Mission Mississippi, a network of Black and White churches, provided planning committee members and recommended participants.

Goals and Objectives: Stating the purpose

HAEF and its partners conducted their community conversations to:

- Identify and gather existing data relevant to student achievement
- Conduct local research that disaggregates achievement data by race
- Increase community awareness, especially among parents, about existing differences in achievement by race among Black and White students
- Conduct local research that compares local perspectives about issues of education and race with the findings from Public Agenda's *Time to Move On*.
- Stimulate interest among educational stakeholders, especially parents, in honest exploration and discussion abut issues of education and race
- Engage a group of parents from each of HAEF's six districts in honest exploration and dialogue about issues of education and race
- Develop an action plan in each district to address issues of education and race identified through public discussion.

Planning Process: Setting the stage

As the only fulltime staff member, HAEF Executive Director Sue Van Slyke coordinated plans for the town meeting. A former university president and a senior officer from the state highway patrol co-chaired the planning committee, which included 21 members – recommended by superintendents and school administrators – from across Hattiesburg's six districts. A significant force on the planning committee was a group of local ministers, particularly those from African-American churches, which played an important role in publicizing the town meeting with their congregations.

Organizers used the Public Agenda framework for its town meeting. After a day and a half of training by Public Agenda, the twelve moderators held three practice session to hone their facilitation skills and engaged in-depth discussions about education and race.

The Facts: Gathering and sharing student achievement data

HAEF experienced setbacks and "lessons learned" while collecting student data, which delayed planning efforts for three months. Among the difficulties were the state's resistance to release to data disaggregated

by race and its plan to discontinue some assessments. Organizers also learned community-based requests for disaggregated data are virtually unheard of in the state education department.

Collecting data -- even with the hurdles they encountered – helped staff and board members better understand local education issues and appreciate the use of data in empowering parents and community members. In the end, organizers used the data to inform the planning process, but decided against presenting it to the public. They had serious concerns about the data's reliability and relevance, and did not want to confuse or mislead community members, but they have plans to publicize school and student data in the future.

Wiser from the experience, Van Slyke states, "a major lesson learned is that the collection and use of data, though sensitive and sometimes political, is a necessary area of work for LEFs that genuinely have school reform as a goal." She also believes HAEF's efforts may prompt other community groups in the area to request student achievement data, especially data disaggregated by race and socioeconomic status.

CONVERSATION MODEL

Public Agenda Framework
1 town meeting
76 participants (total)
Hattiesburg High School
August 31, 1999

The Conversations: Engaging the public

Gathering at a local high school, 76 residents from across the six districts participated in a town meeting focused education and race. As participants arrived, the co-chairs warmly greeted and directed them to registration tables and the buffet line. After dinner and the opening session, audience separated into five groups and moved into classrooms for discussions.

Using the Public Agenda framework, biracial pairs of moderators led five groups in two hours of discussion. Volunteers were designated as "recorders," who captured on paper the thoughts and ideas generated by participants and summarized their notes before the re-convened audience. To close the meeting, co-chairs remarked on the evening, thanked residents for participating, asked for completed surveys, and promised a timely distribution of a final report of results.

Community voices – an involved parent and town meeting participant

Seneca Nicholson is the mother of two young boys and the PTA president for a Hattiesburg elementary school. Nicholson, known for her involvement in schools and the community, learned about the town meeting from another parent. She says, "I like to be involved when I can."

Nicholson believes the conversations on education and race in Hattiesburg were timely because of local issues, like a newly-hired superintendent, a recent move to neighborhood schools and ongoing changes in the district. She observed that the town meeting drew a diverse crowd and she saw lots of new faces, although she believes more Black parents needed to attend. To draw strong participation from parents and residents, she advises Hattiesburg and other communities to a use a variety of channels to reach deep into schools and communities, and publicize the conversations among a cross-section of people.

During the town meeting, "Everybody got a chance to participate," says Nicholson. Moderators urged everyone to have a say. Nicholson says that this made the town meeting different from other meetings she has attended.

Nicholson is passionate about her children getting the best education possible. She wants schools in Mississippi to be comparable to those elsewhere in the country. She believes the issues of race and racism in education are concrete and obvious to most citizens. She recommends that people drop the "pleasantries" and the "tiptoeing" when discussing education and race, and get down to the real issues that will make schools better. She also believes that her community must let go of the past and move forward. She, like other parents, is "trying to do what's in the best interest of the children – Black and White."

Themes, topics, findings

Breakout sessions revealed a significant communication gap between parents and educators. Public Agenda town meeting model helped to identify where participants agreed or disagreed on issues.

Agreement

- Need for accountability in public education
- Lack of high expectations for some students and schools
- Need to deal more openly with race, class and gender
- Problems with ability grouping among students in the lower grades
- Insufficient transitions from Head Start to elementary school

Disagreement

- Educator qualifications, i.e. what makes a good teacher? And, what should be the minimum qualifications for teachers?

- Ability grouping, i.e. are special programs, like "gifted student" programs, a good idea? Or, are they harmful because they "label" and segregate children?
- Success, i.e. what is success? How is success best defined?
- Academic standards, i.e. what are standards? How should they be implemented? (Ambiguity exists even among educators.)

The Future: Sustaining the conversation, taking action and producing results

An unexpected outcome was the substantive conversation that emerged among HAEF's 26 board members. Reflecting the local citizenry – parents, educators, employers – and often divided by competing district interests, the board benefited from focused discussion on student achievement and race. Citing the board's new perspective since the conversation, organizers believe their involvement was a public engagement event itself.

Sue Van Slyke, ardent in her support for school reform, sees these national conversations and the important issues they raise as "civil rights work." In Hattiesburg, the conversation participants are emphasizing five issues for follow-up activities:

- Involving students to solve problems with race and achievement
- Engaging parents in early childhood development, in schools and in their children's instructional lives
- Clarifying standards, that is, what children are expected to know and be able to do by specific grades and educational levels
- Improving communication between home, community and schools
- Examining – through continued discussions – the influence of racial and socioeconomic factors on student performance.

OAKLAND

Local Education Fund: Marcus A. Foster Educational Institute

Named after an Oakland school superintendent, the Marcus A. Foster Educational Institute evolved from a 1973 initiative – one of the first of its kind – to unite educators, parents, business and civic leaders in efforts to reform public education. For 25 years the Institute has worked for and with a multicultural community to address the broad range of educational needs.

Local Project Title: "Dialogue on Race in Education"

Community Context: Introducing the conversation site

The 1996 "Ebonics" controversy thrust Oakland's public schools into the national spotlight and fueled discussions about education and race. However judged, Oakland's search for a solution to alarmingly low student performance represents a pressing concern in many cities.

The Oakland Unified School District has 53,320 students who come from very diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. The demographic breakdown is 51% African-American, 22.8% Latino/Hispanic, 17.5% Asian American, 6% European American, >1% Filipino American, >1% Pacific Islander, and >.5% Native American.

Ahead of the curve, California's recent shifts in student demographics, including an influx of Spanish speaking students, characterize the changes occurring in school districts around the country. Consequently, Oakland is keenly aware that the concept of race must extend beyond traditional and historical constructs – Black and White – to include other groups as well. Lagging in this trend is the racial composition of Oakland's school personnel – and this concerns some residents. While students represent a broad cultural spectrum, the teaching staff is increasingly White and administrative personnel include few Latinos and Asian Americans.

Racially diverse and fragmented, Oakland's schools are embroiled in the racial unrest – and sometimes violence – of its students. Troubled by the discord, the Institute believed in-depth conversations about school discipline and safety, inclusive curricula, and school staff could create cross-cultural understanding and a collaborative plan for action.

Summary of modified conversations

Local political conflict and scheduling difficulties led organizers in Oakland to modify their initial plans for multiple, broad-based town meetings and conversations. As a result, they held three smaller sets of conversations at a local meeting hall, and one session with the Institute's board of directors. Additional public conversations are being planned. Race has a whole other meaning is Oakland," says Dr. Julie Henderson, the Institute's executive director. "Strained race relations in the community have filtered down to the kids."

A sociology professor from California State University at Hayward, who specializes in issues of race and diversity, facilitated sessions. Drawing attendance from students, teachers, parents and other community residents, the sessions' participants reflected Oakland's rich ethnic diversity. Vietnamese, Cantonese and Spanish interpreters, recruited by the Institute, assisted participants who were non-native English speakers. During conversations, students and adults spoke freely and were very clear about their concerns, which included the achievement gap, the need for better school resources and infrastructure, and concern for the future direction of public schools in Oakland.

Henderson recommends that other communities allow sufficient time to respond to unforeseen occurrences that could delay plans for conversations. She says it's important to keep an open mind while planning conversations. "Have anticipated outcomes, but be open to see and hear things you didn't know were out there," advises Henderson.

PATERSON

Local Education Fund: Paterson Education Fund (PEF)

A founding member of PEN since 1983, the Paterson Education Fund emphasizes community-school linkages, whole-school change, and professional development. Its mission is to stimulate community action for change so the Paterson Public Schools ensure that all their children achieve high standards.

Local Project Title: *Lift Every Voice / Levante Cada Voz*

Community context: Introducing the conversation site

As New Jersey's third largest city, Paterson's population of 150,000 is a diverse melange of residents, many of whom are immigrants representing more than 50 ethnic groups and languages. Plagued by high rates of poverty and unemployment, city residents, community leaders and educators struggle to end these destructive influences.

The public schools reflect the city's troubles. In 1991 the state took control of schools after decades of failure and mismanagement. A state lawsuit also drew attention to school finance and equity issues and under the court decision schools must implement site-based management and whole-school reform models. Presenting another challenge are rigorous new content standards, which have raised concern about children in Paterson being prepared to meet them.

State-released reports have documented the impact of race, mobility, poverty and family background on the academic performance of local students. Paterson schools enroll 24,000 students with a racial mix of 51% Hispanic, 45% African-American, 4% White, and others who are mostly Arabic. Some residents worry that teachers and school staff – largely White and residing in the suburbs – are failing to meet the needs of their racially and culturally diverse students.

Recognizing a connection between its work in standards and PEN and Public Agenda's Education and Race Initiative, the PEF set out to examine the impact of race on student achievement. "Paterson children will not achieve high standards unless the professional staff believes that every child regardless of race is capable of achieving high standards," organizers assert.

Local Partners: Sharing the work

Building on new and established partnerships, PEF engaged its grassroots community in public conversations on education and race.

National Council on Black Churches (NCBC), a local affiliate organization, offered leadership from area ministers and linkages to congregations.

Aspira Inc. of New Jersey, part of a national Hispanic association, brought resources to involve the city's growing Spanish-speaking population, especially parents.

Paterson Public School, an urban school district, provided student performance data.

Other partners include: *City of Paterson, Barnert Hospital, St. Joseph's Hospital, Paterson Free Public Library,* area museums, and other non-partisan community organizations.

Goals and Objectives: Stating the purpose

In concert with partners, PEF created its initiative, *Lift Every Voice / Levante Cada Voz,* to:

- Develop a national conversation model to encourage deep exploration of issues concerning education and race
- Provide an opportunity for the Paterson community, particularly those people regularly excluded from the conversation, to examine the impact of race on education and student achievement
- Identify specific challenges that impact student achievement gaps among different racial and ethnic groups
- Advocate continued conversation and community action to move all students to acceptable levels of student achievement.

Planning Process: Setting the stage

Cited in the Annenberg Institute's *Reasons for Hope, Voices for Change*, PEF is experienced in public engagement. With *Lift Every Voice*, it set out to cultivate a diverse, new cadre of advocates who could expand the initial conversations to the broader community. Preparing for nine months, the two-member staff, eight planning committee members, 25 steering committee members, and 10 facilitators carefully laid the foundation for conversations to ensure deep and thoughtful discussion. Organizers participated in racism training after learning only half had ever discussed race in a mixed-race setting. They believed the project's leadership should have explored the topic of race among themselves, before promoting similar discussions with the public.

Organizers made a deliberate effort to go beyond the usual suspects – organizational leaders frequently tapped for city initiatives – to residents not generally heard in public discourse. Using an asset mapping

activity to identify both steering committee members and participants, organizers invited people they knew personally and those with a genuine interest in the role of race in education. They also took measures to ensure a balance of race, ethnicity, gender, profession and economic status among invitees. As an added measure they called or met with each prospective participant.

The planning committee elected to hold an initial town meeting – using the Public Agenda framework – followed by a series of in-depth *fishbowl conversations*. For several years, PEF has used fishbowl conversations, adapted from the Kiva model, to engage teachers, parents and school board candidates in discussions about education. Finding the format effective, even with difficult topics, PEF decided to use "fishbowls" to examine student data and to probe issues from the town meeting. Organizers found this two-tier approach important for its residents, because it allowed for ongoing, deep discussions about local multiracial and multiethnic issues.

The Facts: Gathering and sharing student achievement data

Comprehensive reports on achievement – containing extensive school and student data disaggregated by race – were obtained from the independent auditors of the state takeover, Arthur Andersen. The steering committee decided to present achievement data from 4th, 8th and 11th grade assessments. They found line charts effective in illustrating results and examining disparities.

Paterson did not collect national data, but used the U.S. Department of Education's "Education and Race Fact Sheet" to frame the national issue and introduce local data. The fishbowl conversations centered on student data and test results.

CONVERSATION MODELS

Public Agenda framework
1 town meeting
59 participants
Paterson Museum
May 20, 1999

Fishbowls
Two sets of three forums
61 – 90 participants per forum
Local community college and museum
May – September 1999

The Conversations: Engaging the public

The town meeting followed the protocol developed by Public Agenda. Sixty residents – including significant number s of parent and reflecting the community's racial and ethnic diversity – participated in the conversations.

The moderators demonstrated the importance of their role during the small-group sessions. Organizers report that their moderators proved to be strong leaders by keeping the discussions flowing smoothly and probing issues of race and

achievement among participants. In one group, a moderator successful maintained focus and order among members despite a combative member's efforts to disrupt the discussion.

Later, a series of three public forums – using the fishbowl format – were held. To accommodate the schedules of both the educators and the parents and community members, two sets of forums were organized. Educators, who preferred to meet right after school, mainly attended the series of forums that were held from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. Parents and community members generally attended the forums at 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. During each set of forums, moderators led discussions that addressed critical questions.

> Forum One: What data do we have? What data is missing? Is the missing data available? How do we need to disaggregate the data?
> Forum Two: How were the missing data gathered? What do we learn from the new data? What assets do we have or need to make a difference in the data?
> Forum Three: What resources, people, etc. do we have to move our students to high achievement? What is our action plan?

The questions were addressed during fishbowl conversations. The model requires six speakers and a moderator to sit in an inner circle with two empty seats, while listeners sit in an outer circle. Only people seated in the inner circle can speak. By moving to one of the empty inner chairs, listeners are allowed to join the conversation to ask clarifying questions. Midway through the discussion, participants rotate. PEF finds that the format forces each participant to listen to what is being said by the speaker, rather than engage in verbal sparring.

Topics, themes, findings

The following issues surfaced during town meeting and fishbowl conversations:

- Paterson children are not meeting high standards and residents know they can.
- The community needs to talk more about race, ethnicity and diversity; their attitudes and expectations affect learning and performance.
- Paterson's successful schools can help others by sharing their lessons learned and strategies for success.
- Schools lack sufficient supplies, materials, and other resources. The school community needs budget development training; their lack of knowledge limits the implementation of whole-school reform mandates.

- Schools and communities must work together and hold each mutually accountable for student achievement.

Organizers report that, at first, it seemed people did not want to discuss race directly. Instead they often used code words, like "inner city kids" and "poor children" which – given school demographics – alluded to specific racial groups. Participants also skirted the stark racial differences between students and teachers, by vaguely referring to the "make-up of students and teachers" and asking if the school staff was "reflective" of the student body. By the last conversations, people laid it out – race was specifically identified as an issue. Apparently it took time for people to feel comfortable with one another and to confront the issue directly.

"Make sure that the group is diverse. It's very, very critical that people hear different voices," advises Rosie Grant, PEF project director.

Community voices – an LEF board member

Dedicated to issues of race, fairness and justice, Reverend Doug Maven serves on the PEF board of directors and is a member of the National Council on Black Churches. Rev. Maven participated in the *Lift Every Voice / Levante Cada Voz* by chairing the steering committee.

"PEF took on project because local students were not doing well. People were constantly asking, 'is race having an impact? If so, how? And why?' It was legitimate questioning," explains Maven.

He emphasized the committee's desire to bring participants to the table "without their professional hats, but as concerned citizens." Their efforts paid off. "The diversity of the people involved in the conversations," Maven believes was most meaningful. "Some say Paterson has 53 different ethnic groups. They all weren't there, but there were enough to create a multicultural environment and to present multi-issues. There were different levels represented from college professors to single moms, from the well-to-do to those on public assistance. To have everyone equal at the table was very powerful."

Maven's advice to others: "Remain open to how people want to be engaged in the conversation. Don't be heavy-handed on topics. People shouldn't see it was a routine, the conversations should be fluid."

The Future: Sustaining conversations, taking action and producing results

"We've seen personal change and institutional change," reports Grant. She is encouraged by the philosophical metamorphosis that has taken place among school board members, educators, parents, organizers, and other participants as a result of Paterson's conversations.

There's a "genuine interest in the issue...in digging deeper and in examining test data," says Maven. The community is excited about continuing the conversations.

To capture the views and recommendations of conversation participants, PEF has produced and distributed a report, entitled "Does Student Achievement Have Color." Mailed to 2000 of Paterson's residents, the report contains an action plan addressing issues of concern. PEF is also preparing to present their findings to community groups.

Among the actions steps planned in Paterson are:

- Publishing and widely distributing data on student achievement, dropout rates, and graduation rates, disaggregated by race and ethnicity and by school
- Publishing demographic data about teachers, support staff, central office staff, principals, children, parents and the community and taking proactive measures to combat racism and classism in education
- Integrating an inclusive curriculum that reflects the diverse cultures, histories and achievements of various groups to raise ethnic pride and self-worth among all students
- Sharing successful strategies among schools and community groups that sponsor education enrichment programs
- Educating school staff , parents and community members on how to allocate of school funds to ensure adequate budgets for materials, school personnel, professional development (especially in cultural diversity), and other resources
- Defining "accountability" to generate consensus among constituencies and to foster collaboration between those inside and outside of schools.

Concluding thoughts based on these experiences in the field

[Note to Richard: Here's the addition you suggested. I've integrated your notes with Aviva's observations. Are there other points you'd like to make?]

The experiences of these eight communities offer collective lessons to apply to future initiatives. Attentively watching and evaluating the initiative as it unfolds, national organizers at PEN and Public Agenda have noted five main lessons from these initial conversations.

■ **Conversations on education and race are a beginning and should never be approached as one-time events.** The complex issues of education and race are often deeply imbedded in local culture, history and economics. As a result they require long-term commitments to change and ongoing examination to undo the effects. Long-time education reformers know there are no "quick fixes" for education, and this remains true of race and education.

A one-time event may bring short-term improvement, but real change occurs over time, with continuous public discussion and strategic action by educators, parents, students, and community members.

■ **Participants need to focus on one set of issues at a time.** As noted before, the topic of education or race, alone, can overwhelm most Americans. Discussions about the intersection of race and education can steer people down innumerable paths. The topics provide fodder for endless debate and discussion, and it's easy to get off track.

Conversation organizers, discussion moderators, and the public engagement model play important roles in keeping participants fixed on the primary issue s – the impact of race on education and student achievement. Participants, and ultimately students, will benefit from informed, purposeful, focused discussions of race and education.

■ **The conversation model should reflect the needs of the community.** It's important to assess the political and cultural climate of a community, *before* devising an approach to conversation about education and race. For example, when community members are uncomfortable talking about race, a framework like Public Agenda's conversation model is essential. The model's adaptable format, discussion starter video, and moderator training allow for subtle discussions of race to be teased out.

Other models, like *Standards in Practice* or "fishbowls," can be effective when people are willing to talk openly– with little probing – about race and its impact on the achievement gap.

If a community finds that a single public engagement model does not suit its needs, then it is possible to blend models. That is, organizers can draw on the elements of more than one model to create a new format that's responsive to the distinct needs of the community.

■ **Partnerships and other community linkages will determine how the community responds to conversations.** Each site experienced, firsthand, the value of forming strong and strategic partnerships. Few sites would not have drawn diverse participants and carried out multiple conversations without the support and resources their partners brought.

Community-based groups considering a series of conversations on education and race should choose their partners and establish other relationships in community, carefully.

■ **Public conversations on education and race can work.** The sites highlighted in this report have demonstrated that groups of people, from diverse backgrounds, can engage in honest, civil and deliberative dialogue about education and race.

Some communities may worry that broaching such topics publicly can only lead to tension-filled, shouting matches. As hopeful examples to the contrary, conversations in these communities happened without incident. Participants expressed passionate views and listened to sincere concerns, and these discussions led to action plans for improving student achievement. We have learned these conversations can be productive when well-organized community groups use relevant approaches to public engagement.

Section Two

TOOLS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Getting Started

Planning the Conversation

Researching your Schools and Community

Holding Conversations and Engaging the Public

Publicizing your Project

Evaluating your Work

Moving On

GETTING STARTED

What's covered...

- *Setting a statement of goals*
- *Selecting partners*
- *Establishing the planning committee*
- *Assessing local climate*
- *Establishing a timeline*
- *Creating a project budget*

Setting a statement of goals

It is important to begin your initiative by agreeing on what you hope to accomplish. Here's what PEN and Public Agenda advised their project sites and it might be good advice for you, too.

> "The central purpose of the initial dialogue is to open up the topic of education and race in your community in a manner that will inform your subsequent efforts at public engagement. The purpose is not to resolve all the challenges facing the community's schools in one session, and it is important to create positive but realistic expectations."

In general, public conversations on education and race should:

- Promote a rich and productive dialogue among a cross-section of the community
- Help educators become more aware of the community's perceptions, misconceptions, questions and values
- Help establish lines of communications to address new issues as they arise
- Build local capacity to create more, and even, better community conversations in the future
- Explore possible steps, beyond initial conversations, to engage the community at large in ways to improve education.

GOALS

Goals should be...

- Specific
- Observable (results-oriented)
- Measurable
- Time-limited
- Attainable
- Meaningful
- Supported by stakeholders
- Interdependent
- Prioritized

Selecting partners

Partnerships with community, business and educational organizations are key to achieving project goals. It is important to identify organizations that will complement your organization's resources and experience and then establish clear roles and responsibilities for those involved.

Assess the suitability of each prospective partner by determining whether the following statements are true.

- The organization's mission supports the goals of the project and is directly aligned with improving student achievement
- The community perceives the organization as credible, nonpartisan, and valuable
- The organization is willing to participant and wishes to collaborate with other groups
- The organization has access to grassroots constituents who are impacted by the project and who can be influential in its success.

Here are some other ideas on selecting partners from the Education and Race Initiative.

Tool from PEBC in Denver

GUIDE FOR SELECTING PARTNERS

Choose a partner that...

- Plans carefully, set goals and measures of progress
- Sets high standards for student learners
- Welcomes outsiders with new ideas
- Shares learning with others
- Sustains activities with existing resources
- Provides organizational leadership
- Involves parents, families and students the partnership process

ROLES OF PARTNERS

A good partner may...

1. Provide outreach to prospective conversation participants
2. Serve on planning committees
3. Provide expertise on race, ethnicity, language, public engagement, education or media relations
4. Recruit conversation moderators and other volunteers
5. Provide logistical support (meeting space, equipment, transportation)
6. Provide matching financial support and in-kind donations
7. Help gather relevant data

POTENTIAL PARTNERS

Consider partnering with...

- Community-based education advocates (e.g. LEFs)
- Public school districts
- Race and ethnic advocacy groups (e.g. NAACP, LARASA, Aspira, Urban League)
- Ministerial Associations
- Anti-discrimination organizations (NCCJ)
- Parent associations (e.g. PTA, PTO, Parents for Public Schools)
- Colleges and universities
- Businesses
- Hospitals
- Local foundations

Establishing a planning committee

Most organizations create a planning committee to make key decisions and to carry out project activities. The lead organizer, along with its partners, decides who will serve on the committee and then sets out to recruit those individuals. The size of the committee will vary, but many organizations choose between eight to 12 members. Groups also generally elect or appoint a committee chair, who acts as a "champion" for the planned conversations, serves as a spokesperson, and wields clout in recruiting other committee members, participants, and sponsors. In Hattiesburg, organizers appointed co-chairs, each of a different race and representing different segments of the community (e.g., a retired higher education president and a respected community leader).

Planning committee members should be people with access to and credibility with important and diverse segments of the local population. Look for people with influence among community members who are not typically involved or are frequently excluded from existing local dialogues on education. As a rule, your planning committee should reflect the community members and stakeholders you want as conversation participants. In fact, you should consider applying the guideline s for recruiting participants to your planning committee members.

Committee members should share the planning work so no one person or organization bears the sole burden of planning a successful initiative. Sharing the work also creates a sense of ownership of the conversations and will serve you well, after the conversations, when you are ready to take action.

LESSON LEARNED

Scope of work: Don't bite off more than you can reasonably manage. Organizers have found that planning and holding public forums on education and race is labor-intensive. In several cases, organizers decided to scale back from their original plans because they had underestimated the amount of staff time and resources required to carry out a successful forum.

Tool from PEN and Public Agenda

PLANNING COMMITTEE TASKS

This checklist should help you get started but it is not meant to be exclusive of any other activities the planning committee wishes to tackle. Items are listed in chronological order of how to prepare for public conversations, and each task should be completed, or at least begun, before moving on to the next task. More detailed direction on these tasks are covered in the following pages.

- Choose dates for the public conversations on education and race.
- Select the conversation site and make arrangements for food and equipment.
- Select people to serve as moderators and recorders, who will attend training sessions.
- Develop a list of potential participants.
- About four weeks before the conversation, invite participants and observers. Request them to respond at least two weeks before the meeting. Be sure to over- recruit groups that tend to be underrepresented.
- As the date nears, follow up invitations with telephone calls to all participants, especially those who may be difficult to involve, to ensure participation by a true cross-section of the community.
- Keep careful track of who is signing up and make special efforts to recruit underrepresented categories of participants. Assign confirmed participants to small discussion groups (made up of 8 or up to 15 participants) so each group represents the diversity of the total.
- Decide if media coverage is desired, and if so, call the appropriate publications and stations, and set ground rules for media participation.
- Provide copies of participant guides to confirmed attendees before the conversation and also have them available at the meeting.
- Other tasks:

Assessing local climate

Before conducting conversations on education and race you may want to examine the political, educational and racial climate in your community. A historical occurrence or recent media coverage on an issue or event may impact your plans for public conversations. Such local context could help or hinder your plans.

For example, the recent release of a report on student performance could help by piquing interest and concern about education among community members. On the other hand, long-running controversies over race and education could have resulted in public indifference and distrust, and might pose as serious barriers to public conversations.

LOCAL CONTEXT FOR CONVERSATIONS

Find out how these or other community issues could affect your conversations

- Publication of student's standardized test scores
- Local school board election
- History of racial tension
- Ruling on court-ordered busing
- Other community engagement efforts around the issue of race or education
- Changes in district adminstration
- Significant changes in school policies or school assignments
- Shifts in the racial or ethnic demographics of schools
- Political unrest
- Fear of speaking out among residents
- Publicized incidents of racism at schools

To build support early on, consider meeting with key stakeholders to ease any concern and minimize resistance. These stakeholders will vary from community to community, but might include the mayor, superintendent, school board members, school principals and leaders in minority communities. Before you engage the broader community, it might also be a good idea to offer training on cultural sensitivity and racism to your organization's staff, board members and others involved in planning the conversations.

In any case, try to capitalize on the opportunities your community presents, making sure your conversations on education and race are meaningful and timely. This might mean linking with partners to enhance initiatives already underway or scheduling conversations at time when the public is most interested in education or race issues.

Establishing a timeline

It usually helps to set an initial timeline for planning activities, making allowances for the inevitable changes that will occur as your plans progress. This timeline will help set the context of early key decisions.

Tool: Timeline from FEE in Baltimore

Activity	Targeted date of completion	Groups/Individual involved
Hold initial planning meeting		
Set goals and objectives		
Identify partners		
Develop format for public forums		
Develop/modify questions for discussion		
Collect student achievement data		
Conduct moderator training		
Distribute articles for publication		
Advertise public forums in local newspapers		
Hold practice session for moderators		
Hold public forums		
Evaluate results		
Develop action plan from information collected during forums		
Write op ed. pieces for local newspapers		
Disseminate findings and results from public forums		
Present local findings at state and national forums		
Assess follow-up activities		

Creating a project budget

Set a realistic budget for your project, taking into account each of the expenses you will likely incur. Note that volunteer support and in-kind donations might offset some cash expenses. For example, partners and other supporters might agree to donate meeting space, food, and printing services.

The sites highlighted in this report received grant s of up to $25,000 to carry out research, planning, training and multiple public forums. Each site was also required to generate matching funds and in-kind donations through local networks. The scope of work, resources, number of partners, and the number of public forums varied from site to site, and accordingly their budgets varied greatly as well.

Tool: Sample budget categories and estimated costs for multiple public forums – gathered from project sites

Cost Category	Estimated Range of Expenses
Meetings (including meeting facility rental, audio-visual equipment rental, meals, refreshments and beverages	$3000 - 6000
Stipends for Facilitators (optional)	$2500 – 3600
Translators/Interpreters	$750 - 1000
Publications (e.g. research documents and books on educational reform and public engagement)	$2000 - 3000
Copying/Printing	$1000 - 3000
Postage	$1000 - 1700
Phone/Fax	$500 - 1000
Staff time (salaries and benefits, generally based on 30% - 50% of a fulltime project coordinator's time, plus support from other staff members)	$15,000 - 18,750
Consultants (obtaining professional services and expertise for collecting and analyzing, training facilitators, public relations and communication, and evaluation)	$2000 - 5000
TOTAL	**$27,750 – 43,050**

PLANNING THE CONVERSATION

What's covered...

- *Selecting an approach to the conversation*
- *Recruiting moderators*
- *Assigning recorders*
- *Choosing a meeting place for conversations*

Selecting a n approach to the conversation

Choose an approach to public engagement best suits your project goals, community context and organizational mission and programming. Research various models, and then choose an approach that meet the needs of local citizens and can pave the way for your future work. Many communities take the approach of integrating two or more models. If you like elements of one model you can adapt to for your community, by adding your own components or by blending elements of another model. Grand Rapids and Paterson, for example, used formats that were familiar to their stakeholders, and then integrated these models with the town meeting framework.

Below are descriptions of the models used by sites participating in the PEN and Public Agenda Education and Race Initiative.

Public Agenda Town Meeting Framework

This model emerged from Public Agenda's research and observations in the field regarding the attitudes, priorities and perceptions of the public toward school reform issues. Essential elements of this dialogue approach are:

- *Sponsorship and organization by local community groups*, such as parents, school systems and chambers of commerce, usually in combination.
- *Diversity among participants*, in terms of age, occupation and background to ensure that voices from all segments of the population are heard. Demographic diversity by itself, however, is not enough. It is vital to draw participants who are not "the usual suspects," that is, people whose opinions are rarely

asked for but who make up the bulk of the community. To get such variety requires sustained outreach to varied segments of the community to ensure that a wide spectrum of local stakeholders and viewpoints are represented, including parents, teachers, students, residents without children in school, employers and clergy.

- *Small moderated group discussions* of about 15 people. Moderators, who are usually trained local volunteers, do not take part but rather play a nonpartisan role, keeping dominant personalities at bay and ensuring that all participants and viewpoints get a chance to be heard. Each group also has a recorder, again, a local volunteer, who must capture live conversation with enough clarity and detail for organizers to use the notes to plan follow-up activities.
- *Discussions centered around several choices* designed to help citizens understand alternate way of approaching an issue.
- *Discussions centered on understanding difference perspectives* and exchanging points of view, not on advocating pre-existing opinions and platforms.

A typical forum might draw about 100 participants, from various professions and backgrounds. After registration, a meal and welcoming remarks, participants spend about two hours in small group discussions on the issue. Afterward they all regroup for the closing plenary, highlighting summaries of the discussions and ideas for follow-up. Participants are then asked to complete a post-meeting questionnaire for a final chance to comment on the forum's topic, format and their experiences in the conversation, and their ideas for future action.

Contact Public Agenda for more information on the town meeting framework, including *Time To Move On* and other publications, research results, video and materials on public engagement, and trainers.

Public Agenda • New York, NY
(212) 686-6610
www.publicagenda.com

Standards in Practice (SIP)

Developed by the Education Trust, a Washington-based non-profit organization, SIP is a process that builds support for high standards for all students and offers strategies to accelerate gains among low-performing students many of whom are low-income and minority.

SIP works with schools and classrooms, with parents and community members, and with community and education stakeholders. It is one of the Education Trust tools for delivering comprehensive reform with support from inside and outside of the school system. The focus of SIP is on maintaining regular, structured conversations about standards and student work that ultimately lead to an examination of teacher work. These conversations also provide the opportunity to explore how to best use school, district and community resources in support of standards. SIP is a "quality control" tool as well as a professional development process for assuring that ongoing, high-level curricula and instruction are available to all students.

SIP comprises four models that, together, assure that all school activity is aligned and targeted at helping all students meet standards. All models share three non-negotiable components:

- School-based teams to build consensus about what standards look like in practice;
- Time built into the regular schedule for ongoing team meetings; and
- Community participation so that parents, community leaders, district administrators and teachers are all on the same page when talking about standards for all students.

Contact the Education Trust for more information on *Standards in Practice*, as well as national and state data, and trainers and presenters.

The Education Trust • Washington, DC
(202) 293-1217
www.educationtrust.org

Study Circles

Study circles are an informal, practical and effective way to provide adult learning and social change. The model is rooted in the civic movements of the 19th century. The Study Circles Resource Center (SCRC), a project of the Topsfield Foundation, Inc., promotes the use of the public engagement, described as "small-group, democratic, and highly participatory discussions." This national model is designed to engage citizens in dialogue – on a range of topics – that can transform their communities.

Study circles, also known as guided discussions, are informal and can vary in size from five to 15 people. A group can agree to meet together several times to learn about a social or political issue in a democratic and collaborative way. Complex issues are broken down in to manageable subdivision and controversial

topics are dealt with in depth. Groups can decide how frequently they would like to meet, but generally discussions are held over a series of four two-hour sessions. Discussion leaders, acting as facilitators, guide the discussion by asking questions, identifying key points, and managing the group process.

SCRC produces discussion guides, called *The Busy Citizen's Discussion Guides*, on a variety of topics, including for education, violence, racism and race relations, sexual harassment, and civil rights for gays and lesbians. The reading material serves to stimulate the discussion and provide a common reference point.

Contact the Study Circles Resource Center for more information on study circles, collaborative learning, publications and guides (many provided at no charge), and presenters.

Study Circles Resource Center • Pomfret, CT
(860) 928-2616
www.studycircles.org

Fishbowl conversations, also referred to as Kiva
Kiva is a Native American term for a large, underground chamber used by Pueblo men for secret ceremonies. The conversation model, derived from Native American practices, is based on two sets of circles, one for speakers and one for listeners.

The listeners sit in an outer circle and look on as the inner circle of speakers discusses an issue – hence the name "fishbowl" conversations. Six speakers and a moderator are seated in the inner circle, which includes with two empty chairs. The designated listeners are seated in the outer circle. Only people seated in the inner circle can speak. By moving to one of the empty inner chairs, listeners are allowed to join the conversation to ask clarifying questions. The discussion format often forces participants to listen more attentively that they ordinarily would.

[Note to Richard: I recommend the use of an illustration to show how fishbowl conversations are configured.]

The Paterson Education Fund (PEF) uses the fishbowl model extensively. Contact PEF for more information on how to plan and facilitate a fishbowl conversation.

Paterson Education Fund • Paterson, NJ

(973) 881-8914

These are four models for public engagement. You and your local partners may be familiar with other models or you may learn about others through your research.

Lesson Learned

Selecting a model: When selecting a model make sure the materials used to engage the public reflect the needs of your residents. For example, publications are easy to understand and jargon-free, videos and written material are available in foreign languages, and materials contain racially and culturally diverse images.

LESSON LEARNED

Moderators: The success of conversations depends on the effectiveness of moderators. Choose your moderators carefully and train them well.

Recruiting facilitators/moderators

Moderators plan a key role in the community conversation, determining in large part, the quality of the experience. Public Agenda reports that it has occasionally encountered people with a great deal of facilitating experience who do poorly in public conversations on education and race, and those with no experience who do very well. The following guidelines should help you to select prospective moderators for training. Note that the most important qualification – "people skills" and a real interest in supporting an open, inclusive dialogue – should be kept in mind regardless of a candidate's background on paper.

Many of the PEN and Public Agenda conversation sites used biracial teams of two moderators for each discussion group. Sites reported that this type of co-facilitation works well for conversations on race and education,

Tool from Public Agenda

DESIRED SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE AND BACKGROUND FOR MODERATORS AND FACILITATORS

Ideally, moderators will have the following skills, knowledge, and background...

- Group facilitation skills/experience, especially in working with diverse groups and with the general public (as opposed to professional facilitators only)
- The ability t help participants articulate the reasoning, experiences, and values supporting their positions
- Comfort and ability to manage group conflict
- The ability to take a nonpartisan moderating stance
- Nonpartisan credibility. Some people may be *able* to moderate in a nonpartisan manner but who, because of past associations, will not be *viewed* in the that light by conversation participants
- Some general familiarity with local issues and education reform debates, although expertise is not required. This attribute is less important than the others are.
- Overall diversity. The cadre of moderators should reflect the demographics of the community, so it is important to have some diversity (race, ethnicity, gender, language, etc.) among the moderators.

STRATEGIES FOR RECRUITING AND TRAINING FACILITATORS AND MODERATORS

- Target those with past training and experience as facilitators
- Find nonpartisan moderators, people without agendas
- Use biracial, co-facilitation - assigning two facilitators of different races that reflect local demographics or conversations participants - as an effective measure for public discussions on race
- Offer stipends ($100 - $250), optional
- Bring in experts to train facilitators
- Hold refresher courses and practice session for facilitators to sharpen their skills

EFFECTIVE MODERATORS

During conversations moderators...

- Probe for information
- Facilitate group discussion
- Maintain the group's focus
- Bring closure for next steps

WHERE FIND PROPECTIVE MODERATORS

Conversation moderators are often drawn from...

- Business, including trainers and consultants
- Religious groups, including pastoral counselors
- Social workers and others in community service
- Education, including higher education

Assigning recorders

The recording function – taking written notes of what conversation participants are saying – is a difficult and important role at public forums. Some organizers make the mistake of overlooking this function. Make sure you identify a pool of recorders and assign one to each discussion group.

Recorders need to listen well, have a knack for summing up someone's point, and write legibly. They should attend the moderator training session (or at least a major portion of it) to truly understand their role. One approach is to recruit enough moderators so that some can serve as recorders during the conversations.

LESSON LEARNED

Group size: Keep small discussion groups at manageable number. The recommended number of group participants will very depending on the conversation model. Eight to fifteen is a common range of participants per small group.

And although the number of participants can influence the effectiveness of the conversation, every site found the real key to meaningful conversations is a high degree of diversity.

Choosing a meeting place for conversations

Where you hold your conversation could greatly affect how community members perceive it and who will attend. Make your decision based on two points of view: as a prospective participant and as an organizer. Participants are generally attracted to meeting locations they perceive as convenient, comfortable, safe, and welcoming. As an organizer you'll want a location that can accommodate your anticipated number of participants, conversation dates and times, and the planned meeting format. For example, when using the Public Agenda framework, find a meeting place with enough room for breakout groups big enough to accommodate 15 people seated in circles or semicircles.

A neutral site is often best, that is, a place where a cross-section of the community will at ease. Schools are frequent meeting places, but avoid schools where major community controversies are swirling.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

- Select places that are accessible to a broad cross-section of the community
- Select places that offer an inviting environment
- Make sure there are a sufficient number of parking spaces – nearby, safe and free of charge – for participants' cars
- Avoid busy places where noise and passers-by may distract participants
- Make sure there are enough electrical outlets, if presentations require technology
- Make there are a sufficient number of breakout rooms. Avoid having more than one small group conversations in the same room
- Make sure there are enough restrooms in the building
- When using a model that requires a series of conversations, designate one meeting location for the duration of the series. When using a town meeting format, consider holding conversations at multiple locations to attract a variety of residents

POTENTIAL MEETING PLACES

- Museum
- School
- Church
- College campus
- Community center
- City Auditorium or convention center
- Hotel
- Business or [illegible] meeting facility

Tool: Conversation Agenda from FEE in Baltimore

DISCUSSION FRAMEWORK FOR "STANDARDS IN PRACTICE"

30 min	Introduction* * Welcome / Purpose * Group Introductions * Ground Rules
1 hr 45 min	How can we help all students in the community be more successful in school? 1. Introduction to *Standards in Practice* model 2. *Standards in Practice* model and discussion
15 min	Possible next steps
20 min	How well are our student doing in school? 3. Look at school system / state achievement data
10 min	Closure

* Light supper (or the appropriate meal for the time slot) is served at each meeting.

Tool: Conversation Agenda from PEBC in Denver

DISCUSSION FRAMEWORK FOR PUBLIC AGENDA TOWN MEETING

45 min	Registration and Dinner
15 min	Large Group Welcome and Overview
10 min	Break
2 hrs	Small Group Moderated Discussions 4. Video: "Helping All Students Achieve in a Diverse Society" 5. Topic One: How well are our students doing in school? 6. Topic Two: How can we help all children to succeed in a diverse society? 7. Topic Three: How can schools, family and the wider community do a better job of working together to help all children succeed? 8. Summary
45 min	Large Group Wrap-up and Survey

Resources for more information on getting started

Annenberg Institute for School Reform • Providence, RI
(401) 863-7990
www.aisr.brown.edu

Public Education Network (PEN) • Washington, DC
(202) 628-7460
www.publiceducation.org

The Right Question Project, Inc. • Somerville, MA
(617) 492-1900
www.rightquestion.org

RESEARCHING YOUR SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY

What's covered…

- Deciding what data to collect
- Collecting and analyzing data
- Presenting information in a user-friendly format
- Using data responsibly

Deciding what data to collect

Many sites rated collecting data on student achievement and race as their greatest challenge. And although it can be challenging, student and school data are important for planning a healthy public conversation.

Think carefully about which student data you want to present to conversation participants. There's a broad range of data on school generated by school districts, universities and community groups. The data you decide to collect should be relevant and meaningful, and inform the discussions. Think about the potential range of conversation participants – young parents and retirees, educators and students, and college graduates and high school dropouts. Use data that will interest and offer insights for every participant.

It's also a good idea to collect student data from multiple years to analyze trends in demographics and academic performance. These trends can be highlight strengths and weaknesses in schools.

Please note that while you want your research to be thorough, don't go overboard by collecting lots of data and dumping it onto participants. This kind of "data dump" can overwhelm the general public and give a distinct advantage to participants most familiar with research and statistical data.

Lesson Learned

Availability of test data: Find out when test results will be released. The timing can have two implications: the availability of the most recent test results and the publicity (good or bad) surrounding the results.

TYPES OF DATA TO PRESENT

You may choose to share the following information with conversation participants...

- School enrollment
- Enrollment by race and socioeconomic status
- Enrollment by percentage of total population
- Educational attainment of people over age of 25
- Educational attainment by race and socioeconomic status
- Student achievement scores
- Student achievement scores by race and socioeconomic status
- Dropout rate
- Dropout rate by race and socioeconomic status
- Mobility rates
- Mobility rates by race and socioeconomic status
- College attendance rates
- College attendance rates by race and socioeconomic status
- Minority and low-income enrollment in gifted programs, special education, college prep courses

Collecting and analyzing data

Develop a strategy to collect the data you'll need. Use your partners and relationships with district administrators to gain access to test results and other research. Expect to go to more than one source, in the event you run into a dead-end, or two. Some project sites report that local and state departments of education were reluctant or slow to respond to their initial requests for school records. The reasons ranged from concerns about confidentiality of students and limitations on how school systems track data to fears about exposing deficiencies and revealing achievement gaps. In any case, be resourceful and persistent – and when necessary, patient – until you obtain the data you want.

SOURCES FOR STUDENT DATA

Look to the following groups for data:

- School districts
- State and national departments of education
- Colleges of education
- Local education writers and newspapers
- Non-profit organizations focusing on education – at the local, state and national levels (e.g., LEFs, state education policy groups and Education Trust)

You'll learn a lot about student performance at your community's schools by looking closely at basic data. Analyzing data doesn't have to involve complicated formulas and statistics. On the contrary, much can be gained by calculating averages, percents, and rates based on readily available data on students and schools.

If you need assistance with data analysis, consider bringing in a volunteer with the appropriate expertise, perhaps someone from the planning committee. Or hire a researcher from a local college or research firm.

Presenting information in a user-friendly format

Share your data with public using a straightforward and easily understood format and language. Your research does not have to be extensive, only accurate and reliable. Publications like school report cards or fact sheets might already exist in your community. If so, use these reports or create your own outlining "snapshots" of key data on school and student performance.

Lesson Learned

Using data responsibly: "We originally used [our district's] student data to paint a bleak picture of the student performance of African Americans in our system, and to show the disparity in achievement between these students and students in the rest of the state (by race). We also initially planned to use these data at the beginning of our conversations, for introductory purposes. What we have learned is that the data, if they are not placed in a broader context – including what we can do about the data – can derail a conversation...."

As a result, organizers elected to share success stories from across the country, "so that participants are left with the understanding that urban children can and are performing to national levels."

– A project coordinator

Using data responsibly

Take care in presenting the data you collect. Make wise decisions about what data you present and avoid – at all costs – misinforming or misleading. The information should always be accurate and credible. Conversations on race and education often require data disaggregated by race, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity. Be sure to present this information with sensitivity. Some conversation participants – especially minorities, low-income residents and those new to education discussions – may be put off by data emphasizing the backgrounds of students.

More resources for researching your schools and community

Learning Research and Development Center • Pittsburgh, PA
University of Pittsburgh
(412) 624-7450
www.lrdc.pitt.edu

Education Watch: The 1998 State and National Data Book
The Education Trust • Washington, DC
www.edtrust.org

A-Plus Communications • Arlington, VA
(703) 524-7425
www.ksagroup.com/aplus

Reporting Results: What the Public Wants to Know, a full research report, a 12-minute video summarizing the research and a prototype school report card.

U.S. Census Bureau • Washington, DC

(301) 457-4700 (customer service) (301) 457-4717 (general information)

www.census.gov

U.S. Department of Education • Washington, DC

www.ed.gov

"Education and Race Fact Sheet"

HOLDING CONVERSATIONS AND ENGAGING THE PUBLIC

What's covered . . .

- Recruiting conversation participants
- Tapping established networks
- Taking measures to ensure diversity
- Recruiting observers

Recruiting conversation participants

It takes special, creative effort to recruit people who do not tend to be involved. Even though we create categories of participants (parents educators, senior citizens) each person should be invited as an individual bringing his or her own points of view, rather than being invited as a representative of a group, profession or affiliation.

Over-recruit those community members least likely to come, such as lower income people who might find the travel more difficult to negotiate, or those who feel they have nothing to say because they do not have children in school. Do not over-recruit those most likely to attend, like teachers.

The Education and Race Initiative project sites used an invitational approach to draw participants. In this way, a more representative and diverse group can be assembled and you can avoid single-issue types of people dominating the conversations. Participants should include a cross-section of the community with a majority of them representing the general public rather than professionals, experts or activists.

Invitations should come from credible sources that community members know and can identify with. For example, a respected parent or senior citizen is often the most effective person to invite other parents or senior citizens to attend. Perhaps invitations will come from the planning committee chair or the entire committee, with the signature of each member.

People should get the idea that this meeting is different – e.g., less "political" and more interesting – than other public forums that they may have attended.

Make the meeting user-friendly. It should be in a well-known, accessible location that people feel comfortable visiting at the time of day when the meeting takes place. Organizers may want to provide some transportation for participants who don't drive, childcare for parents, and interpreters for those who do not speak English.

Remember there are, of course, limits to how far organizers can go to make the meeting accessible. Time and money can be a factor. Depending on the facility, there may not be appropriate space for childcare. These guidelines are meant, therefore, as suggestions, and it is up to you to improvise on them as seems appropriate for your situation.

PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANTS

The community voices you want to hear.

- Teachers
- Principals
- Public housing residents
- Parents and grandparents of public school students
- School board members
- Middle and high school students
- College students, especially those from the colleges of Education
- Young adults (those age 21 – 25, who may not have school age children)
- Business people
- Taxpayers
- Private school parents
- Senior citizens

Tapping established networks

Your efforts to draw a cross-section of participants will go farther when you rely on the community's established networks of people. Establish these relationships early on. Partners or planning committee members often represent these networks. Or you may need to reach out to other community groups for support.

COMMUNITY NETWORKS

Consider tapping these networks for diverse conversation participants:

- Parent associations (e.g., PTA, PTO, Parents for Public Education)
- School district administration
- Neighborhood associations
- Faith community (e.g. mosques, churches, synagogues/temples)
- Colleges and universities
- High school student clubs
- Urban League
- Cultural and ethnic associations (e.g. Caribbean Association)
- Senior citizen groups
- Teen parent programs
- Junior League
- Boys and Girls Clubs

Lessons Learned

Getting people to the table: Make personal calls to prospective participants and then make a reminder call on the day of the event. Start a "phone tree" to get the job done, by divvying a list of names to call among organizers.

"...with few exceptions, participants came because of a personal call that had been made."

RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

Consider using these strategies, used by several project sites, to get the word out about your conversations on education and race.

Phone tree – this approach requires organizers to divvy up a telephone list of community members among a pool of volunteers. Each volunteer agrees to call a specific number of prospective participants (perhaps 10 people) and each person who is called is asked to call more people, creating a snowball effect. The same approach works with email, as well. People often respond positively to personal calls, requesting their participation at a community event. This personal touch makes people feel like their participation is valued.

Snowball effect – this technique is similar to the phone tree, but is used more broadly. Partners and volunteers identify others – usually personal friends and acquaintances – interested in the conversation topic. Those individuals are contacted (by phone, in writing, or in person) and asked to spread the word through the community.

Social interaction – this strategy requires organizers to contact or visit grassroots organizations throughout the community to introduce the initiative and to request participation from their constituents and members.

Mass mailing – this strategy begins with the collection of mailing lists from partners and other community groups with large memberships – like the chamber of commerce, ministerial associations, neighborhood associations, and the YMCA. A brochure, flyer or letter, announcing the public conversations, is mailed to hundreds or thousands of prospective participants.

Taking measures to ensure diversity

A mix of participants is important for a well-rounded conversation on education and race. Remember diversity goes beyond race and extends to gender, age, ethnicity, language, socioeconomic status, education, neighborhood, and profession. Avoid a gathering of the "usual suspects," by using the same mailing lists and tried-and-true communications plans from past initiatives. Cast your nets wide to draw fresh faces and new voices from the parents and community members seldom invited to the table. Don't underestimate the challenge. Project organizers confirm it's hard work to attract participants who don't generally attend school events, public forums or school board meetings. It is possible – albeit, labor intensive – and it's necessary to generate the rich discussions, dynamic solutions, and lasting improvements communities are seeking.

Take extra measures to build relationships with groups who are often underrepresented and publicize your conversations through the communication channels they rely upon. This includes using the networks previously mentioned, as well as door-to –door campaigns, personal appeals, strategic media campaigns.

Monitor who is registering for conversations and allow time to adjust recruitment strategies, if necessary, to draw the number and range of participants you want. In Buffalo, prospective participants received sign up sheets detailing meeting dates, times and locations of sessions across the community. Sheets provided space for participants to identify their race and ethnicity. When participants mailed in their sheets, the information on the returned forms was used to assign participants to circles to ensure diversity within each small group

Setting up for public forums

Begin setting up the meeting place well before the conversations take place. Make everything is in place and up and running for a successful event.

A registration table should be set up where participants enter the building. At the table they should receive a participant guide, nametags indicating their small group assignment and any other materials you wish to share early on. Make sure there are helpful, friendly people at the registration table able to answer questions about the community conversation.

Test any equipment you plan to use and ensure it is operating properly. Equipment for conversations might include microphones, televisions, VCRs, overhead projectors, computers, and LCD panels. You might also use a camera, video-recorder, and tape recorders to capture moments from the public forum.

Forward in the Fifth recommends setting up the recorder's easel in a discreet location, so it won't distract conversation participants. In one conversation, organizers in Kentucky found that people were speaking to the recorder rather talking to one another.

Tool from PEBC in Denver

SAMPLE LETTER TO
CONFIRM PARTICIPATION IN TRAINING

Dear [Prospective Participant] ,

I am writing this letter to confirm your participation in our upcoming Training [e.g. parent training or moderator training]. The training will take place [day, date and time] in the [meeting place , including room number and street address]

A continental breakfast and lunch will be provided as part of the training. In addition, you will be provided a stipend for your time and dedication. Please let us know if you have to pay for childcare so that we can reimburse your expenses.

Thank you once again for participation in the very important training. I look forward to seeing you there!

Sincerely,

Parent Liaison

Estimados Padres de familia,

Les estoy escribiendo esta carta para confirmar su participicion en nuestro proximo Entrenamiento para Padres de Familia. Tal entrenamiento se llevera a cabo en la siguiente forma:

[Fecha, hora y lugar]

Se les proveera de desayuno tipo continental y comida. Tambien se les proveera de guarderia para sus hijos y una gratificacion economica. Por favor dejenos saber si ustedes prefieren que otra persona cuide a sus hijos, nosotros la podemos rembolsar por ello.

Gracia una vez mas por su participacion en este entrenamiento tan important. Le esperamos!

Sinceremente,

Enlace Comuntario

RESOURCES AND SERVICES
TO DRAW BROAD ATTENDANCE AND STRONG PARTICIPATION

Logistics to consider attract parents and other community residents.

- Offering a meal or refreshments
- Distributing written materials, including an agenda, participant list, evaluation forms, sources of more information
- Promoting elements that make this public forum different from other community meetings and events
- Presenting data on schools and student performance
- Offering childcare
- Entertaining children with movies, games, art and recreation
- Providing language interpreters (e.g. Spanish, Vietnamese, Arabic, American Sign Language)
- Distributing commemorative items, such as certificates of participation, stickers, buttons, pens/pens, coffee mugs and T-shirts

EVENT DAY CHECKLIST

Make sure these items are available at the meeting location on the day of your conversations...

- Tables and chairs (enough to accommodate planned activities and an overflow of participants)
- Food, utensils, and paper products (meals, beverages, ice, snacks, forks and cups, napkins, etc.)
- Moderator guides
- Name tags
- Flip charts with easels
- Markers
- Tape
- Clock/timer
- VCR(s) and Television(s)
- Screen(s)
- Public Agenda video
- Podium and microphones
- Microphones
- Notepads and pens
- Evaluation forms

Tool: Meeting ground rules from Forward in the Fifth in Kentucky

GROUND RULES

- Stay on track – get out on time
- Everyone contributes to the conversation
- Participants may disagree with ideas, not people
- Everyone is free to express ideas and views, and to consider the views of others

Tool – from PPE in Grand Rapids

GROUND RULES

- First, let's all work together to keep the conversation on track and to make sure everyone has an equal chance to talk. If someone is talking at great length I may remind him or her that we need to open things up so everyone can participate.

- Second, we want this to be a session where people feel free to express their views of others. It's OK to agree with others and it's OK to disagree as well. We will want to see how much common ground there is when we've finished the discussion, but don't need to end the meeting all agreeing. We don't need to reach consensus. If we do, we do.

- If you do disagree with another group members, we just ask that you disagree with ideas, not with people. In other words, lets keep this constructive and avoid getting personal.

Does anyone have anything to add? Are we ready to get started?

Tool – from PPE in Grand Rapids

MODERATOR NOTES

Prejudice – when an original belief continues to be believed after new facts, which dispute its validity, are rejected. An emotional commitment to ignorance. Commonly held stereotypes of people.
Stereotypes – a single image of a group of people made to prevent acceptance of differences between individuals in the group. Making up a pretended category about individuals of similar appearances for simplifying understanding and, maybe, casting blame. Stereotypes serve to mask the holder's own feelings of inadequacy and help isolate one from relationships with different people.
Race – the mark or criterion for assigning cultural traits and characteristics. In the United States people are classified into races and consequently cultural groups by skin color, language, and physical features.
Racism – a hidden disease of perceptions, beliefs and behaviors which elevates, on basis of skin color, a stereotype, or group, of people over another to promote pretended positions of power versus powerless, affluent versus poor, good versus bad.

Sources: Institute for Healing Racism 2/99, Handbook of Multicultural Counseling 1995

Lesson Learned

Coded language: It's hard to talk about race. Participants may use code words, like "inner city " and "those people," rather than directly speak about race.

Encourage moderators to try to eliminate the use of coded language. Early on in conversations invite participants to talk about language, labels, and descriptions people use, as well as the meanings and impact of different words. Ask, "What terms do you prefer to use? Can everyone agree to use straightforward terms that no one finds offensive?"

Recruiting observers

Observers are often invited by the local organizers to listen to the view of conversation participants, without actually participants themselves. Observers can also be useful in evaluating the effectiveness of the conversation. Project sites handled observers in different ways. It will be up to you to determine who should be invited as observers and what their role will be.

CONVERSATION OBSERVERS

Consider inviting these groups to come and listen only...

- School board members
- District superintendent
- Elected officials
- Boards of directors and staff from the partnering organizations
- Media

Tool – from Public Agenda's town meeting framework

PARTICIPANT GUIDE

Helping All Students Succeed in School in a Diverse Society

Everyone want to see student succeed in school, but too often too may are doing more poorly than they should. In some cases students throughout an entire district are struggling with failing grades and low test scores. In others, there are entire schools within a district, or pockets of students within a single school, where low student achievement is the norm. And even in schools doing better than average, many students say they aren't challenged and do as little as possible to get a passing grade.

How can we do better than failure or just "getting by?" Ho w can we help all students learn and grow to the best of their abilities?

This community dialogue is designed to bring together a diverse group of community members of different backgrounds to talk through these questions together, including parents, students, educators, taxpayers, and people of different ages, races and occupational backgrounds. The aim is to help people understand the issues more fully, communicate with each other more effectively, and build more common ground on how schools, families and the wider community can work together to help all students succeed.

This dialogue is sponsored and organized by [list organizers].

[State the project goal and describe why and how the organizers are leading these conversations.]

Most of our community dialogue will take place in small groups with a moderator whose job is simply to keep the discussion focused and moving along in a way that works well for everyone. The job of participants is simply to think and talk through the following three topics:

- First, we will examine the question: How well are students doing in school in our community?
- Then we will talk about different approaches to helping all students succeed:
  a. Raising expectations, demanding excellence and having higher standards for student achievement
  b. Increasing parental involvement and helping students with social problems that distract them from their school work
  c. Improving safety and discipline at school and making sure that a few disruptive kids don't stop others form learning
- Finally, we will talk about how we can do a better job of working together on behalf of all of our community's students.

PUBLICIZING YOUR PROJECT

What's covered...

- Creating materials for public distribution
- Writing op-ed pieces and newsletter articles

[Note to Richard: You've mentioned a press release and sample op-ed developed by PEN. I'll add it if you'll email it me. I didn't see such examples among the sites' reports.]

Publicity is getting the word out about conversations. You'll also want to inform the community about the results of the conversations. Consider submitting op-ed pieces to local journal and newspapers.

LESSONS LEARNED

Generating publicity: Involve your partners in publicizing the conversations. Encourage partners to announce your plan for public conversations at board and committee meetings, at gatherings with constituents, and in organizational newsletters, websites, and mailings.

STRATEGIES TO GET THE WORD OUT

- Partner with the public relations and advertising firms and the media (television and radio stations and newspapers), especially those that serve ethnic audiences.
- Use a local cable station's community bulletin board
- Produce and air public service announcements (PSAs) for TV and radio
- Create an insert for church bulletins
- Convene roundtable discussions with the media on education topics, such as reforms taking place in schools and how communities can help schools to improve.

Tool: Flyer from the Education Fund in Buffalo

Do our schools measure up to your standards?

You worry about how your kids are doing in school. You wonder if our schools are teaching them what they need to know. You have talked about your concerns before - and you want answers.

We do, too. We are the Education Fund for Greater Buffalo. Our goal is to improve teaching and learning in our community's schools. And we give money to schools and community groups who can help children learn.

We would like to be a helpful resource for your. . . and invite you to a discussion where together we can:

Decide what needs to be done
What do you think is keeping your kids form doing their best?? problems need attention first?

Look for solutions
Do you have ideas? What can the community do together?

Put together an Action Plan
We want a plan for change that outlines steps we can all take to make our What school better.

Make sure our schools measure up.
Together we can make a difference.

They can.
We need to make sure they do.
Join our discussion. We'll come to you.

Turn over for more details.

Tool: Flyer from FEE in Baltimore

Helping All Children Succeed In School
In a Diverse Society

Two opportunities to talk openly about the issue of
how race impacts educational opportunities for children.

Who should attend?

All who have a role in helping our children achieve: students, parents, business people, community members, members of the faith community, school system teachers and administrators. These meetings are open to members of the public, private, and parochial school communities, city and suburban residents, as well as residents of any neighboring counties. Please plan to attend only one meeting.

Why participate?

- To have a rich and productive dialogue about issues that are critical to our society today.
- To discuss how well students in our district and throughout the state are learning.
- To share beliefs about how we could all work to better support students.
- To explore together possible steps to engage the community at large in ways to improve education.

When and where are these town meetings?

- First meeting date, time and place – RSVP by [State deadline for reserving a seat]
- Second meeting date, time and place – RSVP by [State deadline for reserving a seat]

Directions enclosed

*Dinner will be served at each site with reservation only. Limited childcare services available. Please RSVP to [Name and number of the coordinator] by the above deadlines.

Sponsored by [Name of organizing group.]

EVALUATING YOUR WORK

What's covered…

- Obtaining feedback from participants
- Gathering feedback from moderators and observers

Obtaining feedback from participants

[Note: Add narrative.]

Gathering feedback from moderators and observers

[Note: Add narrative.]

Tool: Facilitator Summary Form from the Education Fund in Buffalo

FACILITATOR SUMMARY FORM

Facilitator's Name:

Session Number:

Date:

- Describe the areas of common ground expressed in today's session.
- Describe the areas of disagreement expressed in today's session.
- Issues that need to be probed for the next session.
- Notes for the Action Plan.

Tool: Evaluation of Effectiveness from the Education Fund in Buffalo

PLAN FOR EVALUATING PROJECT EFFECTIVENESS

During each study circle, at the midpoint and at the final session:

- Evaluate which questions and or presentations were most effective in increasing tolerance

At the end of the series of study circles:

- Evaluate if the initiative met our goals for broad scale participation
- Ask participants to record personal changes in attitude
- Ask participants if they are willing to lead or participate in further Study Circles or in a component of the Action Plan – as a measure of commitment.
- Assess whether the Action Plans are realistic, strategic, and likely to have impact

Two months after the conclusion of the Town Meeting:

- Assess if the initial implementation schedule has been achieved.
- Asses if the Action Plan is fully incorporated into our organizational agenda and that of our partners

On a broader level:

- Evaluate if the Action Plan continues to maintain/build momentum
- Assess the degree to which the Action Plan informs and becomes incorporated into other local initiatives focused on race and/or education.

Tool: Survey Instrument developed by Public Agenda

PARTICIPANT SURVEY

Helping All Children Succeed in School in a Diverse Society: A Community Dialogue

[Place and Date]

This survey is the final step in the community conversation. It will pro vide more information on your views about today's topic as well as valuable feedback on how to follow up on this meeting and how to make future meeting more successful. Please hand in the survey on your way out, and thank you very much for your participation.

Please indicate the small group you were in:

- Having spoken with your neighbors about helping all students succeed, do you have any additional comments on the subject you'd like to make?
- Is there any information or data you feel would be useful as you consider these issues in the future?
- Which of the following would be the most useful way to follow up on today's meetings?

  ☐ More discussion on today's topic - *If this is your choice, what aspect of today's topics needs more attention:*

  ☐ Discussion of the a different issues - *If this is your choice, what issue would you like to discuss:*

  ☐ Something else - *If this is you choice, please specify:*

- Can you think of any specific individuals or groups who did not attend today's meeting who you think would like to be invited in the future? If so, please list below:

Throughout today's discussion, how often did you:

5. Decide something was more complicated than you originally thought?

☐ Never ☐ Once or twice ☐ 3 or more times ☐ Not sure

6. Hear arguments AGAINST your position you thought were good?

☐ Never ☐ Once or twice ☐ 3 or more times ☐ Not sure

7. Say something differently than you ordinarily would to avoid offending others?

☐ Never ☐ Once or twice ☐ 3 or more times ☐ Not sure

How did today's meeting compare to other discussions of education issues you've been exposed to? Specifically, how did it compare to:

8. New programs

☐ Better ☐ Worse ☐ About the same ☐ Not sure

9. Discussions you've seen among politician/experts

❑ Better ❑ Worse ❑ About the same ❑ Not sure

10. School board meetings

❑ Better ❑ Worse ❑ About the same ❑ Not sure

11. Did you find your moderator to be:

❑ Very helpful ❑ Somewhat helpful ❑ Not very helpful ❑ Not helpful at all ❑ Not sure

Comments:

12. Was the video discussion starter:

❑ Very helpful ❑ Somewhat helpful ❑ Not very helpful ❑ Not helpful at all ❑ Not sure

Comments:

13. Overall, what did you like most about today's meeting?

14. Overall, what id you like least about today's meeting?

15. Do you have any suggestions for improving the meeting format?

[Questions 16 – 20 are for research purposes only.]

16. Please indicate the category that best describes your main occupation:

❑ Homemaker
❑ Teacher
❑ Student
❑ School administrator
❑ College administrator or educator
❑ Business person
❑ Clergy
❑ Non-educator employed as a
❑ Retiree
❑ Other (please specify):

17. Are you a parent of school-age children?

❑ No ❑ Yes

18. *If yes to question #17:* Do they attend:

❑ Public schools? ❑ Private schools? ❑ Home school?

19. Are you of Hispanic descent?

☐ Yes ☐ No

20. Do you consider yourself to be:

☐ White
☐ Black/African-American
☐ Asian
☐ Native American
☐ Pacific Islander
☐ Other:

21. Would you like to be informed about activities designed to follow up on today's dialogue

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure

22. Would you like to help plan and organize activities to follow up on today's dialogue?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure

If you said "Yes" or "Not sure" to either question #21 or #22, please fill out the contact information below. You may tear off this sheet and hand it in separately so your earlier answers will remain confidential.

Name:

Address:

Phone(s):

Option E-mail address:

Tool: Survey instrument developed by Public Agenda

RECORDER – MODERATOR – OBSERVER SURVEY

Helping All Children Succeed in School in a Diverse Society: A Community Dialogue

Name: I was a (circle one): recorder / moderator / observer

Location: Date:

Part I: Dialogue Content

1. What would you say were the major area5xc of common ground in the discussion?

2. What were the major areas of disagreement?

3. What were the main areas of question or concern that were raised but not fully addressed?

4. Is there any kind of information that people said they needed?

5. Is there any kind of information that you feel people ought to have?

6. Was the relationship between race and education ever discussed? If so, please summarize what was said and how it came up. Continue on back of page as need

   1st time:

   2nd time:

   3rd time:

7. Were any other important or interesting ideas discussed in your group that are not covered in the above questions?

Part II: Dialogue Process

How helpful was the video in getting the discussion started? Was it:

☐ Very helpful ☐ Somewhat helpful ☐ Not very helpful ☐ Not helpful at all ☐ Not sure

Comments:

What was the greatest moderating challenge?

What surprised you most about the group and the discussion?

Which should be the most useful way to follow up on today's meeting?

☐ More discussion on today's topic - *If this is your choice, what aspect of today's topics needs more attention:*

☐ Discussion of the a different issues - *If this is your choice, what issue would you like to discuss:*

☐ Something else - *If this is you choice, please specify:*

Can you think of any specific individuals or groups who did not attend today's meeting who you think would like to be invited in the future? If so, please list below:

Do you have any recommendations for improving future dialogues?

Additional comments?

Tool: Survey instrument developed by a PEN evaluation consultant

PARTICIPANT SURVEY

This survey is the final step in the community conversation. It will provide more information on your views about today's topic as well as valuable feedback on how to follow up this meeting and how to make future meetings more successful. The responses you give will be kept CONFIDENTIAL. Please hand in the survey on your way out, and thank you very much for your participation.

Please indicate the small group you were in:

I. Purpose of the Community Conversation

Please tell us to what extent you agree with following statements about the purpose of the Community Conversation. Circle the choice that most represents your feelings about each statement. A "Neutral" response merely means that you neither disagree nor agree with the statement.

A. The community conversation promoted a rich and productive dialogue.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

B. The conversation clarified areas of common ground on how to help all children succeed in a diverse society.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

C. The conversation clarified areas of disagreement that will need further dialogue.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

D. The conversation clarified my questions, concerns and needs for further information. The conversation will help educators become more aware of the community's perception misconceptions, questions, and value.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

E. The conversation helped to establish lines of communication so that new issues can be better addressed as they arise.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

F. The conversation will help to build a local capacity to create more, and even better, community conversation in the future.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

G. The conversation helped us to explore possible steps, beyond this meeting, to engage the community at large in ways to improve education.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

II. Organization of the Community Conversation

Please tell us what you think about the overall organization of the community conversation.

A. Overall, the conversation was well organized.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

B. The preparation for the meetings, (e.g., logistics, materials, etc.) were well done.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

C. The publication, *Time to Move On*, helped to frame the issues around education and race.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

D. The video provided a valuable resource to guide the discussion.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

E. The location for the meeting (e.g., transportation, parking, etc) was highly accessible.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

F. The length of the meeting was adequate to thoroughly address the topic of the conversation.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

G. I believe that my participation was valued.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

H. This meeting was different from most public forums.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

III. The Conversation Moderators

Please tell us what you think about the work of the conversation moderators.

A. The moderator for my small group generally was well prepared.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

B. The moderator exhibited good group facilitation skills.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

C. The moderator was able to help me articulate the reasons, experiences and values supporting the positions I took during the meeting.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

D. The moderator made me feel comfortable.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

E. The moderator took a nonpartisan approach to the discussion.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

F. The moderator generally was familiar with local issues and education reform.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

G. The moderator reflected the predominant demographic characteristics, (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, age, etc.) of my community.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

IV. Finally

I think that meetings like community conversation are important and useful means for addressing and closing achievement gaps in education that are related to race.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

MOVING ON: NEXT STEPS AFTER THE CONVERSATIONS

What's covered...

- Sharing the results from conversations
- Developing a plan for action

[Note: Currently completing this section.]

Community next steps:

- Conduct more formal and informal conversations
- Create committees and sub committees to review recommendations
- Form new partnerships and collaborations
- Establish new media relations and communication plans
- Coordinate general and targeted outreach to the community
- Develop specific projects and initiatives in response to issues raised

Tool: Paterson's Maslow's Triangle - Hierarchy of Needs

Paterson used Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to develop its action plan. According to Maslow's theory, basic needs must be met before individuals can step to the next level of development. Conversation participants applied the theory to children's readiness to learn believing children cannot learn until their basic needs are met.

▲

Self actualization

and fulfillment of potential

Self-esteem, leadership and achievement

Love, acceptance, belonging and participation

Safety, security, protection, comfort, peace and order

Physical needs, food, sleep, health, exercise

Lesson Learned

Moving forward: One challenge is to withstand the political pressure and backlash that may results from airing long-suppressed issues. As groups seeking change have come to know, resistance to change can be a formidable obstacle.

Tool from FIF in Berea **ACTION PLAN**		
Priority Goal #1: [State goal.]		
Action	Who Will do It	By When
1.		
2.		
3.		
Priority Goal #2:		
Action	Who Will do It	By When
1.		
2.		
3.		
Priority Goal #3:		
Action	Who Will do It	By When
1.		
2.		
3.		

For more information call or write the projects sites directly and these other organizations:

Gladys Baxley, Ph.D.
Evaluation Consultant
Washington, DC
(202) 396-2150
gbbaxley@msn.com

Adrianne Christmas, Ph.D.
Education Fund For Greater Buffalo
712 Main Street
Buffalo, NY 14202
Ph. (716) 843-8895
Fax (716) 852-2861
panthe4832@aol.com

Beth Dotson
Forward In The Fifth
433 Chestnut Street
Berea, KY 40403
Ph. (606) 986-3696
Fax (606) 986-1299
bdotson@fif.org
www.fif.org

Jennifer Economos Green
Fund For Educational Excellence
800 North Charles Street, Suite 250
Baltimore, MD 21201
Ph. (410) 685-8300
Fax (410) 685-1911
ffee002@umaryland.edu

Will Friedman, Ph.D.
Director of Public Engagement
and
Aviva Gutnick
Public Engagement Associate
Public Agenda
6 East 39th Street
New York, NY 10016-0112
Ph. (212) 686-6610
Fax (212) 889-3461
wfriedman@publicagenda.org

Rosie Grant
Paterson Education Foundation, Inc.
22 Mill Street, Third Floor
Paterson, NJ 07501
Ph. (973) 881-8914
Fax (973) 881-8059
rosieg@cybernex.net

Julie Henderson
Marcus A. Foster Educational Institute
1203 Preservation Parkway, Suite 303
Oakland, CA 94612
Ph. (510) 835-0391
Fax (510) 835-5706
mafei0391@aol.com

Jan Meck
Public Education & Business Coalition
1410 Grant Street, Suite A-101
Denver , CO 80203
Ph. (303) 861-8661
Fax (303) 861-1501

jmeck@pebc.org

Heather Roe
Democracy Resource Center
253 Regency Center, Suite A
Lexington, KY 40503
Ph. (606) 276-0563
Fax (606) 276-0774
hroe@kydrc.org

Richard Tagle
Public Education Network
601 Thirteenth Street, NW, Suite 900 North
Washington, DC 20005
Ph. (202) 628-7460
Fax (202) 628-1893
www.publiceducation.org

Sue Van Slyke
Hattiesburg Area Education Foundation
5912 US Highway 49
Cloverleaf Mall, Suite D-17
Hattiesburg, MS 39401
Ph. (601) 545-5654
Fax (601) 545-1057
svanslyke@c-gate.net

Karen Ward
Partners In Public Education
111 Pearl Street, NW
Grand Rapids, MI 49503-2831
Ph. (616) 771-0310
Fax (616) 771-0329
karenw@grppe.org

List publications and people interviewed to develop report.

Ed Ballinger, Kentucky

Gladys Baxley, Ph.D., Evaluation Consultant

Adrianne Christmas, Buffalo

Beth Dotson, Kentucky

Tru Ginsberg, Baltimore

Jennifer Economos-Green, Baltimore

Rosie Grant, Paterson

Aviva Gutnick, Public Agenda

Julie Henderson, Oakland

Synette Jones, Buffalo

Doug Maven, Paterson

Jan Meck, Denver

Carol Morgan Williams, Grand Rapids

Seneca Nicholson, Hattiesburg

Sue Van Slyke, Hattiesburg

Richard Tagle, PEN

Karen Ward, Grand Rapids

Melissa Zack, PEN

Public Agenda's *Time To Move On* report and "Helping All Students Succeed In A Diverse Society" video.