



*A Philanthropy at Its Best® Report*

# CONFRONTING SYSTEMIC INEQUITY IN EDUCATION

## High Impact Strategies for Philanthropy

*By Kevin Welner  
and Amy Farley*

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## Executive Summary

American schoolchildren face alarming inequities in educational opportunities. While the public schools attended by some U.S. students are among the best in the world, other children are cast off into unsafe, unsupportive, unchallenging and under-resourced schools where their chances of academic success are minimal. These inequities are tied powerfully to parental wealth, education, ethnicity and race, and they persevere from generation to generation.

Across districts large and small, rural and urban, low-income students – and students of color in particular – are outperformed on average by their higher-income white counterparts on all measures of academic achievement. Marginalized communities – primarily children in low-wealth families and children of color, but also English language learners, gay and gender-nonconforming youth, students with disabilities, immigrant youth and females in male-dominated fields – consistently experience public education in profoundly less positive ways than their more-advantaged peers. As a result, they face a greater likelihood of not graduating from high school, lower college attendance and completion rates, and decreased economic potential following school.

If these patterns of unequal opportunities and outcomes are to change in a dramatic way, there must be changes to the foundational inequalities, because differences in educational access and student outcomes are systemic problems and will continue until the system itself is improved. This report examines those systemic issues and considers the implications for effective education grantmaking. In particular, we focus on the importance of addressing inequalities in policymaking access and power through targeted funding decisions. Grantmakers have poured

billions in recent years into grants for education, yet improvements at the systemic level are elusive at best. This report offers specific, intentional practices that grantmakers can adopt to help reform and improve our nation's education system.

In 2009, NCRP challenged grantmakers to provide at least 50 percent of their grant dollars to benefit marginalized groups and to provide at least 25 percent of their grant dollars for “advocacy, organizing and civic engagement to promote equity, opportunity and justice.” Those two benchmarks provide a foundational touchstone for this new report. New analyses of education grant data suggests that of 672 foundations included in the sample, only 11 percent devoted at least half of their education grant dollars to marginalized communities and only 2 percent devoted at least one-quarter of their education grant dollars for systemic change and social justice. This suggests that many foundations seeking to improve education may not be as strategic in their grantmaking as they intend.

***The key contention in this report is that grantmakers in education will have the most success in advancing equity and access if they focus a great deal of attention and funding on marginalized populations and if they do so by addressing systemic inequality.***

This need not entail a wholesale devotion of resources to those singular goals; education grantmaking also can be extremely effective when focused on other pressing needs and worthwhile projects. But this report explores the tensions and tradeoffs, concluding that a far greater focus on marginalized populations and systemic inequality would be beneficial.

First, this report examines the tension between advancing overall change aimed at improving schooling versus targeted change

aimed at marginalized groups. We contend that most education-related grants, even if motivated by general objectives of higher-quality schooling, can be structured to provide substantial benefits for marginalized groups and, as such, we advocate “targeted universalism.” The key is for grantmakers to focus conscientiously on the needs of marginalized students, in ways that can benefit education generally and the population of students at large. Without such targeting, the services and systems-change efforts funded by foundations are not likely to successfully address the needs of marginalized students.

Second, we examine the tension between addressing immediate needs versus addressing long-term effectiveness. We argue that a given grant can advance needs of *both* types.



However, because policymaking takes place within a context that makes some policy options more feasible than others, it is critical to shift this context so that the political voice of marginalized communities is strengthened and the intergenerational reproduction of inequality diminished. Merely providing assistance to address unmet needs in education does little or nothing to change the cycle of inequity. Such assistance addresses only the cycle’s damage – its harmful byproducts. As such, breaking the cycle of systemic inequality is absolutely necessary to avoid intergenerational inequities. Another main contention of this report, then, is that by investing in advocacy, organizing and civic engagement, grantmakers seeking to improve education can assist in addressing power imbalances and participatory inequities and, ultimately, can help break this cycle. By investing in such advocacy-related activities, philanthropists receive a return on their investment of a magnitude that would be impossible if the spending had only immediate, direct beneficiaries.

The advocacy, organizing and civic engagement necessary to accomplish this can and should take a wide variety of forms. But ultimately a foundation advances these goals best when it works collaboratively with a marginalized community. Those most affected by the problem should be decision-makers spearheading the change, and meaningful community involvement adds weight to the foundation’s efforts.

NCRP encourages every education funder to have probing conversations about the ideas raised in this report. We especially encourage you to consider your foundation’s current allocation of grant dollars, and how investments in marginalized communities and advocacy-related efforts might help better achieve your goals. Were American schooling inequalities and their repercussions less stark, the rationale for taking on these challenging projects would be weaker. But ultimately, this report follows the compelling logic that philanthropic ambitions should match needs, and in education those needs are systemic, vast and stubborn.

## I. Introduction

American schoolchildren face alarming inequities in educational opportunities. While the public schools attended by some U.S. students are among the best in the world, other children are cast off into unsafe, unsupportive, unchallenging and under-resourced schools where their chances of academic success are minimal. These inequities have not arisen randomly or by happenstance. They are tied powerfully to parental wealth, education, ethnicity and race, and they persevere from generation to generation. In short, differences in educational access, quality of instruction and student outcomes are systemic problems; they will continue until the systemic inequalities themselves are addressed. This report examines those systemic issues and considers the implications for effective grantmaking for education, from early learning through post-secondary. It asks grantmakers to step back and reconsider how their goals interact with policies and how they might directly engage with broad policy issues. In particular, the report focuses on the importance of addressing inequalities in political access and power<sup>1</sup> – differences that play out in policies and opportunities that too often exacerbate existing inequalities and neglect the needs of marginalized children (please see this report’s definition of “marginalized” children in the endnote).<sup>2</sup>

The report begins with an overview of the current distribution of opportunities and resources in education. The inequities and needs are stark, and their effects on students and society are devastating. The potential of marginalized children often is unrealized, and their dreams are thwarted. Beyond these dire practical consequences for society and the economy,<sup>3</sup> such inequities stand in painful conflict with American ideals of fairness and opportunity.<sup>4</sup>

Grantmakers can play – and do play – a variety of roles in responding to this crisis. They can provide resources to individual students, such as the most disadvantaged or highest-potential needy students. They also can provide resources to educators who have shown potential to create better opportunities for marginalized populations. They can fund research institutes to identify programs that work and then disseminate that information widely in the education and policy community. They can back evaluations that help to provide necessary feedback and knowledge. They can invest in developing new curriculum or out-of-school enrichment programs, and they can assist in developing technical, curricular or instructional advancements in the provision of education. They can help educators and families understand data, and they can work to improve accountability reports or teacher education and professional development.

While each role may illuminate inequalities and their causes and even may provide desperately needed resources to address the symptoms of those inequalities, these approaches largely leave the inequalities in place. That is, even after grantmaking has been successful in its immediate goals, future decision-makers faced with allocation of funding and opportunities will, as a rule, make decisions within a political context that continues to disadvantage the same marginalized persons and groups. Grantmakers accordingly will be called upon to again play the charitable role of plugging some of the holes. Only if the political context<sup>5</sup> is shifted in ways that can be sustained will the next set of allocations be substantially more equitable.

The key contention in this report, then, is that grantmakers in education will have the most success in advancing equity and access if they focus a great deal of attention and

funding on marginalized populations and if they do so by addressing systemic inequality. This need not entail a wholesale devotion of resources to those singular goals; education grantmaking can also be extremely effective when focused on other pressing needs and worthwhile projects. But this report explores the tensions and tradeoffs, concluding that a far greater focus on marginalized populations and systemic inequality would be beneficial.

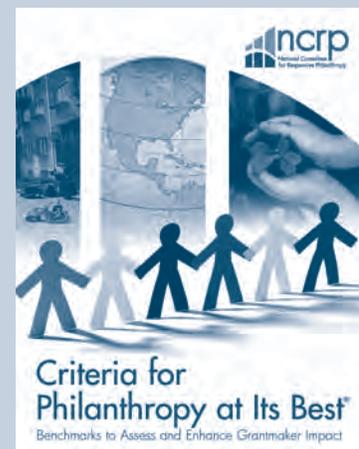
In particular, recognizing the tradeoffs inherent in shifting resources from one approach to another, the report first examines the tension between advancing overall change aimed at improving schooling versus targeted change aimed at helping marginalized groups. Second, it examines the tension between addressing immediate, often pressing needs versus addressing long-term effectiveness. That is, for funding targeted to benefit marginalized groups, it considers the continuum of grantmaking strategies from, on one hand, funding services for marginalized children to, on the other hand, investment in advocacy, organizing and civic engagement to promote equity, opportunity and justice.<sup>6</sup> In exploring this ten-

sion, however, no claim is made that these are the only two grantmaking options, nor is there a claim that the two approaches cannot be combined effectively. In fact, all these choices exist in shades of gray. And as illustrated with exemplars throughout, effective grantmaking can advance multiple goals, helping a foundation advance its own mission and boosting its impact through deliberative adoption of these strategies.

The approaches to giving recommended here present only one valuable type of philanthropy. What sets these approaches apart and makes them worthy of the attention given here is that they are the ones with the largest potential impact. Moreover, as detailed later in this report, they address needs that are far from being met fully by current foundation investments. This report, then, is offered as its own form of advocacy – as a reasoned call for grantmakers to consider judiciously whether their overarching goals might be advanced by a shift toward the support of advocacy, organizing and civic engagement for the benefit of marginalized communities.

## The NCRP Benchmarks

In its 2009 publication *Criteria for Philanthropy at Its Best: Benchmarks to Assess and Enhance Grantmaker Impact*, the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy called for grantmakers – those serving all areas, including education – to provide at least 50 percent of their grant dollars to benefit marginalized groups. NCRP also called on grantmakers to provide at least 25 percent of their grant dollars for “advocacy, organizing and civic engagement to promote equity, opportunity and justice” (p. xiii.). Those two benchmarks – 50 percent to marginalized groups and 25 percent for advocacy – provide a foundational touchstone for this new report. While these aspirational benchmarks are meant to be applied flexibly, many foundations meet or exceed these thresholds, demonstrating their attainability and sustainability. Of course, the ultimate measure of effective philanthropy is impact – which is challenging to measure and best seen over time – but these benchmarks provide a way for grantmakers to reconceptualize their funding priorities to generate the greatest impact in the future.



## II. The State of Education in America

Schools should serve as the “great equalizer of the conditions of men [and] the balance wheel of the social machinery,” according to Horace Mann – the “father of American public education.”<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Jefferson contended that successful self-government depends on an educated citizenry.<sup>8</sup> In truth, Americans expect this and much more from public schools. These schools are intended to assist society and to serve individuals. We want them to further democracy as well as the economy. We ask them to pursue equity, liberty and excellence. Our cherished myths tell us that schools function as a meritocracy and also that they function to provide universal opportunities. These various conceptions lead to a broad set of goals.<sup>9</sup>

Education grantmaking may be designed to advance any of these purposes, as well as others. But the guiding vision of this report and of NCRP impels giving that places *opportunity* and *equity* in the forefront: “Our vision is that philanthropy contributes in meaningful ways to the creation of a fair, just and democratic society. It does so by serving the public good, not private interests, and by employing grantmaking practices that help nonprofits achieve their missions most effectively. Philanthropy, at its best, also strengthens democracy by responding to the needs of those with the least wealth, opportunity and power.”<sup>10</sup>

Unfortunately, American schools have fallen short of the ideals articulated by Mann and Jefferson, failing to provide equal opportunities for children in each new generation. In fact, economic and social inequalities tend to be reproduced, generation after generation.<sup>11</sup> Although these divisions go beyond race, the gaps between black and white families are particularly well documented. In its 2010 report, *The Black-White Achievement*

*Gap: When Progress Stopped*, the Educational Testing Service (ETS) explained:

[T]he data show that many Black people have been stuck in neighborhoods deprived of social and economic capital for several generations. Although only 5 percent of White children born between 1955 and 1970 grew up in high-disadvantage neighborhoods, 84 percent of Black children did so. There was very little change for children born between 1985 and 2000. Also, four out of five Black children who started in the top three income quintiles experienced downward mobility, compared with two out of five White children. ... [T]hree out of five White children who started in the bottom two quintiles experienced upward mobility, versus just one out of four Black children. In such circumstances, any generational improvement becomes a huge challenge.<sup>12</sup>

A child’s academic success is strongly predicted by the income, wealth and educational level of his or her parents.<sup>13</sup> Although this



economic reproduction should not be simplistically blamed on schooling inequalities – there are, after all, many other sources of disadvantage<sup>14</sup> – the very least that should be said is that overall, and despite some notable exceptions, schools have *not* been sufficient to overcome those other disadvantages.<sup>15</sup> And the harshest condemnation (which sadly finds a great deal of empirical support) is that schools themselves have contributed to inter-generational inequalities.<sup>16</sup> A recent Brookings Institution report states that at “virtually every level, education in America tends to perpetuate rather than compensate for existing inequalities. ... [R]esources devoted to education are closely linked with where people live and with the property wealth of their neighbors. For this and other reasons, poor children tend to go to poor schools and more advantaged children to good schools.”<sup>17</sup>

An August 4, 2010 *New York Times* article<sup>18</sup> discusses these inequalities through the eyes of a student at Hunter College High School, a New York City public school for the intellectually gifted. Hunter has educated many prominent Americans, including Supreme Court Justice Elena Kagan. In a graduation speech last spring, an 18-year-old black and Hispanic student named Justin Hudson shocked his classmates and many in the audience with a candid graduation speech about educational inequity that hit close to home:

He opened his remarks by praising the school and explaining how appreciative he was to have made it to that moment. ...



[Then he said,] “More than anything else, I feel guilty ... I don’t deserve any of this. And neither do you.” They had been labeled “gifted,” he told them, based on a test they passed “due to luck and circumstance.” Beneficiaries of advantages, they were disproportionately from middle-class Asian and white neighborhoods known for good schools and the prevalence of tutoring. “If you truly believe that the demographics of Hunter represent the distribution of intelligence in this city,” he said, “then you must believe that the Upper West Side, Bayside and Flushing are intrinsically more intelligent than the South Bronx, Bedford-Stuyvesant and Washington Heights. And I refuse to accept that.”

Hudson spoke largely in response to the overwhelmingly affluent and white composition of Hunter College High and the marked decrease in the enrollment of Latino and African American students in the past 15 years.<sup>19</sup>

Such stories of educational inequalities – and the cruel realities they create for young people in America could in fact be written every day. It has now been two decades since Jonathan Kozol poignantly described substandard facilities and poor educational opportunities for communities of marginalized students living in economically depressed neighborhoods: raw sewage periodically overflowed into the buildings attended by small children, causing schools to be closed and children to miss perhaps the only opportunity for healthy meals in a given day. Less dramatically, although likely as important, Kozol chronicled overcrowded classrooms, violence, inadequate and under-resourced sports facilities, and extraordinary dropout rates. Over the ensuing 20 years, some communities have seen investment and improvement; others have seen further decline.<sup>20</sup> Kozol’s “savage inequalities” remain pervasive.

According to a 2003 *WestEd* report,

*Many city schools have make-shift ventilation systems and air conditioning units. Many windows are broken or do not open. Also, faulty heating systems in schools make some classrooms too hot while others are too cold. Photo courtesy of ACLU of Maryland Foundation.*

although public school funding in America comes from a combination of federal, state and local sources, nearly half of education costs are provided by local property taxes – an approach that often puts property-poor districts at a considerable disadvantage, with some of America’s wealthiest students attending schools with funding in excess of \$15,000 per student per year, while other districts must survive on less than \$4,000 in per-student funding annually.<sup>21</sup> Further, students within marginalized communities are consistently provided fewer educational opportunities – from preschool to enrichment programs – than their more advantaged peers.<sup>22</sup>

Although resource limitations certainly come into play for almost all educational needs, these inequities go beyond dollars and cents. As Linda Darling-Hammond concluded recently after reviewing analyses of data prepared for school finance cases across the country, “On every tangible measure – from qualified teachers and class sizes to textbooks, computers, facilities and curriculum offerings – schools serving large numbers of students of color have significantly fewer resources than schools serving mostly White students.”<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, in the last two decades students of color have become increasingly segregated into schools with high-poverty and high percentages of ethnic and racial minorities, a phenomenon that exacerbates many of these inequalities.<sup>24</sup>

Teacher quality issues also are particularly well-documented and crucial to student success.<sup>25</sup> Recent attention has been focused in particular on collective bargaining agreement provisions in some districts that have the potential to undermine individual teacher creativity and initiative, district policies that allow for forced placements at new schools



*In some Baltimore City high schools, the science lab is completely inoperable or nonexistent. In other schools, the science labs are commonly inadequate to support the curriculum. Photo courtesy of ACLU of Maryland Foundation.*

of teachers who were not effective in their prior placements, and the ineffective evaluations and management on the part of school and district leaders. Longstanding attention also has been focused on resource inequalities and on structural incentives that encourage movement of the most experienced and successful teachers away from schools in the most marginalized communities. Key disparities arise at almost every key point in the process: hiring, professional development and induction, retention and tenure policies, turnover, supervision and evaluation. At each point, schools serving marginalized communities are at a disadvantage. And at each point, these schools tend to incur additional costs associated with hiring and developing new teachers. This makes it even harder to provide the working conditions and support that might improve teacher quality.

The net effect of these unequal opportunities and resources are devastatingly unequal outcomes – often resulting in lost potential and unfair life chances. The so-called “achievement gap” that follows from the opportunity gap has become one of the most

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—Linda Darling-Hammond

well-documented phenomena in education. In a 2009 report from the National Center for Education Statistics,<sup>26</sup> detailing findings from the nationally administered National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), white students outperformed black students, on average, on *all assessments*.<sup>27</sup> These differences are statistically significant; in contrast, there are no statistically significant changes in the gaps between white and black students as compared to the last NAEP administration in 1999. Similar gaps are seen between low-income and other students. These patterns are seen throughout the country in districts large and small, rural and urban, heterogeneous and largely homogeneous. Across these contexts, low-income students and students of color in particular are outperformed on average by their higher-income white counterparts on all measures of academic achievement, including GPA; standardized tests at the local, state and national levels; and college admission examinations (SAT and ACT).<sup>28</sup>

Achievement gaps like these ultimately turn into large gaps in graduation rates, with disproportionate numbers of students from marginalized communities who do not complete high school and receive their diplomas.<sup>29</sup> A 2009 report from the Center for Labor Market Studies paints a bleak national picture of America's "dropout crisis," which disproportionately affects men, blacks and Hispanics.<sup>30</sup> This inequality continues into college acceptance and completion rates, with people from marginalized communities – both low-income students<sup>31</sup> and students of color<sup>32</sup> – disproportionately not finishing a two-year or four-year college degree, or not attending college at all. Ultimately, these "gaps" lead to employment and wage differences<sup>33</sup> as well as intergenerational

patterns of poverty.<sup>34</sup>

A 2007 ETS report suggests that the economic inequalities linked to skill and opportunity gaps may worsen with time and that the impact of increasing inequalities and the persistence of skill and opportunity gaps are destructive to society at large. Only with a significant commitment to change can these patterns be reversed: "a looming question is whether we will continue to grow apart or, as a nation, we will invest in policies that will help us to grow together."<sup>35</sup> If grantmakers and others do not act to mitigate disparities now, the consequences will be felt for many decades to come.

These inequalities have accumulated over the nation's history and have prompted education expert Gloria Ladson-Billings to advocate for redefining the achievement gap as an *education debt* owed to communities that endured these hardships: "When we think of what we are combating as an achievement gap, we implicitly place the onus for closing that gap on the students, their families and their individual teachers and schools. But the notion of education debt requires us to think about how all of us, as members of a democratic society, are implicated in creating these achievement disparities."<sup>36</sup>

This reconceptualization of the achievement gap as a debt our entire society owes to young children reinforces the NCRP contention that education grantmaking can be most productive when it prioritizes both marginalized communities and advocacy efforts. This is not about temporary solutions or reparations; it's about long-term effectiveness and impact. If these patterns of lesser opportunities and outcomes for students within marginalized communities are to change in a dramatic way, there must also be changes to the foundational systemic inequalities.<sup>37</sup>

This is not about temporary solutions or reparations; it's about long-term effectiveness and impact. If these patterns of lesser opportunities and outcomes for students within marginalized communities are to change in a dramatic way, there must also be changes to the foundational systemic inequalities.

### III. In Pursuit of Excellence and Equity

Given the great needs of marginalized school-age populations, grantmakers can have an important and positive impact by heeding NCRP's call to designate at least 50 percent of grant dollars to benefit such groups. Moreover, as described below, most education-related grants, even if motivated by general objectives of higher-quality schooling (what might be called "universalist" programs), can be structured to provide substantial benefits for marginalized groups.

As a rule, both targeted and universal grantmaking would see greater impact if pursued with an eye toward the twin goals of excellence and equity. Under this approach, grants targeted toward marginalized populations would be made in a way that disrupts patterns of inequality, benefiting concretely the most vulnerable while also impacting and improving broad educational practice. Correspondingly, grants intended to improve schooling broadly would be made in a way that ensures that the improvements actually reach marginalized groups without being watered down or co-opted. Grantmakers also will be most effective if funded projects prioritize increased agency within marginalized communities, so that community members themselves can adopt, adapt and employ effective approaches.

Thus, this report advocates "targeted universalism,"<sup>38</sup> as articulated by John A. Powell and others concerned with persistent schooling disparities. The key is for grantmakers to focus conscientiously on the needs of marginalized students; otherwise the most difficult challenges of the equity mission will likely be diverted or abandoned.<sup>39</sup> As explained by NCRP:

Several studies of seemingly neutral universalist programs conclude that without



an explicit recognition of barriers to equality in grantmaking, such initiatives can serve to reify deeply entrenched structures of privilege and hierarchy, no matter how well-intentioned. Universalist programs can and do result in gains for targeted beneficiaries; but the unconscious reifying of existing racialized structures that lead to disparate outcomes are a cause for concern. [Grantmakers who presume] systemic neutrality would achieve their objectives more effectively if they respond to who benefits and apply "targeted universalism," an approach that is targeted to benefit the most marginal, but benefits all in the long run.<sup>40</sup>

As one philanthropy veteran told the authors of this report, "I've seen grantmakers apply the concept of targeted universalism especially usefully by paying attention to the development (or life cycle) of a promising grantee organization and finding the right moment to urge that organization to take on a challenge associated with serving the hardest-to-serve kids. This stretches the organization, helps it learn and generates lessons that

## Marginalized Groups and Evaluations

Best practice suggests that grants in substantial amounts be accompanied by an external evaluation.<sup>41</sup> But too often evaluations broadly considering outcomes (or processes) fail to disentangle the overall effects of a grant from the disaggregated effects on students in unequal circumstances and contexts. For instance, an after-school program may do an excellent job serving boys, while girls find it uninviting. A new science curriculum may resonate with English language learners, but its positive effects may be washed out in aggregated data if native English speakers are not benefited.

In contrast, when an evaluation does pay particular attention to the grant's impact on marginalized groups, the funder can learn whether and how to invest in the future. In addition, these equity-focused evaluation elements help grant recipients understand from the outset the equity-focused priorities of the grantmaker. Accordingly, grantmakers may see more positive results if evaluations are structured to consider specifically the effects of the program or intervention on marginalized groups.

For example, MDRC's evaluation of Career Academies<sup>42</sup> found that although there were only modest reductions in dropout rates, increases in attendance and course-taking, and relatively small labor market impacts, a slightly different picture emerged when the data were disaggregated by gender and drop-out risk. "[T]hroughout the eight-year post-high school follow-up period, the high-risk subgroup experienced the most consistent and positive impacts on labor market outcomes. All of this occurred without a systematic decline in access to postsecondary education opportunities for the low-, medium-, or high-risk students." By attending to the specific effects of Career Academies on vulnerable groups – instead of focusing only on the aggregate effects for the entire population – MDRC was able to conclude that "Career Academies can make special efforts to serve students who are at risk of dropping out of high school without compromising their capacity to provide college access opportunities, as well as labor market impacts, for all students."

influence all its work – and often the larger school system."

Indeed, the best educational practices for the most marginalized students are often also the best practices for most other groups. While a tide that lifts only those boats not leaking leaves behind those who will sink to the ocean floor, a rising tide that successfully lifts the most vulnerable can indeed lift all boats. A grantmaker investing in improved science instruction, for example, would apply this approach and target its efforts towards marginalized schools and communities, but lessons learned may – in addition to providing understanding of the educational needs of those specific communities – have broad application, helping students in more advantaged communities as well.

An example is provided by the Posse Foundation, which has three goals: "To expand the pool from which top colleges and universities can recruit outstanding young leaders from diverse backgrounds;" "to help these institutions build more interactive campus environments so that they can be more welcoming for people from all backgrounds;" and "to ensure that Posse Scholars persist in their academic studies and graduate, so they can take on leadership positions in the workforce."<sup>43</sup> In targeting their efforts at marginalized communities, Posse is able to create real opportunities for disadvantaged students. However, the foundation also works with institutions to help bring beneficial change to all students. For example, the foundation facilitates "an annual weekend-long PossePlus Retreat attended by members of the larger student body, faculty and administration, with the goal of discussing an important campus issue identified by Posse Scholars."<sup>44</sup>

Several projects that focus on teacher and administrator quality also practice the ideals of targeted universalism. The New Teacher Center,<sup>45</sup> The New Teacher Project<sup>46</sup> and New Leaders for New Schools<sup>47</sup> all receive a great deal of foundation support and focus on the placement and/or assistance of teacher and principal candidates in high-need schools, while also maintaining a commitment to strengthening the larger organiza-

tion of education and influencing practices in entire school systems.

The Coalition for Educational Justice (CEJ) in New York City provides another excellent example of an organizing and advocacy coalition that began with a concern about one population of students identified as particularly vulnerable – in this case, low-income children of color – and undertook a campaign that resulted in positive change for all students. In one particularly compelling effort, CEJ built a constituency of predominately low-income parents of color in Brooklyn neighborhoods, who worked with researchers to identify significant educational problems in their community. These parents felt that middle school was a particularly vulnerable period in education – one that many felt had been critical to their own school success or lack thereof. As such, they undertook research on educational practices and conducted observations in schools – in conjunction with staff from the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University – to determine what works for middle school students and to identify practices relevant to the problems they saw in their schools and communities.

These concerns grew into a city-wide campaign, which led to “the establishment of a Department of Education Middle School Success incentive grant fund of almost \$30 million to support comprehensive reform in low performing middle grade schools.”<sup>48</sup> The grant support provided by dozens of grant-makers to the CEJ and its members embodies the ideal of targeted universalism. The grants were designed specifically to target the needs of a vulnerable community, but they also sought to improve the educational experiences and opportunities of all students. In a New York City Department of Education press



release following the announcement of the follow-up support, CEJ parent leader Carol Boyd explained that “[t]oday is a prime example of what can happen when the DOE and parents work in concert on behalf of the biggest stakeholders, the school children of New York City. ... CEJ has worked tirelessly to ensure that one day all of our children will have equal educational access and opportunity for success regardless of neighborhood, economic status, or language of origin. These grants are one small step in that direction.”<sup>49</sup>

CEJ also continued its commitment to the marginalized populations that inspired the grants. Within neighborhood middle schools in the Bronx and Brooklyn, parents and organizers from CEJ member organizations assisted the community in developing grant applications, and several of these schools in the Bronx and Brooklyn were awarded grants. CEJ also serves as a particularly compelling example because it effectively utilized community building and organizing to strengthen the voices of those within the marginalized community, rather than simply funding advocates from outside.

Indeed, the best educational practices for the most marginalized students often are also the best practices for most other groups. While a tide that lifts only those boats not leaking leaves behind those who will sink to the ocean floor, a rising tide that successfully lifts the most vulnerable can indeed lift all boats.

## IV. Advocacy for Systemic Change

As described earlier in this report, there exist serious, immediate problems that undermine the success and equity of American schools. Most of these problems are also long-term and do not appear to be dissipating – in fact, they are arguably worsening.<sup>50</sup> Accordingly, grantmakers dedicated to assisting marginalized populations are often faced with dire

needs in at least two key categories: immediate, compensatory interventions and systemic, transformative reform. A given grant can advance needs of both types, as well as needs in other categories, such as improving current programs. Furthermore, the approaches can and should be combined, and effective grant-making can advance multiple goals.

### Shifting the Policy Context: Advocacy, Organizing and Civic Engagement

The advocacy-related grantmaking recommended in this report prioritizes efforts to promote systemic reform of public school systems through various approaches for overcoming structural barriers to equitable access and opportunity. This may encompass conventional campaigns, legal approaches and policy analyses, as well as community organizing and civic engagement activities. What all these approaches have in common is their potential to shift the policymaking context toward decisions that better address access and opportunity needs. Because the overarching goal is this environmental shift, there is no tension between advocacy and organizing – between supporting community organizing versus civic engagement activities versus legal strategies versus any of the other approaches discussed here. Funding can generate mutually reinforcing forces, all working together in concert to change policy discussions and outcomes. An argument in favor of funding a community organizing effort, pointing out the importance of grassroots input, should not be understood to be an argument against funding a litigation campaign; the latter effort may lack the grassroots element, but it carries other strengths. Shifting the policymaking context requires the exertion of multiple forces.

Keeping this in mind, the report uses the shorthand “advocacy” to encompass a wide range of advocacy, organizing and engagement activities. However, there does exist a key difference between conventional advocacy and community organizing activities: power. A grantmaker can fund an advocacy effort that succeeds in changing policy but that never directly touches inequalities in power dynamics. Again, this points to the importance of combining different forms of “advocacy” – including conventional, top-down advocacy and advocacy that arises through community organizing and engagement. Depending on the need and context, the most effective such activities might include any of the following, or a combination of two or more:

- Advocacy for a particular issue, such as the Advancement Project, confronting inequitable discipline practices.
- Advocacy for a marginalized group, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN).

The following discussion includes a model illustrating how advocacy-related approaches can leverage a foundation's contributions. Although immediate needs are undeniably enormous, arguments of leverage and efficiency counsel in favor of investments with the greatest potential to mitigate *future* needs.<sup>51</sup>

#### A. BREAKING THE CYCLE OF SYSTEMIC INEQUALITY

Policy-making takes place within a context that makes some policy options more feasible than others. A recent example of this would be the discretionary funding provided to Education Secretary Arne Duncan as part of

the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, allowing for the *Race to the Top* program. Without the economic downturn and the need for a stimulus, the funding would not likely have been available.

To the extent that such contextual factors can be deliberately altered, policymaking is shaped by a battle over contested contextual turf.<sup>52</sup> The successes of the free-market-oriented philanthropists described in "How It's Done" on p. 15 arose from their ability to create a favorable policymaking environment – one where the context for their desired policies shifted from unacceptable to acceptable and then to politically desirable. Similar success can follow from other

- Advocacy for a "campaign," such as the Schott Foundation's *Opportunity to Learn* campaign, which advocates to "increase resource accountability and ensure that race is no longer a significant predictor of educational resource access or outcomes" (see <http://www.schottfoundation.org/funds/otl>).
- Organizing at the community level, such as groups affiliated with the People Improving Communities through Organizing (PICO) national network and grantees of the funder collaborative Communities for Public Education Reform (CPER).
- Efforts that are research-based and policy analysis aimed at developing a knowledge base for access and equity reforms, such as the UCLA (formerly Harvard) Civil Rights Project.
- Organized efforts to preserve legal rights, such as the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) and the Legal Defense Fund (LDF).
- Mobilization of communities through political activity to influence decision making, legislation, or political campaigns, such as Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition.
- Engagement of voters and potential voters, such as the Center for Community Change's Community Voting Project
- Education efforts aimed at the broader public, such as the Public Education Network, the Afterschool Alliance, and the Leadership Conference for Civil and Human Rights Education Fund's campaign to educate the nation about the importance of a fair and accurate census in 2010.
- Sharing information through hubs, networking and technical assistance, such as the Promise Neighborhood Institute.

For any given grantmaker, some of these types of advocacy activities will fit better than others, and those choices will also depend on immediate strategies and opportunities.



Students at Gateway Math and Science Elementary School work on a census lesson during the St. Louis launch of the Census in Schools program. Courtesy of U.S. Census Bureau, Public Information Office.



*Carl Topkok, with his father Andrew, shares his story of feeling lost and alone in the Anchorage School District at a public meeting with the Superintendent of Schools in 2005. Photo courtesy of AFACT.*

types of advocacy-related funding as described earlier, such as that intended to enact specific policies or to alter the dynamics of the policymaking process by increasing the participation of marginalized groups.

Investments in advocacy can have enormous payoffs. A recent series of reports from NCRP shows that every dollar invested by foundations in advocacy, community organizing and civic engagement has a substantially greater return in benefits for communities. Of the five reports released to date in the series, the lowest showed a return on investment of \$89 to \$1 and the highest a return of \$157 to \$1. These figures reflect the monetized benefits of the “wins” that the advocacy achieved. A campaign for a living wage, for instance, can bring a great deal of resources into a community. The reports were examining advocacy on many issues, not just education, but the point is clear that funding advocacy provides grantmakers with substantial leverage.<sup>53</sup>

One other recent example is worth noting here. The emergence of venture philanthropy over the past decade as a large and important sector of private education giving – and as a

correspondingly important vehicle for policy advocacy – provides a useful illustration of grantmaking that has effectively been able to shape a favorable policymaking environment. These philanthropists fund non-profit and for-profit entrepreneurial endeavors, often supplementing available public funding and thereby increasing the capacity of the endeavor as well as its potential for success.<sup>54</sup>

As with the preceding examples of more conventional forms of advocacy investing, the venture philanthropy example illustrates how funders can change the policymaking context through their investments and can thereby create a larger, sustained change in public policy. While some venture philanthropists aim primarily to drive the market and others aim primarily to drive policy, these efforts combine to change the policymaking context around the implicated public policies. That is, they help to establish a new common sense about what’s normal, sensible and effective. These philanthropists have designed their efforts to do more than just help their grantees – their investments are a powerful driving force behind policy change.

Additional insights into the importance of funding for advocacy arise when one looks specifically at the political voice of marginalized communities and at the intergenerational reproduction of inequality. In an ideal, equitable democracy, the voices of all people would have equal force – an equal chance of being effectively heard. In this ideal, marginalized communities would be at least as likely as any others to be advantaged by the resulting policies. But such participatory parity is undermined by systemic social inequalities, such as those outlined above. A context of pervasive inequality leads to political dynamics premised on correspondingly unequal structural and systemic relations, resulting in an imbalance within policymaking processes. Participatory parity, or the ability of all communities to participate equally, must be grounded in the elimination of systemic social inequalities, thereby breaking out of the cycle of power disparities.<sup>55</sup>

As a rule, policies arising from a system with imbalanced political power tend to be

## How It's Done: Using Advocacy to Change Policymaking

Changing the policymaking context, particularly on a national scale, is no easy feat. Perhaps the most prominent example is the civil rights movement, which was able to change the policymaking context surrounding educational and other policies. The women's rights movement and, most recently, the gay rights movement, provide other examples. By changing context, these rights movements were able to correspondingly change policy, which inevitably lessened systemic inequality. While foundation support played an important role in each of these instances, the larger movements incorporated many additional groups, people and resources.<sup>56</sup>

The advocacy approach perhaps is best illustrated by the efforts of a group of funders and their grantees who collaboratively built an infrastructure to push for policy changes in line with Milton Friedman's theories about the benefits of free markets and limited governmental regulation. They helped to usher in a new common sense that underlies the majority of today's policymaking – that the key to good policy is to identify incentives and remove rules that stifle innovation and growth.<sup>57</sup> The effectiveness of this effort can be traced to several key elements: (a) the grantmakers had a clear, strong vision of political and policy change; (b) they provided general operating support to build a network of strong institutions; (c) they invested in strategic communications and marketing of ideas; and (d) they employed multiple advocacy strategies, including legal, research, grassroots and media.

The payoff from this strategic approach has been substantial. In the field of education alone, policy has shifted substantially in favor of promoted policies concerning incentive pay, alternative certification, school choice, contracting out of services and performance-based accountability.<sup>58</sup> As a result, policies that were once on the margins of the political debate now are very much mainstream. Similar changes have occurred in other fields such as industrial and financial services regulation.<sup>59</sup> Through careful, concerted efforts, funders have contributed to a shift in the context of policymaking, changing the nature of discussions and debate.

Such successes highlight the strategic importance of leverage and efficiency. By investing in advocacy (as well as exemplars of their ideas), these philanthropists received a return on their investment of a magnitude that would be impossible if the spending had only immediate, direct beneficiaries. The spending often gave rise to government funding of their priorities. Laws and regulations have also been changed at the federal, state and local levels, creating a more hospitable environment for the funders' own future spending and for the activities of their grantees.<sup>60</sup>

As the above examples illustrate, foundations do not speak with a monolithic voice; altogether, different foundations support policy change with a variety of different aims. But any given philanthropist nevertheless faces the choice of whether advocacy investments are sensible.

While philanthropy cannot be a substitute for public sector programs, it has been able to lay the foundation and shift public sector efforts toward the philanthropists' goals and visions. Over the long run, such shifts and changes to governmental policies and funding are likely to dwarf the efforts of even the wealthiest philanthropists. Correspondingly, a funder helping to address the immediate damage caused by ill-conceived governmental priorities will forever be swimming against the tide.



Taken during an LGBT equality rally at the Opera Plaza, San Francisco, Calif. in November 2008. Photo by sonofabike, [www.flickr.com/photos/oj/3034342596/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/oj/3034342596/).

comparably imbalanced. Unfair processes lead to unfair results. This points to an ongoing cycle of systemic inequality driving participatory inequality and continued power imbalances in policymaking and, accordingly, in new inequitable policies and resource distribution (see Figure A). Changing this pattern requires addressing one or more of the main elements of the cycle: systemic inequality, power imbalances, participatory inequality or the policies themselves. Merely providing assistance to address unmet needs and thus mitigating the damages arising from unfair policies does little or nothing to change the cycle. Such assistance addresses only the cycle’s damage – its harmful byproducts.

Past successful interventions have focused on these power imbalances and participatory inequities. One example of an effort aimed explicitly to shift power distributions and increase participatory equity is grantmaking by Needmor, Norman and other small foundations in the 1970s and 1980s designed to increase the representation of black school board members in the South to distribute resources more fairly and have a more active voice in policymaking on the local level.<sup>61</sup>

Another interesting example is the planned development of the Newark Global Village School Zone (NGVSZ), which will serve 3,500 students in seven Newark schools. The NGVSZ is modeled after the high-profile and well-regarded Harlem Children’s Zone. Funded primarily by “grants and donations, including a \$5 million federal grant for

improvements at Central High School, \$220,000 from the Ford Foundation and \$75,000 from the local Victoria Foundation to hire a social services coordinator,”<sup>62</sup> NGVSZ is linked to the larger “Broader, Bolder Approach” (BBA) movement calling for education policies to address the out-of-school factors that impact student success.<sup>63</sup> As such, the NGVSZ incorporates four key components of the BBA: (a) high quality educational reform that emphasizes both basic and higher-order skills; (b) the provision of social services; (c) community engagement in school decisions, planning, activities, visioning, communication and other school-related activities; and (d) economic development.

Although NGVSZ largely entails the provision of better and more effective services, it also represents a commitment to shifting power imbalances. The NGVSZ effort illustrates an important point: grants focused on advocacy, community engagement and community organizing need not abandon one priority in order to accommodate another. Funded projects can include a combination of advocacy and practical reform; they can directly target power imbalances and participatory inequities, or they can address these issues while also maintaining a commitment to other immediate goals.

One thing is clear, however: breaking this cycle of systemic inequality is absolutely necessary in order to avoid intergenerational inequities.<sup>64</sup> Addressing current unmet needs – the outcomes of the dysfunctional cycle at any given time – leaves in place the system that

FIGURE A: Cycle of Systemic Inequality

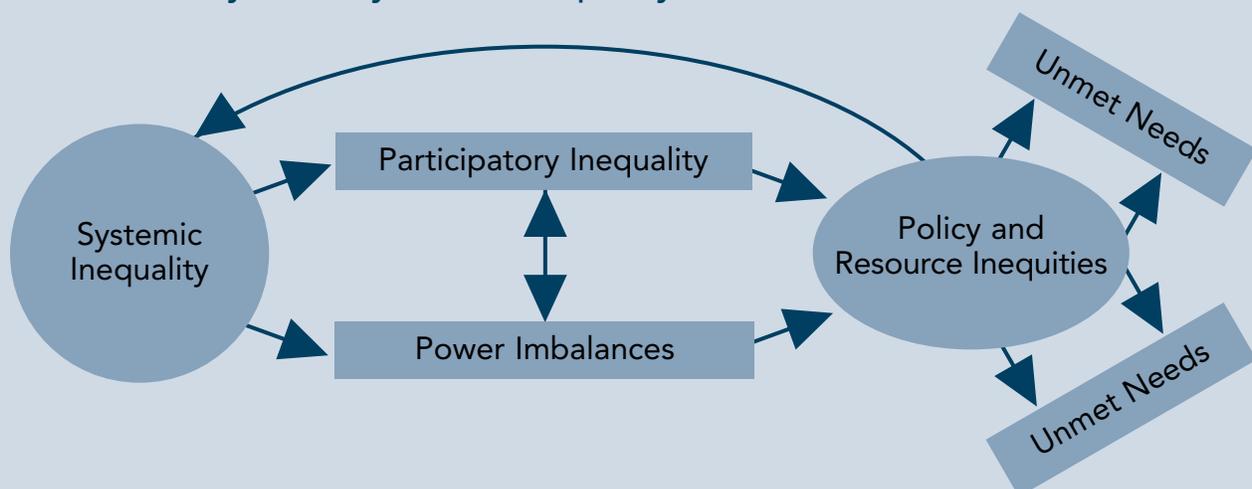
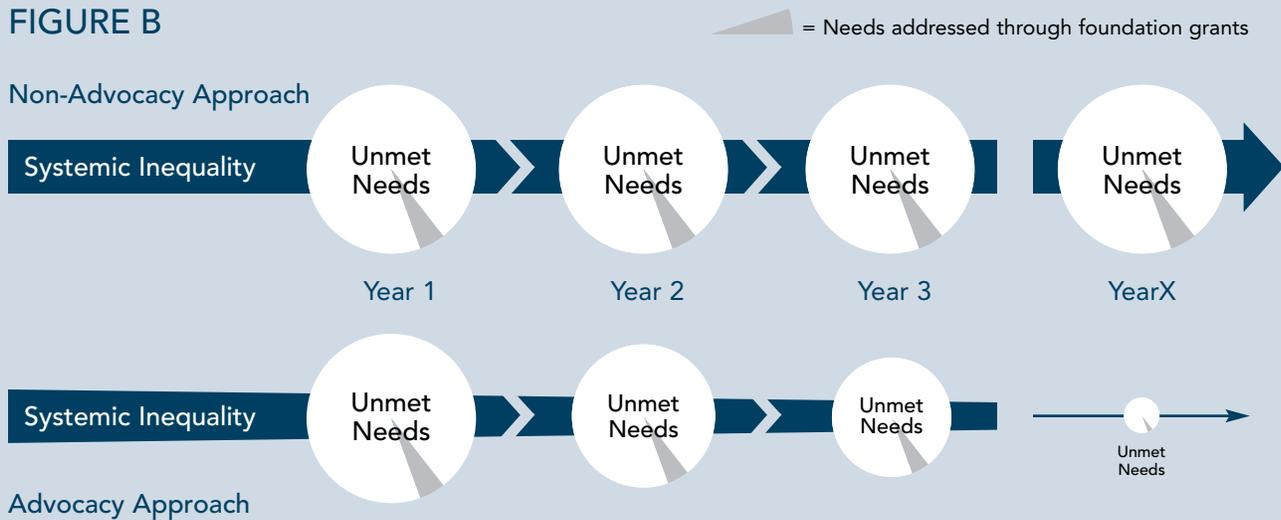


FIGURE B



yields inequalities for each new generation.<sup>65</sup> Accordingly, even under idealized circumstances where the problems do not grow, the magnitude of these unmet needs would likely not decrease. The context for decision-making about policies and resources remains untouched, so future decision-makers faced with allocating funding and opportunities will, as a rule, make their next set of allocations within a context that continues to disadvantage the same marginalized persons and groups. Future grantmakers will, in turn, be called upon to again address the immediate needs arising from the cycle of systemic inequality.

This dynamic is illustrated by Figure B, which presents two alternative funding allocations – one in which funding is spent entirely on addressing unmet needs and one where a substantial portion of annual contributions is directed at advocacy-related activities – particularly activities that change the context and dynamics of decision-making. The top row represents a pure version the non-advocacy approach to grantmaking. The cycle of systemic inequality predictably produces a quantity of unmet needs every year, and that quantity is unlikely to decrease as long as the cycle remains in place. A grantmaker dedicated to helping address those unmet needs plays a positive, vital role in any given year, but the larger problems persist over time.

The bottom row illustrates a grantmaking approach that funds advocacy in addition to addressing unmet needs. Although fewer resources are initially available for immediate needs, effective advocacy carries the potential to change policy and practice – to interfere with the cycle of systemic inequality – and accordingly to decrease the quantity of unmet needs over time. In this illustration, the effects of advocacy are shown as gradual but persistent. In reality, however, these effects are best thought of in terms of probabilities. As the voice of marginalized communities becomes stronger and more effective, and as the policymaking context becomes more favorable to policies benefiting those communities, the likelihood of any given positive change in policy and practice correspondingly increases.<sup>66</sup> By investing in advocacy, organizing and civic engagement to promote equity, opportunity and justice, grantmakers therefore can assist in addressing power imbalances and participatory inequities.

### B. GRANTMAKING AND SHAPING THE ZONE OF MEDIATION

Each policy decision takes place within a political and normative context, and shifting that context modifies the cycle. Looking specifically at equity-focused school reforms,

Put another way, the intersection of forces around a particular issue shapes the zone of mediation for that issue. Such forces may include such far-reaching items as legislation, judicial decisions, demographics, housing and nutritional needs, economic and market forces, social/state political climates, educational influence groups, district history, individual players within districts, their political ambitions and the media. One such potential force is foundation support.

success is frequently impaired by daunting normative and political obstacles at both the initiation and implementation stages. To help illustrate the forces that create the environment surrounding a potential reform, imagine a “zone of mediation” whereby schools are situated within particular local enactments of larger cultural norms, rules, incentives, power relations and values.<sup>67</sup> Together, these forces promote either stability or change and accordingly set the parameters of beliefs, behavior and policy in schools and in broader educational policymaking.

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The zone framework illuminates the forces that continually shape and reshape the context for reform, and this context then mediates the interactions around a given policy discussion. Each new reform effort rests atop multiple layers of social and political history, as well as past experiences with education reforms. “When forces are added, subtracted, strengthened or weakened, the zone shifts. With each shift, the zone becomes more receptive or more hostile to the reform.”<sup>68</sup> For example, the desegregation movement existed before the 1954 Supreme Court decision in

*Brown v. Board of Education*. That decision substantially shifted the zone of mediation for desegregation policies. But it was not until a decade later, with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the 1965 passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act that substantial progress began. Each of these major events changed the policymaking context, making it more favorable to desegregation. But none of these forces magically removed the counter-forces favoring segregated schooling. In fact, *de facto* segregation remains prevalent today.<sup>69</sup>

Another well-known illustration of this is the 1975 Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142, which currently is known as IDEA – the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act). The act was preceded by litigation as well as national movement organizing and other activities that made passage of the legislation possible when only a year earlier it lacked congressional support.<sup>70</sup> Cost concerns and prejudices that preceded passage still existed in 1975, and they have continued in the years since; but these countervailing forces were overcome by new forces pushing for change.

Similarly, a grantmaker’s sustained support for advocacy can create important new forces that help to shift the zone by catalyzing corresponding shifts in power and participation (see “How It’s Done,” p. 15).<sup>71</sup> These types of advocacy forces are important because if the policy context – the zone of mediation – is inhospitable toward a grantmaker’s hoped-for change, merely understanding best practices will be insufficient. Imagine, for instance, that

a grantmaker wants to expand the availability of a successful program that involves increased classroom-level racial integration as well as intensive interventions with struggling readers. Undoubtedly, it would be important to carefully evaluate the program and understand how it works. But this knowledge about the program will do little to overcome the likely political and normative resistance to its adoption and implementation (to say nothing of the resistance that arises simply because educators are overwhelmed). Channeling intensive resources toward marginalized students is often politically difficult, and it becomes even more difficult when combined with racial integration policies that can conflict with widespread racist beliefs about academic capacity and engagement.<sup>72</sup> Understanding “best practices” for schooling is a very different thing than getting them implemented.

This type of systemic change can seem daunting, particularly so for smaller grantmakers who are not part of a larger, collaborative effort.<sup>73</sup> Societal sources of inequality often create the context for local injustices; these larger forces also are unlikely to be changed in a measurable way by investments in community-level advocacy. As noted, the zone of mediation surrounding a given issue is shaped by many powerful forces, most of which will be far beyond the reach of such advocates. But these are not either-or choices. Advocacy of change that is felt most directly at the local level contributes to the broader push for change.<sup>74</sup> Recognizing the differences between small and large funders, *Grantmakers for Education*, a membership organization for more than 240 public and private philanthropies, states the following *Principle* describing the need for enduring, systemic solutions: “The depth and range of problems in education make it difficult to achieve meaningful change in isolation or by funding programs without changing public policies or opinions. A grantmaker is more effective when working with others to mobilize and deploy as many resources as possible in order to advance solutions.”<sup>75</sup>

One such collaboration is the Youth Transition Funders Group, a “network of

grantmakers whose mission is to help all youth make a successful transition to adulthood by age 25.”<sup>76</sup> One of its targeted efforts, the Multiple Pathways to Graduation work group, works to create strategies for increasing high school graduation and is supported by the William Penn Foundation, the Walter S. Johnson Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, and the Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer Foundation.<sup>77</sup> The combined grants of this group have funded “broad-based partnerships that included educational advocacy groups, public school districts, public care agencies, service providers, parents, youth and other stakeholders.”<sup>78</sup> The funders collaborated with community groups and prioritized stakeholder involvement to ensure that the ideas that came out of the work group represented the voices of those in the community and were informed by their experiences.<sup>79</sup>



Children participating in a March 2010 rally in Stockton, Calif. against more cuts in public education. Photo by Patrick Giblin from <http://www.flickr.com/photos/inkyhack/4409820318/>.

## V. Challenges and Limitations

This report is unequivocal in concluding that foundation giving in education will be more effective if greater investments are made in marginalized communities and in advocacy-related initiatives. In particular, philanthropy can further the goals of access and equity by addressing systemic inequality. But there are, nonetheless, tradeoffs to be made when investing in marginalized communities and in advocacy-related grantmaking – other needs also are very real. There also is a daunting ambitiousness inherent in advocacy-related

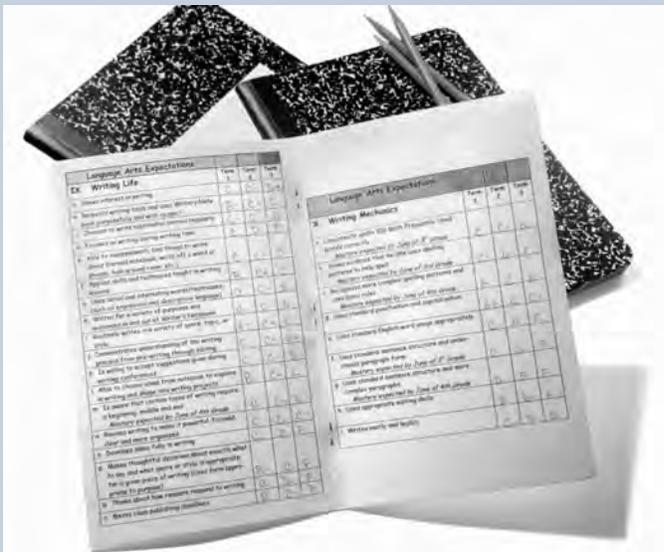
grantmaking that’s designed to influence broader policymaking. And there are limitations that must be acknowledged: no single foundation effort will truly reshape the policy context, and some efforts will find little if any success. Were the inequalities and their repercussions less stark, the rationale for taking on these challenging projects would be much weaker. But ultimately, this report follows the compelling logic that philanthropic ambitions should match needs, and in education those needs are systemic, vast and stubborn.

## Enhancing Evidence-based Grantmaking

Reaching the goals outlined in this report begins with a core intention of serving marginalized populations and of pursuing advocacy-related approaches. But it also requires effectiveness – it requires avoiding the funding of the educational equivalent of cold fusion. Marginalized populations will not be helped by funding directed at an ineffective advocacy approach or even by an effective advocacy approach promoting an ineffective schooling policy.

Consider this illustration from outside the world of philanthropy. Each year, like clockwork, a big-city mayor or school superintendent can be counted on to announce that he or she will

improve schooling results by doing away with “social promotion.” Under these reforms, students are retained in grade until they demonstrate, through performance measures, that they have sufficiently mastered the material necessary to be moved along to the next grade level. This makes intuitive sense, but these reforms tend to be short-lived and unsuccessful. In fact, the research evidence overwhelmingly demonstrates that between two bad choices – social promotion and grade retention – the latter has the worst outcomes. In particular, grade retention increases dropout rates but does not improve achievement.<sup>80</sup> (A research-based and more cost-effective policy would provide intensive intervention but not grade retention.)



How does this example relate to philanthropy? Without pointing fingers, it frames the problem of investments in policies and practices that have already been unsuccessfully tried or that are likely to have weak results or unintended consequences. Some philanthropists want their funding to be directed to programs and ideas with a solid, proven track record. Others want their funding to drive innovation. And many more look to combine the two approaches. Few or none want to fund unsuccessful endeavors, and few would want to designate funding for a “proven practice” that turns out to be unproven. As one grantmaker explained to



the authors of this report, there are “no mice here; we are impacting real lives.” While strongly supporting innovation, this grantmaker called for a system that carefully reviews the innovation before it is taken to scale or implemented. The key to this type of system is access to clear, timely explanations of the existing research evidence – evidence regarding the following:

- (1) The strengths and weaknesses of an approach being considered by the grantmaker;
- (2) The most effective and most efficient known approaches for accomplishing the same goal or goals;
- (3) Any unintended consequences of each of those approaches;
- (4) The local contextual factors that are likely to strengthen or weaken each of the approaches;
- (5) The elements that are likely necessary for replication of the most promising approaches;
- (6) The factors and resources that would be necessary for large-scale, long-term potential; and,
- (7) Alterations or additions that might make a new effort even more successful.

Evidence that answers some of these questions generally is available from researchers; evidence that answers others is generally available from local educators and community members.

One knowledgeable consultant to education grantmakers suggested to the authors of this report that experienced grantmakers take a variety of steps to help ensure evidence-based grantmaking within their foundations. They stay current on relevant research in their fields – and share that research with current and potential grantees, support grantees’ attendance at conferences and meetings, and sponsor conversations that probe the implications of research findings for the supported work. They immerse themselves in, and thereby enable, real dialogue with grantees about the structural barriers that enforce current inequities and thwart improvement. They engage in active, continuous inquiry into what research and innovation can tell us about how to overcome those barriers. These experienced grantmakers often develop a system for soliciting proposal reviews from a cross-section of practitioners, researchers and experts and are careful to include people who take different views or use different approaches than what is being suggested. If warranted, they also provide prospective grantees with opportunities to respond with amended proposals to reviewers’ critiques and doubts, especially those based on alternative readings of the research evidence.

The Pathways to College Network (PCN) provides another useful illustration. PCN, an alliance of 38 national organizations and funders focused on issues of college access and success for marginalized students, has worked with researchers to identify and publicize the types of policy and reform shown by research to have positive outcomes.<sup>81</sup>

## VI. Making This Report Relevant to Your Foundation

NCRP encourages every education funder to have probing conversations about the ideas raised in this report. Below are some discussion questions that NCRP hopes will help you and your philanthropy's decision-makers think through these issues.

- Would your foundation see better results by pursuing targeted universalism – by intentionally seeking to benefit certain disadvantaged populations? Which marginalized groups are most important in the context of what your foundation is trying to achieve?
- What percentage of your education grant dollars are currently intended to benefit vulnerable populations? Are you satisfied with that percentage? How do you measure up against exemplary grantmakers?
- How might advocacy, civic engagement and community organizing around education issues help you better achieve your goals? Are you comfortable funding those strategies? If not, what steps can you take to begin to address and overcome your reservations?
- What percentage of your education grant dollars are currently devoted to creating systemic change through civic engagement, community organizing or policy advocacy? Are you satisfied with that percentage? How do you measure up against exemplary grantmakers?
- Please consider again the marginalized groups and their issues that are most important to your foundation's goals. What is the policymaking context around those groups and those issues? How would that context have to change if it were to become more favorable to your foundation's goals? How might your foundation help create systemic change through civic

engagement, community organizing or policy advocacy?

- What other ideas in the report are relevant for your grantmaking?

To help inform those discussions, NCRP conducted a detailed analysis of the most recently available data from the Foundation Center about grants to education. It examined 672 foundations that made at least \$1 million in grants to education over a three-year period from 2006 to 2008.<sup>82</sup>

Of the 672 foundations in the sample, only 11 percent devoted at least half of their education grant dollars for marginalized communities, and only 2 percent devoted at least a quarter of their education grant dollars for systemic change and social justice. While these percentages should be considered to be rough, given the challenges with categorizing and coding grants, it also is clear that there is significant room for improvement. (If you want to know how your foundation scores on these benchmarks using Foundation Center data, contact [edfunders.research@ncrp.org](mailto:edfunders.research@ncrp.org) and NCRP will be happy to share with you the data concerning your foundation.)

NCRP's benchmarks from *Criteria for Philanthropy at Its Best* were meant to apply to an entire foundation's activities, not only to one program area. But considering the equity issues in education described throughout this report, it is particularly surprising that so few foundations are operating in ways likely to produce the greatest impact.

Given the small proportion of foundations meeting the benchmarks when considering separately their funding for education, it appears that many foundations are not as strategic in their grantmaking as they intend. Some funders, for example, may employ

these strategies – targeted universalism and systemic change approaches – but may do so with a relatively small portion of their education grant dollars. Knowing these percentages might help a foundation make better decisions.

Listed alphabetically below are nine exemplary grantmakers that met both recommendations in *Criteria*: at least half of their grant dollars for education were explicitly intended to benefit vulnerable populations, and at least one-quarter of their grant dollars for education were classified as “social justice” grants, suggesting a commitment to systemic change and the inclusion of advocacy, community organizing or civic engagement.

Some of these exemplary grantmakers have an explicit focus on education, while others made education grants as part of a different priority area. There are multiple entry points to being an education funder, and the issues facing vulnerable communities are complex, interrelated and multifaceted.

These are not, of course, the nation’s only exemplary education funders. Some of the best funders of education are too small to be included in the Foundation Center’s data. And some remarkable larger funders do not meet the benchmarks but nevertheless do great work. The point is to add some rigor and some benchmarking to the discussion, so that all education funders can be more strategic and more responsive.

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\$21,442,205 in grants for education from 2006 to 2008:

- 85% of education grant dollars were intended to benefit vulnerable communities
- 52% of education grant dollars were social justice grants
- 9% of all grant dollars awarded were for education

Established in 1948 by Jim Casey (one of the founders of UPS) and his siblings, the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s mission is “to foster

public policies, human-service reforms and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today’s vulnerable children and families.”<sup>83</sup> Focusing on improving the lives of disadvantaged children, it is not surprising that education funding comprises a substantial portion of this grantmaker’s portfolio. The Annie E. Casey Foundation funds five issues: child welfare/permanence, community change, economic security, education and juvenile justice. Within education, this funder has two overarching goals: 1) supporting initiatives that provide more lower-income families with the opportunity to send their children to high-quality schools, which produce strong outcomes, and 2) building the connections between communities and schools, thus helping families gain access to much-needed services and support.<sup>84</sup> The Annie E. Casey Foundation’s education grant-making focuses on advancing life opportunities for children and families, specifically those from communities of color living in disinvested neighborhoods.

#### **B. THE CALIFORNIA ENDOWMENT** Los Angeles, CA • [www.calendow.org](http://www.calendow.org)

\$18,104,903 in grants for education from 2006 to 2008:

- 97% of education grant dollars were intended to benefit vulnerable communities
- 70% of education grant dollars were social justice grants
- 7% of all grant dollars awarded were for education

The California Endowment is known primarily as a health funder, not an education funder. But the issues that affect marginalized communities do not have rigid boundaries. Accordingly, some of the foundation’s work to improve health outcomes also involves working in and with public schools or universities. One of the foundation’s most successful efforts, for example, was an advocacy campaign in the early 2000s to ban junk food and soda sales in public schools.<sup>85</sup> Another example is a million-dollar grant

given to a local university medical school for a pre-residency training program that helped boost the number of Latino doctors in low-income, underserved parts of California.<sup>86</sup> The foundation is clear about the importance of including funding for advocacy, community organizing and civic engagement in its grantmaking, stating on its web site: “The California Endowment believes that public policy is essential to achieving meaningful changes in access to quality health care and improvements in the health status of California’s underserved communities.”<sup>87</sup>

### C. NAOMI AND NEHEMIAH COHEN FOUNDATION

Bethesda, MD • [www.nncf.net](http://www.nncf.net)

\$1,035,000 in grants for education from 2006 to 2008:

- 66% of education grant dollars were intended to benefit vulnerable communities
- 40% of education grant dollars were social justice grants
- 17% of all grant dollars awarded were for education

The Naomi and Nehemiah Cohen Foundation (NDCF) was founded in 1959. Mr. Cohen was a founding partner of the Giant supermarket chain. The NDCF is a family foundation that provides more than \$4 million in grants annually and funds a range of issues continuing the legacy of its founders’ vision of helping across a variety of charitable issues.<sup>88</sup> The NDCF focuses its grantmaking in the greater Washington, D.C. area, nationally, and in Israel. Its funding priorities in the D.C. metropolitan area include strengthening civic engagement by bolstering effective citizen participation in civic affairs and education and youth development with an emphasis on out-of-school time. NDCF’s web site lists ten grantees under its education and youth development initiative. One example is the Higher Achievement Program, where the mission is to develop crucial academic behavior among young students to improve their grades and also advance their educational opportunities.

The Program builds the skills of middle-school children in disinvested communities, providing them with the opportunity to succeed in the demanding atmosphere of high school. This program demonstrates targeted universalism in action and is a testament to this foundation’s commitment to social justice. Indeed, the Higher Achievement Program was one of fifteen groups that received in November the “Coming up Taller Award” from the Obama administration.<sup>89</sup>

### D. FORD FOUNDATION

New York, NY • [www.fordfoundation.org](http://www.fordfoundation.org)

\$154,768,542 in grants for education from 2006 to 2008:

- 54% of education grant dollars were intended to benefit vulnerable communities
- 33% of education grant dollars were social justice grants
- 20% of all grant dollars awarded were for education

The Ford Foundation web site states: “In every society, people from marginalized and disadvantaged groups deserve an education that expands opportunity, guarantees quality and achieves equitable results.”<sup>90</sup> This commitment leads Ford to be a real leader, domestically and internationally, in the kind of education funding recommended throughout this report. Ford prioritizes education in its grantmaking because the foundation recognizes the fundamental role that education plays in shaping life opportunities for all individuals and societies. Because of this, Ford notes that the interconnectedness of social, political and economic equality necessitate high-quality education for disadvantaged or marginalized populations.<sup>91</sup>

The Ford Foundation employs a holistic approach to its education grantmaking by providing funds that strengthen educational systems and advance democracy by allowing younger populations to participate and contribute meaningfully as citizens in diverse socio-cultural settings. The foundation funds innovative grantees with proven impact and

the ability to communicate and advocate for reform. The foundation's education work in the United States pursues three initiatives: transforming secondary education, advancing access to and success in higher education, and building knowledge for social justice. Across the globe, Ford also applies a targeted approach to its education funding, prioritizing students from poor or otherwise disadvantaged communities in increasing their access to higher education and transforming the quality of secondary schools.<sup>92</sup> The Ford Foundation also funds heavily community organizing efforts in its education work (see "Community Organizing: An Integrated and Strategic Approach to Improving Schools" for details).

#### **E. MARGUERITE CASEY FOUNDATION** Seattle, WA • [www.caseygrants.org](http://www.caseygrants.org)

\$4,161,666 in grants for education from 2006 to 2008:

- 79% of education grant dollars were intended to benefit vulnerable communities
- 45% of education grant dollars were social justice grants
- 8% of all grant dollars awarded were for education

Founded in 2001, the Marguerite Casey Foundation's mission is "to help low income families strengthen their voice and mobilize their communities in order to achieve a more just and equitable society for all."<sup>93</sup> The foundation works to advance a "just and equitable society for all, where all children are nurtured to become compassionate, responsible and self-reliant adults; where families are engaged in the life of their communities, the nation and the world; and where people take responsibility for meeting today's needs as well as those of future generations."<sup>94</sup> The values guiding Marguerite Casey's grantmaking include diversity and anti-racism, equity, mutual respect and trust, sustained connections and transparency.<sup>95</sup> The foundation has funded, for example, the Direct Action and Research Training (DART) Center, a network of faith-based community organizing groups

## Community Organizing: An Integrated and Strategic Approach to Improving Schools

In 2008, the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University released preliminary findings from a groundbreaking book titled *Community Organizing for Stronger Schools: Strategies and Successes*.<sup>96</sup>

Authored by Kavitha Mediratta, Seema Shah and Sara McAlister, it documented the findings from a six-year study of seven diverse community organizing groups working on school reform issues in various cities across the country. The study, funded by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, found consistent and positive relationships between community organizing and educational outcomes on multiple levels. In the main report and the case study series associated with it, the authors present clearly the broad benefits that accrue to society when the people who are most affected by the policy decisions around them are given voice in the decisions that impact their lives.

Similarly, a group of more than 40 grantmakers have recently come together to fund community organizing around education issues. Through this funder collaborative called Communities for Public Education Reform (CPER), these grantmakers are aligning their resources to strategically invest in community-driven reform efforts. Grantmakers large and small have found ways to be involved through CPER. The Ford Foundation, for example, has invested more than \$2 million in CPER since 2009, while smaller education reform funders like the Edward W. Hazen Foundation also have found CPER to be an effective vehicle for their giving.<sup>97</sup>

that have successfully campaigned to improve reading instruction and access to pre-kindergarten programs in Florida. The foundation also funds the Algebra Project Network, which improves math instruction for low-income students of color. Similar to the other exemplary grantmakers described here, the Marguerite Casey Foundation focuses on cross-cutting themes related to disparities that complement its education funding, including health, poverty, civic engagement, poverty, race relations and criminal justice.<sup>98</sup>

#### F. CHARLES STEWART MOTT FOUNDATION

Flint, MI • [www.mott.org](http://www.mott.org)

\$38,674,774 in grants for education from 2006 to 2008:

- 74% of education grant dollars were intended to benefit vulnerable communities
- 44% of education grant dollars were social justice grants
- 28% of all grant dollars awarded were for education

The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation operates with “the premise that unequal education is both a cause and an effect of poverty.”<sup>99</sup> Their grantmaking employs the vast majority of the practices recommended throughout this report. They invest, for example, in groups organizing parents and community members to work as equal partners in efforts to improve schools. Their work on education issues is primarily within their “Pathways out of Poverty” program, reflecting their belief that “education, economic participation and community engagement are critical to moving low-income Americans toward greater prosperity.” This program focuses on improving community education, expanding economic prosperity and building organized communities.<sup>100</sup> Pathways also addresses explicit issues of institutional racism and racial injustice, reflecting a deep understanding of the myriad issues allowing inequities in our democracy to persist and addressing them holisti-

cally to have long-term and sustainable impact within its education grantmaking. The Mott Foundation funds community organizing and education reform and continues to fund assessments of this work to gain a better understanding of what strategies and tactics have worked for local communities. In 2002, Mott joined with a consortium of other funders to provide monies for *Successful Community Organizing for School Reform*, prepared by the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform and Research for Action.<sup>101</sup>

#### G. NIKE FOUNDATION

Portland, OR • [www.nikefoundation.org](http://www.nikefoundation.org)

\$2,245,600 in grants for education from 2006 to 2008:

- 88% of education grant dollars were intended to benefit vulnerable communities
- 35% of education grant dollars were social justice grants
- 9% of all grant dollars awarded were for education

The Nike Foundation has a clearly-stated commitment to the concept of targeted universalism. They invest in girls in the developing world as a way to have the greatest impact. “Nike believes in the power of human potential to accomplish anything [...] we’re applying that belief to poverty in the developing world, an issue that impacts everyone’s future. We sought out where we could make the greatest impact. We found it in adolescent girls. Invest in them, the theory goes, and you will unleash a powerful ripple effect.”<sup>102</sup> Nike calls it “the girl effect.” As stated on the foundation’s web site, this funder believes that its grant dollars will have the most impact by addressing the physical, educational and social well-being of girls because girls are frequently the “insurance policies” for impoverished families in the developing world. It is their education monies that get tapped when their families lack resources. The Nike Foundation funds, for example, Opportunity International in Uganda.<sup>103</sup>

**H. SKOLL FOUNDATION**Palo Alto, CA • [www.skollfoundation.org](http://www.skollfoundation.org)

\$3,742,500 in grants for education from 2006 to 2008:

- 87% of education grant dollars were intended to benefit vulnerable communities
- 58% of education grant dollars were social justice grants
- 19% of all grant dollars awarded were for education

Founded by Jeff Skoll, the first president of eBay, the Skoll Foundation is primarily a funder of social entrepreneurship. Skoll believes that “strategic investments in the right people can lead to lasting social change,”<sup>104</sup> and as such, the foundation works for systemic change by investing heavily in global social entrepreneurs and creating connections among them and other innovative individuals working to address the world’s most urgent problems. The foundation defines social entrepreneurs as “proven leaders whose approaches and solutions to social problems are helping to better the lives and circumstances of countless underserved or disadvantaged individuals.”<sup>105</sup> The foundation empowers these individuals and their programs working to alter fundamentally the social landscape. Grants are provided to social entrepreneurs in the form of three-year awards, to continue or scale-up successful programs across a range of issues including economic and social equity and human rights.<sup>106</sup> One grantee is helping disadvantaged youth in South Africa earn degrees in business administration. Another, Teach for America (TFA), places talented young college graduates in disadvantaged schools in the United States and also includes significant advocacy in their work. While the TFA model – frequently criticized for placing very inexperienced and only briefly trained teachers in high-needs schools for a short two-year commitment – may in fact undermine efforts to build a stable, high-quality teaching force in vulnerable communities, it is clear that many funders support the organization because they believe the program helps disadvantaged students.

**I. SURDNA FOUNDATION**New York, NY • [www.surdna.org](http://www.surdna.org)

\$4,887,630 in grants for education from 2006 to 2008:

- 50% of education grant dollars were intended to benefit vulnerable communities
- 37% of education grant dollars were social justice grants
- 10% of all grant dollars awarded were for education

The Surdna Foundation was founded in 1917 by John Andrus and, since then, has been governed largely by his descendants. Based in New York, this family foundation “seeks to foster sustainable communities in the United States – communities guided by principles of social justice and distinguished by healthy environments, strong local economies and thriving cultures.”<sup>107</sup> As Surdna’s web site notes, Andrus wanted his legacy to reflect providing communities with “opportunity for youth and rest for old age.” One example of this funder’s commitment to excellence and equity in education is its support of Mothers on the Move, a community organizing group in the Bronx that has established “Student Success Centers” in the public schools in this low-income borough of New York City. Surdna also invests in Youth United for Change, a group of diverse young leaders in Philadelphia working to improve their schools.

## VII. Conclusion

Grantmakers have invested billions of dollars in recent years in efforts to improve education. Yet, success remains elusive and millions of children are denied equitable opportunities. Grantmakers are not responsible for these inequities, but if properly crafted, their efforts have the potential to powerfully catalyze improvement and reform. This report is intended to spark serious reflection among education grantmakers about their priorities and their strategies. Better grantmaking can be part of the solution.

By explicitly seeking to benefit the most marginalized, a foundation can advance equity and also reap broader change. And by supporting advocacy, community organizing and civic engagement around education issues, a grantmaker can help to heal systems that have perpetuated inequality.

Collaboration between a foundation and a marginalized community has many benefits. Each partner advances the goals of the other. The money, relationships and resources provided by a philanthropy can bring legitimacy

and social capital in addition to direct benefits. Foundation involvement can add political heft to the efforts of a community organization and can also be felt at the individual level of a parent's influence when advocating on behalf of his or her own children. These are day-to-day benefits of investing in marginalized communities that exist on top of the large-scale potential discussed in this report.

Correspondingly, a foundation engaged on behalf of a marginalized community gains local knowledge, skills and capacity – in addition to moral authority that can be diminished with top-down efforts that lack such collaboration. Foundation effectiveness and impact is enhanced when those most affected by the problem are decision-makers, spearheading the change. Meaningful community involvement adds weight to the foundation's efforts.

Foundations enjoy unprecedented operational freedom. In exercising this discretion, foundations benefit greatly from careful, serious reflection. This report offers our rationale and evidence for considering in particular the level of education grantmaking targeted to marginalized communities and targeted toward advocacy-related activities. By refocusing on these approaches, foundations can most successfully advance their goals of bringing more quality and equity to America's public schools.



## Endnotes

1. Gloria Ladson-Billings, "From the Achievement Gap to the Education Debt: Understanding Achievement in U.S. Schools," *Educational Researcher* (October 2006); Linda Darling-Hammond, *The flat world and education: How America's commitment to equity will determine our future* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2009); Michael Apple, *Education and Power* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Joel Spring, *The Sorting Machine: National Educational Policy Since 1945* (White Plains: Longman Inc., 1988).
2. This report uses the terms "marginalized children," "marginalized groups," and "marginalized populations" throughout to refer to historically and currently non-dominant groups. Children in low-wealth families and children of color are the two primary marginalized U.S. populations of concern. English learner children are another key marginalized group in today's schools, as are gay and gender-nonconforming youth. Other groups that likely should be included, depending on context, are students with disabilities, immigrant youth and females in male-dominated fields. In each case, members of the marginalized are faced with the challenge of overcoming discriminatory beliefs, special needs and political power inequalities.
3. Ladson-Billings, Op. Cit.; Darling-Hammond, Op. Cit.
4. Jeannie Oakes, Karen Hunter Quartz, Steve Ryan, and Martin Lipton, *Becoming good American schools: The struggle for civic virtue in school reform* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000).
5. This report is not advocating a partisan shift in political context. Instead, this refers more broadly to how power and influence are distributed and wielded for the benefit of different groups of students.
6. This phrase is from Niki Jagpal, *Criteria for Philanthropy at Its Best: Benchmarks to Assess and Enhance Grantmaker Impact* (Washington, D.C.: National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, 2009).
7. Horace Mann, Twelfth annual report to the Massachusetts State Board of Education, In *Life and Works of Horace Mann* (Boston: Walker, Fuller, 1848/1868) (Vol. 3, p. 669).
8. James Gilreath, *Thomas Jefferson and the Education of a Citizen* (Washington D.C.: Library of Congress, 1999).
9. These goals include the following, many of which are not always in harmony with one another: (a) the endowment of academic skills and knowledge, (b) the promotion of personal liberty, (c) the creation of a citizenry able to participate in democratic society, (d) the provision of equality of opportunity and increased overall equality in society, (e) the encouragement of economic growth through the creation of a competitive future workforce, (f) the overcoming of oppression, (g) acculturation, (h) public health, and (i) a rich appreciation for diverse cultures as a way to engage, value and encourage learning. See Barry Bull, *Social Justice in Education: An Introduction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Nel Noddings, *Philosophy of Education* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2007); Amy Gutmann, *Democratic Education* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987); bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the practice of freedom* (London: Routledge, 1994); Peter McLaren, *Critical pedagogy and predatory culture: Oppositional politics in a postmodern age* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995); James Banks, *Educating Citizens in a Multicultural Society*, Second Edition (New York: Teachers College Press, 2007).
10. Jagpal, 2009, Op. Cit., p. viii.
11. Jean Anyon, "Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work," *Journal of Education* (Fall 1980); Gloria Ladson-Billings, 2006, Op. Cit.; Linda Darling-Hammond, Op. Cit.; Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, "Schooling in Capitalist America Revisited," *Sociology of Education* (January 2002); The Southern Education Foundation, *The Worst of Times: Children in Extreme Poverty in the South and Nation* (Atlanta, GA: The Southern Education Foundation, 2010). Retrieved August 16, 2010 from <http://www.southerneducation.org/pdf/TWOT-Extreme%20Child%20Poverty%20Rpt-Final.pdf>.
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13. Educational Testing Service, 2010, Op. Cit.; Bowles & Gintis, 2002, Op. Cit.; Amy J. Orr, "Black-white differences in achievement: The importance of wealth," *Sociology of Education*, 76(4), pp. 281–304 (2003).
14. Paul Barton and Richard Coley. *Parsing the Achievement Gap II*. Princeton (New Jersey: Educational Testing Service, 2009). Retrieved July 14, 2010, from <http://www.ets.org/Media/Research/pdf/PICPARSINGII.pdf>; David C. Berliner, *Poverty and Potential: Out-of-School Factors and School Success* (Boulder and Tempe: Education and the Public Interest Center & Education Policy Research Unit, 2009). Retrieved July 14, 2010 from <http://epicpolicy.org/publication/poverty-and-potential>.
15. Richard Rothstein, *Class and schools: Using social, economic, and educational reform to close the black-white*

- achievement gap (Washington, D.C.: Economic Policy Institute, 2004).
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  17. Sawhill, 2006, Op. Cit., p. 3.
  18. Sharon Otterman, "Diversity Debate Convulses Elite High School," *New York Times* (August 4, 2010). Retrieved August 17, 2010 from <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/05/nyregion/05hunter.html>.
  19. Otterman, 2010, Op. Cit.: "In 1995, the entering seventh-grade class was 12 percent black and 6 percent Hispanic, according to state data. This past year, it was 3 percent black and 1 percent Hispanic; the balance was 47 percent Asian and 41 percent white, with the other 8 percent of students identifying themselves as multiracial. The public school system as a whole is 70 percent black and Hispanic."
  20. A complaint filed in California in 2000 details how these funding inequalities played out for one San Francisco school serving African American and Latino students:
 

Luther Burbank classrooms do not have computers. Computer instruction and research skills are not, therefore, part of Luther Burbank students' regular instruction. The school no longer offers any art classes for budgetary reasons. ... Two of the three bathrooms at Luther Burbank are locked all day, every day. ... Students have urinated or defecated on themselves at school because they could not get into an unlocked bathroom. ... The school has no air conditioning. On hot days classroom temperatures climb into the 90s. The school heating system does not work well. In winter, children often wear coats, hats, and gloves during class to keep warm.

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  22. Magnuson, Meyers, Ruhm, and Waldfogel document the underrepresentation of students of color and low income students in their 2004 article in the *American Educational Research Journal*: "[C]hildren whose mothers have a college degree are nearly twice as likely to be in center-based care arrangements as those whose mothers did not complete high school" (p. 115–116). Katherine A. Magnuson, Marcia K. Meyers, Christopher J. Ruhm, and Jane Waldfogel, "Inequality in Preschool Education and School Readiness," *American Educational Research Journal* (March 2004); Jeannie Oakes, John Rogers, and Martin Lipton, *Learning power: Organizing for education and justice* (New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2006).
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  24. Orfield and Lee chronicle this increasing segregation: "[T]he average white student attends schools where 77 percent of the student enrollment is white. Black and Latino students attend schools where more than half of their peers are black and Latino (52% and 55% respectively), a much higher representation than one would expect given the racial composition of the nation's public schools."
 

Gary Orfield and Chungmei Lee, *Historic Reversals, Accelerating Resegregation, and the Need for New Integration Strategies* (Los Angeles, CA: Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles, UCLA, August 2007), p. 24. Retrieved July 14 from <http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/integration-and-diversity/historic-reversals-accelerating-resegregation-and-the-need-for-new-integration-strategies-1/orfield-historic-reversals-accelerating.pdf>; Jonathan Kozol, "Still Separate, Still Unequal: America's Educational Apartheid," *Harper's Magazine* (September 2005).
  25. Suzanne M. Wilson, et al., *Teacher Quality*. Education Policy White Paper (Washington, D.C.: National Academy of Education, 2009); National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, *No Dream Denied: A Pledge to America's Children* (Washington, D.C.: National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2003).
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28. Roland Fryer and Steven Levitt. "Understanding the Black-White Test Score Gap in the First Two Years of School," *Review of Economics and Statistics* (May 2004); Christopher Jencks and Meredith Phillips, *The Black-White Test Score Gap* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1998); Jaekyung Lee, "Racial and Ethnic Achievement Gap Trends: Reversing the Progress of Toward Equity?" *Educational Researcher* (January 2002).
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30. "In 2007, an astounding 16.0% of persons between 16 and 24 years of age (nearly 6.2 million people) were high school dropouts. ... Nearly one in five U.S. men between the ages of 16–24 (18.9%) were dropouts in 2007; [n]early three out of 10 Hispanics were dropouts (27.5%), including recent immigrants; [and, m]ore than one of five Blacks had dropped out of school (21%) – versus a dropout rate for whites of 12.2%." Center for Labor Market Studies, *Left Behind in America: The Nation's Dropout Crisis* (Boston, Massachusetts and Chicago, Illinois: April, 2009). Retrieved August 16, 2010 from [http://www.clms.neu.edu/publication/documents/CLMS\\_2009\\_Dropout\\_Report.pdf](http://www.clms.neu.edu/publication/documents/CLMS_2009_Dropout_Report.pdf).
31. A 2010 report from Grantmakers for Education similarly shows that 77 percent of students from families in the highest income quartile earn at least a bachelor's degree by age 24, compared with only 10 percent of students from families in the lowest income quartile. Grantmakers for Education, "From Access to Success: A Funders Guide to Ensuring More Americans Earn Postsecondary Degrees," (Portland, OR: 2010) Retrieved August 16, 2010 from [http://edfund.org/downloads/GFERReports/GFE\\_FromAccessToSuccess\\_FundersGuide.pdf](http://edfund.org/downloads/GFERReports/GFE_FromAccessToSuccess_FundersGuide.pdf).
32. According to Education Trust's "College Results Online Database," college enrollment for all students increased by 23 percent between 1995 and 2005; however, students of color remain the least likely to attend or graduate. While the black-white gap in college graduate rates has decreased slightly, the gap between Latinos and whites appears to be widening. For more information, see also William G. Bowen and Derek Bok, *The Shape of the River: Long-Term Consequences of Considering Race in College and University Admissions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).
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36. Gloria Ladson-Billings, "From achievement gap to educational debt: Understanding achievement in schools." *Educational Researcher*, 35(7), 3–12 (2006).
37. The current system of opportunities – educational and beyond – is far from what is needed. And while the current federal policy climate has begun to address these systemic issues, there remains significant work to be done. Linda Darling-Hammond warns that "[t]he common presumption that schools currently provide a level playing field paralyzes necessary efforts to invest in schools attended primarily by students of color. If academic outcomes for minority and low-income children are to change, reforms must alter the quality and quantity of learning opportunities they encounter." Linda Darling-Hammond, Op. Cit., p. 329. This report advocates exactly this – addressing inequitable life outcomes by prioritizing education funding and grantmaking that supports necessary systemic changes and targets the most marginalized students and communities.
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41. For a recent discussion of evaluation, see Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, *Evaluation in Philanthropy: Perspectives from the Field* (Washington D.C.: Grantmakers for Effective Organizations and the Council on Foundations, 2009). See also Joy Frechtling, *The 2002 user-friendly handbook for project evaluation* (VA: National Science Foundation, Directorate for Education and Human Resources, Division of Research, Evaluation and Communication, 2002).
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44. <http://www.possefoundation.org/about-posse/program-components/campus-program>.
45. <http://www.newteachercenter.org>.
46. <http://www.tntp.org/>.
47. <http://www.nlns.org/>.
48. <http://www.nyccej.org/about>.
49. NYC Department of Education. *55 Middle Schools Receiving \$13 Million in Grants to Raise Student Achievement: General Electric Foundation to Fund Grants for 17 Northern Manhattan Schools* (News and Speeches: April 8, 2009). Retrieved August 30, 2010 from [http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/mediarelations/NewsandSpeeches/2008-2009/20090408\\_ms\\_grants.htm](http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/mediarelations/NewsandSpeeches/2008-2009/20090408_ms_grants.htm).
50. Jaekyung Lee, 2002, op cit.; Lindsay C. Page, Richard J. Murnane, and John B. Willett, *Trends in the Black-White Achievement Gap: Clarifying the Meaning of Within- and Between-School Achievement Gaps* (NBER Working Paper No. 14213).
51. In fact, some foundations have found that the impact of their advocacy efforts can be even stronger when the efforts of several foundations and funders are pooled together. Ansell, Reckhow, and Kelly (Summer 2009) as well as MacKinnon (2006) present case study examples where the targeted efforts of a coalition of funders found great success. Chris Ansell, Sarah Reckhow, and Andrew Kelly, "How to Reform a Reform Coalition: Outreach, Agenda Expansion, and Brokerage in Urban School Reform," *The Policy Studies Journal* (Summer 2009); Ann MacKinnon, *Case Study No.3, Principles for Effective Education Grantmaking – Working Together to Achieve Greater Impact: The Donors' Education Collaborative of New York City* (Portland, OR: Grantmakers for Education, April 2006).
52. Kevin Welner, 2001, Op. Cit.
53. All reports from NCRP's *Grantmaking for Community Impact Project* can be accessed at [www.ncrp.org/gcip](http://www.ncrp.org/gcip). The first five reports in the series examined foundation funding for advocacy in New Mexico, North Carolina, Minnesota, Los Angeles, and the Northwest Region.
54. As applied to education, venture philanthropy was recently described as follows by Berkeley professor Janelle Scott:
 

A number of relatively newly formed philanthropies are pouring large sums into education reform; they are specifically targeting school choice and privatization expansion in key urban markets. In many ways, these new philanthropists have become among the most prominent and influential educational leaders and policymakers currently influencing state departments of education and the leadership within many urban school systems. Functioning as a de facto advocacy coalition, they often fund the same educational initiatives and organizations, gauge success according to similar outcome measures, and pursue similar goals for public education. In the case of charter school reform, philanthropists aim to increase the number of high-achieving charter schools, especially in urban school districts, and to bring to scale successful charter management models.

Janelle Scott, "The politics of venture philanthropy in school choice policy and advocacy." *Educational Policy*, 23(1), 106-136 (2009).
55. See generally Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in Henry A. Giroux and Peter McLaren (Eds.), *Between Borders: Pedagogy and the Politics of Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
56. In the narrower realm of education, the Ford Foundation, which has been among the most prominent funders of advocacy (see the discussion later in this report), was able to help launch Head Start as a federally funded endeavor by investing in research and startup activities. Maris A. Vinovskis, *The Birth of Head Start: Preschool Education Policies in the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).
57. Sally Covington, *Moving a Public Policy Agenda: The Strategic Philanthropy of Conservative Foundations* (Washington, D.C.: The National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, 1997); Jeff Krehely, Meaghan House and Emily Kernan, *Axis of Ideology: Conservative Foundations and Public Policy* (Washington, D.C.: The National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, March 2004); Andrew Rich, *Think tanks, public policy, and the politics of expertise* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Andrew Rich, "War of ideas: Why mainstream and liberal foundations and the think tanks they support are losing in the war of ideas in American politics," *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (Spring 2005).

58. Jane Hannaway and Nicole Woodroffe, "Policy Instruments in Education," In *Review of Research in Education* (Volume 27, 2003); David Hursh, "Assessing No Child Left Behind and the Rise of Neoliberal Education Policies," *American Educational Research Journal* (September 2007).
59. Jacint Jordana and David Levi-Faur (Eds.), *Politics of Regulation: Institutions and Regulatory Reforms for the Age of Governance* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2004); Michael Moran and Tony Prosser (Eds.), *Privatization and Regulatory Change in Europe* (Buckingham, UK: Open University Press, 1994).
60. These priorities can be seen, for example, in financial support for performance pay, funding for which began during the Bush administration and has substantially increased in the Obama administration. Performance pay systems also have been promoted through added "points" that *Race to the Top* applicant states received if they allowed test score data to be used in evaluating principals and teachers. Other states responded to these *Race to the Top* added points by expanding the availability of alternative teacher certification (see [http://www.nctq.org/p/publications/docs/nctq\\_race\\_to\\_top\\_scorecard.pdf](http://www.nctq.org/p/publications/docs/nctq_race_to_top_scorecard.pdf)). Similarly, federal incentives prompted states to lift caps on the number of allowed charter schools, and the federal budget has included charter schools grants in ever-increasing amounts. In 2010 alone, the federal government budget included \$250 million in charter school grants and \$400 million for the *Teacher Incentive Fund* (a program designed to fund teacher and principal performance pay programs). Charter schools and alternative routes into teaching also were among the big winners for *Investing in Innovation Fund* scale-up grants (<http://www2.ed.gov/programs/innovation/2010/i3hra-list.pdf>).
61. Grants files of the Needmor Fund.
62. <http://www.nje3.org/?p=4347>; see also <http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/metrocenter/bba/newark>.
63. <http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/metrocenter/bba/>.
64. See Kathleen Knight Abowitz, "Intergenerational justice and school choice." In Walter Feinberg and Christopher Lubienski (Eds.) *School Choice Policies and Outcomes: Philosophical and Empirical Perspectives on Limits to Choice in Liberal Democracies* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2008) pp. 79–98.
65. For policies to be fair to marginalized communities, they must secure justice for future generations, not just for current students. However, there is an issue here about equity in implementation. Structural changes that can benefit future students can have a disruptive and dislocative effect on current students. This is an ongoing concern with "turnaround strategies" involving school closure or conversion. This is not an argument against change – it is merely an argument for caution in the design of change.
66. These issues of effective political voice should not obviate or obscure the political need for marginalized communities to have effective allies. Given the demographic reality – for example, the difference between the number of schoolchildren and the number of likely voters from marginalized communities – fundamental change is likely only if the voices of both marginalized communities and a significant group of allies are enlarged.
67. Welner, 2001, Op. Cit.
68. *Ibid*, p. 223.
69. *Ibid*.
70. *Ibid*.
71. See Michelle Renee, Kevin Welner and Jeannie Oakes, "Social Movement Organizing and Equity-Focused Educational Change: Shifting the 'Zone of Mediation,'" in Andy Hargreaves, Michael Fullan, David Hopkins, and Ann Lieberman (Eds.), *International Handbook of Educational Change, Second Edition* (New York: Springer International Handbooks, October 2010).
72. This is akin to the situation faced by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's Global Health Program and its HIV/AIDS strategy. They learned that sound knowledge about HIV prevention has little benefit if the policies are insufficiently advocated and implemented, so they invested "in building country-level advocates who can work for development and delivery of prevention methods will address this challenge" (p. 6). <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/global-health/Documents/hiv-strategy.pdf>.
73. The *Criteria* book offers the sound suggestion that smaller grantmakers work with partners in the advocacy community to develop this capacity:  
 "Policy experts" outside of the foundation world can offer important guidance and tools for developing a legally sound (process-related) and well-informed (substance-related) public policy strategy. Often, the best advice can come from informed but neutral third-party experts who have a better understanding of the policy process. These experts should be used as appropriate and necessary by foundations to build their knowledge and understanding of the world of policy advocacy, and the important role that this, together with organizing and civic engagement, plays in moving policy agendas. Grantees can benefit from policy advice as well; many nonprofits do not engage in advocacy or lobbying because they do not have the right information or appropriate human resources to devote to this work. It is, thus, important for foundations to invest in the capacity of their grantees to engage substantively in policymaking on Capitol Hill and in local communities (Jagpal, Op. Cit., p. 18, internal citations omitted).
74. Michelle Renee, Kevin Welner and Jeannie Oakes, 2010, Op. Cit.

75. Grantmakers for Education, *Principles for Effective Grantmaking* (Portland, OR: Grantmakers for Education, 2005) p. 6, Principle #6, "Leverage, Influence and Collaboration". The organization's Education Policy Working Group has also been pursuing these ideas (see [http://edfunders.org/funder\\_networks/policy.asp](http://edfunders.org/funder_networks/policy.asp)).
76. <http://www.ytfg.org/about-ytfg>.
77. Youth Transition Funders Group, *Multiple Pathways to Graduation: A Collaborative Philanthropic Initiative* (Chicago, IL: Youth Transition Funders Group, October 2007). Retrieved on September 1, 2010 from <http://www.ytfg.org/documents/MPGFINAL.pdf>.
78. <http://www.ytfg.org/about-ytfg/strategic-areas-of-focus/multiple-pathways-to-graduation-work-group%20>.
79. Chris Sturgis, *Stemming the Tide: Accelerating the Adoption of the Multiple Pathways to Graduation Framework through Coordinated Grantmaking and Leadership* (Chicago, IL: Youth Transition Funders Group, October 2008).
80. See Lorrie A. Shepard and Mary Lee Smith (Eds.). *Flunking Grades: The Policies and Effects of Retention* (London: Falmer Press, 1989).
81. See, for instance, the American Youth Policy Forum's recent report with PCN: Monica Martinez and Shayna Klopott. *The Link between High School Reform and College Access and Success for Low-Income and Minority Youth*. (Washington, D.C.: American Youth Policy Forum and Pathways to College Network, 2005). Available online at <http://www.aypf.org/publications/HSReformCollegeAccessandSuccess.pdf>
82. NCRP worked with custom datasets developed with the Foundation Center, which include detailed information on more than 1,200 of the largest foundations in the United States. The search sets are based on the Foundation Center's grants sample database, which includes all grants of \$10,000 or more awarded to organizations by a matched sample of 734 larger foundations for circa 2006–2008 that made grants coded as for education. For community foundations, only discretionary grants are included. Grants to individuals are not included in the file. To eliminate grantmakers from the sample for whom education grantmaking was a small fraction of giving, we examined only those grantmakers that made \$1 million or more in grants to education over the three year period. Grants were analyzed by intended beneficiary to determine which grants were intended to benefit "marginalized" or "vulnerable" populations. Further, grants were analyzed using the Foundation Center's "social justice" screen to determine, as closely as possible, which education grants had systemic change as a goal and likely included advocacy or community organizing. During the 2006–2008 time period, in the aggregate, \$3,931,010,811 was provided for pre-collegiate, higher education and college, spread out across 23,585 grants. Of this amount, a total of \$832,542,904 across 6,314 grants was classified as benefitting vulnerable populations, broadly defined. A total of \$216,822,753, spread out across 825 grants, was classified as social justice giving.
83. <http://www.aecf.org/Home/AboutUs/MissionAndHistory.aspx>.
84. <http://www.aecf.org/OurWork.aspx>.
85. [http://calendow.org/uploadedFiles/banning\\_junk\\_food\\_soda\\_sales.pdf](http://calendow.org/uploadedFiles/banning_junk_food_soda_sales.pdf).
86. [http://grantfinder.calendow.org/grantfinder\\_inter/index.cfm?fuseaction=getindividualgrant&grant\\_id=20061571](http://grantfinder.calendow.org/grantfinder_inter/index.cfm?fuseaction=getindividualgrant&grant_id=20061571).
87. <http://www.calendow.org/Category.aspx?id=342>.
88. <http://www.nncf.net/history/index.cfm>.
89. <http://www.nncf.net/news/HAP.pdf>.
90. <http://www.fordfoundation.org/issues/educational-opportunity-and-scholarship>.
91. <http://www.fordfoundation.org/issues/educational-opportunity-and-scholarship>.
92. <http://www.fordfoundation.org/issues/educational-opportunity-and-scholarship>.
93. [http://www.caseygrants.org/pages/wwa/wwa\\_missionvision.asp](http://www.caseygrants.org/pages/wwa/wwa_missionvision.asp).
94. [http://www.caseygrants.org/pages/wwa/wwa\\_missionvision.asp](http://www.caseygrants.org/pages/wwa/wwa_missionvision.asp).
95. [http://www.caseygrants.org/pages/wwa/wwa\\_values.asp](http://www.caseygrants.org/pages/wwa/wwa_values.asp).
96. Kavitha Mediratta, Seema Shah and Sara McAlister, *Community Organizing for Stronger Schools: Strategies and Successes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2009).
97. <http://www.communitiesforpubliceducationreform.org/>
98. <http://www.highlandercenter.org/p-seeds-of-fire.asp>.
99. <http://www.mott.org/about/programs/pathwaysoutofpoverty/improvingcommunityeducation.aspx>.
100. <http://www.mott.org/about/programs/pathwaysoutofpoverty.aspx>.
101. [http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/Gold\\_E\\_CCC\\_Strong\\_Neighborhoods\\_Strong\\_Schools.pdf](http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/Gold_E_CCC_Strong_Neighborhoods_Strong_Schools.pdf).
102. <http://nikefoundation.org/>.
103. [http://nikefoundation.org/what\\_we\\_do.html](http://nikefoundation.org/what_we_do.html).
104. <http://www.skollfoundation.org/aboutskoll/index.asp>.
105. <http://www.skollfoundation.org/aboutskoll/index.asp>.
106. <http://www.skollfoundation.org/aboutskoll/index.asp>.
107. <http://www.surdna.org/about-the-foundation/mission-and-history.html>.

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A *Philanthropy at Its Best*® Report

## CONFRONTING SYSTEMIC INEQUITY IN EDUCATION

### High Impact Strategies for Philanthropy

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“The great task to strengthen public education in the United States is to address the fundamental inequities that are built into the system. In this very important report, NCRP has provided a roadmap for how philanthropy can play a critical and successful role in creating a system of great schools for all children.”

—Professor Linda Darling-Hammond  
Stanford University School of Education

“The philanthropic community has historically played an essential role in fueling positive systemic changes for Americans. *Confronting Systemic Inequity in Education* provides a critical roadmap for funders to reclaim that space and provide all students an opportunity to learn.”

—Dr. John H. Jackson  
Schott Foundation for Public Education

Every year, foundations provide billions in grants for education. Yet, our education system is in crisis: American schoolchildren – especially those from vulnerable communities - remain trapped in a continuous cycle of inequities in educational access and opportunities. How can philanthropy be more effective at deploying its limited resources to help reform and improve our nation’s school systems? How can philanthropy help break the cycle of persistent inequality, which undermines our American ideals that public education strengthens democracy and our economy, and promotes justice, equity and opportunity? *Confronting Systemic Inequity in Education* offers two high impact strategies for education grantmakers to more effectively achieve their missions and help address the root causes of intergenerational inequalities. It recommends a deliberate focus on the needs of students from marginalized communities and on supporting efforts that seek to influence education policy in the country through advocacy, community organizing and civic engagement.

This is the first in a series of reports from the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP) that invites grantmakers that focus on specific issues to rethink their funding strategies to generate the greatest impact. Future reports will be issued for funders concerned about health, the environment and the arts.

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