

# CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

A SERIES OF STORIES, RESULTS,  
AND LESSONS LEARNED FROM  
A DECADE OF  
EDUCATION INVESTING BY  
THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION



## ***TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE***

*TO SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS*

*The Annie E. Casey Foundation's education program invests just over \$4 million per year. Over the past decade, a portion of this portfolio has gone to groups that provide technical assistance to organizations—especially schools—that are working to close the achievement gap. Technical assistance consists of a range of activities that help build capacity in organizations so that they can improve outcomes for children and families. At Casey, technical assistance includes new ideas, connections to critical friends, visits to programs that work, other learning opportunities, and “hands-on” assistance.*

*The intent of these investments was twofold. First, Casey hoped to maximize the reach of its relatively modest education portfolio. “We thought we could have a wider impact by investing a portion of the portfolio in intermediary organizations that built capacity in people and institutions that educate low-income children,” said Bruno Manno, senior associate for education.*

*Second, Casey sought to meet an unmet need in the evolving school choice marketplace of the late 1990s. At that time, new schools—particularly charter schools—were opening at a rapid rate across the country. Existing school support organizations were not attuned to the kinds of support these schools needed, so Casey decided to fund intermediary organizations that would provide the comprehensive and customized supports that these new kinds of schools required. These intermediary organizations were trailblazers in what was a brand new field when the investments began.*

*Casey's education portfolio has invested a total of \$9.4 million in these efforts. This publication presents an overview of the Foundation's support to four organizations, each of which targets its technical assistance to a particular audience. It also summarizes selected results and lessons learned. The main essay considers the work of two organizations that provide comprehensive technical assistance to an array of schools, each in a focused geographic area. An extended sidebar shines a spotlight on the work of two national civil rights advocacy organizations that deliver resource materials and training to people who work directly with low-income Latino and African-American children in schools and communities across the country.*

# I. **SUPPORTING INTENSIVE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO SCHOOLS**

Over the past decade, Casey has invested roughly \$7 million in two organizations that provide in-depth technical assistance to a variety of public and private schools to improve their capacity and raise student achievement. Each organization focuses on a particular geographic market.

## **Institute for the Transformation of Learning**

### *Strengthening Schools in Milwaukee*

In Milwaukee, the Institute for the Transformation of Learning at Marquette University has provided technical assistance to charter schools, as well as to independent private schools serving students participating in their city's sizable voucher program. Casey invested \$3.3 million in the Institute over 12 years.

The Institute's goals in this work have been to open high-quality schools of choice, to improve student achievement at existing choice schools, and to hold all the schools it works with accountable to fiscal goals and student achievement targets. The Institute also conducts research on school choice options in Milwaukee and uses this knowledge to provide evidence-based information to city and state policymakers.

After its founding in 1995, the Institute began to provide in-depth assistance to existing and emerging private and charter schools. Charter schools are free, open enrollment public schools—created by parents, teachers, and civic leaders—that have more autonomy and flexibility than traditional district schools, provided that they meet student achievement targets and fiscal goals as specified in each school's contract.

### *Technical Assistance to New Schools*

The Annie E. Casey Foundation began investing in the Institute in 1998. For the first year of the investment, the Institute hosted workshops on curriculum, instruction and assessment for charter and private schools in the Milwaukee market. Then, between 1999 and 2005, the Institute supported the development of 42 new charter and private schools by providing a range of services to interested school founding groups.

“We needed someone who was willing to roll up their sleeves and show us what to do to make our vision real, and the Institute showed us the steps from A to Z,” said Chris Her-Xiong, the principal and co-founder of Hmong American Peace Academy, a PK–8 charter school that serves more than 400

## INVESTMENT SUMMARY

### INSTITUTE FOR THE TRANSFORMATION OF LEARNING

TOTAL CASEY INVESTMENT: \$3.3 MILLION

INVESTMENT PERIOD: 1998–2009

#### *Core Activities Supported by the Investment:*

- Provided technical assistance to groups that wanted to open a new charter or private school in Milwaukee.
- Provided technical assistance to existing charter and private schools that wanted to improve fiscal and academic performance.
- Served as an official state accreditation agency for schools participating in the city's voucher program.
- Provided technical assistance to private schools seeking accreditation to stay in the voucher program.
- Became the sole pre-accrediting agency for new private schools seeking to enter the voucher program.

#### *Results:*

- Coached 190 groups that were planning to open a new charter or private school in Milwaukee:
  - Helped 42 groups successfully open a new school.
  - Discouraged 148 groups from opening a school because they lacked the capacity to do so.
- Coached 35 existing charter and private schools.
- Created rigorous policy, procedures, and technical assistance for private schools seeking accreditation to stay in the voucher program.
- Accepted 22 private schools into its accreditation pipeline and provided intensive technical assistance to them for multiple years.
- Created rigorous policy and procedures to review, evaluate, and pre-accredit new private schools seeking to participate in the voucher program.
- Used Casey dollars to attract support from numerous other funders, including the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Fleck Foundation, Helen Bader Foundation, and Wisconsin Department for Public Instruction.

mostly low-income Hmong and Laotian students. It has made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under the federal No Child Left Behind law every year since it opened in 2004.

While fostering these new schools, the Institute also proactively discouraged groups that lacked the capacity to open a successful school. Of the more than 190 individuals and groups that contacted the Institute about opening a school, the organization dissuaded more than 75 percent of them from moving forward. In addition, the Institute provided technical assistance to 35 existing charter and private schools that wanted to improve operations and raise student achievement.

#### *Quality Control for Private Schools*

In 2006, the Institute expanded its activities when the state legislature authorized it and seven other organizations to accredit K–12 schools participating in the city's voucher program, called the



Milwaukee Parental Choice Program. Created in 1990, the choice program provides public funding to low-income families who want to opt out of failing neighborhood schools and send their children to private schools instead. It serves more than 20,000 mostly low-income students in some 125 schools, which receive roughly \$100 million annually in public funding via vouchers.

During the program's first 15 years, participating schools had little direct oversight. By 2006, roughly 50 of the 125 schools in the program had no formal accreditation—or seal of approval—from an external organization. According to media reports, at least a dozen of these unaccredited schools were not delivering a high-quality education.

In the 2006 legislation that named the Institute as an accrediting agency, the state legislature agreed to raise the city's voucher cap to 22,500, on the condition that participating schools would either get accredited by the end of 2009 or exit the program. The law established accreditation as central to quality control among participating private and parochial schools.

#### *Setting Itself Apart from Other Authorizers*

The Institute moved quickly to set up a rigorous accreditation process that would set it apart from the other accrediting bodies. “Unlike the other accrediting agencies, our number one focus is on student achievement,” said Robert Pavlik, the Institute's assistant director. “We are taking accountability very seriously—in order for us to accredit a school, that school must give evidence that it is closing the achievement gap.”

“One of the reasons we decided to go with the Institute instead of another agency was its emphasis on improving student achievement,” said Christina E. Dyson, principal of Victory Christian Academy, a private religious school that participates in the choice program. “Other accrediting agencies weren't looking as hard at that. In my view, we are receiving public dollars, and we have a responsibility to educate the children we serve.”

The Institute established an accreditation board, which includes local business and education leaders. In addition to creating and monitoring policies, standards, and review processes, the hands-on board conducts on-site visitations and makes decisions on initial accreditation and annual renewals.

The Institute's board is unique in that it provides technical assistance to its candidate schools throughout the accreditation process, which takes up to three years. "My school worked with a different accrediting agency, and we did not get the coaching piece," said Cynthia Marino, president of St. Joan Antida High School, an established Catholic school in Milwaukee. "We did not have anyone helping us put it together."

Delivered by coaches employed by the Institute's accreditation support center, this technical assistance includes staff and board assessment, retreats and trainings, and on-site education audits. Coaches give intensive support to schools in student achievement, governance, facilities, finances, curriculum, and school climate.

"Working with our coach, we did a complete transformation in the curriculum and instructional area, and we've seen significant improvement in student performance over the three-year coaching period," said Dyson, whose school serves 70 mostly African-American and Latino students in grades one through eight. "The process hasn't been easy, but accreditation with the Institute has helped us become better and stronger in areas that I personally didn't have deep background in, like governance and finances."

Since 2006, the Institute has accepted 22 private, non-sectarian schools into its accreditation process. Of this total, 13 have been dismissed by the Institute for insufficient progress or by the state department of education for fiscal insolvency. One school closed due to low enrollment. Eight are on track to receive accreditation. "The schools that are still in our pipeline have truly earned it," said Marino, who is chair of the Institute's accreditation board. "We leave no stone unturned."

#### *Becoming the Sole Pre-Accrediting Agency*

Despite the good work of the Institute and other accrediting boards, quality control has continued to be a problem among a subset of schools participating in the voucher program. As a result, the Wisconsin state legislature recently decided to modify its approach to evaluating proposals for groups seeking to open new schools and enter the program. In the past, groups that wanted to open a new school simply had to submit an application six months in advance of school opening and then attend a single workshop. "The process was way too easy and did not discern who actually had the capacity to succeed," said the Institute's Pavlik.



As of 2009, all new schools seeking to participate in the voucher program must be pre-accredited before opening their doors, and the legislature has designated the Institute as the sole pre-accrediting agency. “The state has effectively said that it believes the Institute can exercise this function responsibly, and that it will take the Institute’s word on new school quality,” said Casey’s Bruno Manno.

Drawing on more than a decade of experience working with both charter and private schools, the Institute immediately created and launched a new school approval board and established policies and procedures for reviewing and accrediting new schools. In short order, the board received 19 education plans and, after thorough review and evaluation, approved just two schools to open in fall 2009. Ten of the schools denied pre-accreditation unsuccessfully challenged the Institute’s decision in court. “Some schools expect pre-accreditation to be pro forma, but we disagree,” said Pavlik.

The Institute will operate through the end of 2011, completing the process for the eight schools still in its accreditation pipeline, perfecting the policies and procedures for the new schools pre-accreditation board, and working with the legislature to determine a permanent home for that board.

#### *Influencing the Accountability Conversation in Milwaukee*

One significant change in the Institute’s role over the course of its life has been the shift from that of advisor and coach—in which schools could choose to take or leave the Institute’s suggestions—to that of accreditation agent and pre-authorizer of schools seeking to participate in the voucher program. “The Institute has earned a gatekeeping role by virtue of its reputation for rigor, quality, and integrity, and for having the best interests of kids as the bottom line,” said the Institute’s accreditation board chair Cynthia Marino.

“Before, anyone could start a school and participate in the choice program,” said Howard Fuller, founder and director of the Institute. “Now, our pre-accrediting process allows us to stop marginal schools from coming into the program. This is a sea-change.”

#### **Foundations, Inc.**

##### *Technical Assistance to Schools in Philadelphia*

In Philadelphia, Casey invested a total of \$3.8 million over ten years in Foundations, Inc., which provides technical assistance to a variety of charter and district schools across the city. Founded in 1992, Foundations is a nonprofit community service organization that has established itself as a “go-to” resource for building education capacity in schools, after-school programs, and communities. As such, it works with charter, district-run, independent, and non-traditional schools at every stage of their development. It also collaborates with school districts to improve practices district-wide, including optimizing their central offices and providing business management services.

Foundations began to provide customized, soup-to-nuts support to charter schools shortly after the Pennsylvania charter school law passed in 1997. Over the years, the organization has helped more than 60 charter schools in diverse ways, including securing planning grants; running the business office;

creating self-assessment tools; and providing guidance in student assessment, special education compliance, student lotteries, teacher evaluation, professional development, and board trainings.

### *Hands-On Assistance to Charter Schools*

Casey began investing in Foundations in 2000. From the beginning, the organization's goal has been to support the launch of high-quality charter schools, so its technical assistance to founding charter groups is rigorous and time-intensive. "The relationship is hands-on," said Gail Meister, executive director of learning and development at Foundations. "We do a lot of the work."

This kind of assistance has been crucial for many new schools in Philadelphia. "We simply did not have the capacity as a founding group to do everything we needed to do to open the school," said Julie Stapleton-Carroll, founder of Wissahickon Charter School, a parent-conceived K–8 charter school that serves 400 mostly African-American students and routinely makes AYP. "Working with Foundations meant we didn't have to spend our time worrying about the details of the business in the first couple of years. We could focus on student achievement, build the culture of the school, and connect with the community."

Like the Institute in Milwaukee, Foundations devoted significant time to dissuading groups that lacked capacity to successfully open a school. "With founding groups, our goal is to help people get enough information so they can make good decisions about whether or not they should go ahead and apply for a charter," said Meister. "For us, deflecting or dissuading people who don't have the capacity to open a high-quality school is an OK outcome."

In its work with charter schools, Foundations discovered that although the state does not require that all charter teachers and leaders be certified, many of those who are not yet credentialed want to complete their certification. In response, the organization collaborated with Arcadia University to create a program that has so far enabled 80 charter school principals and teachers to obtain their certification while staying on the job.

### *Adapting to Shifting Market Demands*

When Foundations first began providing technical assistance to charter schools, Philadelphia was a growth market for charters. The School District of Philadelphia, which was an authorizer, was approving up to a dozen new charters each year, and Foundations was the sole organization providing high-quality technical assistance to these schools. Then, when the state took over the district in 2002, after years of low achievement and budget crises, the new school oversight board drastically cut back on the number of charter schools approved annually.

As the charter market shifted, Foundations adapted and expanded its focus to include direct support and management services to district schools, and it won a contract from the district to run a set of low-performing schools in the northwest quadrant of the city. These schools, which served mostly low-income African-American families, had struggled with poor test scores and high teacher turnover, and the high school had a reputation for violent incidents.

### *Technical Assistance to District Schools*

Since 2002, Foundations has provided extensive technical assistance to these schools—dubbed the Neighborhood School Network—enhancing the quality of education by providing instructional coaching and professional development for teachers and principals; establishing data rooms and parent resource centers in each school; and funding an extended school day and homework support operations. “We are in the school buildings every day,” said Sherrine Wilkins, who oversees the network.

Since Foundations took over management of the network, which started with six schools and currently consists of three elementary schools and a high school, the climate is safer, parents and community members are more involved in school life, and test scores are up. In the three elementary schools, the percentage of third graders scoring proficient or above on state reading tests has increased from 33.4 percent in 2002 to 46.7 percent in 2008, catching them up to their counterparts in other district schools. At the high school, the graduation rate, defined as the percentage of entering seniors who graduate on time, has risen from 41 percent in 2002 to 89.6 percent in 2008.

The organization would like to see even greater gains in student achievement, but it is constrained in several key ways by its contract with the school district. “Under the management approach established by the district, we don’t have complete control over what happens in the schools,” said Meister. “For example, we don’t have the latitude to hire and fire that Pennsylvania charter schools have.”

Foundations has also developed a work readiness and career program at the high school that has trained 1,890 high school students and placed 946 of them in jobs. Currently, the organization is pursuing a number of community education initiatives that support children and families, including a comprehensive set of programs for people living in the neighborhoods around the four schools in the network.

### **Challenges of Providing Technical Assistance to Schools**

The experiences of both the Institute and Foundations, Inc. shed light on the complex challenges facing intermediary organizations that provide technical assistance to existing and emerging schools. “The biggest challenge has been the work itself,” said Howard Fuller, founder and director of the Institute in Milwaukee. “Across the field of school reform, we all agree that it’s important to make schools good, but at the Institute we’ve learned how hard it is to actually do it, because there are so many variables.”

The Institute has also learned that it takes time to plan and launch a high-quality school. In its experience, people often embark on the venture of opening a school with good intentions but little knowledge of the financial resources, networking, and time needed to build a strong institution. “It takes two to three years to develop a good school,” said Pavlik, the Institute’s assistant director.

Another challenge has been that schools’ participation in technical assistance efforts is voluntary. “We are dependent on schools to seek our services,” said Spencer Davis, who spent more than a decade overseeing charter school support efforts for Foundations. “We cannot help without invitation, and in many cases, schools don’t recognize their extensive needs.”

## INVESTMENT SUMMARY

### FOUNDATIONS, INC.

TOTAL CASEY INVESTMENT: \$3.8 MILLION

INVESTMENT PERIOD: 2000–2009

#### *Core Activities Supported by the Investment:*

- Provided technical assistance to groups that wanted to open a charter school in Philadelphia.
- Provided technical assistance to existing charter schools.
- Provided comprehensive back-office services for charter schools.
- Created and provided training and certification for charter school principals and teachers.
- Provided technical assistance to and oversight management for a group of underperforming Philadelphia district schools.
- Created and oversaw a job training and placement center for the city's high school students.
- Obtained \$18.7 million in facilities financing for 5 charter schools.
- Managed \$35 million annually for 5 charter schools.
- Provided training and certification for 80 charter school principals and teachers.
- Served as an EMO for a network of district schools serving a combined total of 3,100 students:
  - The high school graduation rate improved from 41 percent in 2002 to 89.6 percent in 2008.
  - Average third grade reading scores improved from 33.4 percent in 2002 to 46.7 percent in 2008.
- Created a job training and placement center at the high school and trained 1,890 high school students, 946 of which have obtained part-time employment.

#### *Results:*

- Provided technical assistance to 115 groups that were planning to open a new charter school.
- Provided technical assistance to 60 existing charter schools.
- Used Casey's early and steady support to attract federal and state funding and support from other philanthropies, including Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation and the U.S. Department of Education Public Charter School Program.

One of the biggest challenges for both organizations has been devising a sustainable business model, because resources to fund technical assistance to schools are hard to come by. In Milwaukee, the Institute relied on philanthropy and provided its services to schools for free. In Philadelphia, Foundations has supported its technical assistance to charter schools through a combination of grants and fees for services. Both organizations have had to grapple with the sustainability of their approaches.

### **The Value of Casey's Investments in Technical Assistance to Schools**

The Annie E. Casey Foundation's investments in the Institute and Foundations were relatively modest in terms of cash dollars, but multiple dimensions of the investments added value.

First, Casey invested early and thereby helped both organizations attract other investors. "Casey's reputation and early support helped us leverage public dollars, which was particularly important, because



those public dollars made our organization more fundable by some of the other major philanthropies,” said Rhonda Lauer, CEO of Foundations, Inc.

In addition, both organizations benefited from sessions with Casey’s results-based accountability team and from Casey-supported cross-site visits. It also provided valuable strategic advice. “Casey has been a very useful think partner,” said Meister.

Perhaps the most important contribution that Casey has made to these organizations lies in having sustained the investment over a period of multiple years. “Funders usually give grants for a few years, then stop,” said the Institute’s Howard Fuller. “Casey’s sustained support has allowed us to evolve our work through different stages in a rational way—learning and getting better, learning and getting better—while adapting to the evolving needs in our city.”

Casey’s education investment in the Institute lasted 12 years. Initially, the funds supported the organization’s work coaching new and existing charter and independent private schools. But over the course of the investment period, the Milwaukee school choice landscape changed from needing new schools to needing measures of quality and accountability. The Institute’s role and Casey support evolved accordingly.

“From 1997 to 2005, we did what needed to be done, which was to generate lots of good options for low-income families,” said Pavlik. “Since 2005, the Institute has shifted its focus to what needed to be done next—achieving quality and accountability. It was an authentic shift, and Casey has supported us through it.”

Casey’s investment in Foundations, Inc. lasted ten years. Like the Institute, Foundations had to respond to changes in the local choice marketplace. At first, Casey monies supported the organization’s assistance to charter schools. Then, as Foundations expanded its activities to meet emerging market demands and opportunities, Casey support shifted as well.

“The steadiness of Casey’s support enabled us to develop our capacity in new areas, while we also continued to support schools that weren’t getting support from anywhere else,” said Lauer.

“We’ve stuck with these investments over the course of a decade because it is a way that we can make a long-term difference in the life of these organizations,” said Casey’s Bruno Manno. “We can help them get firmly established and help them develop their capacity in multiple areas over time.”



## Conclusion

When Casey began these investments, few organizations were providing technical assistance services to new schools. Now, many organizations offer these services. Both the Institute and Foundations helped break this new ground. As a result, the field has a much clearer and more sophisticated understanding of what kinds of supports new schools need.

“Ten years ago, we knew that new schools needed support, but we didn’t know exactly which services they needed,” said Manno. “That question is now mostly answered.”

A major issue that is still unsettled has to do with developing business models that will enable these kinds of organizations to sustain themselves, either as mostly self-supporting through fees charged for services performed or with some combination of fees for service and philanthropic support. “At Casey, we’ve learned that new and existing school support organizations would profit from early advice that assists them in determining a viable business model for sustaining the services they provide,” said Manno.

Both Foundations, Inc. and the Institute for the Transformation of Learning have contributed to improved school quality in their markets, and they’ve learned valuable lessons over time about how to support schools effectively. “We’ve learned that targeted, sustained, intensive technical assistance works far better than one-time interventions,” said Spencer Davis, formerly of Foundations. “To change behaviors takes a more substantial effort than holding a session and thinking that people will change as a result.”

These two organizations have also influenced the conversation about accountability and rigor in their areas. “With Casey’s sustained investment, we’ve been able to help create an environment in which schools have to reach higher accountability standards,” said Howard Fuller. “We’ve contributed to improving the education ecosystem in our city so that it can better help kids, which is what this is all about.”

## II. **SUPPORTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOOLS AND TRAINING**

To reach more Latino and African-American students, the Annie E. Casey Foundation has invested a total of \$2.3 million to support the work of two national civil rights organizations that provide resource materials and training to schools and other community-based organizations.

### **National Council of La Raza**

#### *Support to English Language Learners*

To build capacity at charter schools that serve English language learners (ELLs), Casey invested \$1 million over ten years in the National Council of La Raza, the largest national Latino civil rights and advocacy organization in the United States. Founded in 1968, its focus is to reduce poverty and discrimination and improve opportunities for all Hispanic Americans. Headquartered in Washington, D.C., the Council's policy team does research and analysis and informs policymakers on issues that affect Latinos, including health, housing, workforce development, youth leadership, and education.

Through its eight regional offices, the Council also supports direct services to its constituency by providing support and technical assistance to roughly 300 affiliated community-based organizations. These organizations provide services to approximately 4 million Latinos of all ages via after-school programs, job readiness and training, English language preparation, charter schools, homeownership counseling, and health clinics.

#### *The Council's Education Work*

The Council's education work stresses literacy, college preparation, and parent involvement. It also addresses the needs of English language learner students by advocating for effective ELL policy at all levels and by developing, implementing, and sharing ELL best practices across its network of 100 community-based charter schools. "We are the 'go-to' organization on ELL," said Delia Pompa, the Council's vice president for education.

The Council's goal in education is to close the achievement gap and increase the Latino high school graduation rate. There are 9.5 million Latinos in American public schools, representing 20 percent of total K–12 enrollment. According to data gathered by Education Trust, only 61 percent of entering Latino freshman completed high school on time in 2006, compared to 81 percent of white students. And in 2007, just 17 percent of Latino fourth graders scored proficient or above in reading on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), compared to 41 percent of their white peers.

The Casey education investment in the Council began in 2000, and between 2001 and 2005, the Council supported the founding and start up of 50 community-based charter schools that embrace low-income Latino and ELL students. These 50 new schools joined 50 existing charter and alternative schools in the Council's affiliate network to bring the total to 100 schools serving Latino students grades K–12 in 16 states and the District of Columbia.

As a national organization with in-depth knowledge about the needs of ELL students and how to address them, the Council is uniquely positioned to have a direct impact on hundreds of ELL classrooms via its charter school network. Charter schools are at a disadvantage when it comes to serving ELL students, because there is a shortage of ELL specialists across the sector and because many charter teachers lack specific ELL training. “Many of our charter schools are small, and in small schools, most ELL services are, out of necessity, compliance-based rather than research- and education-based,” said Pompa.

#### *From Guidebooks to Training*

In the early years of the Casey investment, the Council used the support to create a series of ELL guidebooks—called *Educating English Language Learners*—on the topics of assessment, instructional practices, and program design and implementation. The organization distributed the guides throughout its school network and shared them at other relevant gatherings, including annual meetings of state charter school associations. Over time, the Council learned that “no matter how great a publication is, it doesn't guarantee that people will do anything with the information,” said Pompa.

As a result of this experience, and based on substantive anecdotal evidence from the organization's regional education directors who work directly with network schools, the Council shifted its strategy to face-to-face training. Its primary training venue is its annual Leadership Institute for Latino Literacy, where roughly 50 teachers from affiliated schools get knowledge, tools, and resources to implement effective ELL literacy strategies. The institute is an intensive, three-day event that includes lectures by experts, hands-on small group work, and sessions led by network schools that have relevant experience and lessons to share.

Teachers gain practical knowledge at these national trainings and share what they learn in professional development sessions they lead back at their schools. “I learned how important visuals are to our learners, and as a result, I've incorporated pictures and flash cards into my lessons,” said Alessandra Romano, a science teacher at Nueva Esperanza Academy, a college preparatory charter high school in North Philadelphia that serves 650 mostly Latino students.

#### *Intensive Follow-Up Coaching for Schools*

Since 2008, the Council has selected five network schools annually to receive up to five days of follow-up coaching. “We knew that the training events were terrific experiences for teachers, but we also found that some teachers didn't know how to integrate it into their daily activities once they got back to their classrooms, so we decided to pilot on-site coaching,” said Pompa.

According to Feliza Ortiz-Licon, the Council's regional director of education for California and the Far West, teachers who have received the follow-up support have become “more aware of the academic

## INVESTMENT SUMMARY

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF LA RAZA  
TOTAL CASEY INVESTMENT: \$1 MILLION  
INVESTMENT PERIOD: 2000–2009

### *Core Activities Supported by the Investment:*

- Provided training in ELL best practices to teachers at schools in the Council's network of 100 charter and alternative schools.
- Provided follow-up coaching in ELL best practices to schools in the network.
- Created and distributed ELL guidebooks to schools and teachers, within and beyond the network.

### *Results:*

- Trained 307 charter school teachers from 100 charter schools in ELL best practices.
- Provided follow-up coaching in ELL to 10 charter schools.
- Fostered cross-site learning among 75 charter school principals.
- Created and distributed 6 ELL guidebooks to more than 750 charter school teachers.
- Worked with 11 outside organizations that requested ELL guidebooks and/or training for their constituents.
- Used Casey dollars to attract support from State Farm and Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

needs of ELL students and more comfortable implementing the newly acquired strategies within the classroom setting.”

“I see a big difference in my classroom since I attended the literacy institute and got coaching here at the school,” said Nolan Ortiz, a social studies teacher at Academia Avance, a successful charter middle school in Los Angeles that serves mostly low-income, Latino students. “My kids’ comprehension has improved, and their writing has gotten better. Our English test scores went from 10 percent proficient in 2007 to 35 percent proficient in 2008.”

### *Knowledge-Sharing for Principals*

The Council has also used Casey support to host ideas-exchange sessions for principals of its network schools. “Our charter leaders don’t have a lot of contact with other principals, because they aren’t typically included in gatherings of school leaders in traditional districts,” said Pompa. “The Council enables them to have a peer group.”

“From the other principals and their schools, I’ve learned a lot about new ways to organize classrooms around the students and about creating a college-going culture,” said Carlos Rodriguez, principal at Raul Yzaguirre School for Success, a PK–12 college prep charter school serving 950 mostly low-income, Latino students in Houston. The school has a dropout rate of just 1.4 percent, and the Texas state board of education has recently raised the school’s overall rating from acceptable to recognized, the board’s second highest rating.

The Council plans to scale up the coaching effort by sharing knowledge and best practices with the rest of its network schools via its new interactive web portal.

## **National Urban League**

### *Out-of-School-Time Support to African-American Youth*

To build capacity among adults who work with African-American youth during out-of-school-time hours, Casey invested \$1.3 million over 14 years in the National Urban League. Founded in 1910, the League is a national civil rights organization that advocates on behalf of African Americans and against racial discrimination in the United States. It is the oldest and largest community-based organization of its kind in the nation.

In the early years, the League counseled black migrants from the South and helped train black social workers. It also conducted research on the problems blacks faced in employment, housing, health, and education, and it advocated for policy change at the national level. In the 1960s, the League became a forceful advocate for greater government and private-sector efforts to eradicate poverty, significantly influencing the Johnson administration's War on Poverty legislation.

Today, the League works to influence policy at the federal level while supporting, through technical assistance and training, the grassroots work of a network of 100 affiliated community-based organizations located in 36 states across the country. These affiliates provide direct services to more than 2 million adults and children each year through programs, advocacy, and research.

### *Education and Youth Development at the League*

Through its education and youth development work, the League's goal is to contribute to closing the achievement gap. There are 8 million African Americans in American public schools, representing 17 percent of total K–12 enrollment. According to data gathered by Education Trust, only 59 percent of entering African-American freshman completed high school on time in 2006, compared to 81 percent of white students. And in 2007, just 14 percent of African-American fourth graders scored proficient or above in reading on the NAEP, compared to 41 percent of white fourth graders.

Casey began to support the League's education and youth development work in 1996. In 1997, the League launched the Campaign for African American Achievement, a community mobilization and advocacy effort to educate young people, parents, and communities. The primary goals of the campaign were: to convince African-American youth and their parents that achievement matters, to counteract anti-achievement messages in peer culture, and to create consumer demand for better public schools while holding educators and elected officials accountable.

The campaign positioned the League and its affiliate network as both a national and community voice for quality education throughout the United States. It also led to numerous lasting community partnerships between affiliates and local organizations and set the stage for new programmatic work in education and youth development. "The campaign was broader than a program," said Marsha Mockabee, interim CEO at Urban League of Greater Cleveland. "It enabled us to build a collaboration with other community partners. These relationships have endured, and partners have continued to work with us on new programs."

## INVESTMENT SUMMARY

### NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE

TOTAL CASEY INVESTMENT: \$1.3 MILLION

INVESTMENT PERIOD: 1996–2009

#### *Core Activities Supported by the Investment:*

- Created and distributed curriculum and users' guides in evidence-based, out-of-school-time programs to the 100 community-based organizations in its affiliate network, which focus on services to African Americans.
- Provided training in these curricula for staff and leaders at affiliate organizations.

#### *Results:*

- Trained 540 staff from 100 community organizations in evidence-based practices for the League's signature out-of-school-time programs.
- Developed and disseminated curricula and users guides for out-of-school-time programs in the areas of early literacy, adolescent literacy, and high-school-to-college transition.
- Used Casey dollars to attract co-investment from Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Target, State Farm, UPS, and Verizon, among others.

#### *Tools and Training for League Affiliates*

In 2000, the League launched the Affiliate Training Institute to train affiliate staff to work with African-American youth and families to increase early literacy, improve college readiness, and raise academic and social performance through research-based, after-school programs.

The institute trains affiliates at the League's annual national conference through a combination of presentations by experts and best-practice sharing among affiliate staff. Training topics include effective curriculum and program content as well as strategies and techniques for sustaining programs and designing and conducting effective program evaluations. The League also provides professional development to affiliate leaders at its Whitney M. Young Leadership Development Institute. "Whitney M. Young provides a shot in the arm, real connections, and solid curriculum and information that we can use on the ground," said Mockabee.

With Casey support, the League has developed curriculum and training in the areas of early literacy, adolescent literacy, high-school-to-college transition, and data and evaluation. "Data and evaluation are important because they make it possible for us to know how we are doing and to continuously improve our programs," said Shelia James, vice president for program planning, research, and evaluation at Urban League of Rochester, an affiliate in New York state that offers over 30 programs and serves roughly 5,800 people each year.

Read and Rise, an early literacy program for parents and caregivers, was the first curriculum package that the Casey investment supported. "It was successful at helping parents engage in their children's education, and it also helped them cultivate their own literacy," said Hal Smith, vice president of the League's education and youth development division.

## Casey's Education Investments in Technical Assistance, Tools, and Training

### SELECTED RESULTS

- Contributed to meeting an unmet need in the school choice marketplace.
- Provided support to 305 groups planning to open a new charter or private school:
  - Helped 72 groups successfully open new schools.
  - Discouraged 233 groups from opening a school because they lacked the capacity to do so.
- Provided technical assistance to 101 existing charter, private, and district schools that wanted to improve fiscal and academic performance.
- Created rigorous policy and procedure for supporting and evaluating private schools that want to participate in voucher programs.
- Helped 80 charter school principals and teachers get certified.
- Trained 307 charter school teachers from 100 schools in ELL best practices.
- Fostered cross-site learning among 75 charter school principals serving majority ELL students.
- Provided in-depth ELL coaching to 10 charter schools.
- Created and distributed 6 ELL guidebooks to more than 750 charter school teachers.
- Trained 540 staff from 100 community-based organizations serving African Americans in evidence-based, out-of-school-time programs and practices.
- Developed and disseminated 3 out-of-school-time curricula and users' guides to 100 community-based organizations serving African Americans.
- Helped attract numerous co-investments from other local and national funders, including Fleck Foundation, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, State Farm, Target, UPS, US Department of Education, and Verizon.

#### *Project Ready – A Program for High-School-to-College Transition*

In 2006, Casey monies supported the development of a new curriculum package called Project Ready, a high-school-to-college transition program for African-American students in grades nine through 12. It creates a safe space for students to convene and gain insight into the higher learning process, and it provides academic support, life skills, and cultural and global awareness.

With Project Ready, the League developed an interactive and iterative process for designing, implementing, and expanding a new program. “In the past, we had *the what*, but not *the how*,” said Darlene Burroughs, senior director of education and youth development at the League. “With Project Ready, we created *the how*, and we did it with the participation of our affiliates.”

The Project Ready curriculum designer worked closely with three League affiliates to pilot the program over the course of a year. These community organizations tested it and shared their experiences, and their feedback informed final revisions to the curriculum. “The process was extremely effective for developing a program, making sure the points of view of multiple affiliates, which serve different populations, were reflected in the final design,” said Rochester’s Shelia James. The Rochester Project Ready program has so far served 58 high school students and has a 100-percent college access rate.

Since the pilot phase, the League has expanded Project Ready to 16 sites, which currently serve a combined total of 724 students. “Through Project Ready, I was able to make friendships based on doing



well in school,” said Eryc Duhard, a freshman at Rochester Institute of Technology who plans to major in game design. “That, combined with the program’s emphasis on academics, really helped keep me focused.”

Through seed grants and training, the League helps affiliates get the program up and running. After that, the affiliate must secure local support for longer-term sustainability. “We are stepping up our emphasis on self-sustainability,” said Burroughs. “We get them started, then they need to take the ball and run with it.”

Having taken stock of its own and its affiliates’ experiences with tools and training, the League has several new plans in the works. Like the Council, the League is investigating best practices in online learning and is creating an interactive, online interface.

### **Challenges for Tools and Training**

Both the Council and the League have run into challenges in their work developing resource materials and training for charter schools and community-based organizations that are working to close the achievement gap.

For its part, the Council has learned that charter schools typically operate on extremely tight budgets—they receive less per-pupil funding than traditional district schools—so most schools in its network don’t have money to pay for ELL materials and training. The Council has also found that teachers in its network tend to have less experience in the classroom than teachers at district schools, so in many cases they need more support than the organization had anticipated at the outset.

Perhaps the biggest challenge is that every state has its own ELL requirements. This, combined with the fact that each charter school has unique needs, has led the Council to augment its national ELL training with customized coaching and support to individual schools.

The League has also encountered challenges. First, its nonprofit, community-based affiliates routinely have frequent staff turnover. As a result, training at national conferences has been geared toward first-timers, so affiliate staff with more experience don’t have the opportunity to go deeper into the material. Second, affiliate managers and frontline staff alike attend a one-size-fits-all training, and the League has realized that these different audiences need different kinds of information and support. Finally, affiliates vary widely in size and local influence, so they don’t all have the same capacity to adopt and implement new programs.



To address these issues, the League is formulating an augmented training strategy that includes multiple levels of training targeted at a variety of levels of mastery, as well as at different roles.

### **The Value of Casey's Investments in Tools and Training**

Casey's education investments in resource materials and training were important for both the Council and the League in a number of ways. First, the investments helped both organizations attract additional support in hard-to-fund, mission-critical activities. "Casey's early investment made other people notice," said the League's Hal Smith. "It helped us demonstrate to the corporate community that tools and training are as important an investment as the programs themselves are."

The Casey investment also enabled the League's education and youth development division to expose all 100 of its affiliates to new curriculum. "When other League divisions hold trainings, they can only invite the affiliates that they fund," said Darlene Burroughs. "Casey support has enabled us to open our trainings to all the affiliates that demonstrate a serious interest."

"Not every affiliate has the capacity or the funding to implement the full version of our signature programs," said Lloyd Martinez, vice president for foundations at the League. "But, because they can attend the national trainings, we are able to start a dialogue and inspire them to seek local partnerships and incorporate aspects of our programs into their existing work."

At the Council, the consistency of Casey's support has been crucial for the organization's medium-range planning. "We have been able to count on Casey, and, in turn, our schools have been able to count on us," said Delia Pompa.

Finally, for both organizations, the flexibility of the investment has made it possible for them to learn from experience and evolve their activities accordingly. "We want impact," said Pompa. "We want to see a difference in our schools, and to do that, we need to be able to look at our experience and adapt."

### **Conclusion**

Over the decade-long investment period, both the Council and the League have moved to a more hands-on approach as a result of lessons learned from their experiences. At the Council, ELL support began with guidebooks, then morphed into hands-on training and follow-up coaching on site at the schools.

## MEASURING RESULTS

The core result for education at the Annie E. Casey Foundation is that, one day—all young people in tough neighborhoods will achieve the aspiration their families have for them: to graduate prepared to succeed as adults in the worlds of work, family, and citizenship. Contributing to closing the achievement gap is a central component of Casey's effort to achieve its core result.

All four organizations profiled here strive to have a positive impact on student achievement, but it is difficult to measure direct causation between what these intermediary organizations do and changes in student outcomes. Nevertheless, all four organizations are making headway on this goal through a variety of interesting approaches.

In Milwaukee, the Institute for the Transformation of Learning has created a comprehensive self-reporting process for schools in its accreditation pipeline. The self-report requests current student achievement data and each school's plans for measuring growth in student achievement over time. In addition, to assess the role that the Institute's accreditation process and technical assistance plays in changes in student achievement, schools are piloting a survey of teachers and staff that asks them to describe how they have applied the Institute's coaching, what they have learned as a result, and what they will do next to improve classroom instruction.

In Philadelphia, Foundations, Inc., is also grappling with this issue. "It's challenging to isolate measures of our direct impact on a school's growth when we are often one of many interventions," said Julie Stapleton-Carroll, who oversees technical assistance to charter schools at Foundations. The organization keeps track of customer satisfaction and standardized test scores, and it relies on extensive anecdotal information from the schools it coaches.

The National Council of La Raza is in the process of refining its tools and capacity to track the impact of its training and coaching in ELL best practices on student achievement. New software is making it possible for the organization to record the inputs that each school receives from the Council—including site visits, national training, and follow-up coaching—as well as ELL students' test scores, so it can better track correlations.

The National Urban League conducts site visits and uses survey monkeys to explore how affiliates are using new knowledge and tools to improve the efficacy of their local programs. It has also commissioned external evaluators to assess implementation and impact of its latest signature programs and is using the findings to inform curriculum and training revisions.

"We learned that you can't just send publications and expect things to change," said Pompa. "You have to have face-to-face contact along with high-quality materials. We also learned that you can't just do technical assistance once. Charter schools need an ongoing support system in the area of ELL."

At the League, the education and youth development division's early, publication-based approach has evolved into a comprehensive curriculum development, training, and implementation method that is leading to real results for college-bound African-American students. The organization has also changed the way it conducts its national training sessions. "Early on, we did more lectures, but now we do more interactive workshops that allow practitioners to roll up their sleeves and dig in," said Burroughs. "This helps them imagine how they can incorporate what they are learning in their work back home."

By being committed for the long haul, Casey made it possible for both the Council and the League to function as learning organizations and to develop important programs and training modules that are contributing to closing the achievement gap for Latino and African-American children in dozens of states.



## LESSONS LEARNED

- Strategic early investment in a new school sector can jumpstart needed activity in that sector and create new technical assistance providers.
- A foundation's steady and consistent investment of dollars and staff time over a period of years can enable trailblazing organizations and programs to become established, build their capacity, diversify their activities, and attract other funders.
- Sustained funding makes it possible for organizations to evolve both strategically and rationally, trying things, learning lessons, and refining and improving what they do over a period of years.
- Flexible funding allows organizations to pay for hard-to-fund staff salaries and overhead as they see fit. It also makes it possible for organizations to shift activities in response to evolving demands in their marketplace.
- By investing in new or existing intermediary organizations that provide high-quality technical assistance to schools and community organizations, funders can make their resources go farther and expand their impact.
- Investors can add value by giving advice when asked, convening grantees, and supporting learning exchanges and cross-site visits.
- When it comes to changing behavior and improving program quality at schools and community organizations, creating resource materials and holding training sessions are necessary but not sufficient. The experience of these investments suggests that targeted and sustained technical assistance and other forms of advice and support are also required.
- New and existing school support organizations would profit from early advice that assists them in determining a viable business model for sustaining the activities and services they provide.
- Although these organizations have no measures of direct causation between what they do and positive changes in student achievement, indirect measures and anecdotal information suggest that all four organizations are making headway on this goal, and their efforts are instructive for other intermediary organizations. They use a variety of interesting approaches, including self-assessments for schools and community organizations, client satisfaction surveys, external evaluations, and new database programs that track and correlate technical assistance inputs and student achievement outcomes.



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