

**School Finance Exploration Project (SFEP)**  
**Final Report**  
**January 30, 2009**

In October of 2006, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation awarded a grant of \$860,000 to the School Finance Exploration Project (SFEP), which is comprised of the League of Women Voters of California Education Fund (LWVCEF), the California State Parent Teacher Association (CAPTA), the California School Boards Association (CSBA) and Children Now. The purpose of the grant was to work in partnership to promote a balanced approach of reform and investments in K-12, develop unifying principles and potential policies, and ultimately support the development of the public and political will to act.

The following report is presented as follows:

- I. Proposed Activities
- II. Progress on Proposed Activities to Date
- III. Changes in Proposed Activities
- IV. What We Have Learned & Implications for Future Work
- V. Conclusion

Attachment A: La France Evaluation

Attachment B: First Round Interview Analysis

Attachment C: Second Round Interview Protocol

Attachment D: List of Second Round Completed Interviews

Attachment E: Second Round Interview Analysis

Attachment F: SFEP Community Engagement Activities

Attachment G: Financial Statement: Actual v. Budget

## **I. Proposed Activities**

The League of Women Voters of California Education Fund (LWVCEF), the California State Parent Teacher Association (PTA), the California School Boards Association (CSBA) and Children Now, engaged in three interconnected strategies to promote a comprehensive package of K-12 reforms and investments, including state level outreach, policy development and community engagement.

Specifically, the Partnership committed to the following activities:

- Developing and testing broad principles to determine if these principles can form the basis around which a movement for school reform and investment can be organized.
- Developing and testing policy ideas that fit within the principles and appear the most promising in terms of educational merit and political viability.

- Engaging key organizations and individuals to determine their willingness to participate in coalition activities. The goal being to encourage coalition activities that are predicated on a balanced approach and work within the principle and policy parameters developed above.
- Informing interviewees and key membership groups about relevant state and local activities that are being pursued to build public and political will.
- Utilizing the published research being coordinated by Stanford University to inform and enhance the above activities.
- Continuing and strengthening the Partnership's liaison relationship with the Governor's Committee on Education Excellence, the Superintendent of Public Instruction and legislative leadership, with the intent of keeping broad reform goals consistent and policy positions compatible.
- Conducting planning work for a grassroots education and mobilization strategy for late 2007 and 2008.

## **II. Progress on Proposed Activities to Date**

During the 2006-08 grant period the Partnership made significant progress on outreach to key stakeholder groups; identifying and outlining policy areas with growing consensus and political traction; and developing and implementing various community engagement strategies.

### Outreach

The Partnership continued to maintain and expand the relationships established during the first phase of our work. One of the primary vehicles for this outreach was distilling and sharing what we learned from our first round of outreach interviewees (please see Attachment B for the Partnership's first round interview analysis). The key message conveyed through this work was that interest groups had more in common than public posturing would seem to indicate and that it is possible to enact a comprehensive package of K-12 reform and investments in California.

Between 2006 and 2008, the Partnership used a number of formal venues to share this message. This included:

- 57 second round interviews with key stakeholders in education, business, civil rights, and community organizations, as well as other political and opinion leaders. (Please see Attachment D for a list of second round interviewees)
- Numerous formal presentations, including:
  - i. Two briefings for the Governor's Committee on Educational Excellence
  - ii. Briefing the Getting Down to Facts requestors (which included staff representing the Governor, Legislature and Superintendent of Public Instruction)
  - iii. Briefing the Education Coalition
  - iv. Secretary of Education Dave Long's Regional Hearings, Speaker on Education Reform

- v. California Department of Education and Jack O’Connell, Achievement Gap Summit, *Closing the Achievement Gap by Focusing on What’s Best for Children*
- vi. California Consortium of Education Foundations, *Annual Conference: Local Education Foundations: Connecting Kids, Schools, and Communities*
- vii. Assembly Member Julia Brownley’s Education Forum, *Getting to the Point: An Education Forum*
- viii. California Consortium of Education Foundations, *Annual Conference: Local Education Foundations: Connecting Kids, Schools, and Communities*
- ix. School Wise Press, Statewide Teleconference, *Protecting Reforms from the Budget Crunch: a conversation with Ted Lempert*
- x. Mountain View Educational Foundation Key Donor Event
- xi. TechNet, *Improving California’s Public Schools: Briefing on the “Getting Down to Facts” Studies*
- xii. McKinsey Public Sector Forum Dinner
- xiii. EdSource, *2007 California Education Policy Convening*
- xiv. Presenting at ACSA’s annual conference
- xv. Presenting at CSBA’s annual conference
- xvi. League of Women Voters Luncheon
- xvii. 28th Annual PTA Advocacy Day
- xviii. Children Now Legislative Briefings

In addition to the formal outreach and presentation of the Partnership’s work, there were 100’s of informal conversations with political and opinion leaders throughout the state with the goal of continuing to build momentum for a comprehensive package. Below is a sampling of the kinds of organizations and individuals the Partnership had informal conversations with:

Silicon Valley Leadership Group, Bay Area Council, California Strategies, California Business Roundtable, Silver Giving Foundation, CA Business for Education Excellence, Great Valley Center, San Diego Regional Economic Development Corp., McKinsey Corp., Full Circle Fund, CTA, ACSA, SEIU, CFT, CSEA, CCSESA, CASBO, Senator Darrell Steinberg, Superintendent Jack O’Connell, Alliance for a Better Community, CA Community Foundation, Ed Trust West, Californians Together, Crystal Stairs, Inc., PICO, Urban Education Partnership, Preschool California, Advancement Project, California Community Foundation, Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, Preschool California

The Partnership’s formal and informal outreach strategy allowed us to engage key leaders to help build and sustain momentum for a comprehensive approach. In addition, through this strategy, as well as each of our organization’s contacts, we were able to coordinate our work with the multiple concerted efforts to move this agenda (e.g. *Getting Down to Facts*, The Governor’s Committee on Educational Excellence, etc.), as well as stay

abreast of the changing political environment, including the challenging budget context. Finally, by reaching out to influential leaders throughout the state, the Partnership was able to further refine our political mapping, initial principles and potential policies in order to ultimately support the enactment of a comprehensive package of K-12 reforms and investments.

### Policy Development

The Partnership's first round of interviews provided valuable information that led to the development of initial principles and policies that would benefit students and could potentially bring divergent interest groups together. In addition, we were able to ground these principles and policies in sound research provided by the *Getting Down to Facts* research project.

The five principles that were identified through the interview process included ensuring the system:

- Is academically and fiscally accountable (Responsible);
- Is transparent and provides accessible information on student achievement and fiscal decisions (Open);
- Moves toward a common goal, with a stable plan in place, while at the same time encouraging local innovation (Stable and Responsive);
- Provides every student access to core resources (Adequate); and
- Focuses resources on students that are most in need (Equitable).

In addition, the policy areas that were identified included:

- The recruitment, retention and equitable distribution of staff, including both reforms to staff compensation and working conditions;
- School finance and governance reform, including a weighted student formula (more recently referred to as student centered financing) and local revenue authority;
- Data (or information systems);
- Choice, though this reform area was the least cited; and
- State revenue options.

Please see Attachment B for the entire first round interview analysis that was developed.

With this information in hand, the Partnership conducted a formal and informal outreach effort as outlined above. This vetting process with key stakeholders allowed us to assess whether or not groups viewed the reforms described as sound policy that would positively impact students, and whether a comprehensive package with these potential policy and revenue components was politically viable.

The analysis provided in Attachment E outlines our findings from our second round of interviews. In short, we found that interviewees agreed with our assessment of the core principles and policy areas that were identified. In addition, they provided additional feedback that allowed us to refine the reforms that should be included in a comprehensive package. These reforms adhered to essentially the same policy areas:

- Information Systems,
- Student Centered Finance System Coupled with Accountability,
- Strengthening Human Capital, and
- Additional Resources.

While there were a number of contextual factors that limited our ability to fully realize the promise of the “Year of Education,” as discussed below, the Partnership was able to narrow the scope of what a comprehensive package might include. In addition, based on our analysis we believe that even with our struggling economy and budget deficit, continued work in this area can bring divergent interest groups together to ultimately enact a comprehensive K-12 reform and investment proposal.

Research, Development and Community Engagement

Over the last two years, the Partnership has also engaged in a variety research, development and training activities to engage key constituency groups in the need and possible opportunities for K-12 reform and investment. Each of the partners provided tailored presentations, materials and training opportunities for their members and key contacts. A thorough discussion of those activities are included as part of the La France Evaluation (please see Attachment A). In addition, Attachment F provides a detailed chart of the outreach activities the Partnership engaged in between 2006-08.

Through this approach the Partnership was able to connect local constituencies with the larger statewide reform effort, identify local champions and learn some valuable lessons on how to strengthen this work in the future, as discussed in more detail below.

**III. Changes to Proposed Activities**

The Partnership encountered some timing issues that created a variation to our proposed strategy as outlined in our 2006 grant proposal. While we were able to collaborate with the researchers from *Getting Down to Facts* and members of the Governor’s Committee on Educational Excellence, and there was ultimately a great degree of alignment between each of our respective findings, we found it necessary to alter the timing for some of our work to coordinate with the release of the research and policy recommendations.

The Partnership held off on formal second round interviews in order to capitalize on what we hoped would be growing momentum from the release of the *Getting Down to Facts* research. This in effect meant that there was several months between the release of our first round interview analysis and when we formally meet with key individuals and organizations. While this was not the timing we originally anticipated, it was useful to hear individuals’ reactions to both the research findings and our interview analysis in tandem. In addition, because of our solid working relationships with the Governor’s Committee we were able to float a few of their upcoming policy recommendations (without formal attribution) and receive some initial feedback.

We had also contemplated another set of outreach interviews after the Governor’s Committee publically released their recommendations. This was due in part to our

concern that it was very difficult for some leaders to engage in a deeper level conversation on key reforms and revenues without a specific comprehensive proposal to respond to. Unfortunately, the environment in Sacramento since Spring of 2008 has shifted dramatically and key stakeholders and policymakers have been intensely focused on the short to mid-term budget crisis. With the delay in the release of the Governor's Committee recommendations, coupled with the deteriorating budget climate, the Partnership instead decided to refocus our efforts on more informal conversations with key leaders through the duration of our grant period.

#### **IV. What We Have Learned & Implications for Future Work**

The Partnership has learned valuable lessons with respect to our state level work to promote a comprehensive package and our local community engagement activities.

##### Enacting a Comprehensive K-12 Package

Over the last three years the Partnership has been focused on identifying the key reform and revenue strategies that would be most beneficial to students, are based in sound research and are politically viable.

In addition to our findings on the potential policies that could bring together divergent interest groups together, our outreach effort also identified four major process issues that those pursuing reform will need to address in order to successfully secure both reform and investments in K-12. These include developing:

- A specific proposal that interest groups can respond to that includes both tangible, ready to implement reforms and new revenues;
- A well defined implementation strategy;
- An implementation timeline to provide context and maintain momentum; and
- Visible leadership from California leaders.

As the Partnership conducted follow up meetings, interviewees provided feedback on the initial interview analysis and commented on the political context of the day which was helpful, but for many interviewees it was difficult to provide additional concrete policy direction. Many of the political and opinion leaders we were engaging are outside of education and have limited ability to respond without a specific proposal at hand. In addition, many insiders, while able to drill down deeper into policy options, were unable to engage too deeply because they were 1) waiting for upcoming publications (GCEE and P-16 reports); 2) heavily engaged in the current budget battles and/or 3) unwilling to move beyond their organization's longstanding policy positions without a specific "compromise" proposal to respond to.

For both those inside and outside education circles, the interview process revealed a real need for a well defined package, an implementation strategy, an ideal implementation date that everyone was working toward, and statewide leadership. GDTF, GCEE and P-16 reports have provided much needed information on the system and concrete recommendations that can be translated into a proposal. A coordinated effort that

connects statewide leaders and key local actors will be essential to successfully implement that proposal.

### Engaging and Activating Communities

The Partnership's community outreach activities gave each of our organizations an opportunity to engage our respective memberships and contacts in the larger movement to reform and invest in K-12 public schools. Thousands of parents, community leaders, educators and policymakers have been provided critical information on the challenges schools face, the efforts to promote fundamental change, as well as the reform and investment strategies being pursued. The Partnership has been able to identify key local contacts and lay out a long term vision on where California can and should proceed.

The Partnership has also learned some valuable lessons on how to refine our community engagement work moving forward. Initially, we focused our efforts on reaching out as broadly as possible in order to build a critical mass. This process allowed us to reach thousands of individuals and to identify skilled local champions, but it did not necessarily provide the kind of support necessary to translate an individual's enthusiasm and commitment into action. This was also due in part to the absence of a coordinated campaign to implement a specific proposal. We anticipate that in the next several years a specific proposal will be brought forward that will allow us to more effectively organize constituency groups. In addition, we believe it will be important for us to target our work and provide more intensive support in specific regions in order to most effectively engage local leaders.

Each of the organizations in the Partnership also individually researched and developed materials tailored to our memberships and key contacts. These materials were shared among the partners and delivered to our respective constituency groups. This was an important first step to ensure that these groups were informed. As a next step, we believe we can strengthen our work and more effectively develop a local network of champions by working in closer coordination at the local level. We envision this work will first be conducted in one region, likely Santa Clara County, in order to test a coordinated approach and distill strategies on how it can be replicated in other regions.

## **V. Conclusion**

Since 2005, the Partnership has worked to identify the principles and policies that would bring divergent interest groups together for the benefit of California's students. We have conducted state and local outreach to inform, engage and build momentum for a comprehensive approach to reforming and investing in K-12 public schools. Like many of those we have partnered and collaborated with over the last several years, we had hoped that 2008 would provide a window of opportunity to enact this bold vision. Even though our plans have been delayed, and the context in California will likely be challenging in the short term, we believe that there continues to be a commitment by key allies and several concerted efforts to promote and ultimately achieve this comprehensive approach. Each of the organizations in the Partnership is committed to continuing to work

together and to ultimately ensuring that California's students have high quality schools that prepare them to be productive members of our economy, society and democracy.