

THE HEINZ ENDOWMENTS

HOWARD HEINZ ENDOWMENT - VIRA I. HEINZ ENDOWMENT

Education Program Theory of Change

I. Mission Statement

To ensure that African American students and those living in poverty in Allegheny County have full access to high-quality educational experiences, and to support efforts that affirm them as individuals and validate their ability to achieve, attain, contribute to and thrive in society.

II. Assumptions

Problem Statement

Public education in this country has failed to provide African American students and students living in poverty equitable, high-quality educational experiences consequently perpetuating social injustices, including, but not limited to, racism, funding inequities and lack of cultural affirmation, played out in the larger American society.

Structural Barriers

- Historically and structurally speaking, schools perpetuate a dominant, White, middle-class perspective of community and parent involvement, student engagement, achievement and attainment.
- Policies and their frameworks are often ill-conceived and do not take into consideration the ways in which they perpetuate and exacerbate inequity, bias, and class and cultural supremacy that affects African American students and students who live in poverty.
- There is a narrow measure of assessment that holds schools accountable for ensuring all students are achieving. These measures ignore policy environments within districts, collective bargaining agreements with teachers unions and the social and cultural needs of students.
- State funding formulas based on property taxes allow schools in higher wealth communities to thrive while those in the urban core and surrounding areas struggle to support the costs of materials, facilities, technology and effective educators.
- African American students and students who live in poverty too often attend schools where teachers' cultural and social experiences differ from their own and teachers who are well-versed in their content areas and who are master teachers in regards to cultural responsiveness, discipline and personalization of learning are not employed.
- African American youth and youth who live in poverty are often at the center of policy debates and discussions, but are rarely asked to engage in this dialogue or share their perspective and voices about what is in their best interests regarding issues such as curriculum choices, ways to exhibit content mastery, school safety, discipline, and decision-making.

III. Context Statement

Education is the major means to achieving a more just and equitable society. However, in the education of African American students and students of any racial or ethnic group who live in poverty, schools have perpetuated social injustices; including racism, inferior resources in segregated schools and inadequate funding structures; through policies and practices that have led to low expectations, insufficient resources and supports (i.e. highly effective teachers, rigorous culturally responsive curricula, and quality facilities) as well as low student achievement, disengaged students, high dropout rates and diminished life outcomes.

Fifty-six years after the landmark Brown vs. Board of Education Supreme Court Decision, The Heinz Endowments Education Program acknowledges these injustices and rejects their continued impact on our highest need students. By supporting the creation of school environments that respond to diversity of need, ability, experience and interest, respect distinct racial and cultural differences and value the contributions of all students, the Education Program believes that African American students and students who live in poverty can be affirmed in their abilities, graduate, successfully complete post-secondary education, be prepared for their careers and fully participate as citizens in the Democracy.

Our future grant making will focus on African American and low-income students in secondary learning environments (6-12th grade) in Pittsburgh Public Schools, districts throughout Allegheny County and choice schools-charter, faith-based and independent schools. The Education Program will partner with school districts, intermediaries, universities, and organizations working within districts or with the target populations.

IV. Objectives

Eliminate Policy and Structural Barriers to Educational Equity

Understanding learners' circumstances, strengths and capacities should underpin the development of all education policy whether at the school, district or state level. What is happening in local classrooms should reflect a coherent culturally responsive policy framework including accepted educational aims, curriculum frameworks, assessment systems and a high quality workforce. All learners deserve a quality equitable education that strives to eliminate race-based academic disparities and disparities for students living in poverty.

A strong coherent policy framework will support inclusive teaching and learning practices that promote academic success, validate hopes and dreams of students, parents and communities. Inconsistent policy implementation contributes to disparities in the system such as in discipline and special education putting African American and low income students at risk of not graduating high school, fulfilling their potential or realizing their dreams. We believe accountability is a shared responsibility and policy frameworks can illuminate inequities in the system providing opportunities for dramatic change in the aims of education at the local and state levels.

We advocate child-centered instructional practices that build on the strengths of each individual student, provide sufficient time for effective instruction, where attention is paid to learning styles, student interests, as well as formative and summative assessments. Carefully considered policies for the placement of highly qualified teachers, allocation of learning materials, classroom facilities and the physical infrastructure that play a part in quality secondary learning environments demand collaborative working environments where students, parents, teachers, the district and the union focus on student learning.

Advance Effective Teaching

We know teachers matter. A growing body of literature tells us that teacher quality and effectiveness are the most important in-school variables influencing student achievement.¹ Students living in poverty and [minority] ALANA² students are more likely to be assigned to inexperienced, out-of-field or academically weaker teachers than their peers.³ We want to address this inequity and increase the likelihood that African American and low-income students have a knowledgeable, culturally, socially and community competent teacher each day of their school career. Teachers who are well prepared, collaborators for change, masters of their content and creative pedagogy as well advocates for student success have a dramatic impact on student outcomes.

African American and low income students have endured school environments where expectations are low, their teachers are under-qualified, the instructional strategies have not been culturally appropriate and consequently their achievement has suffered. We want to change that. Highly effective teachers of African American and low income students exhibit notable characteristics. We aim to promote the practices, habits of mind and commitment to the success of African American and low income students in both traditional and choice schools.

Effective teachers set the tone for learning in the classroom. They know each child as an individual as a way to personalize learning. As was commonplace in pre-Brown classrooms, effective teachers promote strong racial identity/racial uplift to help African American students develop a counter-narrative to society's notions of their intellectual abilities and see themselves as able college and career going individuals.⁴ Teachers who develop caring relationships with their students and employ a variety of instructional strategies, including technology, will more effectively address the range of achievement levels, communication and learning of diverse learners.

¹ Robert J. Marzano, "A New Era of School Reform: Going Where the Research Takes Us." Aurora, CO, 2000 as cited by Craig D. Jerald, Kati Haycock, and Amy Wilkins in "Fighting for Quality and Equality, Too: How State Policymaker Can Ensure the Drive to Improve Teacher Quality Doesn't Just Trickle Down to Poor and Minority Children." The Education Trust, November 2009.

² ALANA is an acronym for African, Latino, Asian and Native America peoples. The Education Program uses this acronym as a rejection of the term minority, which carries a negative connotation of inferiority, otherness and subordination in its description of non-European Americans.

³ Heather G. Peske and Kati Haycock, "Teaching Inequality: How Poor and Minority Students Are Shortchanged on Teacher Quality." Washington, D.C.; The Education Trust, 2006.

⁴ See <http://marquetteeducator.wordpress.com/2010/03/01/putting-education-back-into-education-reform-the-vision-of-theresa-perry/>

Empower Youth as Education Reformers

When one looks at some of the most controversial and important issues challenging the country, African American and poor young people are often at the center of these debates and policies.⁵ However, in contrast to the centrality of these youth to the politics and policies of the country, their perspectives and voices have generally been absent from the dialogue.⁶ While organizations have sought to develop new strategies and interventions for young people, they have done so largely without getting input from the youth themselves about their ideas, wants, and desires, making youth the most discussed, yet the least heard from group in American society today. Among the many reasons it is imperative to involve youth in education reform, we find this most compelling - youth have unique knowledge and perspectives about their schools that adults cannot replicate.⁷ We aim to learn from students as a way to improve learning environments, eliminate anonymity and apathy in secondary learning settings and tackle the social justice issues related to equity and fairness by developing a sense of responsibility and belonging. When students experience high levels of student engagement, they are better prepared. Student performance in high school is a key predictor of post-secondary persistence.⁸

Engaged youth demonstrate leadership and by identifying what is important to them, help create a proactive change agenda. Youth who are involved in staying knowledgeable, make connections with peers using a variety of reform strategies, including social networking and technology, see themselves as contributors to their own and others' access and opportunity.

What do youth need in order to be a voice of reform? They need positive role models and connections with significant adults in their environments both in and out of school, also known as adult allies. Youth need skill development and opportunities to demonstrate leadership in situations that matter such as in the learning environment. As scholars have noted, true engagement requires a "rupture of the ordinary" where trained adults work in partnership with youth to develop patterns of interaction that align with the values of equitable relations.⁹ These strategies reinforce the significant role youth have in determining their own destiny.

V. Strategies

The Program believes that a three-pronged strategic approach will enable it to affect measurable change in its three objective areas.

Conduct Direct Grant making

The Program will continue to provide direct support to selected organizations engaged in the types of practices bulleted under the objectives above. Grant making will be informed by alignment with objectives; an ongoing learning agenda; a focus on systems change; and by attention to program quality.

⁵ Cohen, Cathy. African American Youth: Broadening our Understanding of Politics, Civic Engagement and Activism. Jun 07, 2006.

⁶ Cohen, Cathy. African American Youth: Broadening our Understanding of Politics, Civic Engagement and Activism. Jun 07, 2006.

⁷ Dana Mitra, *Increasing Student Voice and Moving Toward Youth Leadership*, The Prevention Researcher, Vol. 13(1), February 2006, pg. 8.

⁸ See <http://hudson.org/files/publications/Gates/2001-07.pdf> Pathways to Boosting the Earnings of Low-income Students by Increasing Their Education Attainment by The Hudson Institute and CNA for the Gates Foundation.

⁹ Fielding, 2004; Kirshner & O'Donoghue, 2001; Mitra, 2005) in *Increasing Student Voice and Moving Toward Youth Leadership*, The Prevention Researcher, Vol. 13(1), February 2006, pg 8.

Build the Capacity of Community Partners

The Program is committed to fostering partnerships with other Endowments program areas and peer foundations, regionally and nationally, so that students, their families, and community organizations will engage with each other in ensuring educational equity and student success.

Buttress the Education Program's Leadership Role

THE is positioned to grow and capitalize on its role as a thought leader, a community leader and a champion for educational equity. Education Program staff has an opportunity to use its unique position in the community and the field to contribute to the body of knowledge concerning the achievement of African American students and those living in poverty.