



Changing the Landscape for Duval County Public Education

Since the launch of The Community Foundation's Quality Education for All initiative, the public education environment in Jacksonville has changed markedly. The community is finding a different vision of what is needed to help all students enjoy academic success and growing its capacity - knowledge, leadership and resources - to achieve that vision.



On an early fall evening in 2011, more than 1,000 guests arrived at the Cummer Museum of Art and Gardens to attend the public opening of a very unusual exhibition. The ONE in THREE exhibit used photography and video to give voice to 20 students in Duval County Public Schools, sharing their stories of struggle and triumph as they sought to graduate from high school.

The exhibit was intended to celebrate the students' tenacity, but also to highlight the community's dropout crisis. During the course of the evening, hundreds of attendees signed up for other activities to become further engaged in the community campaign.

The event, the exhibit and the followup activities were the work of the Jacksonville Public Education Fund and a host of community partners that, just six years earlier, were anything but aligned around the challenges of public education.

What has changed in the realm of public education in Jacksonville, Florida, in the past six years? And what have been the drivers of this change?

To fully appreciate Jacksonville's educational evolution, one must understand where the community is located - politically, geographically and culturally. Situated in the far northeast corner of Florida, Jacksonville is a truly southern city, with a culture, demographic mix and topography more reminiscent of Georgia and the Carolinas than of central and southern Florida. Its consolidated city-county government makes Jacksonville/Duval County the largest city in land mass in the continental United States. From its urban core, to its suburban communities and quickly vanishing rural fringes, it is not unlike scores of other U.S. cities, facing the challenges of poverty, sprawl and unequal opportunity.

The consolidated school district - Duval County Public Schools - is among the largest in the country, with 123,000 students, giving it the size and complexity of school systems in much larger cities. Yet Duval County's size (population 850,000) gives the community a more intimate feel than cities such as Dallas and Detroit, which have comparably sized school systems.

Despite that favorable community atmosphere, Duval County does not have a strong history of coming together around public education. As in many American cities, disinvestment and racial tensions plagued Duval County's school system through much of the 20th century. Public schools were discredited in the 1960s (a major factor in the move to consolidated government), and operated under a court-ordered desegregation plan into the late 1980s. A magnet-school approach, instituted in 1990, allowed some pockets of excellence to emerge, but educational opportunity varied widely across the county. By the early 2000s, community engagement in public education had begun to emerge, but the efforts lacked coordination, they lacked a welcoming response from the school system, and, more often than not, they lacked much basis in data and/or best practices.

On the eve of its 40th anniversary, The Community Foundation in Jacksonville sought to deepen its philanthropic engagement in the community with a focus on public education, recognizing the critical role it played in economic development, quality of life and social equity. At the start of the 2005-2006 school year, the Foundation launched its Quality Education for All initiative - a 10-year investment to improve the academic performance of public school students in Duval County.

As the initiative has unfolded, it has been a catalyst for change across organizations and institutions, across sectors, and across constituencies.

There are new community-based institutions and these new entities, along with some long-standing community organizations, have learned the importance of grounding ideas in data and proven best practices. Moreover, these organizations are playing new roles. In addition to improving wrap-around services to individual students, these organizations are improving the system of services that impact educational outcomes by aligning disjointed efforts, organizing to make advocates' voices more effective and drawing on data and research to bring new ideas to the District and to the community. There is a more constructive and collaborative relationship between the school district and this emerging network of community supports. There is a growing contingent of engaged citizens, parents, advocates, community leaders, philanthropists and educators - individuals interested and willing to grapple with the challenges of public education. And there is a new picture of what constitutes a strong, community-supported, public education system.

While broad scale community change has taken place in Duval County around public education, the Duval County School System has actively engaged in internal change as well, developing a new strategic plan and evaluating its program of work with care. This report does not offer detail on changes within Duval County Public Schools, however, that omission is not intended to discount the importance of those changes. Indeed, all the community support in the world would not make a difference without a school system able, ready and willing to strengthen and improve itself. Similarly, school systems are most effective at changing when they have the support of the full community. This report focuses on improvements in the ways the community and DCPS have worked together, and the changes in the broader landscape of public education beyond the school administration building.

As hopeful as these changes are, the community remains far from the goal of providing quality education for all. Daunting challenges persist around provision of adequate resources, availability of high-quality human capital, and the insidious effects of poverty. But Duval County is taking important steps toward what could be a very different future.

The Community Foundation's Role: *A Catalyst for Change*

Community change seldom happens without a catalyst - an event, individual or organization that serves as a trigger, a focal point or an engine for change. In 2005, The Community Foundation's Quality Education for All initiative became a catalyst for public education reform and innovation in Duval County.

That is not to suggest that there had not been prior efforts to improve public education in Duval County. In fact, through the years, many individuals, institutions and organizations had invested substantial energy in creating positive change, some with success. But by 2005, the challenges around public education, and the gap between advantaged students and disadvantaged students, had become more glaring than ever as the need for at least a high school diploma became increasingly important in earning a self-sufficient, living wage. Duval County - like communities across the nation - faced a serious threat to its economic future as fully 1/3 of public high school students failed to graduate on time. The community was not growing the workforce, or the citizenry, that it would need to thrive in coming generations.

It was clear to the staff and trustees of The Community Foundation in Jacksonville that improving the quality of public education for all children was a "must-do" task if Jacksonville was to continue to enjoy a high quality of life. It was equally clear that public education would not experience sufficient improvement as the result of a single program, or a single strategy, or even a sizeable infusion of money. What was needed was systemic change: change within the school system and outside of the school system, change in the way the entire community - individuals, the private sector, the nonprofit sector and the public sector - engaged with the public schools.

In September 2005, the Foundation launched Quality Education for All, announcing that it was a 10-year commitment that came with a minimum \$2 million investment to improve public education in Duval County. The initiative was heralded by the local newspaper, The Florida Times-Union: "The time is right for this project," it editorialized. "Duval County has a new superintendent, a collegial School Board, a mayor who supports literacy and a business sector that supports education... The Foundation is making an important contribution."

The Foundation structured the initiative around three strands of work – community learning, direct investment and advocacy – and its first task was bringing together 28 community leaders, many of whom had no first-hand knowledge of the public school system, as the Forum on Quality Education. The Foundation convinced the members of this group – university presidents, judges, elected officials, philanthropists, teachers, union leaders, school board members, school administrators, physicians, prosecutors, and others – that the issue of public education reform was so critical they should spend 18 months in meetings and workshops to better understand the challenges and identify ways to overcome them. They agreed. And before the end of 2005, Quality Education for All had grabbed a bit of the media spotlight and the attention of some of the community's most influential citizens.

But being a catalyst for change involves more than grabbing a few headlines and a bit of community attention. It requires staying power and work on a multitude of fronts. Over the next six years, The Community Foundation played a number of different roles as it implemented the Quality Education for All initiative. Among them:

Neutral and Independent Convenor

Though The Community Foundation was financially invested in Quality Education for All, it enjoyed the benefit of being a neutral and independent player on the public education stage. Thus it was well positioned to bring parties together, and it exercised this convening role with vigor. "One thing we learned from other communities was the importance of getting people together, having meals together and sharing decision making," said Nina Waters, president of The Community Foundation.

Convening the Forum on Quality Education was a first step. Subsequent steps included: convening middle school principals and teachers around new programmatic opportunities, convening prospective donors around opportunities for philanthropic investment, convening nonprofit leaders around research and program alignment, convening public school administrators, researchers and nonprofits around the need for evidence-based programs, convening community stakeholders around the need for new community infrastructure, and through it all, connecting the school district administration and school board leadership with actors outside of the school system.

The convenings were more than isolated meetings – they were part of a sustained effort to promote shared learning, coordinated work and co-creation of solutions. In this way, the Foundation itself learned more about, and helped to set a standard for collaboration, underlining the notion that community change comes only through work on multiple fronts, by multiple actors, working in concert toward a common goal.

Knowledge Resource Center

One of the chief lessons of the Forum on Quality Education was how little even well-informed citizens understood about public education. There was much to learn -- how public education operates and is funded in Florida, the challenges it faces nationwide, what other communities are doing, what has been shown to work and what has not. In the first three years of the initiative, The Community Foundation invested significant staff resources in developing its own knowledge and sharing what it learned with members of the Forum and other constituencies.

With a focus on grades 6-12, the Foundation developed contacts with national organizations and communities doing the best work around reducing dropout rates and increasing graduation rates. It built relationships with funders and subject matter experts, and took local administrators, agencies and leaders to other communities to learn. That, in return, attracted national interest in the work in Jacksonville.

When it funded a pilot series of summer programs at middle schools, the Foundation followed up with evaluations and documentation that demonstrated the benefits of specific strategies and gave the school system the evidence it needed to support expansion of the pilot.

Through its contacts in the field, the Foundation learned of research on high school dropouts conducted by Robert Balfanz at Johns Hopkins University. In partnership with the school district and community partners, the Foundation commissioned a similar study, with Balfanz as an advisor. The study tracked four cohorts of Duval County public school students from grade 9 through 12, and then backtracked the non-graduates to grade 6 to identify indicators of risk.

The Foundation also conducted qualitative studies of non-graduates and their teachers. And it underwrote research into the number of public school students who were overage for grade compared with the resources available in the district to serve those students.

Findings from this research provided fresh information for the school system – perspectives it had not previously examined. The findings were used to underpin a second pilot addressing at-risk middle- and high-school students.

Parallel to this work, the Foundation underwrote two major public opinion polls gauging attitudes toward public education – one at the start of QEA and the second at the midpoint.

Through these and other activities, the Foundation drove home the concept of action based on knowledge, and became a resource not only for that knowledge, but for strategies to acquire knowledge.

Nonprofit Capacity Builder

Ideas for change are important, but at the end of the day, someone has to do the work. The Foundation quickly realized that, in many ways, Jacksonville lacked the organizational infrastructure to support long-term work around public education reform.

The Foundation took a leading role in helping new organizations form - from the Jacksonville Public Education Fund and the local chapter of Teach For America to the advocacy organization Save Duval Schools - and helping existing organizations make the internal changes necessary to work at a more robust level.

Often, exposure to expertise is not enough; organizations need help putting knowledge into practice. The Foundation funded experts from other communities to work hand in hand with those in Jacksonville to figure out how to implement and institutionalize best practices locally.

In this way, the Foundation helped the community grow the capacity to sustain progress over the long-term.

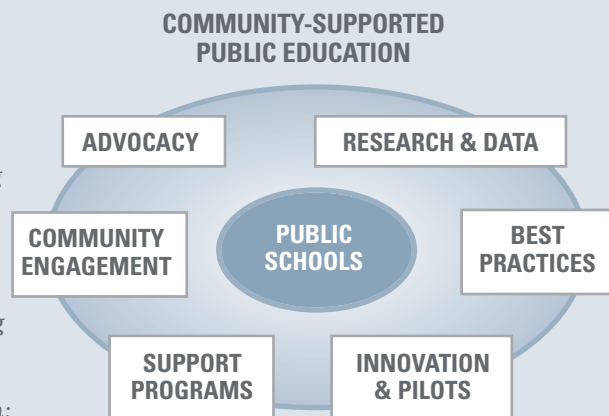
Philanthropic Advisor

Almost from the outset of QEA, there appeared on the scene new donors interested in investing in public education reform, and new opportunities for investments. From organizations such as Teach For America and the Jacksonville Public Education Fund that needed funding, to donor-originated ideas for investment, the Foundation became a hub for public-education-focused philanthropy in Duval County.

Through this work, the Foundation developed its own template for the role of private funding in public education (see box below), helping to create a systematic, rather than shotgun, approach to philanthropic investment.

How Private Funding Can Help Public Education

It takes more than a good local public school system to achieve high-quality public education in today's world. A rapidly changing economy, competing demands for resources, and the changing character and expectations of students and the public create real challenges for public education. To meet these challenges, public education needs a multitude of partners to enhance the daily practice of education, create supports for students outside of the classroom, and provide opportunities for innovation, learning and change throughout the system. Through its Quality Education for All initiative, The Community Foundation in Jacksonville has identified six discreet areas where private investment can help support public education:



RESEARCH & DATA — Florida public schools have among the best data resources in the nation. But it takes time, money and expertise to mine and analyze that data to understand student performance and behavior. Private investment can support this research.

BEST PRACTICES — In communities nationwide, and here in Jacksonville, educators are discovering strategies that are effective at the classroom, school, administration and governing levels. Private investments can help identify, import and institutionalize those “best practices” to benefit the community.

INNOVATION & PILOTS — Testing a new strategy on a small scale allows for close evaluation and mid-course corrections before expanding the initiative. Private investment can provide the dollars often needed to support innovative approaches or pilot programs, allowing them to prove their worth before public dollars are invested.

SUPPORT PROGRAMS — Education does not begin and end at the classroom door. Many students require extra support - after school programs, tutoring, school-to-work supports - to succeed. Private investment is critical to launching and sustaining these efforts.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT — Public education does not thrive in isolation. It thrives when it is an integral part of community life, when citizens are informed and engaged. Private investment can be instrumental in efforts to put the public back in public education.

ADVOCACY — Public policy makers - whether at the local, state or federal level - must be reminded of the importance of making decisions that are in the best interests of students. Private investment is critical to funding advocacy efforts that help hold public officials accountable.

Finally, it is critical that all of these efforts are aligned. Private investment can serve to incentivize and facilitate coordination and cooperation among the partners.

2005-2011: *Coming Together Around Public Education Reform*

In August 2010, the Thomas B. Fordham Institute recognized Jacksonville as one of the nation's top five cities for school reform, noting that, "Too few of our major metropolises have the talent, leadership, infrastructure, culture, and resources—both human and financial—to beckon enterprising reformers and then help them to succeed." The Fordham report - "America's Best (and Worst) Cities for School Reform" - looked at communities' human and financial capital, the environment and culture of the school district and the community, as well as quality controls and choice options.

The recognition was a great boost for Jacksonville's education reform efforts, not only because of the "good grades" but because Fordham validated the underlying theory of Quality Education for All – that improving public education requires a comprehensive approach from multiple sectors of the community, at multiple levels.

Between 2005 and 2010, the Jacksonville community made strides in four key arenas that, together, provide the infrastructure, programs and stakeholder engagement that are essential to driving public education reform.

Developing and Aligning Programmatic Efforts

One of the most basic challenges that faced Duval County – and a challenge shared by many other communities – was the task of getting multiple actors aligned and headed in the same direction. Different organizations often have different programs that target similar groups with differing strategies. Community-based support organizations may or may not be in sync with, or even welcomed by, the public school system. When the efforts of many well-intentioned partners are disjointed, students can fall through the cracks and educators can be overwhelmed. As a result, resources can be used inefficiently, stakeholders can become frustrated and outcomes may be difficult, if not impossible to assess. As one observer noted: "Help is not always helpful."

The Quality Education for All initiative confronted this challenge in spades as it worked on and funded strategies to help more students complete high school on time.

In 2006, the QEA initiative prompted Jacksonville to be chosen as one of two communities to pilot Learning

[There is] a real recognition in our community that public education must absolutely be a top priority for our city. People now understand the link between a high-quality public education system and economic development, race relations crime and overall quality of life.

Audrey Moran
Nonprofit Executive and Civic Leader

To Finish, a dropout-prevention initiative of the Pew Partnership for Civic Change. Implementing the work required a strong partnership with Duval County Public Schools. But it also required strong partnerships among other community-based organizations. The concept was to use student data to identify students at risk of non-completion early and surround them with the supports they would need to successfully navigate high school. Those supports - from tutoring, to after-school programs, to remediation and credit-recovery programs, and parental engagement efforts - were generally available in the school system and the community but not targeted at the right students, and often not with the right support, so many students managed to slip through the cracks.

To inform the work of Learning to Finish, QEA funded an expansive body of research to better understand which students were not completing high school on time, and what indicators might be most accurate in identifying these at-risk students prior to high school. The research proved significant for several reasons, among them:

- » The research re-created national studies using Duval County Public School data, which gave the results credibility with public school administrators and the community. This helped to build relationships between the school system and the Learning To Finish leadership.
- » Learning To Finish created a research committee, comprised of Duval County Public School representatives as well as representatives of various community organizations, to review the findings, vet the written report and jointly consider the implications of the research. This helped to build common understanding of the findings, as well as mutual trust and respect among the organizations. It also provided a launching-off point for discussions about how these partners could better identify at-risk students and align their previously disparate efforts to help them.

Though the path to alignment was not easy, Learning To Finish and QEA carefully nurtured relationships. The result was the Learning To Finish Collaborative, a consortium of two dozen organizations supporting a common vision and strategy to help high school students complete school on time. Five organizations share leadership of this consortium, which is now staffed and coordinated by the Jacksonville Public Education Fund: The Community Foundation; Duval County Public Schools, Jacksonville Children's Commission, Jacksonville Public Education Fund and United Way of Northeast Florida.

Early results of this collaborative work are promising. A pilot program supporting off-track students was implemented at four middle schools and two high schools in the 2009-2010 school year. First-year results show that middle school students involved in the "Early Warning and Response System" showed much greater improvement in math and reading than those not involved – more than twice the gains in math skills and a third greater gains in reading skills. Among high school students, the results were even more pronounced, with EWRS students reading gains 2 1/2 times greater than non-EWRS students and math gains double those of non-EWRS students. Efforts are now under way to pilot the Early Warning and Response System at a third high school using funds from a federal Race To The Top grant.

Meanwhile, Duval County Public Schools overhauled its alternative education department and renamed it the Office of Multiple Pathways and Special Supports to reflect the recognition that off-track students may need multiple high-quality pathways to reach graduation. In partnership with Learning to Finish, this office conducted a thorough segmentation analysis of the district's overage student population and used that data to create a new strategic plan. The new plan aims to ensure there are appropriate pathways and supports for these students.

In response to the plan, a partnership emerged between a local nonprofit (The Bridge of Northeast Florida), the private funding community and Duval County Public Schools to launch the national pilot of Schools For The Future, an innovative school for over-age students in Jacksonville. The Schools For The Future Academy at The Bridge opened in fall 2011 with approximately 100 8th and 9th graders, all of whom are at least two years over-age for their grade.

The Learning to Finish Collaborative was significant as it provided a space for coordination with United Way, which had recently launched two new education initiatives, Success By 6 and Achievers For Life, and with the Children's Commission, which funds most out-of-school time programs in Duval County.

Clearly, the biggest accomplishment of the past six years has been the building of a reform infrastructure. For the first time in a long time, there is a sense of possibility in the air when one thinks of education reform... This focus on education reform, from these organizations and from the QEA initiative as a whole, has bolstered the role that "education reform" plays in our city – in the media, in political campaigns and at cocktail parties. People are talking, even if they don't agree, and the topic at the tips of their tongues is education; that in and of itself is no small feat in a city as large and diverse as Jacksonville....

We are also at a time where we will experience significant leadership change, with a new mayor, four school board seats up for re-election in 2012 and, at some point, the retirement of our Superintendent. These are key civic decisions for the Jacksonville community, and JPEF and these infrastructure organizations will help increase the community's expectation for high quality leadership.

*Trey Csar, President,
Jacksonville Public Education Fund*

Through this collaborative approach and the strong encouragement of JPEF, multiple sectors now share a common definition of off-track students, common understanding of the off-track indicators, and a more coordinated approach to supporting off-track students. Program offerings by various providers have been aligned with these common measures in mind, ensuring these students get priority access to mentoring programs, family supports and are enrolled in out of school time.

The collective work also has contributed to each partner understanding ways to improve their own programmatic offerings and achieve greater alignment. The TeamUp summer programs operated by the Jacksonville Children's Commission, for example, have been redesigned to provide more extended learning time aligned with the school day curriculum. The Children's Commission and the District also worked together with funding from the Wallace Foundation to align and improve their summer programming and ensure students have an opportunity for multiple activities, rather than skipping academic time to attend enrichment activities, as had been the case previously.

As important as these outcomes for students are, the community's victory may be greater. The lessons of overcoming self-interest, learning how to work with other entities and co-create solutions is a foundation that has the potential to pay dividends for years to come.

Discovering and Energizing Community Leadership

The 28 community leaders who participated in the Forum on Quality Education entered with varying degrees of knowledge about public education – and varying attitudes. As the Forum progressed, many members' attitudes shifted from familiar "blame" perspectives ("parents aren't doing their jobs," "it's because these kids are poor") to a more complex and richer understanding of the challenge: regardless of the circumstances in which these young people find themselves, they are the students that we have today, they will be our employees and our neighbors tomorrow, and each has the capacity to learn if we take the time and care to teach them and support them.

It is not possible to quantify the impact that the Forum had on broad community understanding of the challenges facing public education. But it is clear that, subsequent to the Forum and the launch of Quality Education for All, a host of community leaders have become engaged in the issue of public education.

Education gives options. Empowering our young people intellectually allows them to achieve academically and compete economically.

Mayor Alvin Brown
Jacksonville, Florida

Three Leading Changes in Public Education:

- 1) Far greater collaboration with nonprofits
- 2) More engaged public re: education issues
- 3) Better results for students

Three Leading Community Assets:

- 1) Most major players know each other and have regular contact
- 2) Openness of the district to try new ideas that have evidence of effectiveness
- 3) Partners who are patient with "messy" process of change

Ed Pratt-Dannals
Duval County School Superintendent

Moreover, QEA helped to create community infrastructure that provides institutional leadership around education issues.

One of the overarching lessons from the Forum was the importance of having a strong local education fund to be a lasting engine for change and community engagement in public education. Philanthropic initiatives may come and go, but local education funds can provide community leadership on education reform issues that transcends the tenures of school superintendents and school boards.

In 2005, Jacksonville had a local education foundation – the Alliance for World Class Education – but its focus was narrow (primarily teacher awards, back office supports for the administration and identifying and implementing business efficiencies). It was perceived as too closely aligned with an individual superintendent, its board was largely comprised of corporate elites, and it was undercapitalized for a school system as large as Duval County's. It was not well positioned to play the role of "critical friend" to the school system or undertake the kind of community leadership role needed to drive broad-scale community engagement efforts.

From the Forum emerged a core group of leaders willing to tackle the challenge of re-inventing the Alliance. They reached out to other key community stakeholders and, as a cohort, with the leadership of Community Foundation President Nina Waters, convinced the Alliance in 2009 to dissolve its board and reconstitute and rebrand the organization as a high-capacity local education fund.

Today, the Jacksonville Public Education Fund has a diverse board, a scope of work that includes community engagement, research and data analysis, and advocacy, with a particular focus on leadership and vision. Through the work of JPEF, Duval County Public Schools engaged Education Resource Strategies to conduct a comprehensive fiscal analysis of the district's allocation of resources – a critically important activity in an era of drastic state funding cuts. In the 2010 School Board elections, JPEF took the lead in hosting candidate forums and providing candidate questionnaires and impartial information to voters. The work of Learning to Finish, initially housed out of The Community Foundation, moved under JPEF's control in 2009, enabling the integration of research and data, program development and evaluation and assessment. And in fall 2011, JPEF launched ONExONE, a community campaign, anchored around a travelling art exhibit, to drive conversation about the community's vision for its public education system.

Community leadership around education is evident beyond JPEF.

In 2007, as the Forum wound to an end, Duval County Public School administrators convinced Teach For America, the nationally renowned teaching program, to take a look at Jacksonville with an eye toward establishing a TFA program in Duval County. TFA was skeptical, uncertain of the community's commitment to do the work needed to attract TFA. The school system reached out to The Community Foundation, which brought in key members of the Forum and other potential donors. Within 90 days, the group had raised the necessary funds, obtained the green light from the School Board and convinced TFA to launch the Jacksonville program. In 2008, 50 TFA teachers began working in Duval County public schools and by fall 2011, TFA had 110 teachers in Duval County public schools reaching roughly 7,000 students.

Forum leaders also were instrumental in attracting KIPP to Jacksonville to open a charter school in 2010, and the Foundation supported The Urban Education Symposium Initiative in addressing immediate needs of young black male students. And, realizing that local education is inextricably tied to state education policy and funding, Forum and Foundation leaders worked with the Florida Philanthropic Network to establish the Education Funder's Affinity Group, a coalition of those funding education issues across Florida that could build relationships with state lawmakers and speak to common challenges, opportunities and policy barriers.

After six years, Duval County finds itself with a much more robust cohort of individuals willing and informed on issues of public education, with the community institutions needed to help support their leadership. Political leadership also is more engaged – in 2011, the city's new mayor Alvin Brown became the first to appoint an Education Commissioner to be a link between city government and the separate public school system.

Developing the capacity to advocate

As individual and institutional leaders began to emerge, the body of education advocates grew. But having willing advocates and knowing how to organize them effectively to result in real policy change are two different things. It has taken time for the stakeholder community in Jacksonville to learn how to effectively use its voice on behalf of public education. But over time, two lead organizations have emerged with complementary roles.

Education is in our community consciousness and conversation in a way it hasn't been in the past.... In Jacksonville, we have the foundational relationships within the education stakeholders that are required for success.... [but] we do not have a strong advocacy culture.

Melanie Patz
Vice President/Community Impact
United Way of Northeast Florida

There is a dedicated and growing group of public education advocates. Still the circle needs to widen. With fewer than 1 in 4 households in Duval County having a child in the public education system, people often have to be convinced that this is a pressing issue... A broader group of people must list education as our #1 civic priority. We need to use the will of this collective priority for transformation.

Ashley Smith Juarez
Executive Director
The Chartrand Foundation

The Jacksonville Public Education Fund has assumed the task of advocacy at the local level, representing stakeholders before the Duval County School Board and in other local venues where education issues are addressed (the Charter Revision Commission, for instance, briefly discussed the merits of elected vs. appointed school boards in 2010). In many respects, JPEF has found local advocacy a delicate act. The political realities are challenging, and finding the balance between "critic" and "friend" has been difficult at times. But there have been successes. In addition to convincing the School Board to engage Education Resources Strategies, JPEF was instrumental in convincing the board to support and fund the Schools For The Future Academy.

Providing advocacy at the state level is equally critical, as so much of public school funding and policy is set in Tallahassee. In 2009, as the State of Florida's budget crisis deepened, QEA convened a meeting of stakeholders to hear School Superintendent Ed Pratt-Dannals outline the district's agenda for the upcoming legislative session. In addition to Forum members, the meeting drew a surprisingly large crowd of interested parties, many of whom shared concern about the community's ability to make its voice heard in Tallahassee around education funding issues.

From that meeting, Save Duval Schools was formed. The 501(c)(4) nonprofit has taken the role of state advocate, working with sister organizations in neighboring communities as well as across the state. In preparation for the 2011 Legislature, for example, SDS convened community-based education organizations, the area Chamber of Commerce, NAACP, teachers and school board and district officials to identify a common legislative agenda around public education, and then helped carry that agenda to legislators through in person meetings, special events and partnerships with other groups.

Deepening informed philanthropic support

In the past six years, local funders and philanthropists who once viewed public education as a black hole, who were overwhelmed by its complexity, or who were at a loss for answers have begun to see there are approaches that work.

Based on what they learned through the Forum on Quality Education and subsequent community discussion, these donors have become energized by the opportunity to build new capacities in our community that were previously lacking – outside organizations to infuse new ideas, provide assistance with data, engage the community, support and strengthen teachers and leaders and provide wrap-around supports for students.

Since the launch of Quality Education for All in 2005, well in excess of \$20 million in private philanthropic dollars have been invested in public education reform efforts in Duval County.

The Community Foundation itself has invested more than \$4.5 million and more than \$20 million has been invested by other private philanthropists in the community.

Why the difference?

In the past five years, the community began to see investment opportunities, programs, strategies and organizations that were instrumental to driving change in public education and worthy of investment. By adopting the model of a public school system surrounded by private supports, donors discovered new ways to support public education.

Just as important was the growing understanding among local philanthropists of the complexities and nuances of public education and the hope offered by reform efforts. Learning from the experiences of other communities and seeing the impact of different approaches has been encouraging for many who care deeply about quality public education but have felt at a loss for answers. Including key donors in the Forum on Quality Education, and encouraging those donors to bring others to the table, has broadened the circle of informed giving in Duval County.

This widened circle of donors has been able to influence how increasingly limited public dollars are spent. For instance, the investment in the ERS study is paying dividends, with the district anticipating savings of \$3 million from restructured elementary schools. And successful pilot programs launched by philanthropy – such as the Making the Move programs – have been institutionalized by several schools in the district.

With the need for growth, and the inevitability that some funders' priorities will change from time to time, it is imperative that we grow that base of donors - not only locally but nationally - for the long-term health of the organizations and the ability to be a force for change long into the future.

*Trey Csar, President,
Jacksonville Public Education Fund*

Quantitative Results: *How Students Have Fared*

While the core measures of student achievement in Duval County remain below the state average and below its peers in neighboring counties, there are promising trends. Since the 2005-2006 school year, Duval County has seen improvement in almost all of its core measures of student achievement – graduation rates, dropout rates and state test scores.

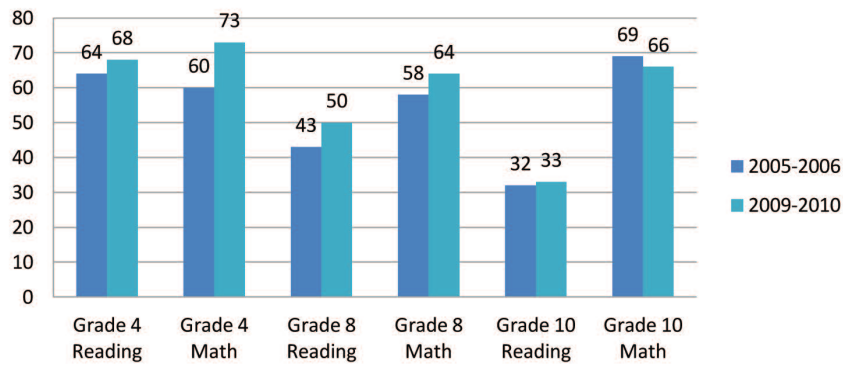
As the chart on Page 10 illustrates, Duval County's graduation rate has improved by almost 14 percentage points since 2005-2006. Even more promising is the improvement in graduation rates for African-Americans and Hispanics, both of which are up more than 15% in the last five years.

On the state standardized test – called the FCAT – Duval County elementary and middle school students have shown improved scores in both reading and math (see chart next page). High school students, however, have had on minimal improvement in reading scores and have lost ground in math.

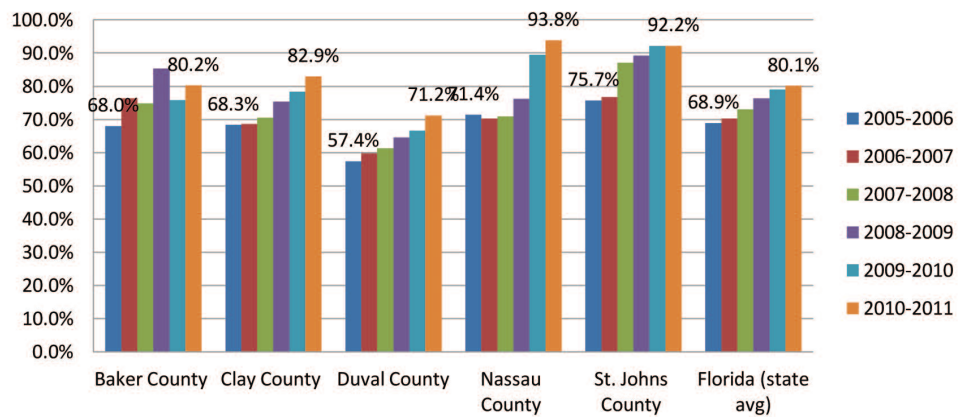
Overall, the District maintains a "B" grade in the Florida Department of Education's grading system, and 85% of the schools made excellent, good or satisfactory grades in 2011. However, the number of state-identified "turnaround" and "intervene" schools has risen since 2006, and a wide achievement gap persists.

Over the next few years, the community must find ways to "jump start" progress at a faster pace. With the groundwork laid, we must find ways to move more quickly toward our desired goals.

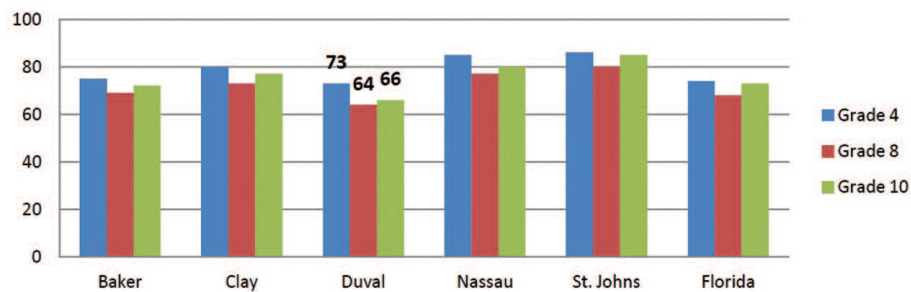
Duval County FCAT Scores 2005 & 2010
(Percent of students scoring 3 or higher)



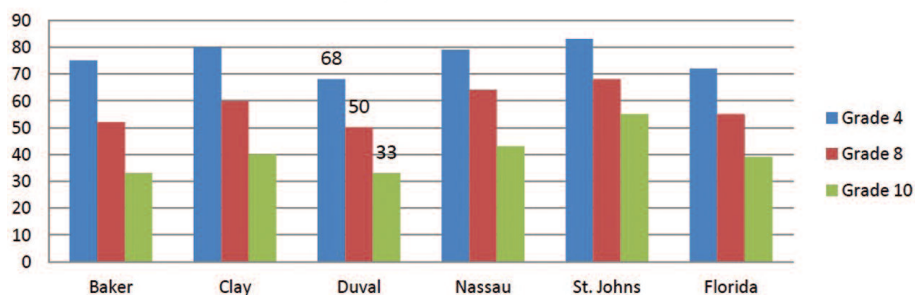
Graduation Rates 2006-2011



2010 FCAT Math Scores
(percent scoring 3 or above)



2010 FCAT Reading Scores
(percent scoring 3 or above)



Community Attitudes: Public Opinion Poll Results

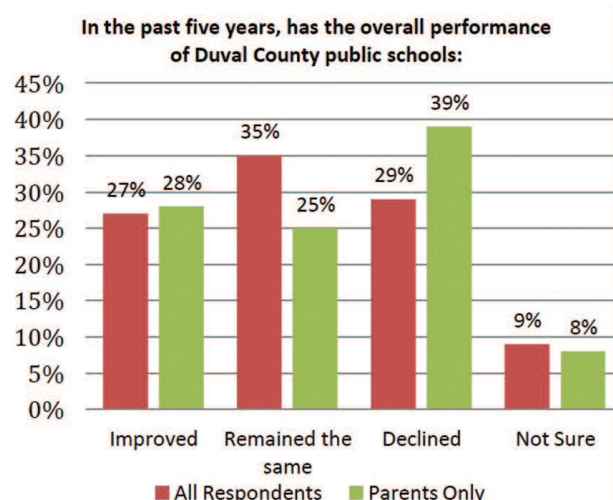
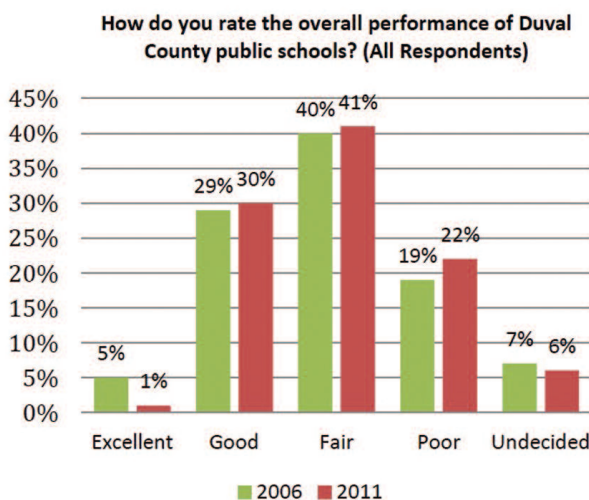
In 2006, as the Quality Education for All initiative was getting under way, The Community Foundation commissioned a poll to understand community attitudes about public education in general and Duval County Public Schools in particular. In short, the poll revealed respondents thought:

- » Having a top-rated school system was very important to Jacksonville's future (88% agreed); more important than reducing crime, attracting jobs or other major civic issues.
- » Duval County Public Schools were not top-rated, with 59% rating their performance fair or poor. Parents of public school students rated schools higher than other groups.
- » Increased funding was necessary to improve Duval County Public Schools (59% agreed) but a slight majority (46%) was opposed to increasing taxes to provide additional revenue (42% supported increasing taxes, 12% were undecided).

Five years later, in January 2011, The Community Foundation underwrote a follow-up poll. This time, the results were surprising.

- » Having a top-rated school system still was very important to Jacksonville's future (85% agreed) and it remained the most important civic issue, by a slightly wider margin than in 2006.
- » However, the performance of Duval County Public Schools was rated lower than in 2006 – 63% rated the school system's performance fair or poor. And this time, parents of public school students gave the school system lower ratings than did other groups.
- » And while a larger proportion (61%) felt increased revenue was necessary to improve school performance, support for increasing school taxes had eroded significantly, with only 30% supporting increased taxes and 59% opposing.

Lagging public confidence and support for public schools remains a challenge for the district and community partners. New engagement efforts, such as ONE x ONE, Save Duval Schools and others seek to change these perceptions and galvanize community support.



Sustaining Momentum, *and Meeting New Challenges*

Often it is the middle part of a long journey that seems the most difficult. The novelty and excitement of the launching has faded and the destination still seems far away. The challenge at this point in the path is sustaining momentum and finding the enthusiasm and vigor to tackle new challenges.

The Quality Education for All initiative finds itself in just such a passage. While much – so much – has been accomplished in six years, the end still seems far away.

In the last six years, the community has created significant infrastructure to support public education. That infrastructure must be maintained, which creates some sizable financial challenges for the community. Teach For America, KIPP, the Jacksonville Public Education Fund, and other entities, all have ongoing operational and, in some cases, capital needs. These organizations and their supporters must find a way to meet those collective needs, without undercutting one another.

At the same time, the community still needs new resources for innovation and expansion. Though there has been great progress in creating strategies to support off-track students, for example, the district's financial capacity remains inadequate to meet the need. And while Teach For America's Jacksonville Teacher Corps is up to 110 members, the need to invest in human capital across the district, especially in low-performing schools, remains paramount.

In the coming years, the challenges for QEA are clear:

- » Continue to stimulate philanthropic investment in public education reform – investment that sustains those important community institutions already present, nurtures new innovations and builds out the full array of systems needed to provide quality education to all.
- » Support an ambitious community vision for public education in Duval County. As a community, we need not be intimidated by demanding and rigorous expectations, nor should we be complacent and satisfied with mediocrity. We need to hear, and listen to, the voice that expects more and believes in our capacity to achieve.
- » Continue to nurture and empower leadership to move us forward. At the district, school and classroom levels, we need thoughtful, innovative and tenacious leaders dedicated to improving educational quality and closing our achievement gap – and we need and energized, supportive community to stand behind them.
- » Continue to widen the circle of those who are interested in public education, willing to become engaged in reform efforts and have the capacity and the willingness to bring others to the table.