CREATING OPPORTUNITY, TAKING ACTION

NEXT STEPS IN QUALITY EDUCATION FOR ALL

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THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY** **3**
2. **INTRODUCTION** **8**
3. **QUALITY EDUCATION FOR *ALL*** **9**
4. **FORUM ON QUALITY EDUCATION** **10**
5. **ESSENTIAL LESSONS** **13**
6. **AN ACTION PLAN FOR CHANGE** **17**
   - **LEARNING TO FINISH** **17**
   - **DIRECT INVESTMENT** **23**
   - **ADVOCACY & PUBLIC POLICY** **25**
   - **COMMUNITY LEARNING** **25**
7. **LOOKING AHEAD** **27**

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A: FORUM MEMBERS 29
APPENDIX B: FORUM SUMMARIES **30**
APPENDIX C: CURRENT COMMUNITY-DRIVEN EDUCATION IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS **44**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This report builds on the accomplishments of The Community Foundation in Jacksonville's Forum on Quality Education to present an action agenda for the Foundation. This agenda posits a comprehensive series of interconnected and strategic activities that focus on significantly improving outcomes for *all* students in Duval County Public Schools. These activities are directed toward one overarching long-term goal – significant reduction in the disparities in learning and academic performance between white and black students as well as those who are affluent and those who are not in Duval County.

As a result of the work and deliberations of the Forum, the Foundation has taken the next step in its ten-year commitment to help reform education and has developed strategies in the three interrelated strands that comprise the Foundation's Quality Education for *All* (QEA) initiative: Community Learning, Direct Investment, and Advocacy and Public Policy. In each of these areas, the Foundation will seek to *build capacity* for reform*, foster collaboration* for systemic change in education, and promote effective *community engagement* to demand and support positive and lasting comprehensive improvement in public education. The Forum will play a central role in this evolving effort.

This report speaks to the approach the Foundation has adopted. It provides a brief overview of the QEA initiative as well as of the Forum's work. Its focus, however, is on the future and how new activities emerging from what the Foundation has learned from the Forum and its other work will help to ensure that every student graduates from high school prepared for the future and positioned to contribute to a flourishing community.

Quality Education for *All*

The Quality Education for *All* initiative is a comprehensive approach to the complex challenge of improving public education. It has three primary, interwoven strands – Community Learning, Direct Investment, and Advocacy and Public Policy.

Community Learning, which focuses on building the knowledge of key stakeholders across the community about public education and effective strategies for improving it. The Forum on Quality Education is currently the core activity of the Community Learning strand.

Direct Investment, through which grants are provided to support efforts to foster long-term improvements in Duval County's schools. Through its "Making the Move: Transitions to Middle School" grants program, the Foundation is investing in six innovative, school-designed efforts to ensure that students successfully transition from elementary to middle school.

Advocacy and Public Policy, which seeks to build public will and facilitate public action to improve public education in Duval County. Building public will to support education requires, among other things, understanding of the public's perception of it. Through its Advocacy and Public Policy strand, the Foundation, in 2006, funded a poll of the community; among other things, poll results indicated that while citizens hold that a strong system of public education is important to the county's future, they do not believe the district is currently doing as well as it might.

In the first two years of its operations, much of QEA's focus has been on Community Learning, specifically the Forum on Quality Education.

Forum on Quality Education

The Forum on Quality Education was created by the Foundation to foster deep community learning – leading to action – about significant educational issues. The Foundation believed that an in-depth look at education by a diverse group of accomplished citizens would build the trust necessary to foster action. The Foundation also hoped that the Forum's extensive learning and discussions would directly inform other areas of the QEA initiative.

By drawing on outside experts and through its discussions, the Forum examined a host of issues. They include demographics and history, the achievement gap, the critical roles of high expectations and academic rigor, the importance of leadership and teaching, federal, state and local polices that mandate testing and accountability, the need to involve all sectors of the community in efforts to improve education, and the concomitant need to develop effective outreach and communications strategies to do so.

Forum members also reviewed considerable quantitative data, paying particular attention to trends in student achievement and outcomes. The data reveal that, while Duval County has made some real gains in education, dropout and graduation rates remain sources of serious concern and students' performance on state tests are uneven.

Forum members surfaced a number of lessons from their explorations. These lessons fell into three broad categories:

- Education reform, which focuses on what is required to promote the teaching and learning necessary to stimulate high achievement for all students
- The community's critical role in education reform, which speaks to the need to include community members and families from diverse backgrounds and circumstances in reform efforts, the importance of fostering a citizenry engaged in education with the will to demand changes in education and the need for effective communications plans and strategies
- The role of philanthropic and other non-profit organizations in education reform, which considers the significant contributions that various outside groups can make to the reform enterprise and the need to align their efforts with one another and with the school district

Forum lessons directly influenced the development of the Foundation's plan for QEA.

An Action Plan for Change

As it moves forward, the Foundation will continue to rely on and extend the three strands of the Quality Education for *All* framework, the chart below outlines the key initiatives of the Foundation's action plan for the next phase of its work.

	COMMUNITY LEARNING	**DIRECT INVESTMENT**	**ADVOCACY & PUBLIC POLICY**
CAPACITY	+ Asset mapping (LTF) + Identifying best practices (LTF) + Data analysis (LTF) + The Forum	+ Testing new strategies (MTM) + Assessing outcomes (MTM) + The Forum + Leadership development + Teacher quality	+ Monitoring policy developments + Disseminating best practices + Push & pull the district to reform + The Forum
COLLABORATION	+ Collaboration with DCPS, JCC, United Way, Pew Partnership (LTF) + The Forum	+ Collaboration with DCPS (MTM)	+ Building community partnerships + The Forum
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT	+ Community organizing/coalition building (LTF) + The Forum	+ Dissemination of learnings and best practices to DCPS educators (MTM)	+ Providing information on educational issues + Solicit community input and monitor feedback + The Forum
**MTM represents Making the Move and LTF represents Learning to Finish; both are initiatives within the QEA Initiative*			

In addition to the initiatives identified above, however, there is one initiative that the Foundation has embarked on that crosses all three strands – Learning to Finish, a comprehensive, community-driven dropout prevention effort.

Learning to Finish

Learning to Finish (LTF) is a five-year dropout prevention effort that relies on community involvement to address the challenge of dropouts on multiple levels and using multiple interventions. Its goal is to increase the number of students who graduate from three high schools, Nathan B. Forrest, Englewood, and Terry Parker High Schools, which are participating in the initiative. The six middle schools who feed these three low-performing high schools will also participate in LTF.

LTF is a collaborative effort between the Foundation, DCPS, the United Way of Northeast Florida, the Jacksonville Children's Commission and the Pew Partnership for Civic Change. The model has five core elements:

- Academic support, in particular to rising sixth and ninth grade students, in partnership with parents, schools and community organizations
- Implementation of proven dropout prevention strategies
- A community-wide discussion on the challenge of dropouts and possible solutions
- A "mapping" of existing "stay in school" resources in the community
- An evaluation plan to assess progress

As indicated on the chart above, however, LTF is only one component of the Foundation's work. It is undertaking activities in each QEA strand.

Direct Investment

The Foundation will also continue to make grants and directly invest in schools. These grants, which support innovations at the school level, generate new learnings. The centerpiece of the Direct Investment strand of QEA is the Foundation's "Making the Move: Transitions to Middle School" grants program (MTM). Through this program, the Foundation is providing grants of up to $10,000 a year to middle schools that have identified or developed initiatives to help sixth graders successfully adapt to their new environment. Six schools have participated to date; schools selected for funding during the first year were re-funded to continue and expand their work during the second.

Looking to the future, the Foundation is taking steps to share what has been learned thus far through the MTM grants with middle school leaders throughout DCPS. The Foundation is organizing "Making the Move: Transitions to Middle School Summit," a conference that will be held in August 2007 for middle school principals and their faculty members who lead efforts to ease students' transition to middle school. Current MTM participants will share results with their colleagues; in addition, there will be presentations by experts as well as break-out sessions in which participants can discuss various issues connected to transitions in greater detail.

Another shift the Foundation is contemplating for MTM is greater alignment with Learning to Finish. Given their shared focus on improving high school graduation rates, the Foundation may provide grants to some of the LTF middle schools, focusing on eighth to ninth grade transition.

Advocacy and Public Policy

Through the Advocacy and Public Policy strand of the Quality Education for *All* initiative, the Foundation seeks to foster changes in policy that reflect the learnings that are surfaced in and generated by the activities of the other two strands. As it has throughout QEA, the Foundation is embracing a collaborative approach in these efforts.

Core activities of this strand will include:

- Disseminating new knowledge and best practices
- "Taking the pulse" of the community through surveys, focus groups and other issues
- Stimulating discussion and action around policies and practices that affect student learning and the achievement gap
- "Pushing" and "pulling" the district to reform, by both supporting positive change and demanding it

Community Learning

The Foundation's experience with the Forum has confirmed its belief that building community knowledge about critical issues in education is vital. The Foundation will continue its reliance on the Forum. Going forward, it will meet quarterly instead of monthly. Among other things, the Forum will *access knowledge* from diverse sources, *advise the Foundation* on elements of QEA, help to *align the work* of non-profit organizations and DCPS, and *advocate for change* in education policies and practices. The Forum's deliberations will be informed by respect and trust. Its approaches will be flexible and its strategies opportunistic – the Forum will seize the moment as it arises. Above all, the Forum and its members will, as they go forward, promote robust and positive change boldly and innovatively.

Looking Ahead

The time is ripe for change in Duval County's schools. The district's new superintendent is committed to reform and the activities of the Alliance for World Class Education, the engagement of Teach for America, the continued contributions of the Schultz Center for Teaching and Leadership, the efforts of RALLY

Jacksonville, the expanded investment by Mayor Peyton and the Jacksonville City Council in vital mentoring and summer programs for youth, which are run by the Jacksonville Children's Commission, and the ongoing leadership of and investment by United Way in critical initiatives, including Full Service Schools, are hopeful signs of a renaissance in community support for quality education. These contributions are matched by others, among them the efforts of the Jacksonville Community Council, Inc. (JCCI) to raise awareness about, identify sources of and create recommendations to address the achievement gap, the ongoing focus on education by the Jacksonville Regional Chamber of Commerce, and the efforts of Florida Community College Jacksonville (FCCJ) to improve educational outcomes for all students.

The Quality Education for *All* initiative represents an ambitious philanthropic effort to gather and target civic resources to ensure that the promise of the future is realized. In two years, much has already been accomplished that is rooted in the potential that an informed community has to foster meaningful and sustainable education reform.

The Foundation has made a long-term commitment to fostering significant and sustainable improvements in public education through the QEA initiative and its three strands of activities over the next eight years. Because contexts change and new opportunities arise, it is impossible today to define the precise path the Foundation will pursue in the years to come. It is clear, however, that in the near future, each of the three strands will be more intertwined and the learnings and results from each will influence the actions of the others. Throughout all of its future activities, in addition to providing financial resources, the Foundation seeks, as it has with the Forum, to gather diverse individuals to participate in an array of aligned activities that, taken together, comprise an emerging action agenda for educational improvement. The Forum will continue to play a lead role as the Foundation moves from learning to action.

INTRODUCTION

This report presents an agenda for action that grows out of extensive examination of and considerable reflection about critical educational issues that confront Duval County. It builds on and extends the findings and learnings of The Community Foundation in Jacksonville's Forum on Quality Education to advance a comprehensive series of interconnected and strategic activities that focus on significantly improving outcomes for *all* students in Duval County Public Schools.

As a result of the work and deliberations of the Forum, the Foundation has crafted a long-term, multi-faceted action plan for its initiative to improve education. This plan is the next step in the Foundation's ten-year commitment to helping to reform education. It incorporates strategies in the three interrelated strands that comprise the Foundation's Quality Education for *All* (QEA) initiative: Community Learning, Direct Investment, and Advocacy and Public Policy. In each of these areas, the Foundation will seek to *build capacity* for reform among educators, families and citizens from diverse sectors of the community, *foster collaboration* for systemic change in education among concerned organizations and between these organizations and the Duval County Public Schools, and promote effective *community engagement* to demand and support positive and lasting comprehensive improvement in public education.

The strategic activities the Foundation will pursue in each of the three strands are directed toward one overarching long-term goal – significant reduction in the disparities in learning and academic performance between majority and minority, and affluent and non-affluent students in Duval County. This "achievement gap" has even more harmful results than individual misfortune and wasted lives, as troubling as this is. It threatens the viability of a community whose future depends on successful participation in a global economy that rewards the knowledge and skills that flow from a rigorous education. Confronting the achievement gap must be the first and abiding concern of education reformers. While the Foundation's efforts will engage specific issues – dropouts, transitions, leadership, funding and other concerns – efforts to address these issues are elements of a comprehensive commitment to bring to bear coordinated district and community resources to rid Duval County of the achievement gap and its pernicious effects.

Relentless focus on closing the achievement gap was identified as the critical factor in improving education by the Forum on Quality Education, the preeminent component of QEA. The Forum is comprised of a diverse group of citizens drawn from across the Jacksonville area. Since the fall of 2005 and with guidance and support from the Foundation, its members have met regularly to examine urgent aspects of public education in Duval County. Forum members heard from and engaged experts on a wide variety of educational issues and, as important, participated in intensive discussions about these issues. School district staff, led by the superintendent, played a central role in surfacing issues, providing data and underscoring the essential part that an informed community can play in systemic education improvement. As a result of these interactions, members increasingly grasped the complexity of the educational enterprise, understood that reform is a long-term process that is in no way orderly, and embraced the idea that no one sector in the community, including the schools themselves, can single-handedly reform education.

Effective reform requires an ongoing, collaborative effort that demands excellence and supports risk-taking and innovation to arrive at it. As it moves into a new phase focused on action, the Foundation seeks to recognize this reality and to align the Community Learning work of the Forum with other strands of the QEA initiative – Direct Investment and Advocacy and Public Policy. This report speaks to the approach it has adopted for doing so. It provides a brief overview of the QEA initiative as well as of the Forum's work. Its focus, however, is on the future and how new activities emerging from what the Foundation has learned from the Forum and other work will help to ensure that every student graduates from high school prepared for the future and positioned to contribute to a flourishing community.

QUALITY EDUCATION FOR *ALL*

The Quality Education for *All* initiative is a ten-year effort created by The Community Foundation to improve public education in Duval County by closing the achievement gap between majority and minority students and between those who are affluent and those who come from low-income backgrounds. In crafting the initiative, the Foundation sought to be pro-active, strategic and systemic. It wanted to address the structures, policies and practices that bear on educational success at every level. It also wanted any positive changes it helped engender to be sustainable; it was not interested in short-term but temporary gains that often result from instituting new programs.

To ensure that its work would be systemic, strategic and sustainable, the Foundation began by gathering and carefully examining extensive data about public education in Duval County as well as other issues, such as poverty and economic development, which influence and are influenced by education. The data made starkly clear that while there were pockets of excellence in Duval's schools, too many schools had become mired in mediocrity or, worse, bordered on failure. Students in these at-risk schools, who were usually low-income and minority, often gave up long before graduation; even those who persisted to graduation found themselves ill-prepared for the workplace or postsecondary study. This had profound and negative implications for students, their families and the community. Many students had little chance of climbing the ladder to professional success and financial stability. At the same time, the community was – and without significant change would continue to be – without a workforce that could attract and retain well-paying, knowledge-based industries, often those that are technology-related. Utilizing the data it had analyzed, its research on best practices emerging from other philanthropic efforts, and insights gathered from various community members, the Foundation established the QEA initiative.

QEA is a comprehensive approach to the complex challenge of improving public education. It has three primary strands – Community Learning, Direct Investment, and Advocacy and Public Policy.

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> ***Direct Investment***, through which grants are provided to support efforts to foster long-term improvements in Duval County's schools. Through its "Making the Move: Transitions to Middle School" grants program, the Foundation is investing in six innovative, school-designed efforts to ensure that students successfully transition from elementary to middle school.
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The work of each strand, while distinct, is interwoven into that of the others. For example, the determination to focus on improving transitions from elementary to middle schools through the Direct Investment strand both anticipated and reflected the knowledge emerging from the Community Learning strand. In their investigations, Forum members probed the points at which students disengage from school and found that the periods of transition – sixth grade and early high school years – were pivotal in determining whether a student dropped out or successfully graduated.

In the two years since it launched QEA, the Foundation has undertaken activities in all three strands. Recognizing, however, the need for extensive and informed community input into any comprehensive and sustainable reform effort, much of its focus to date has been on Community Learning, specifically the Forum on Quality Education.

FORUM ON QUALITY EDUCATION

The Forum on Quality Education was created by the Foundation to foster deep community learning – leading to action – about significant educational issues. The Foundation wished to get beyond many of the myths around education that have hampered communities from embracing long-term efforts at reform, and it believed that an in-depth look at education would help dispel them. It also believed that gathering a diverse group of accomplished citizens who are committed to civic improvement would encourage each member to learn from one another and begin the essential process of building trust among group members. This, in turn, could be a catalyst for building trust across various sectors of the community. The Forum was designed to promote discussion among its members and to surface divergent views.

In creating the Forum, the Foundation also had other hopes. Primary among them was that the deliberations of the group would inform the Foundation's work. The Foundation recognizes that a long-term effort to foster meaningful change in a public system, like the 10-year commitment of its QEA initiative, is not a static process. It involves developing and implementing new strategies and approaches as knowledge surfaces, context changes, and issues become more defined. The perspectives of Forum members and the findings of the full group would be an invaluable resource as the Foundation reviewed the Quality Education for *All* initiative, identified strategic opportunities, created plans to meet these opportunities and undertook focused action.

The Forum is comprised of individuals drawn from an array of sectors and backgrounds across the Jacksonville area. (See Appendix A for a listing of Forum members.) Since the fall of 2005 through June of 2007, the Forum will have met 18 times to probe critical aspects of public education in Duval County. Issues examined include:

- National, state and local demographics: who we are educating and for what
- District history: the continuing impact of race and class on educational achievement
- The achievement gap: what it is, who it affects and how to reduce it
- Federal and state policies: No Child Left Behind and Florida A+; what they mean
- Accountability and assessment: what is success and how is it measured
- What matters most: teachers and teaching
- Critical voices: hearing from the community, families, teachers and students
- Building capacity: leadership at all levels
- Promoting success: persistence, transition and graduation
- Family involvement: what it means and what it takes
- Communications: by whom, for what
- Community engagement: building public will for excellence
- Academic rigor: the importance of setting high expectations in teaching and learning

In examining these and related issues, participants reviewed extensive qualitative data, heard from numerous experts, toured schools, held forthright discussions with Duval County Public Schools leaders, and shared their own insights and experiences regarding public education and the community's capacity to support reform. (A summary of the Forum sessions is available in Appendix B.)

Forum members also reviewed considerable quantitative data, paying particular attention to trends in student achievement and outcomes. Indicators of student success in Duval County were troubling when the Foundation began gathering data in 2002, as it began designing the QEA initiative. In several instances, as the charts below reveal, these indicators have only become more troubling and the need to promote improvements more urgent.

GRADUATION RATES[1]				
	2005-06	**2004-05**	**2003-04**	**2002-03**
Baker County	73.1	72.2	68.2	67.3
Clay County	74.7	75.1	73.8	75.4
Duval County	**60.5**	**65.5**	**67.2**	**63.7**
Florida	71.0	71.9	71.6	69.0
Nassau County	81.8	85.2	81.1	79.5
St. Johns County	76.7	76.8	78.3	78.2
Source: Florida Department of Education, Jacksonville Community Council, Inc.				

DCPS' graduation rate has been uneven over the past four years, with increases offset by subsequent declines. It is not alone among First Coast districts in experiencing this. It is, however, the only First Coast district that has not yet attained a graduation rate of at least 70 percent. In addition, while several of the other districts saw declines between 2002-03 and 2005-06, the decline in the graduation rate was greatest in Duval County. The trend in the dropout rate is similar, as indicated in the chart below.

DROPOUT RATES[2]				
	2005-06	**2004-05**	**2003-04**	**2002-03**
Baker County	3.7	4.3	4.0	3.7
Clay County	1.9	1.9	1.9	2.2
Duval County	**6.6**	**5.9**	**5.1**	**4.6**
Florida	3.4	3.1	2.5	2.7
Nassau County	2.0	1.7	2.3	2.0
St. Johns County	3.5	3.0	2.9	3.1
Source: Florida Department of Education, Jacksonville Community Council, Inc.				

Here, too, DCPS is not unique in struggling to reduce its dropout rate; other First Coast districts have seen increases in it as well. DCPS is, however, the only First Coast district that has not yet brought its dropout rate below four percent, and it is the district that saw the largest increase in the dropout rate.

[1] Florida's high school graduation rate is the percentage of students who graduated within four years of their initial enrollment in ninth grade, not counting deceased students or students who transferred out to attend another public school outside the system, a private school, a home education program, or an adult education program. Incoming transfer students are included in the appropriate cohort based on their grade level and year of entry (Phone conversation with Bethany Wester, Education Information and Accountability Services, Florida Department of Education, April 25, 2007.)

[2] The dropout rate in Florida is the percentage of students in grades 9 – 12 (from the year's total enrollment who have withdrawn from school and have been assigned a dropout withdrawal reason code. Dropout withdrawal reasons include voluntary withdrawal from prior to graduation, failure to meet attendance requirements due to excessive absenteeism, discontinuance of attendance with whereabouts unknown and certain other reasons. (Florida Department of Education, Guide to Calculations for the Florida School Indicators Report and Florida Information Note, Dropout Demographics in Florida's Public Schools and Dropout Rates.)

Trend data on student achievement – results from the state's annual FCAT exam – are also mixed.

FCAT SCORES – FOUR-YEAR TRENDLINES *Percent of Students Achieving Level 3 or Higher*[3]							
	Duval County Public Schools					Florida	
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2005	2006
Grade 4[4]							
Reading	57	60	67	71	64	71	66
Math	42	47	55	60	60	64	67
Grade 8							
Reading	43	45	40	42	43	44	46
Math	48	49	50	54	58	59	60
Grade 10							
Reading	33	34	33	32	32	32	32
Math	55	58	62	66	69	63	65
Source: Florida Department of Education							

In Math, DCPS students made real gains between 2002 and 2006. While fourth and eighth graders lag their peers around the state somewhat, DCPS tenth graders have surpassed them. The trajectory of improvements in reading is more uneven. Fourth graders made steady gains between 2002 and 2005, though they slid back in 2006. Older students, however, continue to struggle to develop their reading skills; in this area, DCPS are like their peers across Florida.

Through the Forum sessions and the extensive qualitative and quantitative data analyzed and discussed in them, a series of core learnings emerged, which directly informed the plan of action the Foundation has crafted to guide its work in the coming years.

[3] According to Florida's Sunshine State Standards, a student who scores at Level 3 or higher on the FCAT is considered to be proficient or at grade level. The Florida Department of Education defines a student who has attained Level 3 as one who "has partial success with the challenging content of the Sunshine State Standards, but performance is inconsistent."
[4] Grade 4 data is provided to align with National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reporting.

ESSENTIAL LESSONS

Presenters at the Forums and the deliberations of participants surfaced many significant lessons that spurred further discussion, investigation and debate. The most essential lessons are those that provide direction for future Foundation work. These lessons fell into three broad categories – education and education reform, the community's critical role in education reform, and the role of philanthropic and other not-profit organizations in similarly promoting education reform. These learnings are outlined below.

Education & Education Reform

- Education reform is a complex and often messy business that does not occur overnight; urgency about results must be balanced with the patience to innovate successfully.
- The achievement gap must be the issue of central concern for Duval County Public Schools and the community. There are various factors that contribute to the gap, including family structure and support, community history, "cultural" values, educator attitudes and expectations, and resources.
- Successful reform to eliminate the achievement gap requires every stakeholder to believe that all children can learn to the same high level.
- Leadership at the school level is critical. Effective principals provide valued instructional guidance and create a culture that prizes high levels of learning by both teachers and students. For principals like these, teacher turnover is rarely a problem.
- Rigor – in expectations, in the curriculum and in instruction – is critical if efforts to reduce the achievement gap are to succeed.
- There is no silver bullet when it comes to reforming schools. Strengthening teaching and improving learning is a challenging endeavor that requires vision, persistence, time and hard work.
- Sustainable education reform requires a systemic approach, not the pursuit of individualized projects.
- Schools and school districts must be organized to meet students' needs, not the preferences of adults.
- Promoting equity in expectations of student learning, teacher quality and funding, among other things, are central to promoting excellence.
- Teachers and teaching matters; effective reform focuses on building teacher content knowledge and pedagogical skills.
- Transforming teaching and learning and improving outcomes for *all* students surpasses the capacities of school districts no matter how visionary their leaders and dedicated their staff are; school districts must have assistance in pursuing systemic reform.
- District and school reforms must be data-driven. Clear and meaningful data should be used in developing a reform plan and in monitoring its implementation.
- Reform efforts must focus on specific objectives to be attained through aligned strategies and coordinated resources; district and school leaders and supporters of reform must resist distractions that may deter them from reaching those objectives.
- Students are most vulnerable to failure during times of transition – from home to elementary school, from elementary to middle school and from middle school to high school; these turning points demand innovative and comprehensive strategies to engender student success.

- Schools and districts need help in learning how to engage and collaborate effectively with community organizations.

The Community's Critical Role in Education Reform

- Knowledgeable community support and active involvement is critical to the success and sustainability of comprehensive reform and should be deliberately fostered through a multi-faceted, inclusive community engagement plan.

- Family involvement in student learning is central to student success; promoting this involvement is sometimes a difficult endeavor that requires patience, persistence and respect for differences.

- The diverse and sometimes critical voices of families and the communities must be heard and respected if the schools' efforts to improve learning for all are to be absorbed and respected.

- There are numerous community assets that will help promote and sustain reform; it is critical to map these assets so that they may be deployed successfully.

- Community beliefs about public education are often based on perception and assumptions, which may not reflect accurate information.

- The community's history of racial discrimination has powerfully affected the conditions under which today's students learn; we will not be successful in our efforts to improve education for everyone unless we confront issues of race and related issues of class.

- Reform must be inclusive; all stakeholders, including family and other community members, must have an opportunity to share their concerns and contribute to shaping reform's goals and activities.

- Accurate, accessible and independent data are essential to build public knowledge about and support for public schools.

- Voluntary leadership from the community to advocate for, galvanize and coordinate reform is critical. Without it, community support for reform is often piecemeal and haphazard, where it exists at all.

- Everyone connected to public education – students, parents, teachers, school and district leaders, community stakeholders – must commit to and meet high expectations.

- Parents' support for the specific schools their children attend is not the same as support for the district; parents often have a positive regard for their children's schools but view the district overall as faring less well.

- Cultivating trust is essential to build effective relationships between districts and community organizations seeking to collaborate on reform. In the absence of trust between schools and parents and districts and community organizations, the past can overshadow the future, curtailing any reform effort.

- Building public will differs from engaging the public. Engaging the public fosters its awareness of an issue and its importance. Building public will provides the public with the knowledge, tools and opportunities to take action to influence policies and practices. Both need to be undertaken to support reform.

- "The public" must be defined broadly and include those who are perceived to be disengaged or having little to contribute. Parents, in particular, must be brought into efforts to improve their children's academic experiences and outcomes.

- Communicating with the public effectively and building their will and capacity to become involved in reform requires a comprehensive plan and coordinated action at multiple levels and by multiple people.

The Role of Philanthropic & Other Non-Profit Organizations in Education Reform

- Outside stimulation – such as calling attention to emerging concerns or providing access to new ideas, research and expertise – is often essential to prompt or enhance district reform.

- Outside organizations can best foster systemic improvement by both supporting the school district and also demanding improvement. This "push-pull" function requires mutual trust on the part of the district and the external organization.

- Community-based efforts to support district reform must add value to the reform. They should be shaped with awareness of and aligned with district goals and activities and should be coordinated with other community efforts to improve public education.

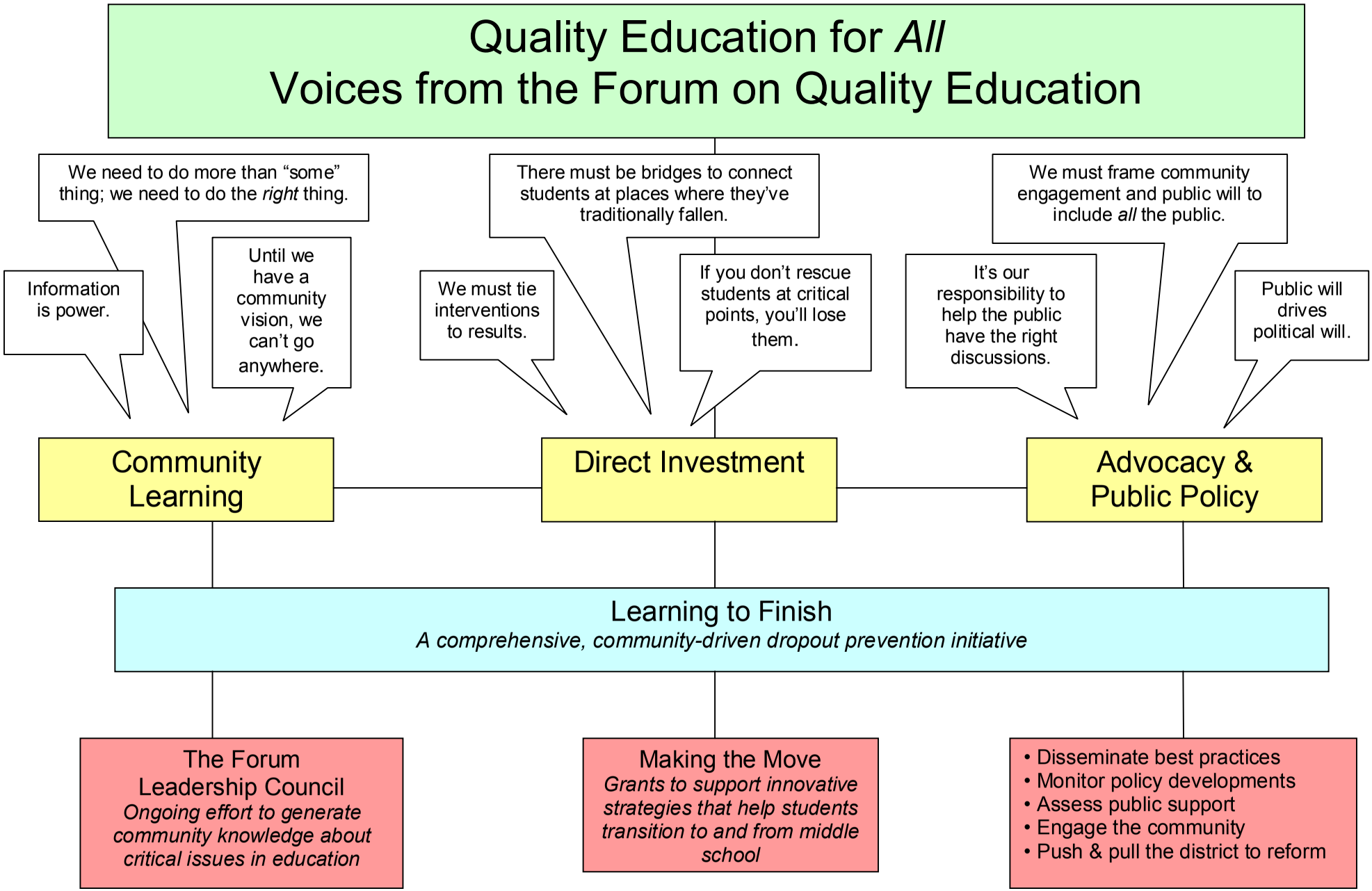
- In seeking to add value to district reform, community organizations must be willing to take measured risks; they typically have greater capacity to test innovative ideas and new strategies than districts do.

- Community-based initiatives and programs intended to improve outcomes for students and promote reform should be aligned with one another so that the resources of individual organizations can be leveraged for greater impact.

- Community organizations, particularly foundations, are usually well-positioned to bring together diverse stakeholders to address common concerns.

- Philanthropic organizations have credibility among stakeholders across the community, enabling them to effectively disseminate information to multiple audiences.

The lessons from the Forum were both a product of what Forum members heard from outside experts and their own spirited discussions. These lessons and the perceptions of Forum members have significantly influenced how the Foundation will implement the next stage of the Quality Education for *All* initiative. We look first at how the perceptions of the Forum have influenced the design of the Foundation's program and then turn to the program itself.


Quality Education for *All*
Voices from the Forum on Quality Education
We need to do more than "some" thing; we need to do the *right* thing.
Information is power.
Until we have a community vision, we can't go anywhere.
There must be bridges to connect students at places where they've traditionally fallen.
We must tie interventions to results.
If you don't rescue students at critical points, you'll lose them.
We must frame community engagement and public will to include *all* the public.
It's our responsibility to help the public have the right discussions.
Public will drives political will.
Community Learning
Direct Investment
Advocacy & Public Policy
Learning to Finish
A comprehensive, community-driven dropout prevention initiative
The Forum Leadership Council
Ongoing effort to generate community knowledge about critical issues in education
Making the Move
Grants to support innovative strategies that help students transition to and from middle school
• Disseminate best practices
• Monitor policy developments
• Assess public support
• Engage the community
• Push & pull the district to reform

AN ACTION PLAN FOR CHANGE

As it moves forward, the Foundation will continue to rely on the vision and the recommendation of the Forum as it extends the Quality Education for *All* framework, which, as described above, is comprised of three strands of activities:

- Community Learning
- Direct Investment
- Advocacy and Public Policy

The Forum will play a role in each of these synergistic categories that intersect with and inform one another. For example, among the key learnings that emerged from the Forum, part of the Community Learning strand, was the recognition that the community has and must fill an active role in systemic reform and that there are many existing community-based efforts to support schools and improve outcomes for students. This led the Foundation and other key stakeholders such as Duval County Public Schools, United Way, and Jacksonville Children's Commission to undertake a "mapping" of community assets in two forms, both of which are described below.

The activities of the three strands have intersected in another way – in each, the Foundation has sought to build capacity, encourage collaboration and foster community engagement. Going forward, the Foundation intends to continue to do so. Using the QEA framework, the chart below outlines the key initiatives of the Foundation's action plan for the next phase of its work.

	COMMUNITY LEARNING	**DIRECT INVESTMENT**	**ADVOCACY & PUBLIC POLICY**
CAPACITY	+ Asset mapping (LTF) + Identifying best practices (LTF) + Data analysis (LTF) + The Forum	+ Testing new strategies (MTM) + Assessing outcomes (MTM) + The Forum + Leadership development + Teacher quality	+ Monitoring policy developments + Disseminating best practices + Push & pull the district to reform + The Forum
COLLABORATION	+ Collaboration with DCPS, JCC, United Way, Pew Partnership (LTF) + The Forum	+ Collaboration with DCPS (MTM)	+ Building community partnerships + The Forum
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT	+ Community organizing/coalition building (LTF) + The Forum	+ Dissemination of learnings and best practices to DCPS educators (MTM)	+ Providing information on educational issues + Solicit community input and monitor feedback + The Forum
**MTM represents Making the Move and LTF represents Learning to Finish; both are initiatives within the QEA Initiative*			

These initiatives are described below by the QEA strand in which they fall.

In addition to the initiatives identified above, however, there is one initiative that the Foundation has embarked on that crosses all three strands – Learning to Finish, a comprehensive, community-driven dropout prevention effort.

Learning to Finish

Learning to Finish (LTF) is a five-year dropout prevention effort that relies on community involvement to address the challenge of dropouts on multiple levels and using multiple interventions. Its goal is to increase the number of students who graduate from three high schools, Nathan B. Forrest, Englewood,

and Terry Parker High Schools, which are participating in the initiative. (School-based activities as well as other LTF elements are described below.) Like all of the QEA initiatives, it bears the hallmarks of building capacity, encouraging collaboration and fostering community engagement. It also combines elements of community learning, direct investment and advocacy.

LTF is a collaborative effort between the Foundation, DCPS, the United Way of Northeast Florida, the Jacksonville Children's Commission and the Pew Partnership for Civic Change, a nonprofit civic research organization affiliated with the University of Richmond.

Forum members, Foundation and partner staff, after examining data about the dropout rate in Duval County and its implications for the community, agreed that reducing the number of students who drop out and increasing the number of students graduating on-time is imperative. In 2006, the DCPS dropout rate was 6.6 percent and the graduation rate was 60.5 percent. Both of these statistics are considerably worse than those of other First Coast districts (see chart on page 5) as well as that of the state, which had a dropout rate of 3.5 percent and graduation rate of 71 percent in 2006. In some high schools in the county, the dropout rate was over 7 percent, and the graduation rate was less than 50 percent. The consequences of this for students and for the community are profound. Compared to those with a high school diploma, students who drop out are more likely to:

- Be unemployed
- Have low incomes, often at the poverty level
- Require greater public assistance
- Be incarcerated[5]

Additional research suggests that high school dropouts are more likely to experience poor health and that their children are at greater risk for also leaving school before completing high school than the children of those who successfully graduate, which can result in generations of families living in poverty.[6, 7]

Beyond this, a high dropout rate undermines efforts to build a skilled workforce in the Jacksonville area, one that can attract and retain high-paying, growth industries such as those in the information technology field. With this information in hand, Foundation and partner staff understood that any efforts to narrow or eliminate the achievement gap must focus substantially on those who are at-risk of not completing their education. This understanding came from more than data. The work of the Forum had increasingly focused on these at-risk students and the need for comprehensive interventions to ensure that they will stay in school and graduate. At the same time, grantmaking in the Direct Investment strand of work had grappled with the need to provide smooth transitions from one level of education to another. Complementary activities reinforced powerful conclusions about the need for focused efforts to see that all students remain in school and graduate.

Impressed by the activity already underway to close the achievement gap and the commitment of community leaders to do so, the Pew Partnership for Civic Change selected Jacksonville to be one of two national sites to implement its new community-driven dropout prevention model. The model has five core elements:

- Academic support, in particular to rising sixth and ninth grade students, in partnership with parents, schools and community organizations
- Implementation of proven dropout prevention strategies
- A community-wide discussion on the challenge of dropouts and possible solutions
- A "mapping" of existing "stay in school" resources in the community
- An evaluation plan to assess progress

[5] American Youth Policy Forum. Issue Brief: Dropout Prevention and Recovery. http://www.aypf.org/projects/briefs/DropoutPreventionRecovery.htm. Accessed April 12, 2007
[6] Ibid.
[7] U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Dropout Rates in the United States: 1992 (1993a).

Implementing the model will be a genuinely collaborative undertaking by all partners – the Foundation, DCPS, United Way, the Jacksonville Children's Commission, and the Pew Partnership. It will be informed also by the ongoing work of the Forum. A Leadership Council, including leaders of partnership organizations as well as other community stakeholders, has been established to provide direction to LTF work. The Leadership Council is being led by Cindy Edelman and Jim Van Vleck, members of The Community Foundation's board, and, more importantly in this instance, leaders of the Foundation's work in the Forum on Quality Education. Their participation in the Forum has given them extensive insight into DCPS, the challenges it is confronting, including dropouts, and educationally sound responses to these challenges.

In addition to the Leadership Council, a partnership planning team comprised of lead staff from each partner organization has been created; it has been charged with responding to the directions provided by the Leadership Council and is tasked with, among other things, gathering and analyzing data, developing resource inventories, and recommending strategies based on identified best practices. The Community Foundation, which is providing $100,000 in support annually to LTF, is staffing the partnership. The Pew Partnership will assist the Jacksonville partners with all elements of LTF, especially organizing the community, surfacing best practices, and gathering and analyzing data to identify specific factors within DCPS and the community that contribute to the dropout rate.

The dropout rates of the three high schools – Nathan B. Forrest, Englewood, and Terry Parker – significantly exceed that of the district, as indicated by the chart below

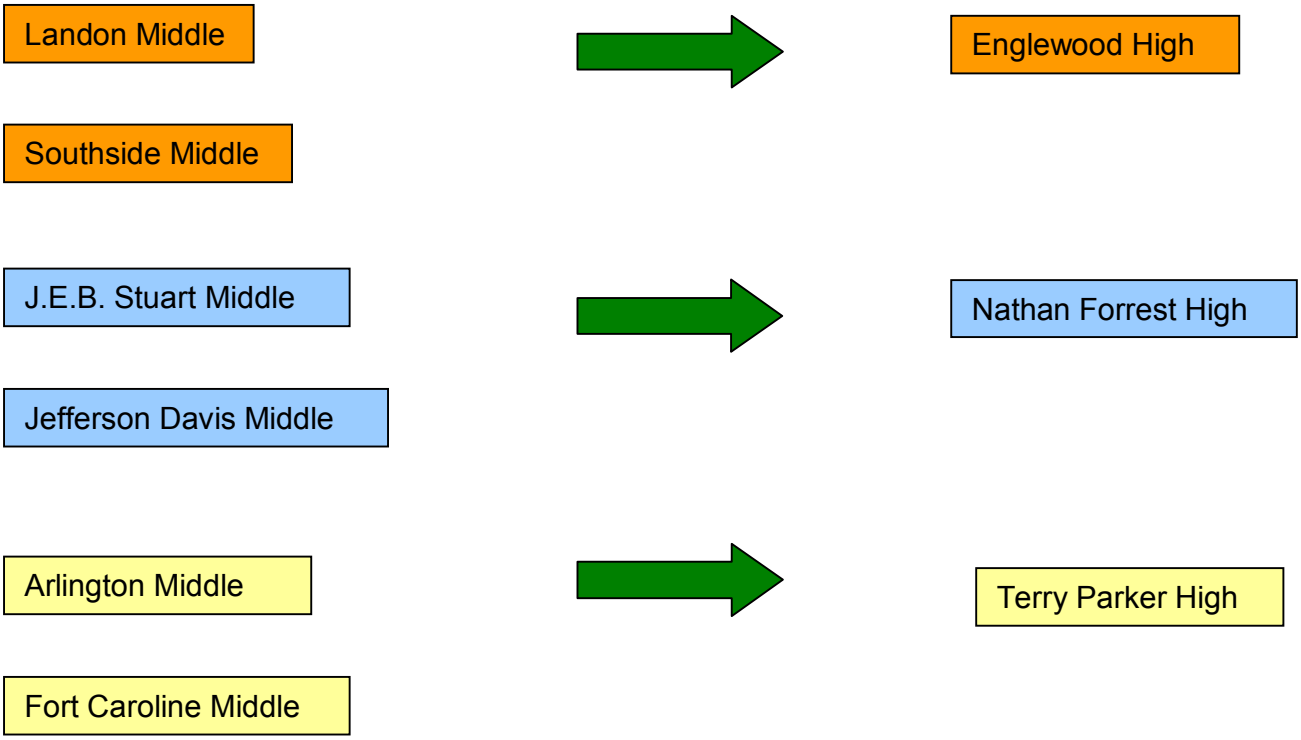
	Nathan B. Forrest	Englewood	Terry Parker	DCPS	Florida
Dropout Rate 2005-06	10.8	7.9	8.6	6.6	3.5
Graduation Rate 2005-06	37.6	43.8	47.8	60.5	71.0

The three high schools, each of which has an enrollment of more than 2,000, serve students who are at increased risk of dropping out – students who are low-income and minority. In addition, results of student achievement tests reveal that the schools are struggling to meet the academic needs of students. The percentage of students who graduate confirms this struggle. In all of the high schools, fewer than half of the students who enroll graduate. This is well below the district's graduation rate as well as that of the state.

	Nathan B. Forrest	Englewood	Terry Parker
Enrollment 2006	2,077	2,204	2,124
Percent Minority	66	56	60
Percent Eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch	35	40	35
Percent 10th Graders Scoring Level 3 or Higher – 2006 FCAT Math	59	54	57
Percent 10th Graders Scoring Level 3 or Higher – 2006 FCAT Reading	24	18	19
SAT Score (2004-05)[8]	891	868	949
Graduation Rate (2005-06)	37.6	43.8	47.8

[8] The scale of the SAT exam in 2005 went up to 1600. In Florida that year, the average SAT score was 996, the third lowest average score in the nation; as the chart reveals, these three high schools had an average score below that of the state.

As noted, the six middle schools that feed these high schools are also participating in Learning to Finish. Their inclusion is critical. Research has revealed that, while most students who drop out of school do so during their high school years, especially in the ninth and tenth grades, their disengagement from school begins earlier, in middle school. To be effective, then, dropout prevention efforts must not only reach out to high school students but to middle school students as well. The participating middle schools and the high schools into which they feed are:



These six middle schools are similar in many ways to the high schools into which they feed. They are large schools – five of them have approximately 1,000 or more students – and they serve primarily minority students, many of whom are also low-income.

	Landon	Southside	JEB Stuart	Jeff Davis	Arlington	Fort Caroline
Enrollment 2006	656	1,126	1,203	1,763	999	974
Percent Minority	71	54	66	62	66	70
Percent Eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch	64	62	63	51	64	58

In terms of students' academic success, these six middle schools are faring somewhat better than the high schools, but they also face some large challenges, as is indicated on the chart below.

FCAT SCORES 2006 *Percent of Students Achieving Level 3 or Higher*							
	Landon	**Southside**	**JEB Stuart**	**Jeff Davis**	**Arlington**	**Fort Caroline**	**DCPS**
Grade 6							
Reading	48	54	54	58	46	44	58
Math	31	34	29	34	26	30	41
Grade 7							
Reading	37	45	55	51	51	51	59
Math	26	35	33	35	34	38	49
Grade 8							
Reading	26	31	28	34	27	35	43
Math	46	48	48	45	46	50	58
Source: Florida Department of Education							

In general, sixth and seventh graders did better in reading while struggling in math. Conversely, eighth grade brought a significant decline in reading scores and sizable gains in math. While this pattern was typical across the district, students in these schools trailed their peers across Duval County. With only one exception – the sixth graders at Jefferson Davis Middle in reading – a smaller proportion of students in these schools scored at Level 3 or higher than across the rest of the district. Given that research has found that poor achievement is both an indicator of and contributor to students' disengagement from school and a factor in their decision to drop out, these scores are troubling.[9] The LTF partners will also gather data on attendance, grade retention and other indicators of risk for dropouts.

This array of data made clear to leaders and staff of the partner agencies, DCPS and the Pew Partnership that these schools and the students they serve need Learning to Finish.

In its first calendar year, 2007, the focus of LTF will be on Terry Parker and its feeder schools, Arlington Middle and Fort Caroline Middle schools; the experiences of these schools will be used to guide implementation of LTF in the other two high schools and four middle schools in early 2008. Going forward to the first full year of LTF, extensive quantitative and qualitative data, including feedback from students and their families, has been and will continue to be collected from Terry Parker and its feeder schools related to the dropout and graduation rate. A preliminary scan of community-based support programs in the area served by the schools is also being conducted; this information will be used to connect at-risk students to existing summer programs. In addition, best practices in dropout prevention are being identified and will be shared with school and community stakeholders.

These student-focused activities are only one aspect of the comprehensive approach to reducing the dropout rate that the Foundation and DCPS are taking through the Learning to Finish initiative. As noted, LTF includes other critical areas of work that the Jacksonville partners are pursuing with assistance from the Pew Partnership.

[9] American Youth Policy Forum. Issue Brief: Dropout Prevention and Recovery. http://www.aypf.org/projects/briefs/DropoutPreventionRecovery.htm. Accessed April 12, 2007

One of the most positive learnings to emerge from the Forum was that there are already multiple institutions, organizations and individuals across the Jacksonville area working on aspects of the challenge of dropouts. Many of them, however, are doing so in isolation; their efforts are not connected and, in many instances, they remain distant from district- or school-based initiatives with similar aims. In short, too few students who need them know about and have access to these programs. There are, as well, organizations with assets – certain areas of expertise, skills, programs or other resources – that could make valued contributions to preventing students from dropping out. As a result, there are great opportunities to leverage existing efforts by "mapping" them, connecting them to schools to expand student access and, as appropriate, coordinating their work. "Mapping" entails identifying organizations that are currently or could be brought into a dropout prevention campaign as well as the specific assets they would bring to the effort – identifying those organizations, for example, that could provide academic support to students or those that, having connections to and credibility with them, could help build parents' knowledge about effective strategies to keep their children on track to graduation.

After completing the preliminary scan of community assets in the vicinity of the schools so that implementation can begin, a more comprehensive mapping will be undertaken by partnership staff in collaboration with the Arlington Collaborative, currently planned as an extension of the Full Service School oversight committee. The collaborative will be a task force of school and community stakeholders from Terry Parker and its feeder middle schools. With deep community knowledge and connections, task force members are well-positioned to map community assets in their area. As with the preliminary scan, findings will be shared with school and community stakeholders so that existing local assets can be better utilized.

The collaboratives – each feeder pattern of schools will have one – are critical to the overall success of LTF. Not only do they have a central role in asset mapping, but they are also essential in facilitating community engagement, another core element of LTF.

Engaging the community and actively involving it is critical to achieving LTF's goal. Some people across Duval County are already aware of dropouts as a growing challenge; many, however, are not. They do not realize how many students are lost each year, even from their own neighborhood schools, or the profoundly negative consequences of leaving school for the students themselves and for the community. Often, even when they do recognize and understand the consequences of dropping out, they do not have the resources or knowledge to begin responding to the problem. A core element of LTF is raising awareness of the dropout problem among local residents and mobilizing them to enable positive change – helping them to respond effectively by various mechanisms to the needs of the schools in their neighborhoods and the students that these schools serve. This may mean, for example, helping parents and families better support and direct their children to graduation or encouraging the development of new dropout prevention strategies by either nonprofits or other local organizations – an employer may, for example, institute a mentoring program for rising sixth or ninth graders.

As is the case with asset mapping, the LTF partners will turn to the local collaboratives of school and community stakeholders to engage and mobilize the community. With assistance from the Pew Partnership, the LTF partners will help collaborative members build coalitions of local stakeholders who can contribute to dropout prevention through existing or new efforts.

In addition to community engagement and organizing work through collaboratives in the areas that surround the three high schools, the LTF partners, with aid from the Pew Partnership, are crafting a comprehensive campaign that will seek to generate significant awareness of the growing urgency of preventing dropouts across all sectors of the Jacksonville community. Beyond raising awareness, the campaign will provide information about and facilitate access to existing dropout prevention resources as well as spurring the development of new ones that incorporate best practices. It will also, in line with findings of the Forum, support strategies that engage parents and seek to give them greater voice.

Across this array of activities, LTF will build capacity, encourage collaboration and foster community engagement. Through it, there will be new levels of communication and collaboration across diverse sectors of the community and a precedent, hopefully one that will be built on, for coordinated community

action. At the forefront of this new collaboration are the LTF partners, in particular the active participation of DCPS. School districts, usually under constant scrutiny and a target of frequent criticism – some earned, some not – are often reluctant to participate fully in collaborative change efforts. Even when prodded to participate, it is difficult for district leaders and even classroom teachers to be fully open. DCPS leaders and staff are embracing a different direction; they are genuinely open to and are full participants in LTF. This is in part due to their active participation in the Forum, through which they were able to share not only information but also their insights into particular issues and their experiences in attempting to resolve them. In the Forum's setting, they were able to have meaningful discussions with stakeholders and move beyond some myths and misconceptions about public education. This, in turn, enabled them to begin establishing relationships with key community stakeholders, which could be leveraged to foster reform.

Beyond this new level of collaboration, LTF will also result in new capacities for participants, from members of local collaboratives to LTF partners. Members of the collaboratives, bolstered by new relationships, will have a new set of skills they can apply to other challenges. Similarly, LTF partners, including the Foundation and DCPS, will have gained valuable experience in designing and leading a community-wide initiative, which they can apply to other complex situations and challenges.

Direct Investment

Direct investments enable immediate change and are valuable for that alone. They do more than this, however. They are intended to build knowledge about critical issues that influence the achievement gap. This commitment to building knowledge affirms a key lesson of the Forum – reforms must be data driven. Very often reforms are instituted because they are popular; scant attention is paid to the educational theory underlying them, to the process of implementing them or to their impact on teachers and students. As a result, such reforms rarely have the hoped-for effect. The reform efforts supported through the Direct Investment strand are different.

Direct Investment grants, which support innovations at the school level, generate new learnings. They enable educators to test ideas, confirm or deny the assumptions underlying the ideas and evaluate implementation strategies – in short, these grants lead to the production of verifiable quantitative and qualitative data that will enable educators at all levels of DCPS to make better decisions for their students. Reforms will be instituted based on reliable data and with clear expectations of outcomes; they will not be pursued because they are the reform "flavor of the day."

Making the Move: Transitions to Middle School

As noted above, the centerpiece of the Direct Investment strand of QEA is the Foundation's "Making the Move: Transitions to Middle School" grants program (MTM). Through this program, the Foundation is providing grants of up to $10,000 a year to middle schools that have identified or developed initiatives to help sixth graders successfully adapt to their new environment. In doing so, they are focusing on easing the transitions between one level of schooling and another.

MTM is closely aligned with Learning to Finish. The transition from elementary school to middle school is a critical period for many students. They are moving from relatively small schools where they spend most if not all of their day with one teacher and know their classmates well, to much larger schools where they spend their days rotating from class to class and teacher to teacher. In this environment, teachers have little time to forge positive relationships with most of their students. In addition, many students have a difficult time establishing friendships with their new peers, who may be from a number of elementary schools. Eight elementary schools, for example, feed into Southside Middle School, one of the LTF middle schools. Adding to the swirl of uncertainty that surrounds sixth graders as they begin middle school are significant physiological changes that affect their physical, social and emotional development. In short, the move to middle school can be very stressful for many students.

Despite these difficulties, some students adjust well to middle school. Others, however, do not. They may be overwhelmed by new academic expectations and overlooked by harried teachers. They may be intimidated by older students or even other unfamiliar sixth graders. Simply navigating a much larger building may invoke anxiety for some of them. As a result of these and similar concerns, some middle school students begin to falter academically, withdraw socially, skip school, misbehave or demonstrate their frustrations and fears in similarly negative ways. All of these responses increase the likelihood that these students will ultimately drop out. Research has indicated that middle school students who do poorly in school, lack social supports, are often absent or have disciplinary problems are more likely to leave school before graduation.[10] [11] These students may not officially drop out until high school, but, as early as sixth grade, they are already beginning to believe that school is not the place for them.

In the short term, then, MTM is designed to ease students' entry into middle school, which should result in increased or at least stable academic performance and a decrease in absenteeism and behavior problems. In the long term, these changes should result in fewer dropouts.

The 2006-07 school year is the second year of the MTM program. Six schools have participated to date; schools selected for funding during the first year were re-funded to continue and expand their work during the second.

The strategies that the schools have chosen to help students' transitions vary. The centerpiece of Kirby-Smith Middle School's efforts, for example, was a four-day summer camp for incoming sixth graders prior to the start of the school year. Activities focused on team building and orientation; a half-day component for parents was included. Twin Lakes Middle School chose a different approach. Among other things, sixth grade students and teachers visited feeder elementary schools to meet fifth graders who would be enrolling the following fall. The fifth graders and their teachers, in turn, visited the middle school. Northwestern Middle School focused on academic readiness. A six-week curriculum was developed for presentation to students at the end of fifth grade; the curriculum emphasizes math and reading and is taught by sixth grade teachers and academic coaches. These are a sampling of the different innovations teachers and administrators at the six MTM schools are testing.

School and Foundation staff are currently assessing initial outcomes of the MTM grants. While the assessment is not yet complete, preliminary data indicate positive results for students. At one school, for example, discipline referrals and tardies among sixth graders dropped significantly during the first quarter of the school year.

In keeping with its commitment to generate and share new learnings, the Foundation has hosted several meetings for MTM recipients in which they shared their experiences and learned from one another. Based on these discussions, several schools made changes to their programs, seeking to heighten their impact.

Looking to the future, the Foundation is taking steps to share what has been learned thus far through the MTM grants with middle school leaders throughout DCPS. The Foundation is organizing "Making the Move: Transitions to Middle School Summit," a conference that will be held in August 2007 for middle school principals and their faculty members who lead efforts to ease students' transition to middle school. Current MTM participants will share results with their colleagues; in addition, there will be presentations by experts as well as break-out sessions in which participants can discuss various issues connected to transitions in greater detail.

Another future shift the Foundation is contemplating for MTM is greater alignment with Learning to Finish. Given their shared focus on improving high school graduation rates, the Foundation may provide grants to some of the LTF middle schools, focusing on eighth to ninth grade transition.

[10] Mullins, Emmett R. and Judith L. Irvin. "Transition to Middle School," Middle School Journal. January 2000.
[11] Wells, Amy Stuart. "Middle School Education – The Critical Link in Dropout Prevention." ERIC/CUE Digest No. 56. 1989. www.ericdigests.org/pre-9213/middle.htm. Accessed 4/15/2007.

Advocacy and Public Policy

Through the Advocacy and Public Policy strand of the Quality Education for *All* initiative, the Foundation seeks to foster changes in policy that reflect the learnings that are surfaced in and generated by the activities of the other two strands. As it has throughout QEA, the Foundation is embracing a collaborative approach in these efforts. In doing so, it recognizes the power of leveraging resources and voices of multiple institutions.

A core activity of the Advocacy and Public Policy strand is the dissemination of best practices to educators within the district and stakeholders outside of it. Making the Move and Learning to Finish will both generate critical new knowledge about effective practices to keep students on track to graduation, which will be relevant to the district and to the community. The Foundation, working with others, will gather this information and get it out to multiple audiences who can act on it.

The Foundation will also work with others to monitor developments in policy at the federal, state and district levels and assess their impact on public education in Duval County. It will then share its findings with its partners in QEA activities as well as with the broader community. Given the marked increase in state and federal activity in public education in recent years, undertaking this work is critical. Among other things, the Foundation will follow state policies that affect education, local and district developments, and federal legislation, including the reauthorization of the federal No Child Left Behind Act, which has significantly shaped what happens in every classroom in Duval County.

Recognizing that public support is critical for the successful institution of new policies, particularly those that result in significant changes in traditional ways of operating schools and districts, the Foundation will also continue to "take the pulse" of the community. Using surveys, focus groups and other data collection tools, the Foundation will periodically assess the community regarding a variety of issues including its view of DCPS and existing and proposed reform efforts as well as its knowledge of various educational issues. These data will help the Forum and its partners in reform activities, including DCPS, engage the community in productive discussions and actions to improve education.

Community engagement remains a priority for the Foundation, DCPS and other stakeholders in the community. Forum members, drawing in part on their own experience of participating in the Forum, have been strong advocates for providing information on critical educational issues to the public. With limited awareness of the connections between public education and the future development and health of the Jacksonville area as well as little knowledge about core issues within education, the public has limited ability and few reasons to become involved in reform efforts.

As it will in its efforts to engage the community and, in fact, throughout the QEA initiative, the Foundation will work with DCPS' superintendent, Dr. Joseph Wise, and others within the district. In this, it will perform two functions – pushing as well as pulling the district to reform. In pushing for reform, it will serve as a resource to the district – it may, for example, provide assistance with the district's outreach and communications strategies. It may help the district develop new policies regarding transitions based on learnings from MTM or establish new structures to align community-based dropout prevention efforts with the district's own.

In pulling the district to reform, the Foundation will act more as a critical friend. It will call attention to important issues within DCPS or in the community that present hurdles to student success. In doing so, it will encourage the district to take action, drawn from identified best practices, to eliminate those hurdles.

Community Learning

In designing the QEA initiative, the Foundation held that building community knowledge about critical issues within education, specifically those that most directly shape student outcomes in Duval County, was vital. Its experience with the Forum has confirmed this belief. Facilitating learning across the community is a core component of building its capacity to undertake collective action to promote positive

change in public education – and collective action inherently requires communication and collaboration to succeed.

The Forum on Quality Education

For its members from all sectors, including those who are educators, the Forum on Quality Education has been a powerful learning experience. It developed their knowledge of critical issues within education and helped them explore possible responses to them. As important, the Forum helped to begin building a sense of shared responsibility among participants for public education and probed the potential of community-driven efforts to assist DCPS in closing the achievement gap and improving outcomes for all students.

As the QEA initiative is evolving and turning greater focus to action, so too is the Forum shifting. As it proved very valuable to both participants and the Foundation, both supported its continuation. Going forward, it will meet quarterly instead of monthly. Among other things, the Forum will:

- Rreview and provide advice on the activities of the three QEA strands
- Identify emerging needs and surface strategic opportunities to respond to those needs
- Offer guidance and feedback on the development and implementation of public engagement strategies
- Serve as a vocal and visible advocate for public education
- Carry on the process of exploration and learning so that it may continue to inform and offer guidance on the QEA initiative.

The Forum will have continuing substantive input into all of the three strands of the Quality Education for *All* initiative. In addition, Forum members will be deeply and directly involved in formulating the overall approaches that will treat each of the strands as related parts of a strategic whole. In doing so, the Forum will:

- *Access knowledge*. Forum members will continue to pursue understanding of complex educational issues and the various political, social and economic contexts that bear on these issues; they will also become more familiar with best and most promising educational practices and their impacts on the achievement gap. They will as well investigate and consider policies – on the local, state and federal levels – that affect the status and performance of students in Duval County.

- *Advise the Foundation on Quality Education for All.* The Forum will serve as a principal advisor to The Community Foundation as it implements the various strands of the Quality Education for *All* initiative. It will receive regular updates on the work of each strand, suggest opportunities for enhancements or expansions, advise on midcourse corrections and provide insight into how interim successes can be extended. Individual members of the Forum will be asked to serve on various advisory committees for each element of the initiative.

- *Align efforts*. The Forum will work to ensure that the various pieces of the educational reform enterprise in Duval County operate together. The Forum will promote strategic alignments among education reformers so that their initiatives add increased value to the work of the school district; at the same time the Forum will encourage deeper and continuing connections between reform initiatives generated by DCPS and those that come from the outside.

- *Advocate for Change.* The Forum will use its knowledge of the community, its understanding of educational issues, and its familiarity with best practices to advocate for change in policies and practices that serve as obstacles to eliminating the achievement gap. Forum members and the Forum as a whole will surface issues, speak to the need for change and engage the community in efforts to develop increased public will for deep and sustainable education reform. In doing so the

Forum will work to support promising policies and practices proffered by DCPS and, at the same time, will encourage the district to actively pursue these strategies.

As with the Foundation's approach to the entire Quality Education for *All* initiative, it is impossible to chart the precise course that the Forum will follow. What is clear, though, is the Forum's fidelity to values that have emerged gradually since its inception and that are sure to guide its work in the future. The Forum's deliberations will be informed by respect and trust. Its approaches will be flexible and its strategies opportunistic – the Forum will seize the moment as it arises. Above all, the Forum and its members will, as they go forward, promote robust and positive change boldly and innovatively.

LOOKING AHEAD

The time is ripe for change in Duval County's schools. The district's new superintendent is committed to reform, and he strongly believes that the community has a role in developing and implementing that reform. He sees this role, moreover, as central to reform's success, not peripheral. As such, he is genuinely open to collaboration with community agencies, a significant shift from previous district administrations. Progress is clearly being made in the eight areas in which the superintendent is focusing his reform efforts: solving overcrowding, high school redesign, accelerating literacy achievement, adding rigor, relevance and relationships to K-8, advancing math and science, staff development, community engagement, and Standard Bearer Schools. In each of these initiatives, the superintendent has identified opportunities for community engagement and partnership.

Beyond the pivotal changes within the district brought by the superintendent, there are also significant developments outside of it, which are laying the foundation for meaningful education reform. The developments are based in and driven by the community and community organizations. They include:

- The exploration by the Alliance for World Class Education, a long-time supporter of educational improvement in DCPS, of strategies to expand its role as a local education fund (LEF). Doing so will enable the Alliance to provide more comprehensive support to the district for reform.

- The engagement of Teach for America, through the efforts of DCPS, The Community Foundation, committed individuals and other philanthropic organizations as well as other community groups, which will bring a cadre of enthusiastic young teachers to some of the district's neediest schools.

- The continued contributions of the Schultz Center for Teaching and Leadership, a community-founded nonprofit organization that provides high quality professional development to teachers across First Coast districts.

- The community-wide commitment to ensuring that young children are ready for school through RALLY Jacksonville, an early literacy initiative created by Jacksonville Mayor John Peyton and carried out by multiple partners including the Jacksonville Children's Commission, the Early Learning Coalition, Episcopal Children's Services, The Florida Institute of Education, Florida Community College Jacksonville (FCCJ), HeadStart, Nemours and United Way.

- The expanded investment by Mayor Peyton and the Jacksonville City Council in vital mentoring and summer programs for youth, which are run by the Jacksonville Children's Commission, an active member of the Forum.

- The ongoing leadership of and investment by United Way in critical initiatives, including Full Service Schools, that provide an array of aligned support services to children and youth. In addition to existing efforts, United Way is also undertaking new initiatives to increase high school completions and close the achievement gap.

- The initiation of community dialogue by the Jacksonville Community Council, Inc. (JCCI) to raise awareness about, identify sources of and create recommendations to address the achievement gap.

- The long-term focus on education by the Jacksonville Regional Chamber of Commerce, which, often through collaborations with others, has influenced public education reform. In partnership with DCPS, FCCJ and other business entities, the Chamber's contributions include the creation of 11 Career Academies as well as the Blueprint for Prosperity, a community-wide plan to increase per capita income.

- The sustained attention on and advocacy for improving educational outcomes by the Florida Community College Jacksonville (FCCJ). The college recently opened Pathways Academy, an innovative charter school in response to the high school dropout problem.

These efforts, several of which are described in greater detail in Appendix C, comprise fertile ground on which to nurture systemic reform. These and other developments do more than align directly with the Foundation's decade-long commitment to help transform public education. Taken together, they reflect a civic awakening about the critical importance of an excellent education for everyone to the long-term well-being of Duval County and its residents. They signal also a willingness by many in the community to break free of the constraints of the past to embrace a future that is defined by opportunity.

The Quality Education for *All* initiative represents an ambitious philanthropic effort to gather and target civic resources to ensure that the promise of this future is realized. In two years, much has already been accomplished that is rooted in the potential that an informed community has to foster meaningful and sustainable education reform. Through the Community Learning strand of the initiative, the Foundation has created the Forum to serve as an active learning organization and to surface new possibilities for effective citizen involvement. The Forum has brought people together, nurtured trust among them, considered best practices, generated new knowledge and presented options for community-driven reforms. Equally important, the Foundation has, through the Forum, blended diverse perspectives into a new and potentially powerful voice for lasting improvement.

At the same time, the Foundation has made direct investments in schools. These investments have had a measurable impact on how students' attitudes towards school and on the culture of the schools themselves. Future investments will build on these accomplishments and the learnings that arise from them to positively affect student performance.

Finally, the Foundation, through the work of the Advocacy and Public Policy strand, has begun to explore how knowledge and action can impact public decision-making. In addition to sounding out public opinion, it will, in the coming years, pursue effective collaborations to promote public engagement and build public will to support reform.

The Foundation has made a long-term commitment to fostering significant and sustainable improvements in public education through the QEA initiative and its three strands of activities over the next eight years. Because contexts change and new opportunities arise, it is impossible today to define the precise path the Foundation will pursue in the years to come. It is clear, however, that in the near future, each of the three strands will be more intertwined and the learnings and results from each will influence the actions of the others. Throughout all of its future activities, in addition to providing financial resources, the Foundation seeks, as it has with the Forum, to gather diverse individuals to participate in an array of aligned activities that, taken together, comprise an emerging action agenda for educational improvement. The Forum will continue to play a lead role as the Foundation moves from learning to action.

Appendix A: The Forum on Quality Education Membership

Ann Baker – Philanthropist and former chair of The Community Foundation in Jacksonville

Terrie Brady – President of Duval Teachers United, the union representing Duval County public school teachers

Nancy Broner – 2004-2005 chair of Duval County School Board

Rena Coughlin – President and CEO of the Nonprofit Center of Northeast Florida

Judge Brian Davis – Serving the Fourth Judicial Circuit of Florida

John Delaney – President of the University of North Florida

Cindy Edelman – Trustee of The Community Foundation in Jacksonville and co-chair of the Quality Education for *All* initiative

Ronnie Ferguson – Executive Director of the Jacksonville Housing Authority

Eleanor Gay – Trustee of The Community Foundation in Jacksonville and liaison between Quality Education for *All* and the Blueprint for Prosperity

Cheryl Grymes – Executive Director of The Alliance for World Class Education

Connie Hodges – President of the United Way of Northeast Florida

Linda Lanier – Chief Executive Officer of the Jacksonville Children's Commission

Wally Lee – President of the Jacksonville Regional Chamber of Commerce

Chip Leonard Jr. – Graphic arts teacher at Wolfson High School and Duval County's 2005 Teacher of the Year

Sherry Magill – President of the Jessie Ball duPont Fund

Kenneth Manuel – Member of the Florida Council of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and a member of the Jacksonville NAACP Education Committee

Jay Plotkin – Chief Assistant State Attorney of the Fourth Judicial Circuit of Florida

Ed Pratt-Dannals – Chief Academic Officer of Duval County Public Schools

Rachel Raneri – President of the District Advisory Council, Duval County Public Schools

Jake Schickel – Partner, Coker, Myers, Schickel, Sorenson & Green

Bob Shircliff – Philanthropist and former chair of The Community Foundation in Jacksonville

Robert Threlkel, MD – Pediatrician

Jim Van Vleck – Special Assistant on Early Literacy to the Mayor of Jacksonville and trustee of The Community Foundation in Jacksonville and co-chair of the Quality Education for *All* initiative

Steve Wallace – President of Florida Community College at Jacksonville

Nina Waters – President of The Community Foundation in Jacksonville

Delores Barr Weaver – Chief Executive of the Jacksonville Jaguars Foundation, director of the Weaver Family Foundation and former trustee of The Community Foundation in Jacksonville

Dr. Joseph Wise – Superintendent of Duval County Public Schools

Appendix B: Forum Summaries

Forum One – An Overview of Education in the Community

The focus of Forum One was on explaining the Quality Education for All Initiative, including the need for and purpose of it, to Forum members as well as their role in it. It was also an opportunity to begin providing members with information about why education matters and why meaningful reforms are so urgent, particularly in light of socio-economic changes already underway in the area.

Presentation – "Current and Emerging Issues in Education in Duval County," led by Dr. Harold Hodgkinson

Key Presentation Points Include:

- Changes in education ripple through all sectors of the community and developments in other sectors affect education.
- Plans to improve education must consider the contexts and anticipated needs of schools in 20 years, not merely the ones they have today.
- The Jacksonville area is growing beyond Duval County; the area will become more multi-county than single county.
- As area grows and changes, Jacksonville must not ignore its suburbs nor should the suburbs ignore Jacksonville.

Key Learnings Include:

- Much of what we think we know about public education is based on what we perceive or assume.
- Information is critical in shaping accurate understandings of what's happening in schools and across the district.
- There is no silver bullet when it comes to reforming schools. Strengthening teaching and improving learning is a challenging endeavor that requires vision, persistence, time and hard work.

Forum Two – Education in Duval County: Considering the Past, Preparing for the Future

The second forum introduced members to key concepts and issues in education, which spurred discussions of how those issues affect schools in Duval County. It also provided members with an opportunity to reflect on developments in the history of Duval County Public Schools that shape education today and can inform decisions and actions in the future.

Presentation – "Confounding Terms: What Are We Talking About?" led by Ed Pratt-Dannals, Associate Superintendent, Duval County Public Schools, and Cheryl Grymes, Executive Director, Alliance for World Class Education

Key Terms Reviewed include:

- No Child Left Behind
- Class Size Amendment
- Florida A+

Key Learnings Include:

- NCLB is the broadest involvement of the federal government in K-12 education to date.
- NCLB and state legislation (Florida A+) differ on key issues. These differences could slow reform.

- Despite the strict requirements of NCLB, states are allowed to develop their own definitions and standards on many issues, leading to considerable differences between them. This includes how states define students' proficiency in subject areas, which makes state-to-state comparisons difficult.

Presentation – "Public Education in Duval County: Significant Events," led by Nancy Broner, Duval County School Board. The presentation included a graphic timeline, which was used to guide and encourage discussion.

Key Presentation Points Include:

- DCPS has faced significant challenges in the past, particularly around race and desegregation as well as quality and governance.
- Past decisions affect the district today such as the establishment of schools to avoid desegregation and magnet schools.
- There is a need to have greater input from the community and a deeper understanding of what they want for students.

Key Learnings Include:

- How contentious issues were dealt with in the past can provide insight into how similar ones could be addressed successfully in the future.
- The district has made progress in some critical areas; it has not remained bogged down in past troubles.
- Much of the progress has resulted from collaboration.
- Engaging the community in meaningful ways in school reform remains a challenge.

This Forum featured the preparation by The Community Foundation, of a comprehensive timeline, in graphic form, of key events in the history of education in Duval County. The original of the timeline has been presented to the school district by the Foundation and copies have been distributed throughout the community.

Forum Three – Transforming Education: An Introduction to What Communities Can Do

The third forum was designed to expose members to some of the different strategies that communities have used to foster school and district improvement.

Presentation – "Enhancing Public Education through Public Engagement: How Communities Can Mobilize to Support Effective Public Schools," led by Wendy Puriefoy, President, Public Education Network

Key Presentation Points Include:

- There is much more known today about creating successful schools, which serve all students effectively including minority and low-income students, than ever before.
- Creating a constituency for reform – particularly one that includes people without children in public schools – is a challenge.
- Public dollars can be used to leverage private dollars.

Presentation – "The Chattanooga Story: The Value of Effective Partnerships in School Reform," led by Dr. Jesse Register, Superintendent, Hamilton County (TN) Department of Education

Key Presentation Points Include:

- The culture of most high-poverty, high-minority schools is dysfunctional and accepts students' academic failure.

- Teachers, principals and other stakeholders should have a voice in creating reform; it should not be imposed on them.
- Accurate and timely data is essential for improving instruction.
- Districts cannot reform themselves on their own; they need help from partners.
- Poor and minority students can master rigorous curricula and attain high levels of achievement.
- The key to closing the achievement gap is improving the quality of instruction; value teachers and help them develop the skills and knowledge they need to be effective.

Key Learnings (Both Sessions) Include:

- Race continues to be a powerful and often divisive factor. It should be addressed instead of bypassed.
- Building trust among a district and its partners in reform is essential to reform's success.
- Accessible and accurate data can diffuse distrust among stakeholders.
- Sustainable, deep change requires a systemic approach, not the pursuit of individualized projects.
- Flexibility is critical; different schools have different needs.
- Changing attitudes, beliefs and habits takes time and effort.
- The reform process must be inclusive; all stakeholders, including family and other community members, must have an opportunity to share their concerns and contribute to shaping reform's goals and activities.
- Active and knowledgeable community support is critical for educational success.

Forum Four – Where We Are; Where We're Going

Forum Four provided an opportunity for members to revisit the timeline provided in the second forum, reflect on the issues presented in earlier sessions, and discuss what they were learning.

Presentation – "Final Updates to the Timeline," led by Nancy Broner, Duval County School Board

Key Additions to the Timeline Include:

- Issues that had a significant impact on DCPS were desegregation/racial issues, disaccreditation and changing demographics.
- The Jacksonville Chamber of Commerce attempted to foster the involvement of the business community in education through its "Academy for World Class Education" but the academy was not sustained.
- Two significant amendments to Florida's constitution were passed – the class size amendment in 2002, which limited the number of students per class, and the pre-kindergarten amendment, which requires students to have access to voluntary pre-kindergarten classes.

Presentation – "Lessons from the First Three Forums/Looking Ahead," group discussion

Emerging Learnings:

- The quality of education is influenced by many things, some of which play out beyond classrooms and schools. Influential factors include family circumstances, community support, civic leadership, state and national policies, and a global economy.
- Duval students and schools present markedly different profiles of performance on state and national assessments of progress.
- Accurate, accessible and independent data are essential to build public knowledge about and support for public schools.
- Many Forum participants consider inadequate funding to be a major impediment to providing an excellent education for all of Duval County's students.
- The achievement gap is an issue of central concern for DCPS. There are various factors that contribute to the gap including family structure and support, community history, "cultural" values, educator attitudes and expectations and resources.

- Successful reform requires every stakeholder to believe that all children can learn, not solely a select group of them.

Forum Five – The Duval Schools: Organization, Authority, Funding and Constraints

In response to requests by Forum members, Forum Five provided an overview of how DCPS functions – how it is organized, who has authority, the sources of funds as well as how they are spent and issues that limit the district's options or actions.

Presentation – "Duval County Schools: Organization, Authority and Funding" led by Nancy Snyder, DCPS Chief of Staff, Charles Wright, Assistant Superintendent of Organizational Effectiveness, DCPS, and Marsha Oliver, General Director of Communications, DCPS

Key Presentation Points Include:

- Overview of DCPS:
  – Approximately 130,000 students and more than 15,000 employees including about 8,000 teachers; it is the 20th largest district in the nation.
  – 165 schools divided into six regions
  – Strengths include number of National Board Certified teachers, magnet school program, success in improving "F" schools
- Role and responsibility of school board and how they are differentiated from those of the district administration.
- Role and responsibility of superintendent and how they are different from those of the school board.
- Overlapping centers of accountability (federal, state, school board, administrators, teachers) creates confusion.
- Culture of system is on ensuring compliance, not cultivating teaching.
- School funds come from multiple sources; state is largest source.
- There are many restrictions on and requirements for how funds are spent.

Key Learnings Include:

- The culture of district is insular and based on compliance; changing it will take time.
- Much of what happens in and around school districts, such as monitoring compliance with federal and state regulations, has little to do with teaching and learning and can be a big distraction to them.
- District leaders have limited flexibility in what they can do and how they can do it.
- Regulations, such as reduced class size, often have unintended consequences of which legislators or other decisionmakers are unaware.
- The system exists to meet the needs of people – most particularly students and teachers – a belief that can be forgotten or overlooked.
- There are many organizations undertaking numerous efforts to help schools and the district. Uncoordinated, these efforts can be distracting and a drain on scarce resources; coordinated and aligned with district goals, they can be a powerful mechanism for change.

Forum Six – Understanding Accountability

The sixth forum unpacked the concept of accountability, offering a discussion of what it is, what it means in operation and what impact it has on schools and districts. Overlaying this discussion was another one regarding NCLB and Florida A+, the federal and state education reform initiatives that contain far-reaching and, at times, competing accountability systems.

Presentation – "Overview of NCLB and Florida A+ and Their Local Impact" led by Maree Sneed, Partner, Hogan & Hartson, and Mary Jane Tappen, Deputy Chancellor for K-12 Student Achievement, Florida Department of Education

Key Presentation Points Include:

- By 2014, NCLB requires that all students be "proficient" in math and reading.
- Districts are accountable for ensuring that every sub-group of students makes progress annually toward the 2014 goal.
- The interpretation and implementation of NCLB, including the definition of "proficient," varies by state.
- Inequities in resources affect student success; affluent schools are less likely to earn an "F" under Florida A+.
- Attracting and retaining highly-qualified teachers is an ongoing challenge for low-performing schools.

Key Learnings Include:

- NCLB established a new, more transparent level of accountability for schools and school districts. Under NCLB, schools and districts must provide accurate and accessible information about all students, including those at-risk for poor academic performance, which few did prior to the legislation.
- Getting the most effective teachers into the schools that need them the most is a challenging and complex process; influencing factors include allocation of funding, school leadership, federal legislation, teacher salary, and routes to certification.
- Low-performing schools can successfully change and their students can thrive academically.
- While much is known about successfully reforming individual low-performing schools, of which there are growing examples, much less is known about reforming school districts; no school district has yet transformed itself so that every school is high-performing.

Forum Seven – Teaching Matters

In the seventh forum, members delved into critical aspects of teaching, the factor that has the most influence on students' academic success.

Presentation – "Current and Emerging Issues in Teaching," led by Dr. Barnett Berry, President, Center for Teaching Quality

Key Presentation Points Include:

- No state or district has yet created a coherent system of teacher development.
- Observations reveal that in Duval County:
  – New teachers get the most challenging assignments
  – High teacher turnover suffocates school improvement
  – Teachers are overwhelmed by numerous and conflicting state and local policies
  – Teachers are hungry for new teaching strategies and the time to learn and use them
- To ensure that every student has a good teacher, districts should:
  – Get serious about enforcing teaching standards
  – Invest strategically in teacher education and professional development
  – Ensure that administrators embrace teacher leadership
  – Redesign schools so good teachers can use their knowledge and skills

Panel Discussion with Teachers – "Teacher Voices: Teaching and Learning in Duval," Chip Leonard, Wolfson High School, Jennifer Dames, Ribault Middle School, Danny Williams, Wolfson High School, Pam Vandergriff, West Riverside Elementary School

Key Presentation Points Include:

- Teachers in DCPS rarely participate in the most effective types of professional development experiences, such as mentoring and coaching, which enable them to gain new skills and knowledge, test using them and gathering feedback on them.
- Students bring many challenges to the classroom that teachers are ill-equipped to address.
- Principals have an essential role in assisting teachers grow professionally, and their ability to guide teachers must be built.

- The community can make critical contributions to students' academic experiences and to improving outcomes for them.

Key Learnings Include:

- Most teachers want to learn, they want to be as effective as they can be in the classroom.
- Teachers accept accountability systems; their concern with such systems is the fairness and utility of them.
- Many teachers accept having their performance assessed; their hope is that such assessments will be used to help them improve, not simply to remove them.
- Schools and school districts are often organized to meet adult needs, not those of students.
- Good principals are more than good building managers; they are good teachers of teachers.
- There are many good teachers in DCPS who work hard and need continued support.
- Improving teaching and learning requires a change of beliefs and practices; without these changes, the results will continue to be the same.

Forum Eight – Closing the Achievement Gap: What It Will Take

The final forum of the 2005 – 06 school year focused on the achievement gap – the persistent gap in academic achievement between minority and low-income students and their majority and upper-income peers. In this session, members explored its causes, its implications and how it might be eliminated.

Presentation – "Raising Achievement and Closing the Achievement Gaps in Duval County," led by Russlynn Ali, Director, Education Trust West

Key Points Include:

- Children who begin with less before school, get less when they are in it.
- To be meaningful and effective, reform must require that every student, regardless of background and circumstance, learn at the same high level.
- African-American and Hispanic students are making progress in closing the gap in lower grades. By middle school, however, the gap begins to widen, and there has been no progress in reducing the gap in high school. By the time they graduate, black and Hispanic students are four years behind their white peers academically – they typically demonstrate the knowledge and skills of eighth graders not the twelfth grade students they are.
- The gap begins before students enroll in school; many low-income and minority students are unprepared for the classroom.
- The children are not flawed, the system is.
- Levers for reform include:
  – High standards and a rigorous curriculum for all
  – Expanding instructional time and using it effectively
  – Monitor and measure student achievement frequently
  – Teachers matter most
  – Money matters – how much and how it is used
  – Schools are closing the gap – learn from them
- In pushing for systemic reform, ask:
  – How much should be spent on whom?
  – Who is teaching whom?
  – What are the expectations of different schools and students? How are high standards maintained for all students?
  – How should classrooms and schools be organized to best serve students?

Key Learnings Include:

- Set student goals high; encourage rigor and provide sufficient supports.

- The reasons there has been less progress in closing the achievement gap among older students are unclear.
- Hard questions should be asked of schools and districts but focus should be on finding solutions, not placing blame.
- Promoting equity in expectations, teacher quality, and funding, among other things, promotes excellence.

Forum Nine – District Vision and Forum Role

The ninth forum began by considering previous forums, including learnings that had emerged during and from them, and turned to discussions of the district's vision for the future and the hope the Forum could contribute to the realization of that vision in a meaningful way.

Presentation – "Review and Discuss Year One Report, *Defining Quality: Determining Strategies*," led by Robert Kronley.

Key Learnings Include:

- There are many organizations within the community that already operate programs that can be drawn upon to improve outcomes for students.
- The programs offered by these organizations are not aligned with one another nor are they aligned with district reform efforts. This lack of alignment is reduces the overall and even individual impact of these organizations.
- The district is genuinely open to and desires input from the community.
- The district should be to be forthright in stating what it needs from the community and what it does not need.

Presentation – "Our Readiness and Capacity to Transform All Our Schools into World-Class Institutions," led by Dr. Joseph Wise.

Key Presentation Points Include:

- There is much already happening in Jacksonville to support youth and improve outcomes for students that form a strong foundation for reform.
- Dr. Wise is committed to providing stable, long-term leadership to the district as it pursues reform.
- The community has to own reform; doing so requires there to be a clear, easily understood vision that all can "hook" onto.

Key Learnings Include:

- As all sectors of the community need to be involved in reform, reform must address the needs of all students in all schools, even those that appear to be doing well.
- Reform should not be "one-size-fits-all." The attributes and needs of students and schools vary; to be successfully implemented, reform strategies must be tailored to meet these unique needs.
- The past must not set the course of the future. Those pursuing reform, both inside and outside the district, must not be distracted or intimidated by previous improvement efforts that collapsed.

Forum Ten – Community Collaboration: An Overview

The tenth forum was designed to facilitate an exploration of the roles that community organizations can fill in promoting educational reform as well as the relationships between these organizations and the school district, including how they function, what benefits result from them and how they can be strengthened to bolster reform efforts.

Presentation – "Panel Discussion: Reflections from the Field," led by Melanie Patz of United Way, Dolly Dillin of the Jacksonville Children's Commission, Cynthia Harpman of Kesler Mentoring, and Jake Schickel of Career Academies.

Key Presentation Points Include:

- There are community organizations already providing services to children and youth to help ensure their academic success and healthy development.
- These organizations often find that their impact is curtailed due to, among other things, lack of resources, volunteers, and information from schools and the district.
- There are many more students in need of the services provided by these organizations than can be met.
- Awareness about the programs offered by community organizations is often scant among students and their families.

Key Learnings Include:

- The school district and community organizations can and do work well together.
- Community organizations can provide supports to students that the district and schools are unable to.
- Successful collaborations between the district and community organizations are not guaranteed. They require, among other things, attention and guidance, leadership and deliberate facilitation, trust and a willingness to take risks, and, in many circumstances, external funding.

Presentation – "Great Intentions, Mixed Results," led by Dr. Jim Williams, Chief Officer for Community Engagement and Organizational Development, DCPS.

Key Presentation Points Include:

- The district is seeking to raise awareness of the need for and institutionalize community engagement by establishing the Office of Community Engagement.
- Family support – however "family" is defined – is critical to students' success.
- There is a often a gap between parents and schools; parents often feel unwelcome in schools while teachers and administrators often believe that parents are not open to their overtures.

Key Learnings Include:

- Every child needs an advocate – someone outside of school who will monitor his/her development and speak up on his/her behalf in school if and when it is needed.
- The district recognizes that greater involvement by family members and the community in students' academic lives and in schools will not occur spontaneously; it requires deliberate planning and facilitation.

Presentation – Forum Discussion, facilitated by Robert Kronley

Emerging Learnings Include:

- Trust is central to collaboration, reform and student success.
- Trust can be difficult to build; it is not always intuitive.
- "The community" is not a single, monolithic entity. It is comprised of many different sectors and peoples. Engaging and involving these different sectors and groups will require different strategies. In addition, expectations the contributions and role in reform of these different sectors and groups of people need to outlined and clarified.
- There must be a vision or theme for the district that the array of diverse sectors and groups that comprise "the community" can easily understand, connect to and support.

Forum Eleven – Community Engagement & Public Will: Building Smart Communities

The eleventh forum built on the discussions and learnings of the tenth forum. It continued to examine the role of the community in fostering educational improvement and how effective community involvement can be nurtured.

Presentation – "Public Will, Public Engagement: How Issues Fuel Currency within the Public Realm," led by Suzanne W. Morse, President, Pew Partnership for Civic Change.

Key Presentation Points Include:

- Most people are ready and willing to support reform and will do so if effectively engaged.
- Effective engagement entails, among other things, provided the public with information on why reform is relevant to them and how they can make a practical and measurable difference to the reform effort.
- Reform strategies must be tied to clear and measurable results for people to become involved in and sustain reform.
- Reformers must utilize non-traditional communication methods if they are to reach the full array of people whose support is critical to implementing and sustaining reform.

Key Learnings Include:

- The Foundation, DCPS and others pursuing reform must present a shared and consistent vision for DCPS and its students.
- DCPS, the Foundation and others pursuing reform must be direct in acknowledging challenges – they must be forthright with data.
- Traditional actors in school reform, including the district, civic leaders, the Foundation and others, should invite others in the community into reform efforts and develop with them ways that they can contribute meaningfully to reform.
- Leadership for reform should be shared; it cannot fall solely onto the district nor should the district seek to retain it completely.
- The purpose and objectives of any reform strategy that is being implemented should be clearly stated and outcomes monitored and shared.

Presentation – "Message, Media and Mobilization," led by Brenda Priestly Jackson, Chair, Duval County School Board, Mike Clark, Times Union, Larry Fairman, Fairman Consulting.

Key Presentation Points Include:

- Conveying a single message about the district is not always easy. There are significant challenges, but there are also genuine successes; both should be acknowledged.
- There are now multiple mechanisms, which appeal to and are utilized by different groups of people, to disseminate information. School districts and reformers should reach beyond traditional dissemination methods and use new and emerging techniques.
- Although there are multiple dissemination tools, newspapers remain a primary information source for many people; they are, as well, a significant source of information for the internet.
- Everyone in the community – even those at the fringes – has a role in supporting educational improvement.

Key Learnings Include:

- It is critical to identify the target audiences and to tailor the message and dissemination strategies to each.
- Those seeking reform, including DCPS, the Foundation and other organizations that have traditionally supported educational improvement, must deliberately seek out and include members of the community who have typically been left out of reform.

Forum Twelve – Parents, Communities and Schools: An Action Agenda for 2007

Forum Twelve provided an opportunity for participants to look back upon the previous three forums and consider the learnings that had emerged from them. It was also a chance to learn more about one of the other elements of the Foundation's Quality Education for All initiative, the Learning to Finish program. Finally, participants also looked ahead to consider how the Forum might foster public engagement and build public will for reform.

Presentations – "Looking Back" led by Robert Kronley and "Learning to Finish: Jacksonville Style," led by Pam Paul Dopf

Key Presentation Points Include:

- The Foundation's core goals remain closing the achievement gap, improving outcomes for students, and engaging the public and building its will for reform.
- One area of reform in which the Foundation can add value is transitions – the periods in which students move from level of school to another (i.e. fifth to sixth grade and eighth to ninth grade).
- There is extensive energy and activity in the community directed to education reform and other services that support children and youth. Much of this activity is diffuse, however.
- It is difficult for schools to manage community involvement; often school leaders cannot say "no" to community members/groups offering a service/program even when that service/program distracts from the school's focus.
- Program leaders are working to develop strategies to make Learning to Finish relevant to average citizens.

Presentation – "The Forum's Role: Sharing Perspectives," discussion led by Brian Davis, Ronnie Ferguson, Linda Lanier and Ed Pratt-Danals.

Key Discussion Points Include:

- Widespread community participation is essential to the success of a sustainable reform effort. It is critical to engage community members, particularly those who have not historically been involved, and the Forum can help in this.
- There is extensive activity in the community that has created a context conducive to change; this opportunity should not be allowed to slip away.
- The Forum's work must be narrowly focused and must demonstrate impact.
- There is a need to reinforce high expectations of students and the importance of education to students' long-term well-being (in addition to that of the community).

Presentation – "Giving Voice: Public Will & Engagement – Who do we want to Influence? Why? What will it take?" discussion led by Cheryl Grymes, Sherry Magill, and Joseph Wise

Key Discussion Points Include:

- In the past, educators were often defensive but, within rising awareness that it is the entire community's responsibility to help young people, succeed, they are more open to interaction with community members.
- Despite the emerging willingness to connect to the community, educators do not know how to do so effectively.
- Engaging the public includes helping them understand what's important and what is not and what questions need to be asked.
- There are multiple "publics." All should be engaged.
- Clarity is needed on the purpose of public engagement – once they have been engaged, what should they be encouraged to do?
- One purpose of public engagement is building a sense of public ownership of education.

Forum Thirteen – Focus on Families: Family Involvement

At the thirteenth forum, parents shared their perceptions of and experiences with the schools their children attend and of the district, their hopes for their children and their efforts to support their children's academic success. This was followed by a discussion among several school leaders of their experiences with cultivating parent involvement, particularly parents of at-risk students.

Presentation – "Family Voices and Values," led by Nina Waters; panelists were Julia Garoutte, Charlesetta Jenkins-Barnhill, Tonya Joiner, Debbie Wingo and Dianne Robinson.

Key Discussion Points Include:

- It is important to parents that their children succeed in school.
- Many parents have a positive perception of public schools, even when they run into challenges with the particular schools their children attend.
- Parents want the specific needs of their children addressed.
- Parents believe that student success is a responsibility they share with schools; they recognize schools cannot do everything.
- It's difficult for working parents to be involved in school activities.
- Some problems with students develop because they are bored in school and/or because their schoolwork does not seem relevant to their lives.

Key Learnings Include:

- Parents understand the link between success in education and success in the workplace.
- Schools are uneven in their responses to individual students' needs; much depends on the principal.
- When given an appropriate and accessible path, many parents will become actively involved in their children's schools.
- Schools need to develop new parental engagement strategies that reflect the changes in family structure and daily life.
- Parents will readily use and value community programs that provide academic, social and developmental support to their children; the challenge they confront is lack of information about them.

Presentation – "Making it Work," led by Robert Kronley; panelists were Sylvia Johnson, Principal, Butler Middle School, Nongongama Majova-Seane, Principal, Raines High School, Jim Williams, Chief, Office of Community Engagement, DCPS.

Key Presentation Points Include:

- Parental involvement is critical to student success.
- Workplace demands are the single biggest hindrance to parental involvement.
- When schools do succeed at engaging parents, especially low-income and/or working parents, it's usually because administrators and teachers have used innovative strategies and at times gone "above and beyond" to welcome them.
- Many parents do not know how to approach school administrators and faculty with their concerns about their children.
- Parents need to know what the academic expectations of their children are.

Key Learnings Include:

- High expectations should be set of students and of their families. These expectations, however, must be communicated to them and supports must be provided so that they can reach them.
- New parental engagement strategies that reflect changing family circumstances must be developed and implemented across the district; their use should not be dependent on the insight and willingness of individual school leaders and faculties.

- Teachers and administrators, particularly those who work with at-risk students, need guidance in understanding the circumstances of their students' lives and in developing strategies that meet their needs without compromising high expectations of them.
- Trust must be deliberated cultivated by educators with families.
- Changing the culture of schools so that they are more welcoming and flexible is important.

Forum Fourteen – Aligning Community Assets

The fourteenth forum focused on the community's assets – resources including organizations and individuals, programs, knowledge, funds and more – that could be tapped and leveraged to address some of the critical issues around improving student achievement in Duval County.

Participants were asked to reflect on the various roles and contributions of community organizations to school improvement efforts as well as to consider how these contributions of these organizations could be leveraged. To facilitate this reflection, forum members split into three small groups; each group was asked to answer a specific questions. Their answers are summarized below.

Question One: What are the most important things you have learned about education through your participation in the Forum?

- The community and parents matter; education improvement and student success is impossible without their engagement and support.
- Education systems are complicated organizations, and reforming them requires a long-term immersion in complexity.
- DCPS has had real success on several fronts.
- Reform has many entry points.
- Leadership is essential for real success.
- Effective messaging is critical for community engagement in educational success.

Question Two: What are the most important things you have learned from your participation in the Forum about the community's role in promoting excellence in education?

- Resources must be organized and focused.
- The definition of community must be broadened and all sectors of the community must be involved in education reform.
- Developing new messages is central to community engagement.
- Progress is being made in improving education; sustaining it requires deliberate and strategic action.
- There is significant capacity in the system and the community, which must be built.

Question Three: What messages from this work would you like to communicate to the community about public education? What sectors of the community? For what purposes?

- Effective reform has multiple elements.
- Education is central to community success.
- DCPS has strong leaders.
- Success is emerging.
- Effective communication strategies are critical to promoting reform's success.

Key Learnings Include:

- Forum members recognize the magnitude and complexity of the challenge of closing the achievement gap and improving outcomes for all students but consider neither to be a deterrent to undertaking reform; their commitment to reform and belief in its necessity is deep.
- Existing activities by community organizations to support children and youth are laying the foundation for systemic reform.

- Current community efforts, though promising, are limited in their impact and capacity to promote reform because they are not aligned either with each other or with the district. They may even, at times, serve as a distraction to reform. Given this, aligning them is essential to the success of any long-term, high-impact reform effort.
- Parental involvement is critical to student success and must be fostered through innovation strategies that respond to families' needs.
- There is a difference between encouraging parents to become involved in their own children's academic lives and in encouraging community involvement (including by parents) in advocating for and supporting systemic reform. This difference must be recognized and incorporated into an action plan for school improvement.
- Forum members affirmed their belief that all members and sectors of the community, regardless of their prior connection to the district or schools, have a role in reform.
- A comprehensive community engagement strategy, connected to a long-term plan to build community will, is essential to reform's success.

Forum Fifteen – Designing Future Options

Forum Fifteen provided members an opportunity to explore options for action that the Forum and the Foundation might pursue given what they had learned about education during the preceding months as they talked with each other and with experts.

Presentation – "Small Group Discussion Results: Presentation and Panel Discussion," led by Robert Kronley; panelists were Nancy Broner, Brian Davis and Joseph Wise.

Key Presentation Points Include:

- There is a sense of optimism and hope among many in the community about fostering meaningful change in schools.
- Often the members of the community support change when it does not affect them; when it does, they resist it.
- There are many hurdles to taking bold action including lack of community knowledge and trust and insufficient funds.
- The district often is not well posed to take advantage of unexpected opportunities.
- While recognizing the need to engage the community, the district is not adept at doing so. This lack of sustained and valued engagement of the community by the district undermines any trust between them.
- Scarce dollars often requires districts to chase funds from external sources to support reform, leaving them with little time and ability to introduce proposed reforms to the community.

Key Learnings Include:

- Effective community engagement focuses as much on building relationships as it does on disseminating information.
- Greater trust and stronger relationships between the district and the community would likely enable the district to move more quickly and act more boldly.
- The absence of trust between the community and the district hinders the ability of the district to respond quickly to new opportunities.
- Optimism within the community about the benefits of change does not mean that the community has the capacity to support change.
- The scarcity of funds and need to pursue external funding opportunities when they arise does not preclude the district from planning for and laying the groundwork with the community for reform.

Presentation – "Communication: Examining the Challenge," led by Robert Kronley; panelists were Martha Barrett, Ronnie Ferguson, Sherry Magill and Ed Pratt-Dannals.

Key Presentation Points Include:

- There are different audiences the district must engage, each of which has different needs and different concerns.
- Engagement requires information to flow in multiple directions – it is a structured dialogue.
- The district must engage black students and their families, who have long been at the margins, in meaningful ways that foster trust.
- The district's efforts to foster community engagement are hampered by a lack of staff.
- While the image of the district has improved somewhat, many positive developments have gone unnoticed by the media and the community.

Key Learnings Include:

- Persistent lack of achievement among minority students is the "elephant in the room." It is recognized publicly and within the Forum but not discussed practically by educators with black students and their families or within the black community.
- Effective communication and cultivation of meaningful dialogue requires deliberate planning and skills; it cannot be done haphazardly or by any DCPS staff member. Staff who are going to reach out to the community on behalf of their schools or the district should be given guidance and tools.
- District employees might serve as advocates for schools and the district; it is shortsighted, however, to presume that they can without guidance and training.
- Strategies to engage the public engagement and build its will should include students. Their perceptions, often missed by others including teachers, are vital in understanding problems and addressing them.
- Sharing information often means sharing power or at least inviting questions about decisions and the decision-making process; this can be difficult to do.

Appendix C: Current Community-Driven Education Improvement Efforts

United Way of Northeast Florida

In addition to serving as a partner in the Forum and in Learning to Finish as well as other child-focused efforts in the community, United Way has been a long-time supporter of Full Service Schools (FSS) in Duval County. FSS are collaboratives that bring together local community organizations, social service providers, public agencies and other groups to address the developmental and social needs of at risk students as well as to respond to issues with which their families are struggling. United Way is the administrative and management agency of FSS and provides youth development grants to the FSS sites. The funding partners of FSS are the Jacksonville Children's Commission, United Way of Northeast Florida, Duval County Health Department and Duval County Public Schools. United Way's Helping At-risk Students Achieve partnership began meeting in March 2006. This group of experts and concerned citizens reviewed national and local research and heard from national, state and local experts on the following topics: Why Students Drop Out, Retention, Truancy, Child Mental Health, Family and Community Violence, Students Mobility, Mentoring, Child Abuse, Culture of Learning, Out of School Time and Parent Engagement. In January 2007, the partnership developed a strategy for the investment of United Way funding to increase high school completions. United Way will soon announce new strategies for addressing the achievement gap.

Rally Jacksonville

Led by Mayor John Peyton, Rally Jacksonville is a collaborative early literacy initiative to ensure that children are ready to enroll in school. Partners include the Early Learning Coalition, Episcopal Children's Services, the Florida Institute of Education, Florida Community College Jacksonville, Headstart, Jacksonville Children's Commission, Nemours and United Way. Core elements of the program include:

- Providing literacy kits to the parents of all new babies born in Jacksonville
- A backpack containing reading resources and books to all pre-kindergarteners
- Volunteers who will read to children in childcare centers throughout Jacksonville
- Teams of literacy experts who coach directors and staff in childcare centers to improve curriculum and instruction and overall childcare quality

Jacksonville Children's Commission

The Jacksonville Children's Commission provides and funds a variety of initiatives that support the healthy development of children of all ages and their families. Recently the Mayor and City Council approved additional funding to support the expansion of mentoring and summer camps programs. The expansion of these programs bolsters a critical continuum of youth development supports form quality after-school programs to mental health programs through Full Service Schools. The Commission has been active member of the Forum and also initiated a youth voice project this year called "Peace Jam," resulting in convening and training youth to serve on boards and councils to insure youth needs are at the forefront of community planning efforts.

JCCI

Since 2003, Jacksonville Community Council, Inc. (JCCI) has actively promoted public dialogue and recommended action to address the achievement gap through a citizen-led study and implementation task force on Public Education Reform. Highlighted as major findings were the following:

- The lack of an ongoing dialogue in Jacksonville on important public education issues.
- Childcare facilities do not adequately prepare all children for kindergarten.

- Teachers are not compensated adequately for accepting challenging situations and for bringing low performing students up to grade level.
- Too many middle and high school students fail the FCAT test and do not receive extra help.

In its final report, JCCI recognized The Foundation as being successful in the development of the Forum as the entity leading community-wide dialogue involving major stakeholders. JCCI emphasizes that, while its work has arguably helped pave the way for future progress in eliminating the achievement gap, ultimate success will be measured by statistical progress that has been slow to appear thus far. The sobering graduation rate slippage recently announced in Duval County Public Schools from 2005 to 2006 is a stern reminder that our work is only beginning. Clearly, bringing about fundamental change in individual student achievement is a long-term proposition, and continued diligence in ensuring a quality education for all will be the ultimate legacy of this study.

Jacksonville Regional Chamber of Commerce Education Initiatives

Since 1997, education has been the major focus of the Jacksonville Regional Chamber of Commerce, and it has made a significant contribution to influencing public education reform. Together with regional partner companies and community-based organizations, the Chamber has developed collaborative programs to improve education and workforce readiness. These include partnering with DCPS, FCCJ and business partners in creating 11 Career Academies and several other programs that promote school to work opportunities and address attendance issues. In partnership with the City of Jacksonville, the Chamber also created the Blueprint for Prosperity, a community-wide plan to increase per capita income. Blueprint's recommendations for improving educational outcomes include increasing mentoring and career academies. Blueprint's emphasis on these two issues will help insure more students receive the support they will need to be successful.

Florida Community College Jacksonville (FCCJ)

FCCJ continues to be a strong advocate for improved educational outcomes, recently launching the Pathways Academy**,** an innovative charter school that opened this past year in response to the high school dropout problem. FCCJ is also an active partner with DCPS and the Chamber in increasing the number and quality of career academies, and continues to provide a broad range of alternative educational pathways as well as college and vocational preparation for DCPS students.