

QUALITY EDUCATION FOR *ALL*
THE FIRST FOUR YEARS
2005-2009

A report to our stakeholders

“The goal is to achieve marked improvement in test scores, graduation rates, drop-out rates and college readiness of all students over a 10-year period, and to minimize the gap in performance between schools with high proportions of lower-income or minority students and those with high proportions of wealthier or majority students...A companion goal is to cultivate citizen demand for quality public education, build citizen understanding of and involvement in public education, and encourage parents to expect higher education for their children.”

Quality Education for All:
Paving a Path to Economic Opportunity and Prosperity.
The Community Foundation, 2005

On a muggy August morning, news reporters and TV cameramen crowded into the media center at Jacksonville’s Terry Parker High School to hear Duval County Public Schools Superintendent Ed Pratt-Dannals announce a community-wide effort to reduce the dropout rate – Learning to Finish. Joining Pratt-Dannals at the podium were a host of familiar faces – Jacksonville Mayor John Peyton, School Board Chairman Tommy Hazouri, Community Foundation President Nina Waters, Jacksonville Children’s Commission CEO/Executive Director Linda Lanier and United Way President Connie Hodges – as well as Trey Csar, the first president of the newly-established Jacksonville Public Education Fund.

The public launch of Learning to Finish was a watershed event for The Community Foundation in Jacksonville. Four years earlier, the Foundation had launched Quality Education for All – a bold 10-year initiative to improve public education in Duval County. Learning to Finish was borne out of the work of Quality Education for All. The broad community coalition that would be engaged in Learning to Finish was nurtured and cultivated by the staff of The Community Foundation and its lead partners. And the Jacksonville Public Education Fund, which would oversee and execute the work of Learning to Finish, was created through the efforts of the Quality Education for All initiative.

Shortly before the media arrived for the news conference, lead Foundation staff and key individuals in the Quality Education for All initiative convened privately, both to reflect on the impact of their work to date, and to consider the next steps on their journey. For them, Learning to Finish – important as it is – is just a milestone. Improving public education in Duval County, they know, will require much more than reducing the dropout rate. The challenges are numerous, complex and systemic, and the opportunities for positive change are immense.

Similarly, this report to our Quality Education for All stakeholders allows us, collectively, to pause and take stock, to acknowledge our progress and successes, to revisit our goals, and to contemplate the distance yet to be covered. Learning to Finish gives us encouragement and confidence for the tasks ahead, but there is much more that we have accomplished and much more that we will accomplish in the coming six years.

QEA LEADERSHIP 2005

Initiative Co-Chairs

Cindy Edelman
Jim Van Vleck

Community Foundation President

Nina Waters

Vice President Grantmaking

Cheryl Riddick

Chair of the Trustees

William E. Scheu

IN THE BEGINNING...

Progress is best measured against a starting point. So, where did Quality Education for All start? What were the conditions that contributed to its creation, and what were the conditions that existed at its creation?

Quality Education for All was borne out of concern for the future of Jacksonville – not just the future of public education, but the future of the community as an economically viable place to live, do business and raise a family. In launching the initiative, The Community Foundation recognized the inescapable confluence of economic trends (more jobs requiring more specialized skills), demographic trends (an increasingly diverse and less wealthy population) and education trends (low graduation rates and a disturbing gap in performance between majority/minority and high/low wealth students). It concluded:

“... when the economy of Jacksonville requires a much better educated workforce, our economic potential will rest heavily upon the shoulders of the very people for whom, today, we are least successful at providing a quality education. It is unlikely that we, as a community, will be able to alter the course of economic change. It is certain that we are unable to alter demographics. But it may be possible, as a community, to change the way we educate our children.”

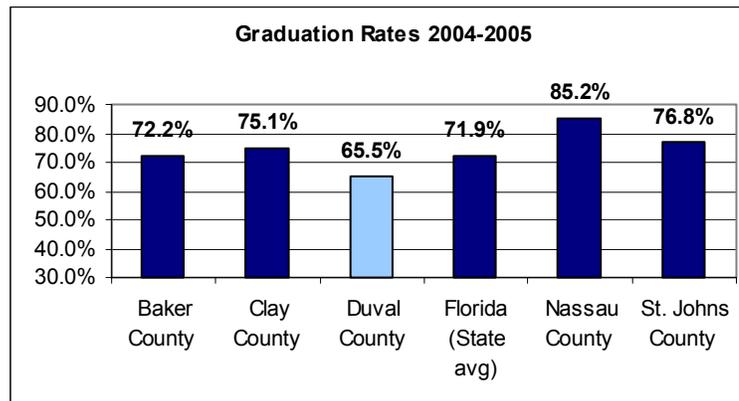
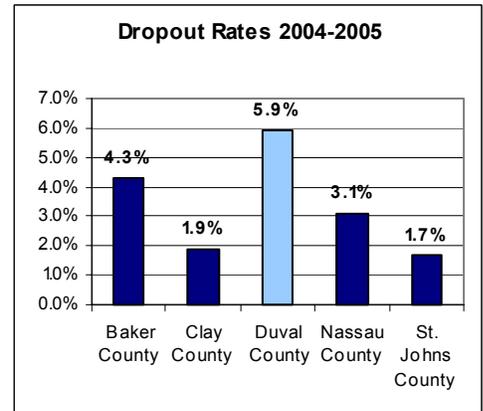
In 2005, at the launch of Quality Education for All,

The Duval County Public School graduation rate was 65.5%, with one out of three students failing to graduate in four years;

The dropout rate, as measured by the State of Florida, was 5.9% - the highest in Northeast Florida;

Two out of three Duval County public high school students could not read at grade level (as measured by the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test);

There were significant disparities in performance among students when sorted by economic indicators, race or geographic location.



TO LEARN MORE

The original report documenting the challenges facing Duval County Public Schools and the community was entitled *Quality Education for All*:

Paving a Path to Economic Opportunity and Prosperity. It can be found at www.jaxcf.org and www.ltjax.org.

QUALITY EDUCATION FOR ALL

COMMUNITY LEARNING
The Forum on Quality Education

DIRECT INVESTMENT
Making the Move - Transitions to Middle School

PUBLIC POLICY & ADVOCACY
Public Opinion Poll

As disturbing as this statistical picture was, an “environmental scan” revealed a community poorly positioned to address these challenges in a meaningful way. Specifically:

Duval County Public Schools were perceived as having weak and inconsistent connections with community-based organizations. In fact, the general perception was that Duval County Public Schools did not encourage community interaction or affiliations with community-based organizations, even as it acknowledged that the challenges it faced were beyond the ability of the school system to address.

Community efforts to work with or in the public schools were disjointed and not aligned. Countless community-based organizations offered well-intentioned supports for public school students. But these efforts were fragmented. Some schools were overwhelmed with assistance, other schools went wanting. As one observer stated, “Help is not always helpful.”

Duval County Public Schools was not strategic in its use of data around student performance. While the school system collected and stored enormous amounts of data on each student, its analysis of this data was lacking, for multiple reasons. Consequently, the district did not have the type of detailed, multi-year picture of students’ progression through school that might identify problems and stimulate change.

Duval County Public Schools’ governance was volatile and the superintendent’s position in flux. In 2005, the district’s superintendent of seven years had resigned and an interim superintendent was in place as the School Board searched for a new appointed leader. The School Board, itself, had a history of erratic public behavior, though by 2005 the board had adopted a more professional and collegial demeanor.

The local education fund – the Alliance for World Class Education – was not focused on public education reform or on increasing community engagement in public education. Its focus was on teacher recognition and helping superintendents manage the back-office functions of the school district.

Not surprisingly, there was weak public will around providing quality public education. In a poll commissioned by The Community Foundation in late 2005, only 34% of the respondents rated Duval County Public Schools as good or excellent.

THE GAME PLAN

The staff of The Community Foundation came to the Quality Education for *All* initiative with a very limited knowledge of the issues surrounding public education. But they were willing to learn, and it was the consensus of the trustees that public education was the *right* issue on which to focus.

Out of the gate, staff and trustees were both bold and careful. They were bold in voice – publicly announcing the 10-year commitment to the initiative and its goals and aims. But they were careful in strategy. They adopted three broad strands of work:

- Community Learning
- Direct Investment
- Public Policy and Advocacy

Throughout the first four years of the initiative, these strands have consistently framed the Quality Education for *All* work, just as they have illustrated the interconnected nature of the different components of the work.

THE FORUM ON QUALITY EDUCATION

Ann Baker

Philanthropist

Terrie Brady

Duval Teachers United

Nancy Broner

Duval County School Board

Rena Coughlin

Nonprofit Center of Northeast Florida

Judge Brian Davis

Fourth Judicial Circuit of Florida

John Delaney

University of North Florida

Cindy Edelman

The Community Foundation

Ronnie Ferguson

Jacksonville Housing Authority

Eleanor Gay

The Community Foundation

Cheryl Grymes

Alliance for World Class Education

Connie Hodges

United Way of Northeast Florida

Linda Lanier

Jacksonville Children's Commission

Wally Lee

Jacksonville Regional Chamber of Commerce

Chip Leonard Jr.

Wolfson High School

Sherry Magill

Jessie Ball duPont Fund

Kenneth Manuel

NAACP Education Committee

Jay Plotkin

State Attorney's Office

Ed Pratt-Dannals

Duval County Public Schools

Rachel Raneri

DCPS District Advisory Council

Jake Schickel

Coker, Myers, Schickel, Sorenson & Green

Bob Shircliff

Philanthropist

Robert Threlkel, MD

Pediatrician

Jim Van Vleck

The Community Foundation

Steve Wallace

Florida Community College at Jacksonville

Nina Waters

The Community Foundation

Delores Barr Weaver

Jacksonville Jaguars Foundation

Dr. Joseph Wise

Duval County Public Schools

PHASE I – LEARNING AND EXPERIMENTING

Quality Education for *All* began with three discreet bodies of work:

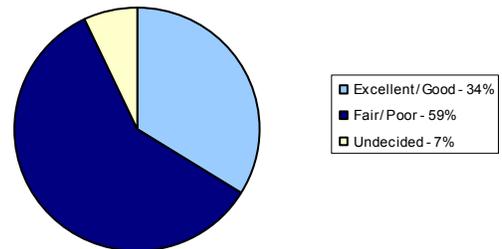
The Forum on Quality Education was the initial community learning activity. Twenty-seven community leaders – including college presidents, philanthropists, civic leaders, the school superintendent, business leaders, teachers and parents – committed to 22 months of half-day meetings dedicated to learning about the challenges of public education nationally and locally, and the paths others were taking to address those challenges.

Making The Move – Transitions to Middle School was the initial direct investment program. Foundation staff recognized that they had limited experience making grants to a public entity as large and complex as the school system. At the same time, there was interest in investing in middle schools, where fewer community partners tended to be active at that time. Making The Move provided relatively small dollar grants (up to \$10,000) to middle schools to design a program that would help rising 6th graders more successfully navigate the transition from elementary to middle school.

A Public Opinion Poll was

the initial public policy/advocacy activity. Foundation staff realized that they needed a baseline of public opinion if they were to measure changes in public perceptions and attitudes over time. The poll, conducted in winter 2005-2006, provided that baseline.

How do you rate the performance of Duval County Public Schools?



While the results of the public opinion poll were predictable, the Forum on Quality Education and the grantmaking program unfolded in some surprising ways.

Members of the Forum arrived with a shared conviction about the need to reform public education, but widely differing views on the causes and solutions to existing challenges.

Because they were a diverse group, Forum members' personal experiences with the school system varied as did their understanding of Duval County's historical struggle with public education. Early meetings were devoted to learning the history of public education in Duval County and sharing personal experiences. (Quality Education for *All* underwrote a comprehensive historical timeline of public education in the county, including a listing of all known public school superintendents – information Duval County Public Schools did not have.)

Through consultant Robert Kronley of Kronley & Associates and a host of guest presenters, Forum members were introduced to the "state of the art" in public education reform. Over time, they wrestled with the challenges of state funding for education, the strengths and limitations of standardized testing in Florida, and the way their local school system was

structured and operated. Because the newly-hired school superintendent was a full participant in the Forum, they became familiar with his vision for the system – and with the struggles he had conveying that message and managing the politics of his position.

In the course of the Forum, three critical changes occurred that were to have long-lasting effects on education reform in Duval County:

The conversation moved from blame to solutions. Initially, some Forum members, like many well-intentioned people, focused on placing blame for the school system's problems – on the school system's stifling bureaucracy, on dysfunctional families, on urban poverty, on parents who "don't care," on popular culture, on violence in the schools, and many other issues. Eventually, however, Forum members recognized that the challenge – and the opportunity – was to work with the students who were there. "Parents send us the best children they have," said Russlynn Ali, director of The Education Trust – West. Public education will be more successful if it focuses on the things that it *can* change (quality teachers, effective curriculum, good educational supports for at-risk students, and so forth) rather than the things it can't change (poverty, family dynamics or what's on television).

The need for stability and consistency over time became apparent. Over the 22-month life of the Forum a new superintendent was hired, spent a stormy and volatile year on the job, resigned amid turmoil and another new superintendent was hired. Because of the superintendent's presence on the Forum, this drama played out in relief and Forum members saw first-hand how politics disrupts the effective delivery of public education. Systemic change takes time. For reform to take root and be successful, a school system and community need to commit to change and stay with that commitment long enough to determine its success.

The lack of community infrastructure to provide stability and support to public education became obvious. While Duval County had a local education fund, it was not meeting the community's needs. There was no entity to hold the school system accountable. There was no anchor for public engagement in public education. There was no community champion for public education.

As these lessons took hold, Forum members also were learning – along with Foundation staff – from the Making The Move grantmaking program. Through Making the Move, two things became apparent:

The school system was not the entity through which to invest grant funds effectively. For reasons as numerous as the bureaucracy was big, moving private money from the downtown office into a middle school for use on a pilot program proved difficult. Eventually, an alternative fiscal agent was located, but the experience highlighted the need for a different kind of community infrastructure that could support public education and be the link between funders and the school system.

Small dollars, invested in strategic programs could make a big difference in student performance. Middle schools demonstrated that students who participated in effective summer bridge programs performed better during the first grading period than

MAKING THE MOVE - Transitions to Middle School

The Community Foundation awarded Making The Move grants to six Duval County middle schools in January 2006:

Darnell-Cookman Middle School
Kirby Smith Middle School
Lake Shore Middle School
Northwestern Middle School
Southside Middle School
Twin Lakes Middle School

GOALS

Helping students transition from elementary to middle school, specifically:

- Reduce disciplinary infractions;
- Minimize student confusion in a new setting;
- Build students' comfort with their new environment;
- Provide skills to support academic performance.

Helping the Foundation learn about the opportunities of grantmaking with a public school system.

students who did not. Discipline problems dropped, attendance improved and academic performance improved. While there were procedural challenges to finding time and staffing for these programs, the school system recognized their merit, and embraced the concept.

Throughout the first 18 months, QEA's learning agenda had been broad, exploring many topics but none in great depth. Making The Move had provided the only real drill-down of learning, looking at what the field, nationally, knew about the risks of transition points in education (from elementary to middle, and middle to high school) and the strategies employed to mitigate those risks.

By late 2006, however, that changed. The Community Foundation connected with the Pew Partnership for Civic Change, which was promoting a new initiative focused on addressing the dropout crisis in public education. This connection proved critical to the evolution of Quality Education for All, and helped propel the initiative into its next phase of work.

PHASE II – BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS & ASKING QUESTIONS

The Community Foundation and the Pew Partnership for Civic Change were well acquainted with one another in 2006. Suzanne Morse, president of the Partnership, had visited Jacksonville multiple times, presenting at a learning day for the Foundation’s Community Building Fund program, among other things.

By summer 2006, Morse was focusing her attention on the national dropout crisis and looking for a few select communities interested in launching programs to address their own dropout challenges. Pew offered technical assistance and a strong national network of experts, but each community would design, manage and fund its own initiative. Jacksonville, as represented by the Quality Education for *All* initiative, was interested and, in August, was named, along with Shreveport, Louisiana, as a pilot site for the Learning to Finish initiative.

From a practical perspective, this meant that the work of the Quality Education for *All* initiative would be heavily focused on graduation rates and dropout rates over the near-term. But the impact of the affiliation actually was far greater.

The challenge for any funder seeking to work in a field as broad as public education reform is finding an appropriate and discrete point of entry. For Quality Education for *All*, that entry point was defined by Learning to Finish. Though Making the Move had focused on middle school students and transitions, it was an exploratory effort – a means of learning and experimenting with grantmaking. There was no expectation that middle-school transitions would be a major focus of QEA long-term. Learning to Finish, however, offered longer-term potential, and the Foundation pledged an investment of \$100,000 a year for five years to the effort.

Learning to Finish also triggered increased capacity within the Foundation: concurrent with the commitment to Learning to Finish, the Foundation hired its first staff dedicated to Quality Education for *All*. During the learning phase, the QEA work had been managed by existing Foundation staff, who juggled a host of other duties. In fall 2006, the Foundation hired Pam Paul, who had a long history of working on children’s issues in Jacksonville, to manage the Learning to Finish initiative and other QEA work for the Foundation.

Perhaps most importantly, Learning to Finish connected Quality Education for *All* and Foundation staff with a broad and strong network of experts nationwide. Staff affiliated with Jobs for the Future, a national organization focused on preparing young people for post-secondary education and career. Staff met and joined the Youth Transition Funders Group, a network of grantmakers focused on educational preparation of youth ages 14-25. Foundation staff visited Boston and connected with a host of experts who were involved in that city’s public education reform movement.

These connections proved valuable over time: in late 2007, Jobs for the Future’s Lucretia Murphy visited Jacksonville conducting training and education sessions for Learning to Finish members. The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation subsequently underwrote the cost of a longer-term engagement between Jobs for the Future, Learning to Finish and Duval County Public Schools. This connected Jacksonville with a learning network of a dozen cities undertaking similar challenges. In late 2008 and 2009, Foundation staff was invited to participate in

QUALITY EDUCATION FOR ALL: NEW CONNECTIONS

Pew Partnership for Civic
Change - Learning to Finish
www.learningtofinish.org
www.pew-partnership.org

Jobs for the Future
www.jff.org

Youth Transition Funders
Group
www.ytfg.org

Grantmakers for Education
www.edfunders.org

Public Education Network
www.publiceducation.org

“Teach For America corps members have a well-earned reputation of elevating school culture as well as a proven methodology in closing the achievement gap. We are thrilled that they have chosen to come to Jacksonville and believe their presence will be invaluable to our overall goals of education reform.”

Jeff Chartrand,
Executive Director of the
Chartrand Foundation

“We have been touched and tremendously gratified by the incredible welcome that we have received from the City of Jacksonville and the Duval County Public School system. The support and perseverance of ... the Duval County School Board, Mayor [John] Peyton, the City Council, and of course, Wayne and Delores Weaver, the Chartrand Foundation, and the rest of our early key financial supporters made our decision to expand to Jacksonville an easy one.”

Wendy Kopp,
founder and president of
Teach For America

the Urban Education Study Tour. Organized by Grantmakers in Education, this tour offered a select group of invitees an insider’s look at education reform efforts in three communities – Boston, Baltimore and Pittsburgh.

The upshot of this networking was a steep ramping up of local knowledge and understanding about the factors influencing the dropout crisis, the new strategies that needed to be used to reach today’s dropouts, and the successes – and failures – that other communities had experienced. It also would prove to be a critical factor in changing relationships and building infrastructure in Duval County.

Just as the Learning to Finish network grew, so did the local network of education reform advocates begun with the Forum on Quality Education.

In fall 2006, Duval County Public Schools, with a new and enthusiastic superintendent, reached out to Teach for America, eager for the national program to establish a site in Duval County. The odds of success were long – Duval County was not on Teach for America’s radar screen and the wait time for new sites typically was several years. Undeterred, the new superintendent and his staff turned to their new acquaintances on the Forum, several of whom were leading community philanthropists. (Among them were Delores Barr Weaver, an influential community leader who was a former Community Foundation trustee, and current trustee and Forum co-chair Cindy Edelman, who would remain a major player in the work for several years.) Through a series of meetings and introductions in early 2007, Teach for America staff learned first-hand about Duval County Public Schools, the Quality Education for *All* initiative and the growing community interest in public education reform. Key Forum members launched a quiet fund-raising campaign and reached out to other community philanthropists. Within 60 days, a total of \$4.9 million had been raised, including a pledge of \$75,000 from the school system – enough to fund the operations of Teach for America in Duval County for the first four years. Teach for America opened its offices in Jacksonville that fall.

Not only was this a remarkable achievement for the community, it illustrated the potential power of the Forum to respond to community needs and engage others in the response. Among those non-Forum members engaged was Gary Chartrand, a local businessman who had recently founded the Chartrand Family Foundation, which would focus on public education issues. Chartrand’s son, Jeff, had returned to Jacksonville to work with the family foundation after experience teaching in New York City. The Chartrands provided one of two lead gifts in the Teach for America campaign, but their engagement in the broader Quality Education for *All* effort would prove significant down the road.

These were exciting times for Quality Education for *All*. Relationships and networks were growing. The Forum, which had proven a rich resource for the community, held its final regular meeting in November 2007, acknowledging that its learning agenda was complete but vowing to remain engaged through semi-annual convenings. Learning to Finish provided a strong framework for programmatic work.

But there were also questions and concerns.

The work of Learning to Finish naturally led to questions about student progress through high school. A focus on dropouts necessitated a thorough understanding of who graduates, who

does not, and who drops out. The school system was not uncooperative, but access to their data was difficult for many reasons. As a first step, Learning to Finish engaged a community researcher, through in-kind support from United Way, to conduct a preliminary review of four-year graduation and dropout rates at three non-magnet high schools. The findings were disturbing – the three schools, collectively, lost 50% of their students between the start of 9th grade and the end of 12th grade – and prompted Learning to Finish to launch a full-scale, multi-prong research project into graduation and dropout rates in Duval County public schools.

At the same time, Foundation staff was looking beyond the immediate research agenda of Learning to Finish, thinking about long-term community change.

By the end of 2007, the school superintendent whose enthusiasm had brought in Teach for America had stumbled badly, squandered his political capital and been dismissed. The turmoil made Foundation leaders keenly aware that the superintendent's office and the elected school board were unlikely to provide the stable and persistent community infrastructure needed to move education reform forward. The Foundation, itself, had no desire to provide that infrastructure – its mission was not to re-invent itself as an education foundation.

The community needed a center of gravity for education reform – an institution that could serve as an advocate, a critical friend of the school system, and an instigator of community engagement.

The community also needed to align the many pockets of work around public education. United Way had its programs, the Jacksonville Children's Commission had its programs, and Learning to Finish loomed on the horizon. In addition, there were many local nonprofits working in and with the public schools: Communities in Schools, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Junior Achievement, and others. Long-term change would require synthesizing these multiple efforts – and that presented one of the greatest challenges of all.

PHASE III – BUILDING COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

One of the very first to present to the Forum on Quality Education, in fall 2005, was Wendy Puriefoy, president of the Public Education Network, a coalition of local education funds across the country. Puriefoy talked about the need for strong, independent advocacy organizations that could develop trusting, but neutral, relationships with school districts and engage diverse community stakeholders in the work of education reform.

Jacksonville had a local education fund – the Alliance for World Class Education – but its funding, scope of work and influence were limited. In fall 2007, the Alliance, having completed a new strategic plan, voted to expand their board of directors and revise their mission in an effort to evolve into a more robust and relevant institution. But the effort fell short. The governance structure continued to be problematic, with a strong executive committee making the majority of decisions, and several new board members expressed openly their disillusionment. And the Alliance, with limited funding and a single staff person, lacked the capacity to alter its work agenda significantly.

Members of the Forum, as well as the QEA leadership, developed a growing interest in establishing a new, high-capacity local education fund in Duval County. They envisioned an independent community entity that could hold knowledge and institutional memory, mobilize community stakeholders around critical issues, and be a consistent and sustaining presence during times of leadership change. They recognized that there were two paths Duval County could take to establish such an entity: the Alliance for World Class Education could restructure itself and become a high-capacity local education fund; or, The Community Foundation could help create one from the ground up. Either path presented a host of challenges.

The Public Education Network identifies three evolutionary stages for Local Education Funds – Start-Up, Moderate Capacity and High-Capacity.

	Start-Up	Moderate Capacity	High Capacity
Research & Data	--	+	+++
Focus on Achievement (Theory of Change)	--	+	+++
Community Engagement	--	+	+++
Focus on Non-Reform Activity	+	+	--
Local Funding	+	+	+++
National Funding	--	+	+++
Project Funding (modest grants for specific projects)	+	+	+

CHARACTERISTICS OF A LOCAL EDUCATION FUND

- * Independent of school district.
- * Non-profit 501c3.
- * Professionally staffed, with a board reflective of the community.
- * Committed to whole system reform, to ensure high quality education for all children.
- * Committed to engaging community stakeholders, who push for reform and high quality public education for all children.



Established January 2009
 Board Chair
 Gary Chartrand
 President
 Trey Csar

LEARNING TO FINISH RESEARCH FINDINGS

The Learning to Finish research looked at Duval County public high school students -- who stays on track, who gets off track, and why. The findings:

Only six in 10 entering 9th graders graduated within four years.

Three out of 10 entering 9th graders were not enrolled in Duval County Public Schools or other accredited school in Florida four years later. This number provides the most accurate count of the students who drop out of Duval County Public Schools.

The greatest loss of students occurred between 9th and 10th grade. For students in the study, 9th grade promotion rates were 74%-78% compared with 85% or higher for subsequent grade levels.

More than 30% of those who did not graduate received a final grade of F in Algebra I. And more than 25% of those who did not graduate received an F in English I. For graduates, these percentages were 10% and 6%, respectively.

Non-graduates came from every neighborhood and ethnic group.

Intangible factors influence student performance – factors such as a constructive student-teacher relationship; being held accountable; peer pressure; community violence or an unstable home life.

In 2008, the leadership of Community Foundation President Nina Waters, Trustee Cynthia Edelman and businessman Gary Chartrand proved critical. All were deeply interested in establishing a strong local education fund. There was great concern about the limited capacity of the Alliance. Together, they agreed to aggressively explore options for a high-capacity local education fund in Duval County.

Through their efforts, a group of individuals, many of whom were members of the Forum, convened for multiple meetings in Jacksonville with Wendy Puriefoy. Together, they solidified their vision for a local education fund and quietly raised \$3 million, providing five years of operating funds for the new fund.

Then through careful negotiations, the Alliance leadership was persuaded to reconstitute its board and rebrand itself as the Jacksonville Public Education Fund. The change was announced in summer 2008, with new and expanded staff and a mission to serve as a high-performing public education fund for Duval County. (For a more detailed history on the evolution of the local education fund, see *Growing Community Infrastructure for Public Education in Duval County, Florida*.)

This created the anchor that Quality Education for All had known would be needed to sustain education reform over time.

Learning to Finish, meanwhile, adopted the planning framework of the other Youth Transition cities, and used a broad research agenda and a network of national experts as tools to build a strong local coalition focused on dropout prevention and growing the graduation rate.

With the funding of The Community Foundation, Learning to Finish engaged researchers in a three-prong study:

The first component **tracked three classes of first-time 9th graders through four years of high school**. Of the roughly 20,000 students in the cohort, 61% graduated with a diploma in four years, while 30% did not graduate and were no longer enrolled in school. (The remainder were still enrolled or completed school with something other than a diploma.) The study identified factors related to student disengagement in high school, and tracked cohort students back to 6th grade to identify what might be factors predictive of future disengagement.

The second component **used focus groups to gather qualitative data about the high school experience** from students, former students, parents, teachers and counselors.

The third component **looked at existing dropout prevention programs used by the school system, their capacity and their effectiveness**. It found that existing programs had capacity to serve only a fraction of the needs in the school system, and that program assessment was limited.

In fall 2008, at the suggestion of Jobs for the Future, Community Foundation staff connected with leaders of Project U-Turn, Philadelphia's city-wide dropout prevention initiative. Foundation staff orchestrated a visit to Philadelphia and invited a team of 12, representing Duval County Public Schools, United Way, the Jacksonville Children's Commission and other stakeholders, to join them. The trip proved to be a turning point.



SAVE DUVAL SCHOOLS

Faced with looming state funding cuts, community leaders — including many from the Forum on Quality Education — came together to form Save Duval Schools, a community advocacy group seeking to mobilize support to stop cuts in funding for public education. Using the internet and social networking media, the organization shared information and encouraged citizen engagement on the issue.

The lessons shared by the leaders of Project U-Turn were these:

- ◆ Dropout prevention efforts must be owned by the entire community.
- ◆ Everyone has a stake in the problem and everyone must have a stake in the solution.
- ◆ Community collaborations are critical to systems reform and sustainability.
- ◆ The management of those collaborations must be transparent and neutral.

It was a “light-bulb” moment for all of the participants. Those who had been only marginally engaged realized they had a serious role to play in driving and supporting reform. And The Community Foundation realized that it would have to relinquish control if the broader initiative was to succeed; it needed to cede power to a more inclusive and representative body.

The presence of Duval County Public Schools personnel also was important. No longer was change something sought only by a group of community organizations; school system personnel acknowledged the need for change as well and began to look to community organizations as potential partners. The perception that the school system was indifferent, or even hostile, to outside help, began to fade.

The trip to Philadelphia was followed by similar trips to New York and Boston, which strengthened the knowledge and perspectives of the broader group. Meanwhile, representatives of these groups were serving on various advisory committees supporting the three-pronged research agenda and identifying best practice solutions. Knowledge was building — both theoretical knowledge and local historical knowledge.

This coalition proved a powerful community catalyst. In spring 2009, as the Florida Legislature’s fiscal crisis deepened and cuts to public school funding loomed, the Learning to Finish/Quality Education for *All* team invited key community stakeholders together for a briefing on the potential impact of the anticipated cuts. A standing room only crowd listened to the school superintendent outline his concerns and, within days, an advocacy coalition had formed — Save Duval Schools — to fight for adequate public school funding.

Save Duval Schools launched its campaign at about the same time that the Jacksonville Public Education Fund president was hired. The two entities quickly began to share resources, mailing lists and use the internet as a key constituency and knowledge building tool.

By summer 2009, Quality Education for *All* could point to a number of critical achievements:

- It had successfully built community infrastructure to support public education reform over the long term.
- It had successfully engaged the school system in a reform agenda, at least around the issue of dropout prevention.
- It had successfully engaged an array of community partners in an aligned effort to address one component of education reform — the dropout crisis.
- It had demonstrated the importance of a data-based agenda of work, through the Learning to Finish research project.
- It had successfully built a consensus to pursue a dual strategy for struggling students: building early warnings systems to identify and support at-risk 6th and 9th graders and designing a new portfolio of options to give off-track students multiple pathways to graduation.

It had demonstrated the ability to engage community leaders in initiatives to improve public education - and convince them to invest their time and money - through the Teach for America campaign, the Learning to Finish campaign, the local education fund campaign and the Save Duval Schools campaign.

It had successfully developed a network of national expertise and resources to call upon in the Duval County work.

As it officially launched the Learning to Finish Collaborative on that hot August morning, it handed off that body of work to the new Jacksonville Public Education Fund. The Fund would work closely with the Foundation and Quality Education for *All* for years to come, but the daily task of managing the Learning to Finish Collaborative would rest with the Public Education Fund.

That left open the question for The Community Foundation: What was next for Quality Education for *All*?

THE EVOLUTION OF MAKING THE MOVE

After the initial Making the Move grants, several of the grantee middle schools, along with other middle schools, continued summer bridge programs, using discretionary funding.

By 2009, both the Duval County School District and United Way of Northeast Florida had embraced the effectiveness of 6th grade summer bridge programs and significantly expanded this strategy through the school district's summer school and through United Way's Achievers for Life programming.

PHASE IV – REGROUPING AND ASSESSING TO MOVE AHEAD

As any marathoner knows, pacing is critical. That is no less true for long-term community change efforts. There is a time for action, and a time for reflection, evaluation and planning. As Quality Education for *All* moves into its fifth year, it is making the transition from action to reflection and planning.

For the near term, the initiative will focus on two primary tasks:

Building the capacity of the Jacksonville Public Education Fund to manage the work of Learning to Finish;

Returning to the “community learning” model with the Foundation trustees and members of the Forum on Quality Education.

The Jacksonville Public Education Fund will face some challenges as it begins to execute the work of Learning to Finish. Community relationships and alliances must be maintained and supported. The school system must maintain its focus on the work even as other issues come and go. Programs must be delivered in the schools and results documented and assessed. The Public Education Fund must have the staff, expertise and resources to keep the work on track and the players on task. In late 2009, the Foundation staff person who led Learning to Finish will move to the staff of the Public Education Fund. Going forward, the Foundation will continue to provide financial support and networking support to the Public Education Fund.

At the same time, leadership at The Community Foundation knows that Quality Education for *All* will not be defined solely by Learning to Finish. As trustee Cindy Edelman prepares to assume chairmanship of the Foundation board, she looks to a return to learning for the trustees and members of the Forum on Quality Education. The group will continue to reconvene two or more times a year to reconnect with issues and explore new topics. What other opportunities may exist to improve public education in Duval County? What strategies have other communities used with success? Where are other discrete entry points to the larger challenge?

This period of reflection, no doubt, will shape Quality Education for *All* for its next five years. The precise dimensions of that shape, however, are yet to be discovered.

LEARNING TO FINISH COLLABORATIVE

A host of community organizations are engaged in the Learning to Finish initiative.

LEAD PARTNERS

Duval County Public Schools
The Community Foundation
in Jacksonville
Jacksonville Children’s
Commission
Jacksonville Public Education
Fund
United Way of Northeast
Florida

PARTNERS

Boys & Girls Clubs of
Northeast Florida
City of Jacksonville
Communities In Schools
Community Engagement
Group
Duval County Public Schools
District School Advisory
Committee
Florida Department of
Children and Families
Florida Department of
Juvenile Justice
Florida State College at
Jacksonville
Full Service Schools of
Jacksonville
JCCI
Jacksonville Public Library
Jacksonville Regional
Chamber of Commerce
NAACP
PACE Center for Girls
Team Gaia
Women’s Giving Alliance
WorkSource