



Greetings to The Education Trust Family

This is the second edition of our Parent and Community Newsletter. As we work with parent groups and community-based organizations, we will share information and ideas we have learned that might assist you in your efforts to improve the education of your children. Though schools have the responsibility to deliver the highest quality education, it is our responsibility as parents, community and education advocates to partner with them to secure those resources necessary to provide the high quality education our children both deserve and have a right to expect.

In our continued efforts to keep you informed and on the cutting edge of education reform, we will share with you some initiatives that other parent groups and community-based organizations are undertaking. Inside these pages you'll read about the work the Urban League of Broward County, Florida, is doing to train parent leaders in the region. You will also read about Parent Information and Resource Centers (PIRCs) and their work in New York to involve parents in education, as well as the tireless efforts of parents in Lower Merion, Pennsylvania, who are working to close achievement gaps in their schools. We believe that

when we share our experiences we strengthen our collective energy to bring the very best education to all children – especially those children who historically have been underserved in educational systems nationwide.

This school year was intended to mark the end of an era and the dawning of a new day. The No Child Left Behind Act requires *all* schools – including those that serve low-income and minority children that in the past have had more than their share of under-qualified, inexperienced and out-of-field teachers – to have “highly qualified” teachers in core subjects by the end of the 2005-06 school year. To be “highly qualified” teachers must have a bachelor’s degree, a major in the subject that they teach, and state certification, although many states are trying to circumvent the provision. While the teacher-quality provisions hold out hope for improving schools, the provisions also represents challenges never before faced.



Meeting the goals will require more than the usual recruitment strategies and incentives to bring those teachers to the classrooms where they are needed. We, as parents and community advocates, must do our part in supporting our schools and the administrators who have the task of meeting the challenge. Parent and community involvement and support cannot be underestimated in this effort. The necessary changes won’t happen overnight; however, we are on the threshold of an era in which educating all children to high levels is the goal of every educator, every parent and every student, and with commitment and determination we will ensure the success our children so deserve.

Let us usher in this new age with a heightened sense of urgency. Let us band together to bring about a revolution long overdue to wipe out ignorance and bigotry and the concept that we must have a system that separates the “haves” and the “have-nots.” Education is truly the key to a prosperous future, a future paved with every opportunity available for those who are prepared to reach for the stars.

We encourage you to visit our Web site (www.edtrust.org) and acquaint yourself with all of the Education Trust resources and publications.

Thank you,

Zattura Sims-El
Community Liaison



Voices from the Community

Community and parent groups around the country are working to make sure that children get the best education possible. Voices from the Community looks at some of the efforts by groups that have worked closely with the EdTrust.

Urban League of Broward County Launches Parent Leadership Training Institute

Submitted by Christine Bates, PLTI Director

When schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer and enjoy school more. Acting on that knowledge, the Urban League of Broward County in 2005 implemented a Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI) to teach parents to become more effective advocates for school improvement. Each year, the program will train 25 parents who will receive extensive leadership training in a series of three two-day workshops.

Parents will work in partnership with the management teams of their children's schools to plan literacy projects to help meet the goals of their School Improvement Plans. "Parent leaders" commit to two years of service, the first year spent in training and development of the project and the second year spent implementing it.

Some of the issues PLTI covers are: how to recognize what high-performing schools look like; how to use test data to determine if their schools are meeting School Improvement Plan goals; how to share data to engage others; how to understand standards-based curricula; how to engage other parents, and how to maximize their community contacts.

Training sessions for the first class of PLTI "parent leaders" began in January of 2005 with the support of the Urban League's 35

partners in the Campaign for African Achievement. The Education Trust and the Center for Parent Leadership in Kentucky worked for a year with the Urban League to help develop the curriculum for PLTI training, which addresses local literacy concerns and achievement gaps. (www.campaignforchange.org)



Pennsylvania Parent Groups Work for Accountability

Submitted by Loraine Carter, Concerned Black Parents and Dawn Craven, Supporting our African American Children

Blue ribbon, affluent school districts like Pennsylvania's Lower Merion and Wissahickon are points of pride for residents of those communities. The media, including the Wall Street Journal and Philadelphia Magazine, rank students from Lower Merion among the state's top academic performers. Standardized state assessments show that nearly 92 percent of its students are proficient in reading and math. District students are winning many regional and national academic, sports, and cultural awards.

But the assessment data also have

a disturbing underside: Nearly half of the Black students in Lower Merion are below proficient in reading and math.

African-American parents, like others, moved to Lower Merion because the school district is so well regarded. It is resource rich and spends almost \$20,000 per student. So when assessments showed that many Black children were not thriving in an otherwise exemplary school district, parents took action. The academic gap between Blacks and Whites developed over generations, but data required by the federal No Child Left Behind law now make it possible for parents to hold school districts accountable.

Parent-led organizations like Concerned Black Parents (CBP) and Supporting Our African American Children (SOAAC) are taking action to address the achievement gap, over-representation of Blacks in non-gifted special education services, and to increase the number of Black students in college-preparatory courses. The Education Trust provided the initial training for parents to help them advocate for their children.

CBP provides "special education buddies" to parents trying to change their children's Individualized Education Plan (IEP). We help parents who want to request a change in their children's schedules or who think that their children are not being challenged enough. We also look at course descriptions to make sure that students are being taught to high levels.

CBP and SOAAC have united with several other organizations to form the Coalition of Organized and Mobilized Parents for Academic

Success (COMPAS). We hope to openly talk about and discover solutions across school districts on raising achievement and closing academic gaps.

Eight Parent Information and Resource Centers Provide Services in New York State

Submitted by Jane Zucker, PIRC Director

EPIC, or Every Person Influences Children, Inc., is a national nonprofit organization that provides programs and resources for parents, teachers, and school administrators to help adults raise responsible and academically successful children. It has eight Parent Information and Resource Centers (PIRCs) across New York state. The centers offer valuable support services, with an emphasis on education and information about the federal No Child Left Behind

law and this year reached nearly 20,000 parents through workshops, conferences, trainings and individual meetings.

The centers work to engage parents, family advocates, educators, community organizers, faith-based activists and others in a collective commitment to educational success for all students, especially low-income, minority and English language-learning students. The resource centers implement programs like family literacy programs, workshops on parenting and parent leadership training.

The resource centers are typically housed in a school in order to help break down the barriers between home and school. Helping parents understand the details behind the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law prompted the resource centers to develop workshops called "Demystifying the Facts." Education

Trust is engaged in helping with these workshops that show how valuable NCLB is as a tool to advocate for improving the education of all children. The resource centers have integrated some of the Education Trust's materials in the workshops for parents.

The resource center workshops help parents to better understand NY state proficiency test scores, educational options and their rights, including public school choice and supplemental educational services. Participants can find guidance to help them ask appropriate questions about academic improvement for their children's school and the implementation of their rights under the NCLB law. The workshops are available in English and Spanish and are offered at the resource centers and on the EPIC Web site. (www.epicforchildren.org)

EdTrust Reports Look at Funding, Accelerating Learning

The Education Trust released two important reports recently. The first, "The Funding Gap 2005," exposes how states shortchange poor and minority children when it comes to funding the schools they attend. The other, "Gaining Traction, Gaining Ground," looks at how some schools are helping high school students who are behind begin to catch up to grade level.

The Funding Gap reports that nationally, we spend about \$900 less per pupil on students educated in our nation's poorest school districts than those educated in the wealthiest. In some states, the funding gap exceeds \$1,000 per pupil.

In 27 of 49 states studied, the school districts serving the highest

concentrations of poor students spend less per pupil than the lowest-poverty districts. Underfunding is also pervasive in districts educating the most minority students: In 30 states, the school districts serving concentrations of minority students spend less per pupil than the districts that educate few children of color.

This analysis of school funding, done annually by the Education Trust, looked at the money that state and local governments provide to school districts based on data for the 2002-03 school year, the latest year for which such financial data are available.

"Gaining Traction, Gaining Ground" focuses on one of the biggest challenges that high schools

have — getting students who come in behind caught up so they can graduate.

The study found that high schools that succeed in boosting achievement of struggling students have many of the same practices, including assigning the best teachers to the students who need the most help.

The report identified four schools serving predominantly low-income or minority students that have been able to accelerate the learning of struggling ninth-graders more than expected. It compared the practices of those schools to three demographically similar schools that were able to move students forward, but not as rapidly.

For copies of these reports, go to www.edtrust.org.



Washington Update

Pilot Program to Test Alternative to AYP

The U.S Department of Education recently announced a pilot program that potentially will allow some states to change the way schools meet accountability goals under the No Child Left Behind law.

The program announced by Education Secretary Margaret Spellings is an experiment that will allow as many as 10 states to try “growth models” for determining whether schools make adequate yearly progress. Under the growth model pilot, states can base school accountability goals on individual students’ achievement gains over time. The current AYP model compares the performance of students in the same grade from one year to

the next.

As we work toward getting all of our children to high standards, we need to learn more about which accountability systems provide the most constructive information to teachers, parents, and the public.

A limited, carefully developed pilot to test alternatives to the current approach could be enormously helpful in teaching us how to improve on No Child Left Behind in the next reauthorization. But a poorly designed growth system, like many states had prior to NCLB, will give people the illusion of progress while children never actually reach high standards.

The Education Department’s proposal contains some of the elements necessary to protect the

interests of parents and students. But parents need to get involved in crafting their states’ proposals to demand that expectations still be set high so that students who come in behind can catch up.

“This can’t be about using growth models to let schools, districts, and states off the hook,” said Kati Haycock, director of the Education Trust. “We had so-called growth models before NCLB, and they did little to drive reform or improvements for students.”

If your state applies to be one of the 10 included in this pilot, be sure to ask how the state plans to measure improvement/growth. It is still important to insist that your state continues to teach all students to high standards.

Contact Us

Call us today to schedule your training session, which is available in both English and Spanish. Take advantage of our many resources by visiting our website at www.edtrust.org.

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The Education Trust works for the high academic achievement of all students at all levels, pre-kindergarten through college, and forever closing the achievement gaps that separate low-income students and students of color from other youth. Our basic tenet is this: All children will learn at high levels when they are taught to high levels.

Around the country, many schools are boosting the academic performance of all students while accelerating the gains for poor and minority children, particularly in the elementary grades. These early results demonstrate what close observers have known for a long time – that dedicated educators can narrow, and ultimately, close these unacceptable gaps in achievement.