



MAYORAL LEADERSHIP AND INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION

CASE STUDIES OF URBAN HIGH SCHOOL REFORM



THE UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF MAYORS

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THE UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF MAYORS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Columbus Case Study

Introduction and Background.....	00
Mayoral Engagement.....	00
Mayoral Initiatives and Accomplishments	00
District Leadership.....	00
Community Engagement.....	00
Business Community Involvement	00
High School Reform	00
Key Findings	00
Appendix A: List of Interviewees	00
Appendix B: Mayor Michael Coleman’s Educational Programs and Initiatives	00

Denver Case Study

Introduction and Background.....	00
Mayoral Engagement.....	00
Mayor’s Office for Education and Children	00
District Leadership and High School Reform	00
Graduation Requirements Advisory Work Group	00
Community Engagement.....	00
Key Findings	00
Appendix	00

MAYORS OFTEN NEED
TO TAKE EXTRAORDINARY
MEASURES TO EXERT
LEADERSHIP OR
BECOME INVOLVED
IN EDUCATION.



MAY 1, 2008

DEAR MAYOR:

As President of The U.S. Conference of Mayors, I am pleased to provide you with the latest publication from the Mayors' Initiative on Leadership in Education (MILE) — *Mayoral Leadership in Education: Case Studies of Urban High School Reform*. This publication examines two mayors – Columbus Mayor Michael B. Coleman and Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper – and their leadership roles in education, high school reform, and the level of community and business engagement in education, particularly as it relates to changing high schools, in their cities.

Mayors do not usually have direct control over the school district(s) in their city. Therefore, mayors often need to take extraordinary measures to exert leadership or become involved in education. They recognize that education is a critical component of the city's well-being, economic success and future vitality. For most of the 20th century, and now the 21st century, there has been a distinct separation in a majority of cities between city government and the school system – even though numerous city services affect the quality of life of children, many of whom are at risk.

This publication describes activities that will assist mayors in bringing down the roadblocks to their involvement in education established over the last 100 years and create a more effective systematic approach to serve the needs of children and families, especially those at-risk. Without the engagement of mayors, it is very difficult to make the changes necessary to establish the critical relationships needed to attain success and meet the challenges of systemic education reform. As the chief elected official in every American city, the mayor is the single individual who has the ability to bring people and stakeholder organizations together to address issues and come to a collective solution. As such, the mayor is the most appropriate person to be the leader (while not necessarily being responsible for schools) in improving education and educational opportunities in a city.

I would like to express my gratitude to the Carnegie Foundation for making possible the compilation and dissemination of this valuable resource, as well as to the mayors who contributed to the contents within. This publication is a valuable addition to our organization's well-established efforts to assist mayors on issues that directly affect their cities. We thank you for your continued support of this important work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Douglas H. Palmer".

Douglas H. Palmer
President

1

COLUMBUS, OHIO

INTRODUCTION

The Columbus case study was conducted by the U.S. Conference of Mayors in 2006. It included visits to several Columbus high schools and a series of interviews with Mayor Michael B. Coleman, Superintendent Dr. Gene Harris, mayoral and district staff, administrators, teachers, parents and students at four high schools, and other community and business representatives. Each of the individuals and groups interviewed were asked questions regarding roles of the mayor in education and the level of community and business engagement, particularly in high school reform.

One of the reasons for selecting Columbus was the mayor's commitment to education and institutionalizing a cabinet position and office of education within the Office of the Mayor. The office focuses on non-instructional activities, primarily after school and youth programs. The goal of these programs is to help make teaching and learning more effective. The Mayor sees his role as an active partner with the school district but also understands his responsibility to raise awareness and initiate programs appropriate for a mayor's office.

Mayoral Involvement

Mayor Michael B. Coleman took office on January 1, 2000 and will begin his third term in January 2008. Throughout his administration, he has articulated and demonstrated a commitment to improving the city's public education system and views education as a vital part of the community's well being and economic development.

The mayor has delicately balanced his role of supporting the school district, and his commitment to and involvement in education and after school programs without overstepping his authority. There is a positive working relationship between the mayor and Dr. Gene Harris, Columbus' Superintendent of Schools. They meet quarterly and have worked cooperatively on a number of issues, including passing a bond issue to support the schools. At times, however, there has been criticism that the mayor has not taken a more visible and active role.

Mayor Coleman's administration has undertaken a number of education related initiatives. He receives high marks from school district, community and business leaders for his participation and support. However, there remains a general public concern about the quality of the local educational system. Some people who were interviewed expressed an interest in having a greater level of mayoral involvement and leadership in Columbus to pursue and achieve school reform.

Mayoral Initiatives and Accomplishments

Office of Education

Shortly after his first inauguration, Mayor Coleman created the Office of Education as a cabinet level office. The creation of this office institutionalized mayoral involvement in education. At that time, similar structures were in only a handful of cities. The office provides a focal point for visible mayoral involvement and the administration of specific initiatives. The leadership of the first director (Hannah Dillard), a respected figure in the Columbus community, provided legitimacy to the office. The director is a member of the mayor's cabinet. Concerns were raised during interviews as to the future of the office once Mayor Coleman leaves office. The issue is – have the activities of the office institutionalized its existence?

The primary program the office administers is **Capital Kids**. This is a comprehensive after school program begun in 2000. There are

four pilot sites located around the city. Based on these programs, the office has created program standards for funding after school programs run by other organizations. The early focus of the after school programming has been pre-school and elementary students. The current director, Tei Street, is interested in expanding the programs to middle school and high school students without sacrificing the programs aimed at younger children. At the time of the site visit there was an RFP out to establish programs for middle school aged students.

In the summer of 2006, the office also administered the Summer Youth Employment Initiative. Local youth were provided with basic job skill training and summer jobs across the city. The initiative was in specific response to cuts in the federal summer jobs program that supported summer youth employment. Approximately 2,000 high school students received jobs through the program in 2006. It is worth noting that staff at the high schools we visited did not seem well informed about the program. At one school, Marion-Franklin, the staff member responsible for coordinating student participation complained about poor communication and mixed signals.

As part of her role as director, Ms. Street serves on a number of inter-governmental and community organizations and boards, related to youth and education. This includes

Approximately 2,000 high school students received jobs through the Summer Youth Employment Initiative in 2006.

Columbus's Youth Commission, the County Workforce Investment Council's Youth Commission, and a newly formed P-16 Council. She also meets with Dr. Gene Harris on a monthly basis.

Ms. Street also serves as the Mayor's primary advisor on education issues. She has recently been asked by Mayor Coleman to identify a list of education issues, from which he can choose one or two to focus on over the remainder of his time in office. Ms. Street identified the following as potential areas of concentration:

- Finding ways to engage youth to support graduation as primary goal.
- The creation of internships through after school programs for High School students
- Mentorships
- Academic enrichment

Columbus Covenant 200

This document outlined the major principles and goals of the Coleman administration. The Covenant states the following: "**Education: encourage and promote participation in learning opportunities.**"

Regional Educational Summits

Mayor Coleman hosted four educational summits, bringing together educational, community, and business leaders across the Columbus metropolitan area. The purpose of these meetings were to address common education concerns and key issues, such as closing the achievement gap, and encouraged the use of common data collection and analytic tools. Of particular importance was the inclusion of school officials from the 16 school districts in which Columbus children attend school.

Other Initiatives

The education office has a number of other programs and initiatives including programs addressing school safety, truancy, gangs, development and infrastructure. For additional information, see Appendix B.

District Leadership

Dr. Gene Harris has been superintendent of Columbus Public Schools (CPS) since 2001. A former teacher and administrator in the system, Dr. Harris began with strong local support, and has managed to maintain a good reputation. Her tenure has been marked by several accomplishments including improved graduation rates, and upgrading the district from a state rating of Emergency Watch to Academic Watch.

CPS continues to face significant challenges in performance, demographics and governance. Although Dr. Harris maintains a strong reputation throughout the city, considerable doubts were expressed about the ability of CPS to overcome the challenges, especially because of a school board often characterized as dysfunctional, and a district staff who may not be of the same quality as Dr. Harris.

Dr. Harris set the goal to improve graduation rates to

90%

Graduation Rates

Dr. Harris set the goal to improve graduation rates to 90% by 2012. Since her arrival, the rate has increased by 12.9% up to 67.7%. The district has engaged in a variety of strategies to increase graduation rates that span the entire K-12 spectrum. These strategies include the adoption of Project GRAD in two low-performing high schools, and their feeder schools; credit recovery programs; and creating a more rigorous and challenging curriculum, while providing more early intervention. A recent evaluation of Project GRAD in Columbus indicated that there had not been significant results or improvements as a result of the intervention. (Additional discussion of these efforts is presented in the section on High School Reform.) »»

The goal of raising graduation rates has permeated the thinking of district and school personnel. When we discussed district reform strategies and plans, the graduation rate was the first issue mentioned by most people. It seemed as if it was a mantra. This indicates at least a general dedication to making the goal a reality, and improving graduation goals is undoubtedly an essential indicator of district performance. However, setting a goal is not a strategy. Suggesting there is a lack of a clear and defined improvement strategy plan.

Governance

The Superintendent is appointed by the Board of Education. Board members are all elected at-large. A number of the people we interviewed—representing teachers, community and business leaders—expressed concern over the ability of the Board to function as a decision making body. They referenced in-fighting, micro-management and a lack of good decision making. Several people mentioned the possibility of a mayoral takeover of schools as a positive step, even if they did not think it was going to happen. Mayor Coleman himself has made clear that he has no intention nor interest in doing so. There are efforts underway to provide more intensive training for the Board to improve its performance and effectiveness.

Demographics and Competition

CPS is facing decreasing enrollment, despite the growth in the city's population. This is due to the large number of alternatives such as charter schools, transfer to schools in neighboring districts, and, to a small number of private schools. The loss of school population is leading to the need to close schools and lay off professional, administrative and support staff. It also reflects a general lack of confidence in the public school system, as evidenced by a recent survey by KidsOhio.

Another response to the enrollment loss by the district has been to offer an increased number of alternatives within the public school system. The most recent choice option opened in the Fall 2006 as the first charter school run by the school district. Academy Community School targets over-aged students who are at risk of not completing high school. The school will provide an intensive program to accelerate high school graduation.

Our interviews revealed support for district efforts to offer new alternatives as a way of retaining students within CPS. However, several people wondered whether it was too late. They speculated that the momentum was leading to students moving away from attending CPS. Well-informed parents are seeking alternatives to sending their children to CPS because of real problems such as school safety and poor academic performance combined with a general negative public perception of the public schools.

Curriculum

Curriculum in CPS is driven by the state standards aligned with the state's annual assessments. CPS has taken steps to standardize the curriculum across the district, and increase rigor. With 38% of students changing schools in any given year, it is essential to have the stability of a standard curriculum. Additionally, CPS has recently centralized the responsibility for all curricula in one office, rather than splitting it between elementary and secondary. This is part of a general strategy for successful high school reform, improving elementary education, and ensuring a rigorous, aligned curriculum throughout the grade span.

38% of students
change schools
every year.

Data

CPS is paying increasing attention to the collection and analysis of data. They have standardized the type of data collected, improved analysis, and provided increased teacher training on how to use the data to improve instruction. The current emphasis is on training principals how to understand and use the data to improve the performance of their schools. They are also utilizing systems provided by SchoolNet to make the data accessible and usable for teachers, allowing the data to drive instructional decisions.

Community Engagement

Mayor Coleman has taken an active role in engaging the wider community in education issues. Most notable were the series of Regional Educational Summits. He hosted four educational summits during his first term, bringing together educational, community, and business leaders across the Columbus metropolitan area. The inclusion of school officials from the 16 school districts in which Columbus children attend school was of particular importance, as it signaled the effort to address common concerns. The summits addressed key issues, such as closing the achievement gap, and encouraged the use of common data collection and analytic tools.

More recently Mayor Coleman has been planning to convene a Commission on Young Black Males. In the interview, the Mayor noted the prevalence of crime committed by this population, with the same population as the victims. It's also the same group most at-risk for dropping out of school and/or having low achievement, as well as gang affiliation. For this reason, Mayor Coleman has made forming the commission a priority to address and bring attention to this cluster of issues.

Business Community Involvement

The interviewees characterized the extent of business involvement and its effectiveness in a variety of ways. There was general agreement that individual businesses are actively involved in a specific school, and acknowledgement from both business and the school district of the importance of a more sustained and coordinated effort. What seems to be missing is a clear, well thought out effort to coordinate business involvement at the school and district level.

The Office of the Mayor

Mayor Coleman has periodically paid attention to the business contribution to education. For example, the Education Summit brought business leaders to the table to discuss education reform issues with school and community leaders. However, a more sustained effort by the Office of the Mayor to coordinate business involvement in schools is needed.

Business Perspective

Our information on the business perspective comes largely from Robert Milbourne, the President and CEO of the Columbus Partnership. The Columbus Partnership is a civic organization representing the largest employers in the Columbus area. Mr. Milbourne concurred with school principals that successful relationships with businesses depended on leadership and attention from the principal, rather than coordination by the central office. On a broader level, he believes that businesses are interested in supporting education, but are unsure of how to contribute. He also warns of the danger of business leaders thinking they know how to run schools. >>>

Two upcoming initiatives demonstrate how businesses can productively contribute to district-wide improvement: funding of training for school board members and for the board and staff in budget development and communication. Both of these originated as requests from the superintendent and reflect areas that businesses can contribute. Mr. Milbourne suggested Information Technology guidance as a third area that his organization could assist.

Individual School Perspective

All four of the schools we visited demonstrated some level of business involvement. It ranged from employees providing tutoring, to business supporting scholarship programs. However, principals and staff all agreed that it was up to the individual school to solicit business assistance. Most of the principals expressed a desire for greater coordination and support from the central office to obtain business support. Given the workload already on the principals, they believe it is unrealistic to expect them to be able to focus on coordinating business involvement in any sustained fashion.

Central Office Perspective

District representatives did state the existence of the “Partners in Education” office, designed to “provide assistance in identifying and developing collaborative relationships with business and government partners.” However, the fact that this office was not mentioned by any of the schools suggests that more work needs to be done in communicating the services offered and making those services more effective. District personnel also pointed to the Chamber of Commerce’s involvement with the Pathways to Success Initiative, and its sponsorship of the Career Academies. District staff also believed that it is important for businesses to provide support and assistance when it is needed and requested by school officials, rather than businesses trying to reform schools on their own.

High School Reform

With a key goal of CPS to raise the graduation rate to 90% by 2012, high school reform is inevitably an integral part of school district activities. A glance at the various high schools throughout the district reveals a plethora of approaches and programs aimed at improving high school performance, graduation rates and postsecondary readiness. These range from the college prep approach at Columbus Alternative School, known for its rigorous curriculum centered around an International Baccalaureate program and Advanced Placement tests, to newer strategies, such as Early College at Africentric Early College High School. What is not evident is one consistent strategy for improving high schools as learning environments to address the academic, social and personal needs of the students. Rather, one can characterize the CPS approach is “let a thousand flowers bloom.” Below is a descriptive summary of the approaches we saw in the schools we visited, and some of the approaches that spanned across the district.

Early College

Columbus Africentric Early College High School, utilizes Gates funded Early College model in the general framework of a K-12 Africentric alternative school. Under this model, students are engaged in a rigorous curriculum in grades 6-10. Those students that meet specific academic requirements are able to take college courses at Columbus State Community College. They have the opportunity to earn an Associates Degree simultaneously with a high school diploma. The Early College Program is a new initiative. Beginning in 2005-06, sophomores were the first students eligible to participate in the program. Technical support and funding for the program is provided by the KnowledgeWorks Foundation which manages the Bill & Melinda Gates grant focused on high school transformation in Ohio.

The Early College program faces the traditional challenges of implementing major changes in a pre-existing school. Africentric has been a low-performing school, which has often been a “dumping ground” for problem students. To make the Early College program a success, the attitude of staff, students and district officials must be transformed. There have been significant staff changes, since the current principal, Robert Murphy, took over in 2004-05. Teachers with whom we spoke were supportive of the Early College model and the changes implemented by Mr. Murphy. Nonetheless, they acknowledged there are significant challenges in the transformation of the school. The principal is attempting to alter the transient nature of student population into a consistent student body. Also it is important for staff to be trained and educated in the same curriculum that is fundamental to the programs success. Early College must co-exist in the building with the Africentric Model, first proposed by community leaders, and still a large part of the school’s culture.

Project GRAD

Two of the schools visited, Linden-McKinley and Marion-Franklin, are Project GRAD schools. They are also provided with funding and technical support through Knowledge Works. Both of these schools have been traditionally

low-performing schools with poor reputations in the neighborhood and across the district. The schools both displayed signs of positive change, but still face large challenges.

Staff members at both of these schools are supportive of Project GRAD and the overall changes the principals are implementing. However the perspectives expressed as to the likelihood of substantive change ranged from cautious optimism to change can only be achieved on the margins, because the problems remained too large and outside the control of the school

Project GRAD is based
around 5 core components

5

Project GRAD, originated in Houston, Texas in 1992. It operates in a feeder school model, based around 5 core components: reading support, math programming designed to accommodate different learning styles, classroom management for teachers and students, social services/mentoring for students and families, and college scholarships for successful graduates. The goal of the model is to reduce the achievement gap for and increase graduation rates among low-income and minority student groups. Because it uses a feeder school model, the five components are implemented, as appropriate, in all grades K-12.

Both of the principals saw Project GRAD as a useful tool in improving their school performance and climate, but only as one tool among many. One of the major issues involves how to maintain the programming once the initial seed money is gone. >>>



Small Schools

A third model of high school reform, also funded through KnowledgeWorks, is the Small Schools model in Brookhaven High School. Under the Small Schools model, three small schools, with distinct faculty and staff, are housed within one building. The concept is that the smaller size will lead, in conjunction with other reforms, to a greater sense of community and belonging among the students that will help improve retention, performance and results.

The student perspective on the transformation was mixed. Some students saw the change as largely cosmetic, with no substantive differences in their education or school environment, while others viewed the change as a truly positive development. Staff and faculty all seemed enthusiastic about the change and its potential to help transform the academics of the school. One unique aspect of Brookhaven is that it has been a traditional athletic powerhouse, attractive to students for its athletic success, and owing much of reputation to athletics, rather than academics.

Remedial and Preventative Programs

CPS has instituted a number of programs designed to prevent students from falling behind and enabling them to recover, if they are interested. These include: the [Summer Bridge Program](#) — an intensive academic program aimed at students transitioning to high school at risk for not meeting state standards; [Freshman Academies](#) — designed to ease the transition to high school by placing freshman in teams that provide academic and advisory support; and [Credit Recovery](#) — allows students to re-gain credits through a combination of on-line education and individualized instruction.

College credit programs, and other partnerships

CPS has instituted a variety of programs in conjunction with local postsecondary institutions to prepare high school students for college, and enable them to earn college credit while attending high school. This includes the [Higher Education Partnership](#), a consortium of 7 local postsecondary institutions working with CPS to increase college access, readiness and retention. It also includes the Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate programs, and agreements with local institutions that allow high school students to earn college credits, either by taking special courses at the high school, on-line, or by taking courses on college campuses.

Key Findings

Throughout his tenure, Mayor Coleman has demonstrated a commitment to education and a willingness to devote resources to its improvement, while maintaining boundaries with district officials. His visibility on education issues seems to have been higher at different times, particularly when sponsoring the education summits.

District Relations

Mayor Coleman and Dr. Harris have a good working relationship that appears to be based upon mutual respect, shared goals, and an understanding of boundaries. Under the leadership of the Mayor, his office has provided support to the district, and worked collaboratively on issues of shared concern and responsibility.

Questions that remain revolve around the concern for school board governance and effectiveness, school demographics and competition with schools outside CPS, and public concern over school safety. The continuing loss of enrollment, despite a growing city population, poses a number of dilemmas for CPS. There is a clear need for a strategic plan to handle the changing demographics

and increasing competition for students. With the public confidence level in the Mayor significantly higher than that for CPS, there is some sentiment for a greater mayoral role over the schools. Given Mayor Coleman's clear statement that he is not interested in a takeover, realistic attention should be given to what areas the Mayor's office can be more involved and/or provide additional support for CPS and public education in Columbus.

Areas for consideration include:

- Greater use of the bully pulpit to raise the importance of education. This could be done to make the connection between the performance of the schools and the future of the city. The Mayor can use his office to highlight shared issues of concerns, such as school safety, school closings, school system budgets, and truancy.
- Consideration of what non-instructional functions the Mayor's office might be able to more effectively perform than CPS. The city already provides funding for a school resource officer in each school. These could include an increased youth services and out of school time role.

Mayor's Office of Education

This office has benefited from strong leadership and a focus on after school programs. The intention to pay greater attention to programming for middle school and high school students is an important one, particularly as the city focuses on how to improve high school graduation rates, postsecondary readiness and access, reduction of youth violence, and engagement of the teenage population in productive out-of-school activities.

Concerns were raised over effective communication of programs, such as the Summer Youth Employment Initiative, and in producing data with results that demonstrate program effectiveness. Paying attention to these issues would be a welcomed role.

The establishment of the Office of Education was an important indicator of the commitment to education. Increasing participation by the director in such community initiatives as the Youth Commission, Workforce Development and the P-16 Council are critical to institutionalizing the office as a legacy of Mayor Coleman, and maintaining a foothold in the crosscutting areas that these initiatives represent. »»



Business Engagement

Business engagement in education is important in Columbus, but scattered and inconsistent. One role the education office could play is to help coordinate, encourage and oversee this involvement. Finding a way to take the burden of finding corporate sponsors away from school principals and by providing a central repository where both schools and businesses could connect would be very useful. The mayor's office could help the business community and the school district better identify district and individual schools needs, and how the business community can best contribute in meeting these needs.

High School Reform and a Thousand Flowers Bloom

CPS is awash in ideas and experiments in how to reform the city's high schools. Schools are drawing on the technical expertise and funding of major foundations to redesign the high school experience, improve graduation rates and increase postsecondary readiness and access. The offering of multiple alternatives is a deliberate strategy, meant to make CPS more competitive with the charter schools, surrounding districts and private schools. It also reflects the reality that there is no one model that will prove success for all. However, the question remains, are programs being adopted because they are proven effective or because there is money to implement them? It is our best guess, that it is a combination of these. The district would be better served by a concerted effort to evaluate the change models and assist schools to make wise choices. Also, the system needs to develop and institute a comprehensive and thoughtful plan for high school transformation in the district.

It is outside the purview of the Mayor to develop a strategic plan, but he could use his bully pulpit to encourage such an effort. Even though the Mayor has been reluctant to be very visible on school matters, it may be the appropriate time to take such a position. The district might want to ask the mayor to consider a Mayor's Summit on High School Transformation as a means to begin and direct the discussion to create an initiative that includes a strategic plan, better information and data on successful models and the roles for business and community leaders. The summit's goal would be the development of a short and long-term process for instituting effective high school change.

In the end, the Mayor, his education policy staff, and CPS need to have a more concerted and visible effort to encourage and support change. The key to the success of the partnership is defining the roles and making sure everyone understands their responsibilities and the goals and objectives of the effort.



**MAYORS RECOGNIZE
THAT EDUCATION IS
A CRITICAL COMPONENT
OF THE CITY'S WELL-BEING,
ECONOMIC SUCCESS
AND FUTURE VITALITY.**

APPENDIX A

List of Interviewees

Office of the Mayor

- Mayor Michael B. Coleman
- Tei Street, Director of the Office of Education
- Pam O’Grady, Policy Advisor to Mayor Coleman

Columbus Public Schools (District level)

- Dr. Gene Harris, Superintendent of Schools
- Dr. Marvenia Bosley, Deputy Superintendent of Academic Achievement
- Dr. John Stanford, Special Assistant for Government and Board Services
- Susan Ripple-Rhett, Director of High School Curriculum Programs
- Jackie Ralls, Executive Director for Principal Leadership Development

Columbus City Council

- Councilman Kevin Boyce

High Schools

- **Africentric Early College Alternative School:** Principal Robert Murphy, teachers, parents.
- **Brookhaven High School:** Acting Principal Talisha L. Dixon, small school principals, students, teachers/staff.
- **Linden-Mckinley High School:** Principal Carlton D. Jenkins, staff, parents, student.
- **Marion-Franklin High School:** Principal Brian Terrell, teachers/staff, students, parents.

Columbus Education Association

- Rhonda Johnson, President

Education Council

- Dr. Brad Mitchell, Executive Director

KidsOhio

- Mark Real, President and CEO

Columbus Partnership

- Robert Milbourne, President and CEO

Columbus Urban League

- William “Eddie” Harrell Jr., President and CEO

APPENDIX B

Mayor Michael Coleman’s Educational Programs and Initiatives

Regional Educational Summits: Mayor Coleman has hosted four educational summits, bringing together educational, community, and business leaders across the Columbus metropolitan area. Of particular importance was the inclusion of school officials from the 16 school districts in which Columbus children attend school, to address common concerns. The summits addressed key issues, such as closing the achievement gap, and encouraged the use of common data collection and analytic tools.

Columbus Covenant 2000: This document outlined the major principals and goals of the Coleman administration. Under goals, the Covenant states the following: “**Education:** encourage and promote participation in learning opportunities.”

School Safety: The Mayor’s office pays half the cost of the school resource officers located in all public schools. This recognizes the shared interest and importance of school safety. Recent surveys conducted by KidsOhio identify school safety as the number one concern of Columbus parents and the primary reason cited for taking children out of Columbus Public Schools.

Truancy: There are ongoing discussions between the Mayor, his staff and the school district about how to approach the problems of truancy. In the past, the City and the school district ran truancy centers, (which provide a variety of services intended to prevent and deter truancy, as well as intervene in on-going problems). Budget cuts led to their demise. Current discussions are centered around the creation of truancy courts, possibly housed in schools to serve as a deterrent.

Young Black Males: Mayor Coleman cited the particular problems of male black youth in Columbus, a problem receiving considerable national attention recently. The Mayor noted the prevalence of crime committed by this population, with the same population as the victims. In conjunction with an anti-gang initiative, Mayor Coleman is convening a Young Black Male Commission. One of its primary goals is to reach out to this population and provide them with positive models and options, with incentives to stay in school, and the creation of mentorship and internship programs, summer youth employment and academic intervention programs.

Growth Corridors and Pay as-you go: Columbus is the only major city in Ohio that is growing, with 1,500 to 2000 new residents being added every month. However, as to be expected, the growth is in the outer portions of the city. Changes in population density and the loss of substantial number of students to other districts, charter and private schools has resulted in the need to close many schools in the central portions of the city, while at the same time needing to build new schools in the growth corridors. To facilitate the latter, the Mayor has initiated a “Pay as you go” policy. Under this policy, funding from both public and private sources must be provided concurrent with new development to pay for infrastructure, such as roads, firehouses, sewers and schools. By establishing Community Development Authorities, real estate taxes are being funneled to help pay for the infrastructure, while developers are also required to contribute.

2

DENVER, COLORADO

INTRODUCTION

With a grant made possible by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the U.S. Conference of Mayors conducted two case studies of cities to explore mayoral involvement in education, specifically as it relates to high school reform. The Conference, in consultation with Carnegie, identified Denver as a site of interest because of its then first term mayor, John Hickenlooper. Since coming into office in 2003, Hickenlooper played an instrumental role in elevating the importance of education through his support of the **College Invest Mile High Graduate Rebate Award for Denver Students** (GRADS) Program and **ProComp**, a teacher compensation system.

[Note: Subsequent to the site visit, Mayor Hickenlooper placed on the November 2006 ballot an early childhood funding initiative which passed enabling every eligible child to be guaranteed access to pre-k education. This is being paid for by a small increase in the city sales tax.]

In addition to the mayor's engagement in education, the Conference selected Denver because the city had institutionalized in the mayor's office an Office for Education and Children. It was created in 1995, under Mayor Wellington E. Webb, to develop programs and projects that reflect the mayor's commitment to support the successful education of the city's children and to strengthen the city's partnership with Denver Public Schools.

With the Mayor's Office for Education and Children, Mayor Hickenlooper has articulated education policy, issued agendas and initiatives, and used his bully pulpit when necessary to gain support for his initiatives such as high school reform and pre-k education.

The case study interviews with key education officials in the city were conducted by Conference staff in-person on May 1-3, 2006 in Denver. (See Appendix – Itinerary).

Mayoral Engagement

Mayor Hickenlooper has used the bully pulpit to support initiatives such as the **College Invest Mile High Graduate Rebate Award for Denver Students** (GRADS) Program and **ProComp**, the city's new teacher compensation system.

CollegeInvest Mile High Graduate Rebate Award for Denver Students (GRADS)

In collaboration with CollegeInvest, the mayor launched GRADS in 2005. CollegeInvest is a not-for-profit division of the Colorado Department of Higher Education that provides more than \$700,000 in scholarships in addition to college savings plans for families. GRADS was developed to offer all 2005-2009 DPS high school graduates low-cost student loans to help finance their higher education, with a partial »»

debt forgiveness aspect upon completion of a college degree, from \$300-\$1,500. It is funded through the use of the city's private activity bond allocation.

ProComp

In March 2004, members of the Denver Classroom Teachers Association approved a landmark collective bargaining agreement that established a 9-year commitment to implement a professional compensation system for teachers, known as ProComp. It is a results-based teacher compensation system with different opportunities for teachers to earn bonuses and pay increases based on factors, such as meeting annual instructional objectives, working in hard-to-serve schools or hard-to-staff assignments, and obtaining certification from the

National Board of Professional Teaching Standards. Teachers set their objectives at the beginning of the year in consultation with the principal. All new teachers will be covered by ProComp and currently employed teachers in Denver can choose to participate in this form of compensation or the old structure.

The success of Mile High GRADS and ProComp was dependent on the role of the mayor as a catalyst and the use of his bully pulpit. He was able to bring together community stakeholders to combine their resources and individual efforts to address issues of access to higher education, teacher compensation and instruction.

District Leadership and High School Reform

Because the mayor's engagement in education is more focused on early grades and higher education, it appears that little is being done to directly address high school transformation. The Denver Public Schools (DPS) has started to address high school issues through the Denver Public Schools Commission on Secondary School Reform, the Denver Plan, and new graduation requirements. Denver Public Schools Superintendent Michael Bennet, who served as Mayor Hickenlooper's first chief of staff, is using the Commission report as a tool for awareness and guidance on current issues in high school student achievement and high school transformation.

Denver Public Schools Commission on Secondary School Reform

In April 2004, then Superintendent Jerry Wartgow and the Board of Education established the Denver Commission on Secondary School Reform. The Commission was charged with making recommendations to the district on closing the achievement gap and improving graduation rates. Members of the commission included the executive director of the Mayor's Office for Education and Children, Maria Guajardo and local education stakeholders. In 2005, the commission released the report *Not a Moment to Lose: A Call to Action for Transforming Denver's High Schools*. The district has 34 public high schools serving 17,913 students of which 49% are Latino, 22% African American, 24% white, 3.6% Asian, and 1.4% American Indian. The report highlighted the following areas of concern:

Mayor's Office for Education and Children

The Mayor perceived his education role as more than utilizing the bully pulpit. He saw himself as a convener often through his Office for Education and Children. The office plays an important role in creating collaborations between stakeholders across interest areas to develop and implement initiatives in education. Under Hickenlooper's leadership the office had already developed an early childhood initiative and Latino Summit.

Early Childhood Initiatives

This initiative, *Invest in Success*, was launched in 2004 to promote awareness of the need to focus education efforts on the youngest students. It was an opportunity for government officials, education providers, civic and business leaders to collectively strategize ways to ensure all children have an equal chance at the starting gate. Through *Invest in Success*, the mayor formed a Leadership Team on Early Childhood Education to develop a strategic plan for Denver's early education system which is now being implemented.

In addition to *Invest in Success*, the Mayor's Office for Education and Children assisted in the selection of eight early childhood centers that would receive a total of \$325,000 in grant funding to improve school readiness by giving the providers an opportunity to attend child development courses, earn environmental quality ratings for their centers, and expand parent education. Funding was made possible by Denver's Department of Human Services and approved by the Welfare Reform Board in an effort to target early childhood providers serving low-income families and address the achievement gap.

Latino Summit

In October 2004, the Mayor's Office for Education and Children organized the Mayor's Summit on Latino Academic Achievement. The daylong summit had more than 200 participants including education leaders, administrators, elected officials, civic leaders, philanthropists and community organization representatives. The summit included presentations from local and national leaders on the status

of Latino student academic achievement in Denver and best practices. Sessions ranged from addressing pre-school programs to elementary, middle, secondary, and college preparation programs. The overall goal of the summit was to recommit community stakeholders to increasing academic achievement, closing the achievement gap and increasing graduation rates for Latino student populations.

The Mayor's Office for Education and Children also promote many programs in addition to those mentioned above. These include the national after school program, *Lights On After School*, that provides tutoring and activities for Denver's elementary and middle school students. It is a partnership between the office, the Denver Public Schools Foundation and Mile High United Way focused on increasing school attendance and academic achievement. The program has led to a decrease in high school dropouts within the district. (See Appendix – Impacts of After School Programming in Denver)

38% of 9th graders were proficient in reading on the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) test in 2003-2004, including just 25% of Latino students and 40% of African American Students, when compared to 70% of white students

11% of 9th graders were found proficient in math, including just 4% of Latino students and 5% African American, compared to 37% of white students

30% of 11th graders were college ready based on their Colorado ACT scores, including just 12% of Latino students and 17% of African American students, compared with 60% of white students

18% of 9th graders were held back at the end of 2003-2004; 62% were Latino, 20% African American, and 14% white »»

Of the 34 high schools, there are 12 neighborhood schools, 9 charter schools, 9 alternative schools, 2 contract schools, 1 magnet school, and one on-line high school. The district has 51% of the high school students for free and reduced lunch, 11.6% designated as special needs, and 10.6% enrolled in English Language Acquisition

High Schools in the Denver Public School system:

34

programs. The Denver Public Schools (DPS) is faced with meeting all of these demands to ensure quality education and high expectations for all students. Consequently, the Commission's recommendations included the following:

- All schools need to design experiences for students in all grades that stress individual attention, rigor, relevance, and relationships.
- The district needs to offer students a choice of schools and opportunities that reflect different learning styles and interests.
- The district and the schools need to develop a timely and user-friendly information system to integrate data on student performance, student characteristics and educational programs, and use a unique student identifier to track individual progress and gather accurate data on student dropout, transfer, and graduation rates.

The Commission's report was finalized at the end of the 2005 school year which coincided with the retirement of Superintendent Wartgow. After a national search, Michael Bennet, then Mayor Hickenlooper's chief of staff, was selected by the school board to be the superintendent of schools. Superintendent Bennet "shelved" the report (DLL1).

The Denver Plan

Given the unique circumstances, some education stakeholders raised concerns about the new superintendent and his closeness to the mayor. These were fears of a future attempt by the mayor to takeover the schools. This has not been an interest of the mayors, and to quell any notion of this he has taken a very low profile and stayed below the radar on education issues, leaving the visible role for education leadership to the superintendent. Superintendent Bennet used the newly formulated Denver Plan to define his role as superintendent and further disassociate himself from his former position.

The Denver Plan has three goals:

- 1** Denver children will learn from a highly-skilled faculty in every school that is empowered by robust professional development and timely assessment data.
- 2** Highly-trained principals and assistant principals will serve as instructional leaders of the faculty in Denver Public Schools.
- 3** Collaboration among the Denver community and all Denver Public Schools stakeholders will support children in a safe, orderly, and enriching environment in every school and classroom.

Though the goals are not directly aimed at high school reform, Bennet believes that its emphasis on quality instruction at all grade levels will have a significant impact. Recognizing the importance of a quality high school education, he plans to develop and then reveal a high school plan that incorporates aspects of the Secondary Commission Report and suggestions from the Graduation Requirements Advisory Work Group.



Graduation Requirements Advisory Work Group

Superintendent Bennet at the time of the site visit had not yet announced the much anticipated high school reform plan. At the same time of writing the high school reform plan, the District was developing new graduation requirements by the Graduation Requirements Advisory Work Group. These new requirements will be implemented for students entering high school in 2006 and are scheduled to graduate in the spring of 2010. The work group is composed of 36 district staff and community members. The plan includes such requirements as the following:

The Personal Education Plan

Each student who enters a DPS high school will develop a Personal Education Plan (PEP). This plan will set their intended course of study and an academic adviser (this may be a teacher, counselor, dean administrator or other professional school staff member) will review and amend the PEP each semester, prior to the selection of a new class schedule. For students attending the 8th grade in the DPS, the PEP will be initiated during the spring semester of 8th grade.

Declared Area of Focus

Students in both the 11th and 12th grade are required to identify an area of academic interest. After declaring an area of focus during the first semester of their junior year, students will need to engage in at least 1.0 units of study, beyond the graduation requirement of a particular content area and develop a portfolio of their learning that demonstrates both the depth of their academic understanding and communicates their intended application of this understanding in life beyond high school graduation.

Community Engagement

The majority of community groups and local foundations approved of the new superintendent and were excited about the mayor's role as "cheerleader for DPS." They saw it as an opportune time to create change. Local organizations, such as Padres Unidos and the Piton Foundation, value the role of the Mayor's Office for Education and Children as a tool for presenting best practices and creating collaborations among stakeholders to address the needs of students. There has yet to be a focus on high school reform by most community groups, with the exception of Padres Unidos which produced a student-led survey which found the following by surveying 700 students from North High School:

38% of 9th graders who enter North High each year graduate four years later

93% of North students surveyed want to attend college, but 56% feel they are not being prepared adequately

58% of students surveyed do not feel motivated to succeed by North teachers or administrators

65% of students surveyed said they ditch school because classes are boring, 39% said that the best way to increase attendance would be to improve the quality of teaching and curriculum

Results such as those above demonstrate the need to transform high school conditions for students. Though community groups are engaged in reform efforts, the voice of the business community is lacking. There needs to be a place at the table for business community leaders and a vision for their involvement. Without such an effort, engagement of the business community will continue to be lacking.

Key Findings

Lack of Plan, Lack of Progress

Because there is no specific plan for high school reform (at the time of the site visit), individual stakeholders are choosing in-direct methods of addressing the issue. Schools such as the Denver School of Science and Technology are preparing students beyond basic skill development. However, this is a charter school which the mayor did assist in its development, but at the time of the visit there was no discussion of replication or other models to be instituted by the district. Each high school seemed to be on its own. Also, the district failed in an effort to transform one high school with Gates funding and it is being closed as part of a reconstitution of the school. The district must find ways to replicate successful models and strategies. These must recognize and incorporate the new graduation requirements.

Policy Windows

One would believe that all the stars are aligned for education reform in Denver with the selection of Bennet as superintendent and in partnership with the mayor's office. Stakeholders in education see this era of reform in Denver as an opportune time to address issues in education. With more time in office, Mayor Hickenlooper may become more visibly involved.

Business involvement

There needs to be a clearly defined role for and seat at the table for the business community. Numerous business community leaders are willing and interested in getting involved, but at present it needs to be self-initiated. A coordinated business effort in education has not existed in the past. The mayor is very interested in getting a comprehensive engagement by business. This is clearly something lacking in Denver.

Collaborative Spirit

Through collaborations, stakeholders are willing to sit with the school system to address the educational needs of high school students. The framework for this effort was at the beginning stages during the site visit, because the superintendent was still defining his role and educational agenda, and redefining his relationship with the mayor to address the needs of students. Thus, there is a delicate balance between addressing high school education issues through the Mayor's office and the district. Because of the public's fear of a takeover, the mayor has stepped back to allow Superintendent Bennet to create and win support for the Denver Plan. It is still vital that the Office for Education and Children complement and work with Bennet's future efforts to improve high school learning. It is possible for the office to expand the after school program to include high school age students as part of the Denver Plan.

Dual Roles of Being a Coordinator and Initiator

The mayor facilitates collaborations by bringing leaders to the table on a common issue. In Denver the mayor uses his Office for Education and Children. As an individual, the mayor is also an initiator of new programs, such as those funding higher education for Denver students (i.e. MileHigh GRADS). This dual mayoral role is unique because the Office for Education and Children helps to depoliticize reform efforts while maintaining opportunities for Mayor Hickenlooper to use the bully pulpit when necessary to be an advocate.

In conclusion, the role Mayor Hickenlooper has chosen is definitely more than a cheerleader. The role is evolving since he does not want to appear too involved while still fully engaged. He definitely relishes the catalyst role while enabling his Office of Education and Children to be a resource and carry out programmatic functions that complement his pro-active bully pulpit efforts. He will pick his spots for visible engagement and take on other initiatives in subtle ways. Thus, the mayor is very adept in making sure he keeps that delicate balance and not to adversely affect the superintendent's education leadership role during Bennet's first years in the position. This is a very politically scrutinized approach but one that seems to be working in Denver.

Because there is no specific plan for high school reform, individual stakeholders are choosing in-direct methods of addressing the issue.



APPENDIX

Denver Site Visit April 30 - May 3, 2006

Sunday, April 30

6 PM
Dinner with Dr. Mariah
Guajardo Lucero

Monday, May 1

8:15 - 9:00 AM
Mayor John Hickenlooper

9:15 - 10:15 AM
Kim Ursetta, President, Denver
Classroom Teachers Association

10:30 - 11:30 AM
Scott Mendelsberg, Director,
GEAR UP, Colorado Commission
of Higher Education

12:30 - 1:30 PM
Brad Jupp, DPS Senior
Academic Policy Officer

1:30 - 2:30 PM
Michael Bennet, DPS
Superintendent Policy
Advisors Sarah Hughes
and Happy Haynes

2:45 - 3:45 PM
Alan Gottlieb, Education
Program Officer, the Piton
Foundation

4:00 - 5:00 PM
Students 4 Justice

Tuesday, May 2

7:30 - 9:30 AM
Denver School of Science
& Technology, Principal
Bill Kurtz

10:00 AM - NOON
North High School, Principal
Dr. Darlene LeDoux

1:30 - 2:30 PM
Theresa Pen, President,
DPS Board of Education

2:45 - 3:45 PM
Alex Medler, Policy Director,
Colorado Children's Campaign

4:00 - 5:00 PM
Pam Martinez, co-director,
Padres Unidos

Wednesday, May 3

9:15 - 10:15 AM
Tim Marquez, CEO, Venoco, Inc.

10:30 - 11:30 AM
Rev. Lucia Guzman,
DPS Board member, Co-chair
of DPS Secondary School
Reform Commission



The United States Conference of Mayors saved the following resources by using New Leaf Reincarnation Matte, designated Ancient Forest Friendly and manufactured with electricity that is offset with Green-e® certified renewable energy certificates, 100% recycled fiber and 50% post-consumer waste, and processed chlorine free: XX fully grown trees, XX gallons of water, XX million Btu of energy, XX pounds of solid waste, and XX pounds of greenhouse gases. Calculations based on research by Environmental Defense and other members of the Paper Task Force. www.newleafpaper.com





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