

INSIDE The Annenberg Challenge

A public-private partnership improving education for 1.5 million urban and rural public school students



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In Memoriam

All of us who are part of the Annenberg Challenge have been deeply saddened by the passing of Ambassador Walter H. Annenberg. His steadfast belief in public education and his unprecedented generosity in establishing the Challenge will endure through our ongoing efforts to improve public education in both urban and rural schools serving America's most disadvantaged children.

— Warren Simmons, Executive Director,
Annenberg Institute for School Reform

Inside the Annenberg Challenge highlights recent accomplishments in the eighteen sites across the country that were awarded funds under Ambassador Walter H. Annenberg's \$500-million "Challenge to the Nation" to improve its public schools, especially for underserved urban and rural students.

Up Front

▶ Chattanooga's Public Education Foundation has been awarded \$1.5 million by the Osborne Foundation to implement an advanced degree program for urban educators. The Osborne Fellows Project will help to improve student achievement and increase teacher effectiveness by enabling 20 elementary teachers a year to earn a master's degree at no personal cost. Teachers from the nine schools involved in PEF's Benwood Initiative will participate in the project, which will be coordinated by the PEF and hosted by the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga in partnership with Johns Hopkins University. The goals of the project are to educate teachers on how to enhance student learning within urban schools and communities and to ensure that all students are reading at or above grade level. For information: Tel: (426) 265-9403; Web: www.pefchattanooga.org

▶ A summary report released by the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative (BASRC) cites achievement gains in some of the region's chronically low-performing schools. The report, prepared by the Center for Research on the Context of Teaching (CRC) at Stanford University, evaluates the impact of the first five years of BASRC's experience with inquiry-based school reform. According to the report, the \$50-million public-private partnership, also known as the Hewlett-Annenberg Challenge, helped to change teacher practice, improve student learning, and narrow the achievement gap between poor and well-to-do students but lagged on closing the gap between disadvantaged and advantaged students at individual schools. Drs. Milbrey McLaughlin and Joan Talbert of the CRC discussed the report with an audience of educators, funders, school-support organizations, and community leaders at a day-long regional education summit on October 3, hosted by BASRC and the CRC. The complete report will be distributed in late October. For information: Tel: (415) 348-5500; Web: www.basrc.org

▶ The Rural School and Community Trust has received a \$994,000 grant from the Ford Foundation to work in five states on equity issues in rural education. Partner organizations in Vermont, West Virginia, North Carolina, Mississippi, and Nebraska will be working individually and in collaboration with the Rural Trust to increase funding for rural schools in their states. More broadly, the Rural Equity Collaborative seeks to define rural school finance issues nationally from a rural perspective; develop and demonstrate skills, practices, and tools supporting rural organizing on school finance issues; communicate effectively with urban education activists; and build a national rural constituency for school finance reform. The Collaborative hopes to add new state partners over the next several years. For information: Tel: (202) 955-7177; Web: www.ruraledu.org

▼ Impacting Students, ▼ Schools & Systems

“They [NYNSR schools] are teaching us a great deal about what works in public education and what doesn’t, and we’re using them as models for other schools. These schools are helping to revitalize public education in New York City.”

– David Sherman, Vice President,
United Federation of Teachers

Since 1996, the Center for Arts Education has contributed more than \$26 million dollars in public and private funds to support arts-education partnerships in the New York City public schools. In its current round of funding, 31 of the 170 schools that applied will receive \$100,000 in multiyear grants totaling \$3.1 million. The grants will be used to support arts partnerships between schools and the vast array of the city’s cultural institutions, performing and visual arts companies, arts education organizations, and museums. Tel: (800) 721-9199; Web: www.cae-nyc.org

A \$25,000 grant from the George Foundation will allow the Houston Annenberg Challenge to expand the network of mathematics specialists and teachers in its the K–5 Mathematics Initiative. The award will enable the Fort Bend ISD to address student achievement in mathematics by providing ongoing professional development for staff and by sharing expertise across district lines. Begun two years ago in Houston ISD’s Southwest District, the program supports math specialists who co-teach and coach teachers in effective mathematical practices in the classroom. The specialists also facilitate a parent mathematics series and family mathematics activities. Tel: (713) 658-1881; Web: www.houstonannenberg.org

All nine inner-city elementary schools in the Chattanooga Public Education Foundation’s Benwood Initiative have made marked progress in overall student performance, according to data from the Terra Nova achievement tests in reading, language, and math. Some schools improved as much as 8.72 points overall compared to the previous year

and as much as 7.56 points in reading, a focus of the initiative. The average gain of 4.93 was nearly double the district average of 2.55. The Benwood Initiative, begun in 2001, focuses on improving literacy and attracting high-quality teachers in high-priority elementary schools. Tel: (426) 265-9403; Web: www.pefchattanooga.org

The South Florida Annenberg Challenge received this year’s National Urban League Partnerships for Opportunity Award at the League’s annual conference on July 29 in Los Angeles. President and CEO Hugh B. Price said: “The judges unanimously agreed that the South Florida Annenberg Challenge best exemplified the qualities that would have a lasting impact on the Urban League of Greater Miami and the Urban League of Broward County and the communities they serve.” SFAC was nominated jointly by the Greater Miami and Broward Leagues for its local community leadership. Tel: (305) 377-9909; Web: www.sfannenberg.org

BASRC has developed an Internet-based course to introduce educators to its improvement process, the “Cycle of Inquiry.” Created by staffers at BASRC Central working with outside reviewers, the online course teaches a structured inquiry process that draws on data to improve teaching and learning and to narrow the achievement gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students. The process encourages teachers to work together, developing collegial bonds and shared professionalism. (Two groups of educators have completed the course, which will be available to the larger Collaborative this fall.) Tel: (415) 348-5500; Web: www.basrc.org

The final evaluation of New York Networks for School Renewal concludes that the more than 50,000 students who directly benefited from the initiative were well served. With a focus on small schools to help foster a more personal learning environment, NYNSR helped to create or restructure 140 small schools in New York City. Released earlier this year, the five-year evaluation showed that, compared to students citywide, NYNSR students generally had lower dropout rates, better student attendance, and less student mobility. The evaluation was led by New York University’s Institute for Education and Social Policy. Web: www.nynetworks.org

With a grant from the McGregor Fund, Schools of the 21st Century is distributing *Using Data to Improve Teaching and Learning to every teacher in the Detroit Public Schools* this fall. Based on a study of 12 Annenberg-funded Leadership Schools, the publication examines effective ways to use student-assessment and other data to make decisions at both the school and classroom levels. The study is part of a joint effort of S21C and the Detroit Public Schools to create a school-based accountability system that links data to school-level decision making. Tel: (313) 871-3515; Web: www.s21c-detroit.org

The Boston Plan for Excellence and the Boston Public Schools have collaborated to enhance the district’s intranet information system with new data-management tools. Teachers can now consult this user-friendly system, called MyBPS, to access district- and school-based student-performance information as well as medical records, attendance figures, and other data, which can be sorted by numerous fields to create a variety of useful analyses. Tel: (617) 227-8055; Web: www.bpe.org

“When private monies are combined with public funds to reach goals set by a targeted program, great results are inevitable. If communities work together with the public schools, invest in the teachers, support the leaders, and involve the families, then all of our children will achieve.”

– Dan Challener, Executive Director,
Public Education Foundation
(Chattanooga)

▼ Building Expertise ▼ & New Partnerships

A book of essays and reflections of 33 participants in Minneapolis's Arts for Academic Achievement gives voice to efforts to create change in and through the arts. The teachers, artists, administrators, and parents whose stories are collected in *Letters from the Field* offer personal and powerful testimony to the success of Arts for Academic Achievement from their own experiences. *Letters from the Field* is available in pdf format at the AAA Web site. Tel: (612) 668-5333; Web: www.mpls.k12.mn.us/aaa

The Center for Arts Education in New York City has received a grant from the Entertainment Industry Foundation's new National Arts Education Initiative, which raises awareness for arts education and funds exemplary programs nationwide. A press conference and event honoring the Center and the national Arts Teacher of the Year was held on October 1 at FAO Schwarz in Manhattan. Mattel is the founding sponsor of the Arts Education initiative, which is supported by entertainment industry executives and celebrities. Kelly Preston and Jada Pinkett Smith appear in the initiative's print public-service campaign, "Art Inspires." Tel: (800) 721-9199; Web: www.cae-nyc.org

Detroit's Schools of the 21st Century is gearing up for a major public engagement effort to support the district's emphasis on reading achievement and family literacy. Activities will fall into several categories in accordance with the program's goals: engaging businesses and community organizations in partnerships for education; developing parent education and training strategies; beginning a community dialogue to produce action-oriented outcomes; and strengthening school-community partnerships. This effort builds on S21C's successful 2001-02

campaign to reach parents with information on academic standards and on how they can support their children at home. Tel: (313) 871-3515; Web: www.s21c-detroit.org

A video produced by the Boston Plan for Excellence kicked off a three-day institute for the district's principals-headmasters. The 30-minute video follows a coach as she helps teachers in three schools learn about and practice "workshop" instruction. Superintendent Thomas Payzant used the video to drive home his priority for the new school year: using coaches to launch workshop instruction in K-12 language arts classes. Information on the video is available at the BPE Web site. Tel: (617) 227-8055; Web: www.bpe.org

The Rural School and Community Trust, in conjunction with What Kids Can Do, has published *Tell Us How It Was: Stories of Rural Elders Preserved by Rural Youth*, a volume of community oral histories collected and presented by kids from Rural Challenge sites across the country. *Tell Us How It Was* also contains how-to information for teachers who want to implement classroom oral-history projects in their communities, an annotated bibliography, and a description of one exemplary project from its conception through the publication of a bound book with accompanying CD. Tel: (202) 955-7177; Web: www.ruraledu.org

The Houston Annenberg Challenge is providing 65 new Teach for America corps members with support in their first year of teaching in Houston and the Rio Grande Valley. Ocean Energy made a \$25,000 grant for the 45 corps members who will teach in Houston. Training in the

use of Critical Friends Group protocols helps the new teachers create professional learning communities of eight to 12 teachers who regularly examine student work and open their classrooms to each other's scrutiny. CFGs provide a supportive alternative to "one-shot" professional development workshops. Tel: (713) 658-1881; Web: www.houstonannenberg.org

The Florida School Report, the last major initiative by the South Florida Annenberg Challenge, was launched at the State Board of Education meeting in Tallahassee on August 27. The Florida School Report (FSR) is a free, on-line research tool that analyzes and charts multiyear school performance, based on comparable school demographics and Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test data. Studies of high-performing schools are under way, in cooperation with Florida Atlantic University's College of Education. The information at FSR is available to parents, educators, policy-makers, and anyone interested in school achievement at www.floridaschoolreport.org. Tel: (305) 377-9909; Web: www.sfannenberg.org

Salt Lake City's Eccles/Annenberg Challenge Community Governing Board is providing encouragement and financial support for a serious discussion on reform at the middle-school level. Middle-level administrators, teachers, parents, and students gathered in June for a summit to begin building a collaborative process for addressing common middle-level needs and districtwide academic issues. A follow-up meeting for participants was held in August to continue discussions raised at the summit. Tel: (801) 578-8599; Web: www.sl.c.k12.ut.us/annenberg

“One of the most exciting facets of our work with rural schools across the country is seeing the excellent work young people are capable of producing, while learning important academic skills. [Tell Us How It Was] is testimony to the fact that when the community becomes the textbook, the classroom, and the laboratory for student learning, kids can achieve great things.”

— Rachel Tompkins, President, Rural School and Community Trust

“We have become a place that I once dreamed of and it feels great.”

—Dr. Jeffrey Raison, principal of Minneapolis's Dowling Elementary School, in *Letters from the Field*

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▼ Collaborating ▼ Across Projects

“The Challenge breathed new life into American education. It brought hope to schools that had been all but abandoned. It helped educators who had accepted mediocrity and failure to make a new commitment to excellence. It helped teachers to change their minds about students they thought were doomed to failure.”

— from *The Annenberg Challenge: Lessons and Reflections*

The culminating report on the Challenge’s achievements in improving urban, rural, and arts education was released on June 12 at a press conference in Washington, DC. *The Annenberg Challenge: Lessons and Reflections on Public School Reform* was published jointly by the Annenberg Foundation and the Annenberg Institute for School Reform. Warren Simmons, executive director of the Institute, introduced the report and three of the Challenge directors – Merrill Vargo of the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative, Hollis Headrick of New York’s Center for Arts Education, and Rachel Tompkins of the Rural School and Community Trust – who spoke about the impact of the Chal-

lenge both locally and nationally. U.S. Education Secretary Rod Paige was the keynote speaker at the luncheon following the press briefing. Information on how to obtain copies of the report in print or online is available at www.lessonsandreflections.com

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The Annenberg Institute will host a meeting on “Transforming High Schools: The Role of Central Offices and Reform Support Organizations”

on December 8–10 in San Francisco for sites participating in the Annenberg Challenge and Schools for a New Society. Five-member teams from ten sites will investigate school-based reform efforts

as well as the role played by the central office and intermediary organizations. The meeting will feature visits to area schools in the process of transformation, intermediary organizations, and district offices. Teams will take stock of their current efforts and share ways in which urban school districts are transforming their high schools in order to increase achievement for all students, particularly children of color and those from low-income families. In addition to two and a half days of work at the conference, teams will engage in local preconference preparation in conjunction with a conference facilitator.

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www.annenbergchallenge.org