

SECTION 3:

Looking Toward the Future



The successes of education entrepreneurs are varied and significant, yet the greatest part of the work remains ahead.

Today, just 22% of 4th graders in large cities read at or above grade level, and still fewer are able to do so by 8th grade. Only half of students in the nation's 50 largest districts earn a high school diploma. The work of education entrepreneurs must accelerate in scale and scope in the years ahead. It must also change practice within the large urban school districts that serve the vast majority of students. As NewSchools looks to its second decade, the unfinished work of providing strong educational choices to every American child defines the task before us.



Indeed, the overarching challenge motivating the education entrepreneur movement is the achievement gap between wealthy and low-income students, and between white and minority students. Despite the enormity of that challenge, we see reasons for great optimism. Entrepreneurs are making remarkable progress toward closing what many have seen as an intractable gap. For example, students attending the charter schools managed by Uncommon Schools in New York and New Jersey already have caught up with – and in some cases surpassed – their state's wealthier peers. These entrepreneurs are not content merely to see students make their way through the K-12 system; they are determined to ensure that their students successfully complete college. Organizations like Noble Network of Charter Schools require all students to apply to college, then track

their progress throughout and provide them with the support they need to succeed. Other entrepreneurs are helping to sustain success by mobilizing teachers, parents and communities as advocates for school quality. In Los Angeles, for example, Green Dot Public Schools has brought together parents and community leaders to demand strong schools. Their Parents Union offers lessons for what schools, families and neighborhoods can achieve together.

To make real progress in closing the gap and ensuring college success, these entrepreneurs know that a supply of new talent – teachers and principals, but also administrators and even entrepreneurs – will be needed to make these schools successful, and that better training and supports will be crucial to ensuring their effectiveness, especially in the classroom. These educators and administrators will need better information about

how students are doing, and ways of analyzing that data so that they can adjust instruction accordingly. Achievement First, for example, is showing how schools can follow the lead of nearly every other industry in assessing performance and acting on data – and is sharing its tools with other school organizations.

Other entrepreneurs are beginning to take on one of the most daunting tasks in education: turning around failing schools. And there are signs of real progress. Philadelphia's Mastery Charter Schools brings fresh thinking to every area of a failing school, from operations to staffing to curriculum. With the same students and the same building, Mastery creates a new culture that demands dramatically improved results – and achieves them. It's the beginning of a potentially vast area of entrepreneurial work.

CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

America is coming to grips with what many see as the civil rights issue of our time: the gap in educational opportunity between low-income communities and the nation's more affluent places. That gap can be seen in stark comparisons: to take one example, half a century after school integration became law, African-American and Latino high school seniors read and do math at the level of white eighth-graders.

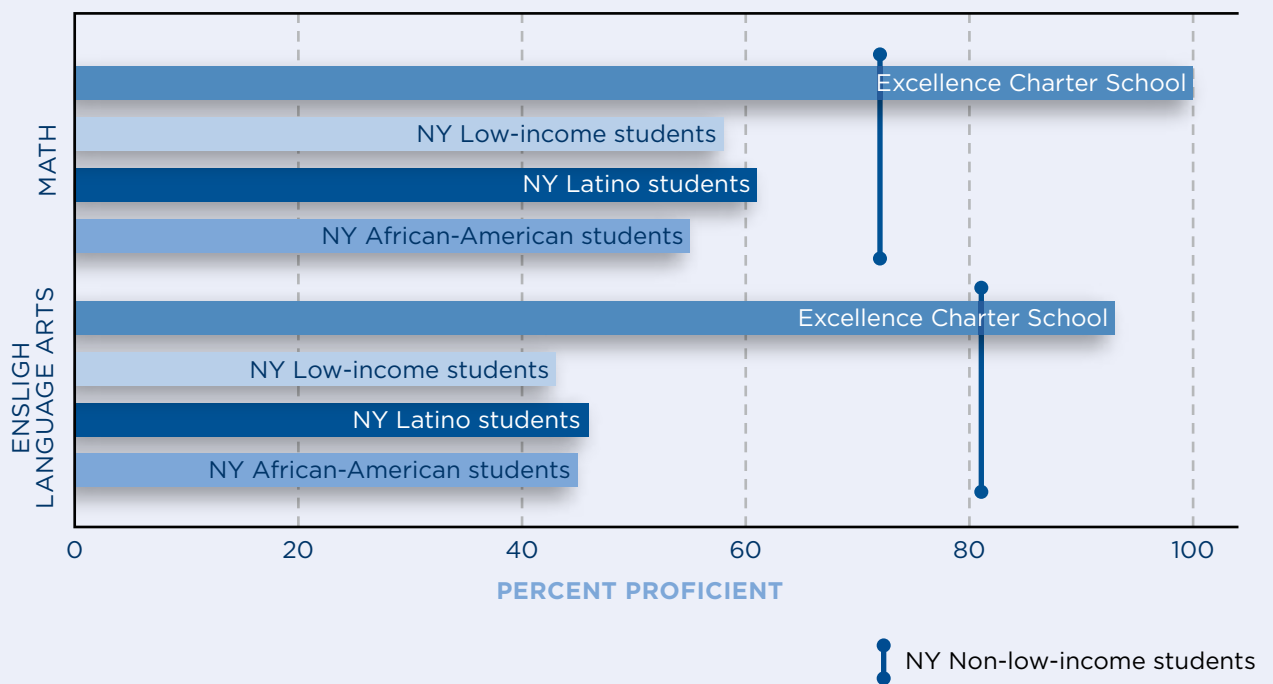
Education entrepreneurs have taken it as their mission to close these achievement gaps. They hold themselves to the goal of delivering a high-quality education that meets or beats what their students would be getting in communities of privilege. Excellence Charter School of Bedford Stuyvesant is one of the remarkable schools in the NewSchools portfolio proving that it can be done. Excellence, which is managed by Uncommon Schools, is located in District 16 in Brooklyn, New York. Across New York State, about two-thirds of non-low-income elementary and middle school students score proficient or higher on reading tests and more than 80% do so on mathematics

tests. By comparison, New York's low-income and minority students perform at significantly lower levels in both subjects.

Although Excellence serves primarily low-income African-American students, they are producing very different results. Students at Excellence are meeting and exceeding the performance of their non low-income peers in New York. In 2008, 100% of Excellence elementary school students scored proficient or better in math, and 94% did so in reading. And Uncommon plans to spread this success to reach more students in more grades: authorized by the State University of New York (SUNY), Excellence is chartered to grow into an elementary and middle school. In addition, Excellence has already begun to develop early learning academies, which ultimately will include a pre-K program. Uncommon is well on the way to accomplishing similar results at its other 10 schools, and over time plans to grow to more than 30 schools in New Jersey and New York that serve over 10,000 students. It is possible to close the achievement gap – and Excellence is proving it.



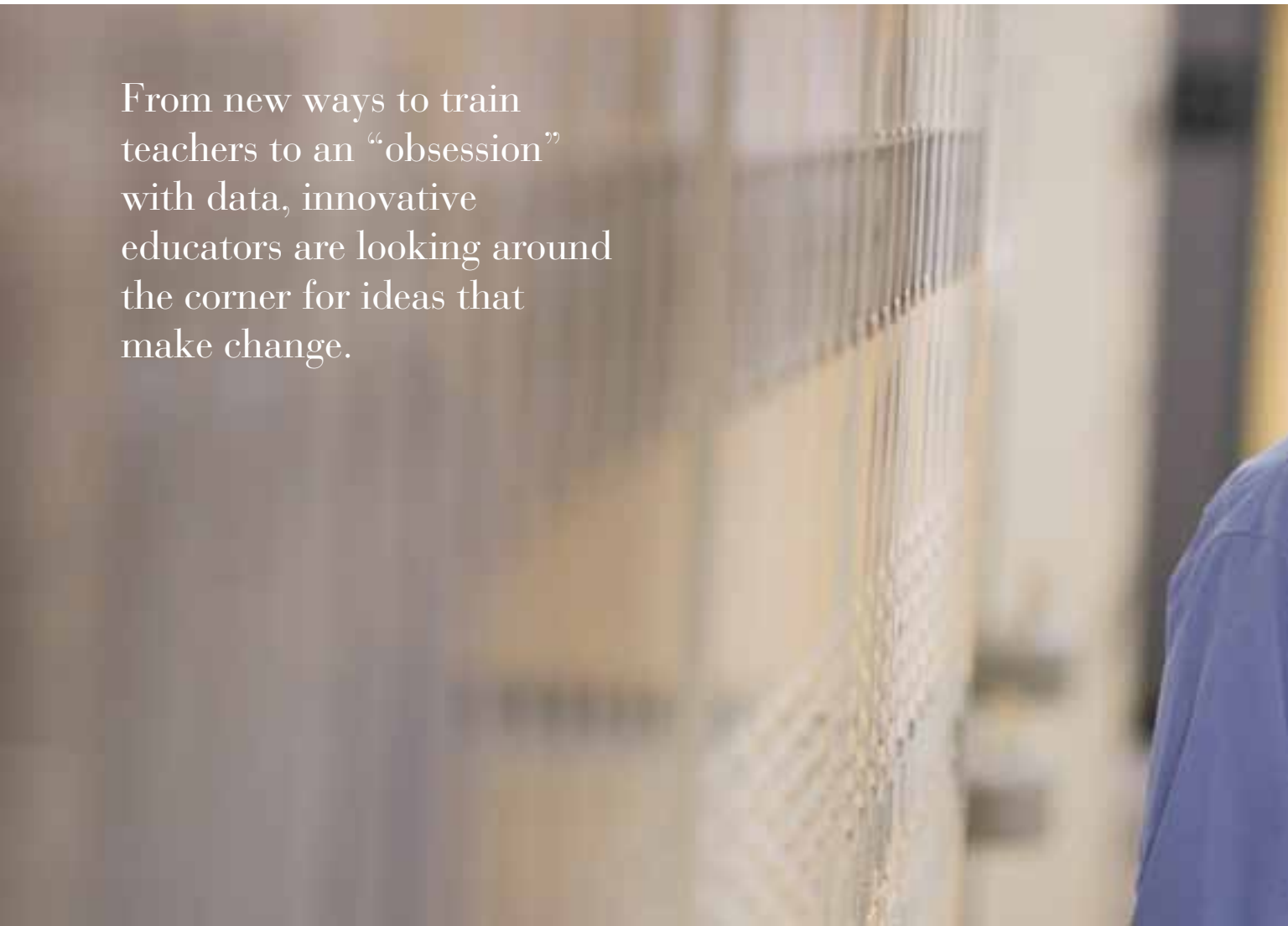
Closing the Gap: Uncommon Schools Excellence Charter School of Bedford Stuyvesant



USING DATA TO IMPROVE INSTRUCTION

For teachers starting a new job, it's hardly unusual to be handed a thick orientation binder on the first day of work. But for teachers at Achievement First, an exceptionally successful New Haven-based charter school management organization, one section might offer a surprise – as well as some insight on that success. The section is called “Some Key Principles, Or Why Achievement First Is So Obsessed with Using Data and Interim Assessments.” It details the organization's firm conviction that “student achievement is the shining star,” and explains how Achievement First gathers student data on a frequent basis – and, more importantly, puts it in the hands of all teachers so they can make day-to-day decisions about how to tailor their teaching to meet the needs of each and every student in their classrooms.

Research shows conclusively that data-driven instruction translates into better learning for children – and across the NewSchools portfolio, teachers and principals are committed to this practice. Entrepreneurial organizations like Achievement First are leading the way nationwide. Co-founders Dacia Toll and Doug McCurry weave student data into everything they do, from discussions in departmental meetings to principal-teacher conversations to changes in instructional practice, professional development, and curriculum. Building on this work with NewSchools' support, Achievement First is now developing software that will make this approach accessible to other schools, serving as just one example of how thoughtful use of data is changing the way schools work for the better.



From new ways to train teachers to an “obsession” with data, innovative educators are looking around the corner for ideas that make change.

THE NEXT STEP IN PREPARING GREAT TEACHERS

It's hardly a secret that this country could use some new ideas about how to prepare teachers – especially in underserved communities.

Arthur Levine, former President of the Teachers College at Columbia University, has said that “the challenge facing education schools is not to do a better job at what they are already doing, but to do a fundamentally different job.” Entrepreneurial efforts in this area, from The New Teacher Project to Teach For America, have already changed the game for many inner-city and rural schools. Yet other entrepreneurs are hard at work building organizations that contribute different visions for how teachers can learn their craft.

Take for example, the Academy for Urban School Leadership (AUSL), a teacher residency model housed inside a network of Chicago schools where teacher “residents” – as in a medical school – participate in a year-long course of clinical classroom apprenticeship with expert mentors. So far, AUSL has prepared almost 200 new teachers who serve more than 5,000 low-income children, and has maintained an impressive 91% retention rate among its teacher graduates. Others, like Teacher U in New York and High Tech High in San Diego, are also exploring school-based models to prepare educators. It's this kind of innovative thinking that will help make teacher preparation “fundamentally different.”



All of these areas – from school turnaround to new approaches to training teachers and leaders – are examples of the types of new ideas, new organizations, and new facts on the ground are so badly needed. To challenges like these, NewSchools brings a singular capacity to “look around the corner” and identify the ideas with greatest leverage to improve education in underserved communities. In the decade to come, as in the last one, NewSchools will seek out the best ideas and the strongest entrepreneurial teams to meet the most important needs, and provide those teams with the expertise, support and funds that will help them grow to successful scale.

Where is this work headed? Ultimately, NewSchools seeks not only to cultivate individual entrepreneurial successes and progress, but to bring about fundamental change in the way that public education works, so that all children have access to an excellent public education. This will require a shift in the culture of public education, away from incremental changes that protect the traditions and interests of adults, and toward a dynamic system relentlessly focused on delivering better outcomes for students.

In some cities, these entrepreneurial successes already have caught the attention of civic and district leaders, who have invited entrepreneurs to act as partners in the important work of increasing the supply of quality options for students. In others, entrepreneurs’ efforts have lit the fire of competition under their local school district, jostling staid bureaucracies into paying closer attention to the needs of students and into embracing new ways of reaching that goal.

Entrepreneurial change is beginning to catch on in traditional systems.



TURNING AROUND CHRONICALLY FAILING SCHOOLS

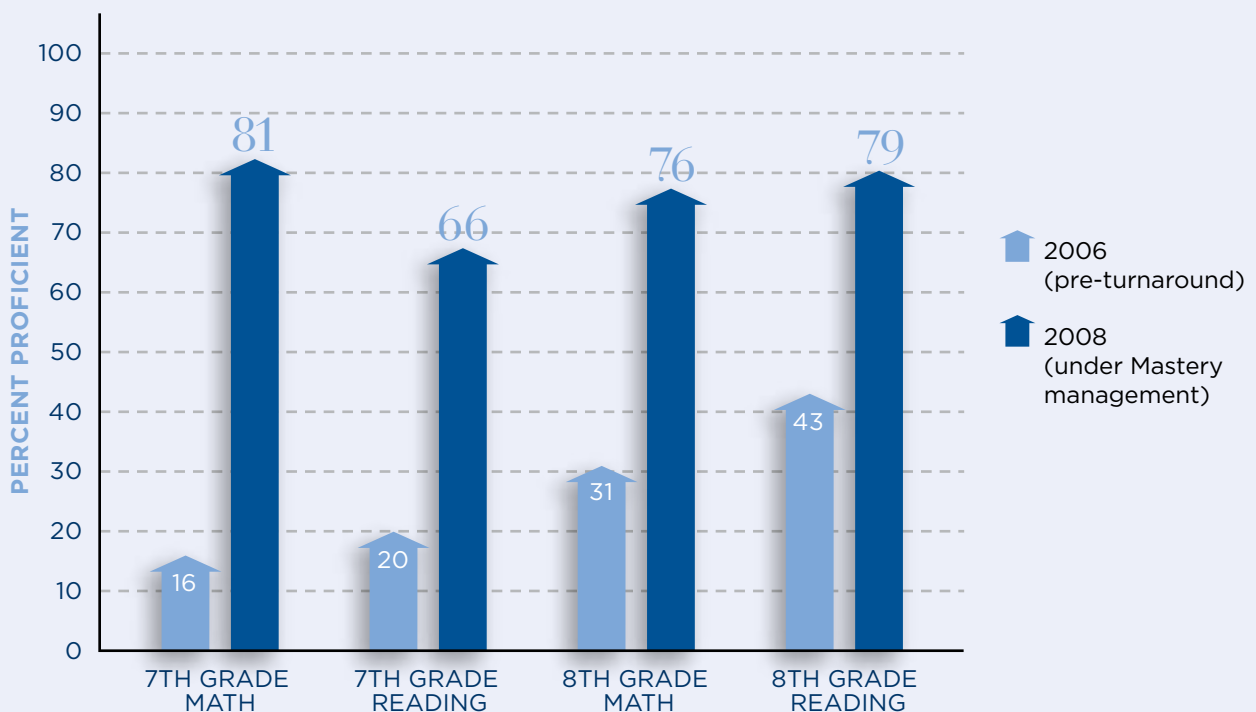
Two years ago, barely a third of the 8th grade students at Philadelphia's Shoemaker Middle School were proficient in math and less than half in reading. Just two years later, the school has become a rigorous learning community where more than 70 percent of all 8th graders perform at or above grade level in both reading and math.

What happened? Mastery Charter Schools, through a unique partnership with the School District of Philadelphia, took on the challenge of turning Shoemaker around. At Shoemaker, the students have remained, but their performance is radically different: they have closed the achievement gap and are performing at a similar level to their peers statewide. To get such dramatic results, Mastery has brought in a team of great teachers and instructional leaders, expanded both the quality and use of data, and put in place a culture for both students and staff that is well-captured by their motto: "Excellence. No Excuses."

Shoemaker is a bright spot on a dismal landscape of failing schools. Due to chronic failure, over 5,000 schools nationwide are expected to be in some form of federally mandated restructuring by 2009-2010. Given the scale of the need and the difficulty of the task, district and state leaders are searching for innovative ways to turn around and quickly improve performance in such schools, and are increasingly open to partnerships with strong school management organizations. Other organizations, like the Academy for Urban School Leadership in Chicago, are also taking this work on and proving that they can make a difference. Cases like these demonstrate the important role that entrepreneurial organizations can play in support of district efforts to turn around failing schools.

With the vast need in Philadelphia and other large cities across the nation, the turnaround work of Mastery offers a model for many others to follow.

Turnaround of Shoemaker Middle School by Mastery Charter Schools



ENSURING COLLEGE SUCCESS

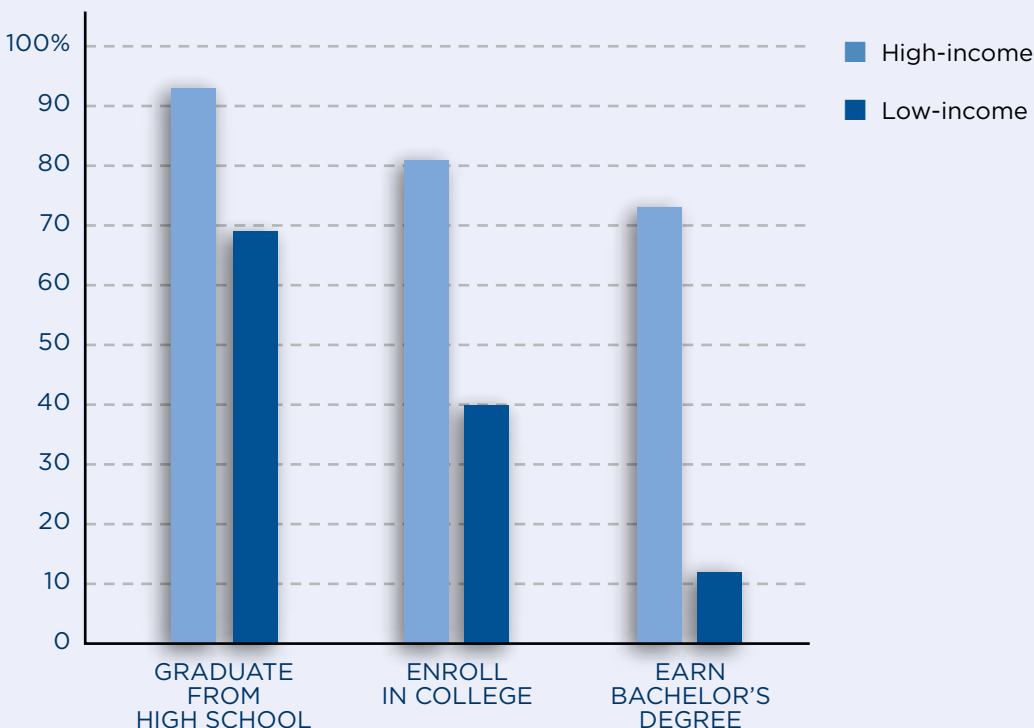
A college degree is a student’s best shot at both fulfillment and financial success. Over the course of a lifetime, college graduates can expect to earn nearly twice as much as those who only complete high school – a gap of almost \$1 million. But just one in ten low-income students earns a bachelor’s degree today.

Education entrepreneurs know that their work cannot stop at just getting students into college – they must also see to it that they get through college. The work starts early in these schools: even kindergartners are surrounded by a college-going ethic, with classrooms are named after universities. By senior year, mottoes like “college for certain” and “climbing the mountain to college” are ingrained in students’ consciousness. That culture supports the central work these schools do: imparting the skills and knowledge students will need in college, often partnering with universities so students earn college credit before they’ve even graduated from high school.

The Noble Network of Charter Schools, which operates seven charter high schools in inner-city Chicago and serves a largely Latino population, understands what it takes to achieve college success. As early as freshman year, students visit local and regional universities, and during their senior year, they take a College Prep class, in which they research colleges, complete applications for admission, and learn about financial aid and scholarship options.

Combined with a rigorous curriculum, these supports are working: about 85% of Noble graduates go on to college – compared with less than 40% of Latino students in Chicago Public Schools. Once Noble alumni have enrolled at a university, Noble’s Alumni Coordinator offers supports ranging from supplemental scholarships to internship and job placement. Like NewSchools’ other portfolio ventures, Noble has set its sights not on college access, but on college success.

Who makes it through high school and college?



Yet in all these places, one central lesson is clear. By demonstrating that students in urban public schools can achieve at the same level as their suburban counterparts, education entrepreneurs are ushering in a new era. This era will be marked by high expectations for all students and diverse school options for reaching those standards. It will be an age that supports any innovator, inside or outside the system, with a proven ability to help students – and one that aggressively weeds out approaches and organizations that don't work.

Together, entrepreneurs are working toward a genuine transformation of our nation's system of public education, from one that meets the needs of some students some of the time, to one that gives every child a real chance to succeed. ■



ENGAGING PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES IN IMPROVING SCHOOL QUALITY

“Statistics said my children wouldn't make it,” says Shirley Ford. Raising two boys in South Los Angeles, Ford learned firsthand how parents can beat the odds. Ford was terrified of sending her children to the chaotic local high school and unable to afford private school. In 2002, she chose her own route, enrolling her sons in Animo Inglewood, a public charter school run by Green Dot Public Schools. The choice paid off. Ford was welcomed into a safe school community where both her sons and she thrived. Her sons have graduated and are now attending college. Today, Ford works to help other parents have a positive public school experience.

Along with Green Dot founder Steve Barr, Ford and other Green Dot parents co-founded the L.A. Parents Union, an entrepreneurial effort working across Los Angeles to give parents the information and support needed to raise their voices to demand a high-quality education for their children.

“Parents, especially those with students trapped in low-performing schools, desperately want to be involved and want their students to succeed,” Ford explains. For this to happen, families need relevant, clear, accurate, and understandable information about their choices to empower them to choose and demand high-quality options for their children. With 7,500 parent members and 12 chapters across the city, the Parents Union educates parents about the local politics of school reform and basic community organizing techniques. It helps parents get elected to local school boards, and empowers them to demand more and better schools in their neighborhoods.

In too many communities, parents lack the information and empowerment to exercise real choice over their children's education. Through ideas like the L.A. Parents Union, families are joining with schools to make the changes needed for quality education options.