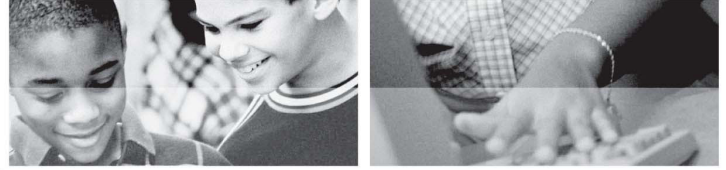


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# **NEWSCHOOLS VENTURE FUND SUMMIT 2002**

April 2002



## **NEWSCHOOLS VENTURE FUND SUMMIT 2002**

The third NewSchools Summit on March 15, 2002, convened more than 250 education entrepreneurs, educators, business leaders, policymakers, philanthropists, and academics to discuss major trends in education reform and the progress of education entrepreneurship in improving our public schools.

### **Panels included:**

1. The Increasing Demand for New, Quality Public Schools
2. The Philadelphia Story: A Case Study of Things to Come?
3. Accountability, Choice, and the Role of Accessible Data
4. Early Literacy—Research and Implementation with Three Luminaries
5. Creating Scalable Systems of New Public Schools
6. Moving Towards a National Assessment

## THE INCREASING DEMAND FOR NEW, HIGH QUALITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Several forces are coming together to create a large and growing demand for a new supply of quality public schools. This panel will touch on four key groups leading the charge: urban parents who are mobilizing to demand better schools for inner-city kids, educators who are discontented with the status quo and want more flexibility and autonomy to implement their educational vision, districts that embrace innovation and entrepreneurship as a lever for positive change, and state-level accountability legislation that is driving the need for new schools and new providers who can contract to manage failing schools. Kim Smith moderated an interactive discussion with:

- Kaleem Caire, American Education Reform Council; former Executive Director, Black Alliance for Educational Options
- Arne Duncan, Chief Executive Officer, Chicago Public Schools
- Reed Hastings, President, California State Board of Education
- Johnathan Williams, Co-Director, The Accelerated School, Los Angeles, CA

### Roundtable Discussion

**KS:** Smith suggests that, “the mission first and foremost is about improving public schools so that we're giving every child in this country access to a high quality public school. And our primary way of doing that is supporting education entrepreneurs. We believe entrepreneurs are very powerful change agents.” It is key to create a hybrid community, combining the best thinking from the public, nonprofit, and business sectors.

There is a building network of people who are bipartisan and willing to speak across traditional boundaries. A dialogue has been opened between business leaders, venture capitalists, entrepreneurs, educators, and education entrepreneurs, and some broader patterns and deeper insights are starting to form.

This morning's conversation will revolve around the emerging demand for creating new schools. An incredible amount of energy has been spent on reforming existing schools, while the new schools movement remained relatively marginal. Some alternative schools formed and there has been growth in the charter school movement over time, but now there exists a critical mass in the demand for creating new public schools.

This point of critical mass comes from a broad base of educators, leaders, entrepreneurs, and communities who, through their own enlightened self-interest, believe we need to create these schools. Today, the panel hopes to examine what that movement looks like, how it plays out relative to the state of California, and how it exists in a large urban district like Chicago.

**RH:** As a young man, he started with the naïve notion that if we changed the law in California and made it easy to start charter schools that hundreds of people would come through and start schools and all of them would be great. It hasn't worked out exactly that way. Definite progress has been made, but there remains a lot of room for improvement. It is still enormously challenging to start a new charter school, particularly in the area of facilities. Nonetheless, with some facility solutions, alongside other measures, Hastings remains confident that those barriers will be lowered.

In the world of business, one always starts with a notion of growth and never becomes self-satisfied. Whenever a company attains a certain level of revenue or impact, the leadership starts to consider how to continue to grow. This is not true in education. People who invest all of the requisite effort into starting a charter school tend to be satisfied to just hold the school together. It is a tremendous accomplishment, so people do not

naturally start thinking about building ten more. They instead seek to make the school or institution better and better.

What is needed, from a capacity standpoint, are entrepreneurs who look past that first success and take on several more because they now know what they are doing. Hastings believes that, “the second wave of the charter school movement is charter school networks. Growing these individual schools into substantial networks.” There are many advantages to building networks:

- Professional development can be developed across school boundaries.
- Career paths beyond the principalship will serve to keep the best and brightest engaged in the movement.
- One really high quality board of directors can be effective across many schools in a network.
- Schools and the central organization will be able to help each other through the inevitable challenges. A lone school has a much more difficult time fixing itself.

So, from the perspective of quality, consistency, and scalability, the growth of charter school networks will be the next step. The pioneers now need to become settlers and start expanding their influence.

**JW:** “These are exciting times for charter schools.”

Williams was in a traditional school as the union chairperson when he realized that he really had very little control. He and his partner saw high-performing teachers taking pay cuts and feeling unsupported in making an impact on students’ lives. The faculty became demoralized and the school’s performance dropped dramatically. A number of smart, young, talented teachers left to pursue more lucrative and rewarding careers. Out of frustration with that broken system, they set out to start a charter school.

The school became a vehicle for continuing the educational growth that they had seen before the cuts. In its first year, the Accelerated School improved test scores by 50% in reading and 40% in math, and has seen consistent gains ever since. The fact that the school exists in south central Los Angeles goes to show that charters can enable people to do some very innovative things even in the most troubled areas.

The idea of a network of charter schools was difficult for Williams to consider at first, knowing how challenging it had been to start the initial school. However, upon further consideration, he saw that the back office was settled, the facilities development process was familiar, and the strong board was already in place. He has since submitted two grants to start two new schools with the clear goal of demonstrating to the district (LAUSD) that charters are really positive.

**MK:** Kushner, along with Williams and Hastings, amongst others, has been focusing on the future potential of charter schools and how they can be brought to the next level. His school, Leadership High School in San Francisco, has been around for five years and the charter laws have been in place for ten. Leadership HS has 75% students of color, 55% from the poorest neighborhoods in San Francisco, and yet the school is scoring eight out of ten on the state API ranking and ten out of ten on the similar schools ranking.

A number of the charter school startups are solid in experience and showing continued success. The various schools know a few things about what works, but much of it entails rolling up the sleeves and working really hard to create small schools. At the same time, it is a humbling process. In a startup school, an enormous amount of time needs to be spent on the business office, the back office, the fundraising, the facilities, and all of the many other challenges. As one school alone in a vacuum, it is especially difficult to make everything happen well. That is where the network of charter schools can step in and help.

As for the demand for charter schools, there are some very good non-charter public high schools in California, but most are huge and impersonal. The big school with many options may work for some kids, but for many students it does not. For those kids, there are beginning to be options like Leadership High, where the school is small and personable and every student is expected to go on to college. In fact, at Leadership, everyone assumes that the students will go to college, the only question has become whether they will go on to graduate school.

In terms of parent demand for Leadership HS, once they heard about this model—100% college prep, the best education that can be offered, and a leadership theme revolving around service to the community—there were 5,000 inquiries for the first 100 openings. Leadership HS continues to get 400-500 completed applications every year for 100 openings. The demand is certainly there for charter schools, there is just a shortage of schools to fill that demand.

**KS:** The new schools movement has centered on charter schools, though they don't necessarily have to be chartered per se. It is important that innovative new schools have operating flexibility and that the managers can actually manage the things that will lead to outcomes. There are some very creative experiments going on for creating these kinds of successful schools, while still keeping these bright leaders within the system. Arne Duncan will speak to how this movement fits into his vision for Chicago, one of the largest urban districts in the country.

**AD:** Duncan started out fighting against the ills of the Chicago Public Schools. He and his mother started a small educational nonprofit in 1992, called the I have a Dream Program, which promised a group of 6<sup>th</sup> graders that their college tuition would be paid if they made it through high school. By 8<sup>th</sup> grade, they became nervous that the kids would fall into the traps of the local high school's culture—67% dropout rate, gang violence, etc.—so they started to take the students and parents to look at alternatives. They looked at other public schools, Catholic schools, and private schools, and ultimately moved every one of the initial 6<sup>th</sup> graders out of the troubled district. The lesson learned: "We know one size doesn't fit all, there's a range of choices and the more we can provide parents with great options the better our students are going to perform."

Duncan and his organization began to realize that they could have impact on a few students, but that they were not changing the larger Chicago Public School System. So, in 1996, they opened a small, inner-city public school, drawing upon the lessons they had learned from the great public and private schools they had visited. From that successful new school, Duncan had an opportunity to get involved with the Board of Education and is now trying to run the system.

Duncan sees a threefold strategy in creating effective choices for parents within the larger system:

1. Charter Schools. They have aggressively pursued the charter model in Chicago and are at the cap of 15 (which they are currently trying to get raised to 30) schools. One of the charters is about to be closed down, but that is a sign of health for the system. Not every start-up is going to be successful, so it is important to have real accountability to ensure that the students are only getting the best quality education. In reality, the vast majority of charter schools in Chicago are doing extraordinarily well.
2. Contract Schools. These are schools where the management of the school has been outsourced. That allows fresh leadership ideas from outside the system to have a hand in transforming schools.
3. Small Schools. This idea is critically important, especially in small, urban schools. In schools with 3,000 students, the kids are often destined to feel lost. In Chicago, they are looking to break up a number of the larger failing schools and create much smaller learning environments. Rather than imposing this idea from the top down, the district did a request for proposals and had fifteen high schools apply to be broken up into smaller units.

There is a great deal of enthusiasm for all of these new choices, especially for those who have been so terribly underserved in the past. Duncan seeks to open eight to ten new small schools every year, giving the parents

students a range of very high quality choices. Critical to the success of this movement is the strong support from the business community, the philanthropic community, the politicians, and the universities.

“I really see my job as creating a new market—creating a market for new startups, for new schools.”

**KS:** It is important to consider this accountability issue that Duncan raised. What should be done with the schools that haven't been able to turn around and succeed?

**RH:** The general political body is supportive of new schools, but also quite focused on educational accountability, testing, assessment, and standards. The question is what should be done with the non-charter public schools that are failing? Cutting the funding or closing the school does not fix the problem. What then can be done in terms of holding schools accountable for state test scores?

The solution may be to provide an effective alternative that could take over the failing schools. The state cannot run the failing schools any more effectively. If there were a half dozen highly reliable, highly consistent networks of charter schools, the failing schools could be handed over to the successful charter operators. These operators would have a great deal of experience in taking over failing schools and would have a high likelihood of turning things around. That might just be the way to enforce the push for accountability.

With continued political support, the three lowest performing schools in the state could be handed over to charter operators. Presuming that the charter operator is successful in turning the school around, there might only need to be three takeovers in a decade as everyone would be able to see that there is a credible alternative. This dynamic has already occurred in Florida. After the three lowest-performing schools were ‘voucherized,’ the other failing schools in the system turned around the very next year. They felt the pressure of actually being taken over and it motivated them to succeed.

In California, the goal is not to hand schools over to a voucher system, but if charter networks were brought into the failing schools, the effect would be the same. It isn't necessary for charters to take over half of the system. “I'll bet that if we just convert three to five schools, the whole rest of the system will start taking the needs of the low performing schools very seriously.” That way, charter schools networks can serve the dual purpose of creating good alternative schools while also providing a way to enforce the high-stakes accountability.

**KS:** With these new school ventures, there is an element of risk and there will be some failure. How can the various constituencies and politicians be convinced to support this kind of change?

**AD:** Firstly, it is important that the support for these ideas comes from the bottom up—from the schools, the principals, and the teachers. It is also key to build partnerships with the business community and the local universities. Within the larger urban system, the unions must also be brought on board through conversations at the very beginning of the process.

**KS:** What then are the challenges or hurdles that stand in the way of growing these schools?

**JW:** There are many misconceptions about the charter school movement, often due to the way the media presents them. People need to see the schools and see that they are really very successful. If a charter school is located in a district next to other traditional public schools, the teachers, students, and parents will all be able to see and experience the benefit of charter schools firsthand.

**MK:** The real challenge is to get experienced teachers who have the entrepreneurial spirit. There are many teachers who would like to be a part of the charter school movement, but they are often younger and less experienced. It will therefore be important to focus on professional development and teacher training to ensure a steady supply of qualified teachers.

Another issue is how to maintain the quality as these charter networks begin to replicate themselves into many school sites. The networks will need some guidance from those who have scaled up businesses in other sectors.

## Q&A

**Q:** How do you get past the belief that charters are taking away valuable resources from the non-charter public schools?

**RH:** It is often a question of political landscape. In Los Angeles, with a supportive superintendent, charters are beginning to be seen as an integral part of the system and are specifically targeted for facilities funding in proposed bond measures. At the state level, charters need to be presented through a lens of equity. They are not taking away funding from other schools. If 5% of California's schools are charters, then 5% of the facilities funding should be set aside for charters. If charters take the discussion to the issue of equity, nothing more, then they have a better chance of getting the funding they need.

**Q:** How do you get legislative support for building networks of charter schools?

**RH:** In California, it started with a midnight legislative maneuver that opened a crack for charter schools to become possible. The rules were tipped against the charters, but now there was the crack of possibility. Entrepreneurs started to take advantage of the possibility and slowly built up credibility for the movement. With attention focused on those initial successes, it was possible to build the political support. "It is on the backs of the early pioneers that we have been able to continue to expand and make the rules more fair for charter schools."

**Q:** How can accountability be measured for a network of schools versus the stand-alone schools?

**AD:** Chicago looks at each school individually, considering twelve different indicators of success over a five-year period. If you have multiple schools under the same umbrella, they are still not going to perform exactly the same way, so they need to be considered separately.

**Q:** It has been proposed that charter schools will form relationships with the other public schools, allowing for the exchange of innovative models and the creation of a sense of competition. Is that happening, and if not, should that be a cause for concern?

**AD:** It is less about competition and more about taking the lessons learned and implementing them on a systemic level. The lessons, the successes, and the failures experienced in starting charter schools and other small schools need to help shape our new small public schools as we go forward.

**KS:** As charter schools and charter networks find success, they cannot be held entirely accountable for disseminating the lessons back into the system. There is an important role there for academics and researchers to publish reports and spread the information.

**MK:** In San Francisco, there has been a healthy tension between competition and partnership. The superintendent feels the tension, but also knows that everyone is trying to improve student learning, so she wants to build a partnership. That ongoing relationship with the district is important in order to create a forum for the sharing of best practices and information.

**Q:** If the demand is so high for charter schools, then why are there legislative limits on the number of charter schools that can be opened?

**RH:** In defense of government, it is properly designed to have a great deal of inertia so that government change is slower than the waves of passion that move through the population.

**AD:** There are also multiple models for change. The small Chicago public schools have worked from within the system from day one. Within the existing constraints, extraordinary schools have emerged.

**MK:** There are local small school movements here in California too. The test will be the level of autonomy and freedom that those schools will actually be granted within the system.

**Q:** The academic gains attributed to charter schools are impressive. Is it programmatic change or cultural change that leads to such success?

**JW:** First of all, communication and collaboration between teachers is key. In smaller schools, teachers can plan and discuss curriculum together. The teachers can engage one another about individual student performance and work closely with the parents. There is a requirement that parents be involved in the learning community. That opens up relationships and mutual understanding.

**KS:** "These schools are anchors in their communities and there is a much bigger ripple effect from building a successful school than just what happens in the classroom for those kids."

**Q:** The downside of charters seems to be that they provide excellence for the few, while leaving the districts with even less capacity to help the overwhelming majority of students. What about a public school voucher system where there would be choice among all of the schools in a given district?

**AD:** It is absolutely important to replicate the quality of smaller schools, charter schools, and magnet schools into the wider neighborhood schools. Parents should be provided with a range of high quality choices within their own area.

**Q:** One of the huge challenges that the charter movement faces over the next five years is to come to a strong and mutually supportive relationship with the teachers' unions. It is critically important that the charter community demonstrate that it is truly pro-teacher. Fundamentally, the interests of the unions and the charter schools are aligned in many ways.

**Q:** What does the New Schools Venture Fund think about for-profit versus non-profit school ventures?

**KS:** What NSVF is really concerned about is quality for the kids. The second fund will focus on building non-profit charter school management organizations for a couple of reasons. Firstly, the capital markets don't have the will to create more for-profit companies right now. There is currently a lot of debate over the for-profit school management companies and it is going to take some time for those providers to get to a scale where their level of success can be measured. At the same time, there is strong demand but little financial support for the non-profit management organizations, so that is where we will direct our resources.

**Q:** Would there be enough teachers available to staff these startup charter schools if the state caps were lifted?

**JW:** Los Angeles starts each school year a few thousand teachers short. The shortage suggests that there needs to be an increase in the quality and volume of teachers coming out of the colleges and universities. At the same time, charter schools need to build from within with master teachers helping new teachers up through the ranks.

**MK:** There may be a shortage of teachers, but we do not see a shortage in the number of teachers applying for positions in charter schools. There are literally hundreds of applicants for every spot at Leadership HS, as the charter school model ignites the passion in teachers.

**RH:** There is no teacher shortage, just a shortage of good working conditions in schools. If charter schools can help improve the working conditions for teachers, all of the teachers that are leaving will be staying.

**JW:** In great schools with great visions, great practices, and great working environments, there are more than enough teachers for any given year.

## THE PHILADELPHIA STORY

Philadelphia has been in the spotlight recently because of a dramatic effort to privatize the school district management as a response to fiscal challenges and the massive failure of inner-city students to achieve adequate academic results. What has ensued is a rollicking tale of politics and persuasion, highlighting the challenges – and at times, the drama – of system-wide reform. As districts throughout the country face the possibility of similar events, Philadelphia gives a glimpse at some of the forces at play. Moderated by Kim Smith, this interactive discussion will get beyond the headlines with key players:

- Dr. Jane Hannaway, Director of the Education Policy Center, The Urban Institute
- Gene Wade, Executive Vice President of Development, Edison Schools
- Anthony Williams, Pennsylvania State Senator, 8<sup>th</sup> Senatorial District
- Charles Zogby, Pennsylvania State Secretary of Education

### Roundtable Discussion

**KS:** First, a bit of background. There has been an ongoing struggle to increase student achievement in the Philadelphia schools. A fiscal crisis arose, which meant that there was some room to maneuver and create real change, but which also meant that the stakes would be high. The Governor created an environment that supported choice, rallying votes to back charters and even vouchers.

The time came for action and so Philadelphia hired Edison Schools to analyze the student achievement problem and to propose a different strategy for reorganizing the district. That move stirred up heated debate in the Philadelphia community, though a model for change has seemingly now emerged. There is an appointed School Reform Commission, supported by various players at the state and local level, which will decide how to contract out the school management and district services.

This panel will consider the lessons from Philadelphia, and how they might apply to the bigger picture of national school reform.

**AW:** Looking at Philadelphia, the public school system is dominated by low-income African American families. The middle class and above have opted out of those schools, and the students who are left are those who have no options, who cannot afford to have choices. “The reality is that the system is in smithereens in Philadelphia County.” There are some tremendously dedicated people who have not deserted the inner-city schools and who maintain the fight, but it is a losing battle at this point.

Many people argue to keep the system in such a way that students cannot get out of the failing schools. They say that if you desert the system, you dilute the system, and if you dilute the system, the system gets broken. “For me the goal simply was to make sure that children have some options.”

The challenges to providing options started with the money. Despite the amount of lip service Americans give to education, they have a long way to go before they spend the amount that needs to be spent. Philadelphia is no different. Where the money gets spent becomes a political question, which is its own challenge. There is a lot of misinformation and manipulation on both sides of this Philadelphia issue, and it isn’t always clear who has the best interests of the students in mind.

The good news is that there are a growing number of politically active people who are trying to find solutions. They are trying to make the charters work, trying to form effective relationships, trying to find the necessary

resources. There remains a need for some sort of infrastructure, something like this New Schools Summit, that could enable those dialogs to happen.

**CZ:** The ongoing situation in Philadelphia really goes back to the Rindge administration, when Superintendent Hornbeck threatened to shut down the school district if he wasn't allocated the resources he needed to enact his plan. The idea of 215,000 students out on the streets without education did not sit well with the political leadership in Harrisburg.

It began to be understood that if the state government were going to be faced with that magnitude of an educational crisis, then it would be absolutely essential to have the necessary tools available. In working on those plans, the state sought to move away from a regulatory, top-down model to more of a market-driven model. "Give the people at the building level the resources, the ability to control their mission, the educational program, the hiring and firing of personnel, but hold them accountable for results."

The Philadelphia district was one where 57% of the children were literally failing in reading and math, based on statewide assessments. The district was facing a \$1.2 billion cumulative deficit over a five-year period. The state therefore understood that if it had to go in, things had to be done differently. The only way to right that system was to bring a reform plan that made fundamental changes and that promised fundamentally different results for kids in the system.

The clock ends for the current administration in 2003 so they sought to insure that whatever changes were put in place would have a long-lasting opportunity to succeed. The timeline was such that it would allow the reform plan to take hold over five years. The state government realized the importance of consistency in leadership, so that is why it created the School Reform Commission (SRC) as a long-term governance body that will help maintain the commitment on the governance side over those five years.

Out of the district's 175 schools, the plan suggests that the 60 lowest-performing schools be taken over by private providers. These providers can be for-profit school management organizations or non-profit charter school managers. In each of the 60 schools, the provider will be coupled with a community organization to ensure close collaboration. The social capital of the neighborhood groups will help in delivering the before and after school services, in reaching out to the parents, and in changing the culture of achievement.

Act 46, the law that governs the state takeover, gave tremendous powers to the SRC. They can essentially aggregate any collective bargaining agreement in the district. It becomes less about what the adults can do for themselves, and more a question of how well they are serving the students.

Other reforms are also being implemented:

- Leadership training and performance pay for principals
- Consolidation of the 100 different reading curricula and 70 different math programs into 2 or 3 field-proven, research-based programs
- Leadership opportunities and intensive professional development for teachers

"The long term vision is to get the district out of the business of running schools and to become a purchaser of quality education." It is a difficult business, requiring a great deal of effort, but the state government believes that it is absolutely the right course of action.

**GW:** The Philadelphia schools' financial crisis created this opportunity for change. It was then enabled by decision-makers who are committed to a plan that can get results.

The changes are relatively straightforward. First, the management team at the district level needs to consist of people who are capable of dealing with what is essentially a major corporation. Philadelphia schools are a huge operation, ranging from busses to hot lunches, so the management systems are crucial. Edison relishes the opportunity to apply all that it has learned over the past ten years on that operational front.

Next, the plan calls for both formal and informal mechanisms for getting the community involved. The parents have to be encouraged and enabled to take ownership of their children's education. The civic organizations and major companies have to be invited to participate again in the community's schools. The management companies come in on that front as well, establishing relationships with all interested parties.

**JH:** "The problems of urban education in this country are the biggest social problem that we have. Clearly." The disparities between the performance of poor kids in urban neighborhoods and that of their more affluent suburban counterparts are enormous. If this problem is not solved, those disparities will continue to manifest themselves in social malaise and conflict along racial lines. Philadelphia is therefore a very important experiment.

There are two main approaches to transforming the landscape of urban education. First is standards-based reform with a heavy emphasis on accountability. That plan is going into effect at both the federal and state level across the country. Next is change in governance, especially those that marshal the benefits of the market through choice and competition

In Philadelphia, the district acts as a broker for independently operated schools. The district develops contracts with the schools, oversees those contracts and holds those schools to limited accountability. The schools enter contracts, set their objectives, choose their measurements of success, develop their own curriculum, and hire and fire their teachers and principals.

What is happening in Philadelphia is a modified version of what Paul Hill described as an alternative way for organizing school districts in the ECS report on governance in American schools. "That plan sets up a regulated market at the district with the district as the regulator. It allows for variety among schools and choice across individuals but all within an overall frame of what's appropriate."

The Philadelphia approach is different in a couple of ways. First of all, the Hill plan is based on choice leading to competition, but Edison schools will have a huge market share in Philadelphia. There is therefore a question of whether competition will still exist. Also, the Philadelphia plan proposes that a single firm come in as the manager of the district as a whole. That would remove some of the choice from the parent level and move it up to the district.

Many of the details of the Philadelphia plan still remain to be set by the SRC. There are some key questions to consider:

- How will quality providers be encouraged to participate in the plan?
- How will central accountability be established? To what extent will it exist?
- How much variety should there be in providing choices for parents and students?
- How will learning across school boundaries be established?
- How will transparency be maintained so that other cities and districts can learn from this experiment?

## **ACCOUNTABILITY, CHOICE, AND THE ROLE OF ACCESSIBLE DATA**

In the current environment of growing choice, accountability and high-stakes testing, reliable data is more critical than ever. Data on student performance, demographics, and trends drives decision-making across the entire educational spectrum — touching students, parents, teachers, school leaders, and policy makers. But making data accessible and intuitive, so that it leads to conclusions that are accurate and to decisions that help kids — that's the hard part. This panel will concern itself with the role of data in accelerating both the choice and school improvement movements. We will hear from organizations that provide information to parents, school leaders, and policy makers, as well as from the consumers of this information. Are we moving closer to getting the data we need to inform effective change?

### **Moderator:**

- Dr. Billie Orr, President, Education Leaders Council

### **Presenters:**

- Mike Hudson, Director of Field Operations, Just for the Kids
- Bill Jackson, President & Chief Executive Officer, GreatSchools.net
- Jonathan Jacobson, Director, School Evaluation Services, Standard & Poor's
- Onnie Shekerjian, Hotline Coordinator, Arizona Parents Association for Children's Education; Contributing Editor, Parent Power!

### **Roundtable Discussion**

**BO:** How will we know if our efforts at change and reform are actually making an impact? “Unless we have the data right, unless we’re asking the right questions, unless we’re putting the right information out there, the fact is we won’t know.” We need to consider the types of data that need to be collected, how that data can be made engaging, and how it can be made accessible.

There currently exists an enormous opportunity, thanks to the No Child Left Behind legislation, to gather some thorough data and establish quality systems for testing. The aggregation of data across districts and states will allow comparison, and therefore, increased accountability. Combined with greater school choice, this movement will create a sense of urgency that will drive the reform.

**OS:** “Parents have the greatest potential for making a difference in individual students’ achievements,” so parents need to be empowered with the data that can guide them. If that data is readily available and easy to understand, parents can become involved in a meaningful way. To support that, the educators need to be educated on how to work more closely with the parents.

**JJ:** Standard & Poor's provides School Evaluation Services, an independent analysis of an extensive set of data that comprises academic, financial, and contextual information. This pooled information is presented in a consistent format on a publicly accessible website in order to provide a diagnostic management tool with which to make informed decisions. Stakeholders from parents to teachers to administrators can get a sense of the “return on resources” where they can see the amount of money being spent, the types of results that are being achieved, and the context in which that spending and those results are taking place.

Standard and Poors aims to increase the parent and taxpayer involvement by increasing understanding and communication. They seek to share the message that the data reveals: "It's not how much money is spent, it's how the money is spent, where the money is spent, and how effectively the money is being used. It's the return on investment that has to be gauged, not just the amount of the investment itself."

**MH:** Just for the Kids seeks to combine the data on achievement with the study of best practices. That way, all the stakeholders can understand what's working in the schools with difficult populations that are meeting with success over time. The data can therefore be moved beyond a system of accountability to actually become a tool that helps educators and parents improve the schools.

**BJ:** The purpose of GreatSchools.net is to help parents choose the right school for their child. Part of that goal, then, requires a re-structuring of the data so that it can become meaningful to parents; they simplify the performance data into an easy-to-grasp statement and a star rating. However, "when you're helping a parent choose a school, it's not just about an ultimate quality measure of good or bad, it's about a fit. So, a good portion of what GreatSchools is providing parents is descriptive, qualitative information about the schools." And, in order for this information to have an impact, it needs to be distributed aggressively, through a variety of outlets.

## **EARLY LITERACY—RESEARCH AND IMPLEMENTATION WITH THREE LUMINARIES**

Studies show that reading proficiency at third grade is the strongest predictor of dropout rates; some states even forecast prison growth based on the numbers of third graders who can't read. Reid Lyon of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development played a large role in President Bush's Early Reading Initiative and will highlight the breadth of the crisis, what we have learned about how children learn to read, and the role research and the federal government should play moving forward. Slavin and Heuston, the founders and leaders of two research based and widely adopted literacy programs, will describe how and why they have designed their programs, some of the challenges they face in implementation, their successes to date, and the challenges of conducting research in schools.

### **Moderator:**

- Dr. Linda G. Roberts, National Consultant; Former Director, Office of Education Technology, U.S. Department of Education

### **Presenters:**

- Dr. Reid Lyon, Chief, Child Development and Behavior Branch of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, National Institutes of Health
- Dr. Dustin Heuston, Chairman & Chief Executive Officer, Waterford Institute
- Dr. Robert Slavin, Chairman, Success for All Foundation

## **Roundtable Discussion**

**LR:** "Today, there is a significant base of knowledge, driven by research and hard data, that can truly engage us as we make decisions about reading and about helping kids achieve literacy." That knowledge enables the Reading First legislation to reserve federal funding for programs that use strategies that are already proven to be effective.

**RL:** Our research has centered on four key questions: 1) What does it take for kids to learn how to read? 2) What gets in the way of the learning? 3) How do you counter the obstacles to learning before they start? 4) What can be done from a remedial perspective?

According to the research, the kids most at risk are from backgrounds of poverty. They are at risk because their parents are giving them one tenth of what middle and upper class kids get in terms of bedtime reading, vocabulary interaction, etc. Those children of poverty, then, are at a serious disadvantage before they even show up for kindergarten.

The data continues to suggest that such at-risk kids require direct, systematic instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. In fact, the more at-risk they are, the more direct and clear the teaching needs to be. Unfortunately, no one instructional approach is equally effective for all students, so teachers need to be prepared to identify which students are being left behind and they need to know how to tailor their teaching to engage those kids as well.

**RS:** The difficulty is implementation, as most teachers are not prepared to offer the type of instruction that we have increasing confidence can make a big difference. The Success for All program therefore sought to identify the best methods of teaching reading, to prepare the teachers for this complicated task, to build support

networks, and to engage the parents. “We were trying to make something that was comprehensive, that would anticipate every way in which children might potentially fall behind, to prevent that from occurring, to be ready to intervene early and intensively should the children fall behind anyway, and to keep track of children’s progress all along the way.”

In scaling up our program and succeeding with many different populations of students, it has become clear that the failure of such large numbers of kids is fundamentally preventable. If we, as a country, want to right that imbalance, it is going to take an enormous commitment to improving the quality of programs, expanding the professional development, and supporting the people that do this very, very critical job.

**DH:** The problems in early literacy can be seen as an issue of work shortage. By age six, the poor student will typically have upwards of 3,000 fewer hours of home literacy training than his middle class counterpart. That imbalance of time, or work, will automatically lead to much higher rates of failure for the poor student.

At the Waterford Institute, we are trying to harness the expanding computer technology to make up the difference in work hours for poor kids. Basically, the technology takes the form of a private tutorial for kids that tracks their learning profile and adjusts to their individual needs.

## CREATING SCALABLE SYSTEMS OF NEW PUBLIC SCHOOLS

In an attempt to accelerate the charter movement and create more consistency in quality, ambitious education entrepreneurs are building systems of branded charter schools. Players are taking varying approaches to scaling effective models. Based on their early progress, much can be learned about the different elements of an educational model that play an important role in ensuring quality outcomes for students. This panel will explore the role of systems in expanding the public school choice movement, and the achievements and challenges of various models.

### Moderator:

- Lauren Dutton, Partner, New Schools Venture Fund

### Presenters:

- Mike Feinberg, Chief Executive Officer, Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP)
- Dr. Don Shalvey, Chief Executive Officer, Aspire Public Schools
- Douglas Thomas, Director, Gates-EdVisions Coop

### Roundtable Discussion

**DS:** “We want to play a small but significant role in creating a reality where every youngster in every neighborhood will have at least two choices of two small schools and each of those schools will enrich the quality of life within that community.” Aspire seeks to grow 100 quality charter schools in California with a four-pronged mission: enhancing student achievement, developing effective educators, catalyzing change in the larger system, and sharing best practices with others. They are using a cluster model of scaling whereby ten schools are grouped together in the same area, allowing them to reach 7 to 10% of the under-served population. The clustering of schools will help maintain consistent quality and create the economies of scale needed to make each school work with about \$4,900 per student (the magic number in California).

**DT:** The EdVisions cooperative is the only public school in the country where the teachers own the instructional program. They strongly believe that the model of teacher ownership will help solve the issue of teacher quality by bringing entrepreneurship into public education. With support from the Gates Foundation, they plan to start 15 new sites over five years, each its own educational co-op and variation on the EdVisions theme. The central model comes from the New Country School, where students work on standards-based performance projects over the year and take no courses. Each school will have a maximum of 200 students, allowing them to be independent and flexible entities where teachers are trusted to run the program.

**MF:** KIPP’s over-arching goal has always been to create a framework that could be replicated and adapted to create successful small schools. They haven’t come up with a cookie cutter model, but do have a plan for spreading their success. All future KIPP schools will center on the “five pillars”: 1) More time on task every day and every year, 2) Choice and commitment, 3) Solid leadership, 4) High expectations, and 5) Great results. New schools will vary, but as long as those core principles are in place, they are confident that students will excel.

At the same time, KIPP is training educators to create their own KIPP-like schools by immersing them in the high-energy culture that has already been so successful in Houston and the Bronx. They train their fellows to be instructional leaders, CEOs of a small business, and community politicians. “The people make the difference. We can grow as fast as we can find great people to train and start these schools.”

## MOVING TOWARDS A NATIONAL ASSESSMENT

Accountability is a major cornerstone of the recently authorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The Bush administration is clearly concerned with holding teachers, schools, and districts accountable for student learning. However, getting a uniform measure of student progress is extremely challenging under the current system, where each state implements its own tests. This panel will explore the desirability and feasibility of a uniform national assessment. What could a national assessment look like and how might it actually be implemented, given that strong factions on both the left and right oppose it? How could a national assessment be an opportunity to develop a better, richer assessment, aligned to teaching standards, that measures what we really care about?

### Moderator:

- Thomas Toch, Writer in Residence, National Center on Education and the Economy

### Presenters:

- Dr. Chester E. Finn, Jr., President, Thomas B. Fordham Foundation; John M. Olin Fellow, Manhattan Institute
- Dr. Marshall Smith, Program Director, Education, William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

## Roundtable Discussion

**TT:** “Measuring student performance has become a cornerstone of both strands of school reform over the last decade: the leveraging of student achievement through the establishment of high standards and the leveraging of school improvement through increasing family and student choice.” The No Child Left Behind legislation means that the amount of standardized testing in this country will greatly increase over the next few years and the question is whether or not that is a good thing for students and schools.

**CF:** “In an era when people’s attention has shifted to school results rather than intentions, inputs, services, or programs, there needs to be a way to know whether schools and kids and teachers are producing results.” The need for measurements and accountability is especially important with standards-based reform, so every state has settled for a testing regimen to determine if the state standards are being achieved.

**MS:** Unfortunately, standardized tests aren’t aligned with the individual state curricula and standards. That has implications for the notion of a national test because 50 different sets of state standards cannot be aligned with one single assessment. There are substantial incentives to use the off-the-shelf tests, like the SAT-9, which are less expensive, easier to use, easier to score, but not as fair as the standards-based tests that the states develop themselves. The incentives are especially strong as states are going to be required to test grades three through eight. There is no way to get around the fact that good tests take time and money to develop.

Furthermore, the policy making process behind all of this is intensely political and without real concern for kids or for coherent systems of testing. Significant compromises have already been made at the policy level that will inhibit the possibility for success with this national testing program.

**CF:** Standards imply a criterion-referenced test, where the test determines if the student has learned certain things. The tendency in this country, however, is towards the norm-referenced tests that are pegged at the performance of the average kid. Grade level, then, refers to the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile of that grade. “It’s a recipe for

total confusion and lack of progress if we use these percentile scores on a norm-referenced test, based on where kids are today, as a way of trying to track progress towards standards.”

In order for a national test to work, it would either have to be adaptable to individual state standards, or else the curricular standards and expectations would have to be uniform across the country. Furthermore, there needs to be the right kind of motivation to ensure that an expensive, quality test is created. The motivation would come if the government were interested in improving student achievement, not just measuring it. A truly quality test could provide a wealth of information that could enable change in the schools. Of course, there would have to be a parallel effort to train teachers and administrators on how to be good consumers of test results.