



Crafting a Civic Stage for Public Education Reform: Understanding the Work and Accomplishments of Local Education Funds

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Research for Action

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Research for Action (RFA) is a nonprofit organization engaged in education research and reform. Founded in 1992, RFA works with educators, students, parents, and community members to improve educational opportunities and outcomes for all students. RFA work falls along a continuum of highly participatory research and evaluation to more traditional policy studies.



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Executive Summary

In August 2003, a group of local education funds (LEFs) and Public Education Network (PEN) asked Research for Action (RFA) to conduct a study on the roles and accomplishments of LEFs as they pertain to public education reform.

RFA began by laying a foundation for understanding and assessing how LEFs carry out their missions and how they demonstrate success. Our ensuing research provided a conceptual model for understanding how LEFs make decisions and how they go about shaping an organizational identity and an approach to their work. We are now in a position to locate LEFs in the constellation of school reform organizations; to define their potentially unique contributions; to articulate an overall theory of change present in the work of all LEFs; to develop a framework of indicators identifying areas of impact on schools and communities; and to capture key processes and potential outcomes of LEF work.

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Our research has revealed LEFs to be highly adaptive organizations skillful in customizing strategies to meet local needs. While the individual nature of each LEF may obscure commonly held overarching values, purposes, and goals, thus masking their collective identity, this customization is at the heart of why LEFs are such effective change agents. Since local education funds view education reform as a community enterprise, they do not take a cookie-cutter approach to change. Rather, they apply a deep knowledge of local contexts and a strong commitment to core values to strategic decisions on how to position themselves and their work in the local public education reform landscape.

The picture emerging from our analysis also points to the potential of LEFs to bridge an all-too-frequent gap between economic development and education improvement. Public officials and development professionals have long valued good public schools as an asset in community development, yet rarely are community development efforts and education reforms ever coordinated. As urban development scholars have noted: it is much easier to build momentum for development efforts that focus on physical attributes—housing, downtown revitalization, recreational facilities that draw tourists—than to build momentum for education reform.

Given their ability to create alliances and develop shared agendas that include civic as well as education actors, LEFs are uniquely positioned to foster a supportive civic environment for improving public education. The importance of a vital civic environment in school reform has only recently been recognized by researchers and public education advocates. Our report identifies key elements of such an environment and shows how LEFs contribute to its existence.

By crafting multi-dimensional programs operating at the juncture of the civic-school arena, LEFs contribute to the reform landscape by shaping a supportive civic environment that brings added value to efforts to improve public schools. LEF strategies are designed to create civic environments able to stimulate, sustain, and sensitize education reform efforts. LEF programs and initiatives perform several functions—building infrastructure, generating knowledge, developing leadership, and creating momentum for innovation—that impact the civic environment for reform. Outcomes at these different points of impact are interrelated and reinforcing. The civic environment supporting education reform acts as a scaffold for achieving outcomes related to school and community capacity. Ultimately, youth, families, and the community as a whole, also benefit.

The theory of change model presented in this report provides a conceptual frame for seeing the relationship of LEF work to these different points of impact and the relationship among resulting outcomes. It describes a common set of goals and an overarching approach shared by all LEFs and explains what accounts for the considerable variation across LEFs nationwide.

LEFs are effective community change agents because they are highly adaptive organizations. They are in tune with the contours, challenges, and opportunities in their local contexts and use this deep understanding to make strategic decisions on how to position themselves in light of their core values. LEFs know they must involve a wide range of constituents in goal-setting processes and that there must be widespread agreement on any reform agenda for change to have momentum. They also recognize that they need the clout that comes with credibility to get constituents to the table and to make sure that agendas are framed by highly regarded, high-quality ideas. Often, these positioning decisions require LEFs to make trade-offs and, when the context shifts, to change course.

It is our hope that, by understanding the process of change and how to identify and measure outcomes at different sites of impact, LEF staff and boards can develop a framework by which to explain their work and its significance to critical constituents such as funders, partners, and researchers. We believe this understanding can guide LEF planning by helping them review strategic decisions in light of goals and local context and provide a framework for assessing accomplishments. The findings in this report can also be used to inform future empirical research on LEFs as well as on other intermediary organizations working to reform public schools.

Introduction

In Florida, The Education Fund in North Miami has been working for almost 20 years to bring private sector support to the Miami-Dade public schools, one of the largest, most diverse school systems in the country whose list of accomplishments include the following:

- *A parent resource guide published in three languages, distributed to 500,000 households, and adopted as a model by the state.*
- *A town meeting and series of community and media events that brought high visibility to the issue of teacher quality and kicked off a campaign to bring resources to bear on the problem of recruiting and retaining excellent teachers for the Miami-Dade schools.*
- *Facilitation of a collaborative effort that mobilized university and community partners and raised more than \$6.5 million for a multi-pronged initiative to improve achievement in all of the schools in one of Miami's lowest performing feeder patterns.*

The Education Fund in Miami and other local education funds (LEFs) across the country have toiled for more than two decades—often behind the scenes—to strengthen public schooling and raise the academic achievement of students in low-income communities. With support and leadership from Public Education Network (PEN), local education funds have educated citizens in almost 90 communities across the United States about important public education issues and mobilized community coalitions to bring much-needed resources and give input to public schooling policy discussions. LEFs have also worked directly with districts, schools, students, and parents to bring robust innovation to public education and institutionalize high-quality programs and practices that strengthen children's learning.

Like Miami's Education Fund, LEFs throughout the country have made education a civic enterprise in their communities. In this report, we argue that local education funds are uniquely positioned to create a supportive civic environment for improving public education. Historically underappreciated, a civic environment that supports school reform has more recently been recognized by researchers and public education advocates as a necessity. This report identifies key elements of such an environment and shows how LEFs contribute to its existence.

We also argue that local education funds are highly adaptive organizations that customize their change strategies to particular communities. While the individual nature of each LEF may obscure the overarching values, purposes, and goals that these organizations share—thus masking their collective identity—customization is at the heart of why LEFs are such effective change agents. They apply deep knowledge of local contexts and strong commitment to core values in order to make strategic decisions about how to position themselves and their work in the local reform landscape.

After more than 20 years of work in public education, LEF leaders and PEN continue to be forward-looking in their insistence on research that examines the role and accomplishments of LEFs. In August 2003, at PEN's request, Research for Action (RFA) began to lay a foundation for understanding and assessing how LEFs carry out their missions and how they demonstrate success. In this report we offer stories of LEF work and suggest a conceptual model for understanding the decisions LEFs make as they shape their organizational identity and an approach to their work.

The project has had the following goals and outcomes:

- *To locate LEFs in the constellation of organizations working to improve public education and define their potentially unique contributions.* Like other intermediary organizations, LEFs broker between other organizations and constituencies, add value to the organizations with which they work, and offer a credible vehicle for action. As we will illustrate throughout this report, additional organizational features uniquely position LEFs to establish a supportive civic environment for school reform in their communities.
- *To articulate an overall theory of change operating across the work of all LEFs.* In this report, we advance a theory of change for LEFs that clarifies complex inter-relationships into a holistic view of ways that change occurs.
- *To develop an indicators framework to identify areas of impact on schools and communities.* An indicators framework identifies the accomplishments of LEFs at different areas of impact and suggests signs of progress toward positive outcomes for schools, students, and communities.

Through a review of the literature on local education funds, direct observations, review of written and website documentation, and in-depth, structured interviews, we gathered stories and data for our analysis of the core values, context, and variation among LEFs. The indicators methodology—coupled with qualitative research that included interviews, observations, and content analysis of written documents—allowed us to capture key processes and potential outcomes of LEF work. In developing our indicators, Research for Action staff drew on four sources of information:

- Empirical research conducted by RFA staff on 14 LEFs, including visits to three LEF sites and interviews with LEF staff and with key players in the local community context of the LEF.

- Key informant interviews with nationally known education reform experts who are also knowledgeable about LEFs and Public Education Network.
- Observations at national meetings attended by PEN staff and LEF members.
- Research literature on LEFs and on other intermediary and nonprofit organizations working in public education.

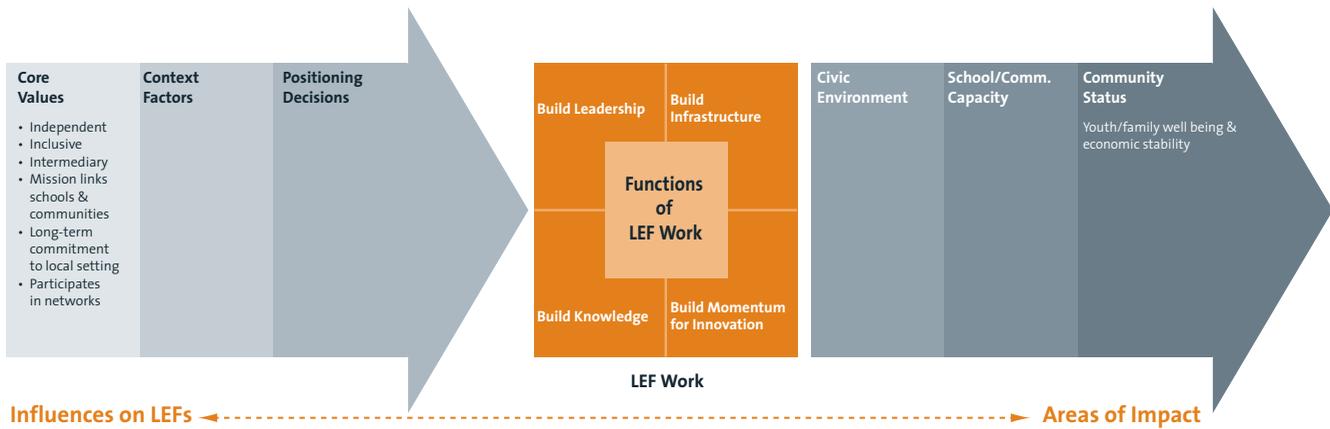
This report was planned with local education funds and those who work with them in mind. The framework and ideas presented here can be used in a variety of practical ways:

- To assist the staff, board members, and partners of LEFs in the development of clear explanations for those outside the organization, including funders, about what an LEF does. In Chapters 1 and 2, we discuss the unique features of LEFs, how LEFs add value to education reform, and describe a theory of change for the outcomes they achieve.
- To assist LEF staff and board members as they chart strategic directions for their organizations and make the operational decisions that will advance their work. Chapter 3 identifies strategic decisions that LEFs make and suggests tradeoffs inherent in these decisions that affect the impacts LEFs achieve.
- To assist LEF staff and board members and LEF stakeholders as they review and assess their accomplishments and plan for the future. In Chapter 4 we present indicators that LEFs can use in a process of planning and self-assessment and to offer as evidence of progress in achieving long-term goals.
- To inform future empirical research on LEFs as well as other intermediary organizations working to reform public schools.

The LEF theory of change forms the basis for the discussion in the following chapters in which we describe the influences on LEF work, the functions of their work, and the different areas of impact this work can reach. Each chapter focuses on a different aspect of the theory of change, starting with an explanation of LEF core values in the next chapter.

Characterizing Local Education Funds

A MODEL OF THE LEF THEORY OF CHANGE



The number and diversity of non-school organizations working to improve public education has grown enormously during the past 20 years (McDonald, McLaughlin, and Corcoran, 2000, Kronley & Handley, 2003, Rothman, 2002, Honig, 2004, Lampkin & Stern, 2003). The diminished role of the federal government in the provision of social services and community development, coupled with growing concerns about the quality of public education, combine to demonstrate the need for external organizations to help increase resources, coordinate services, and represent the voices of minorities and low-income constituents (Fruchter, 2003; Hirota and Jacobs, 2003).

Universities, business associations, civic groups, community organizing groups, school foundations and a range of service providers now play an active role in reforming public education. Local education funds are among the many organizations external to schools that have responded to the need to support public education, especially in communities with low-income, minority, or immigrant populations. What, then, distinguishes LEFs from other organizations that are similarly dedicated?

LEFs as a Type of Intermediary Organization

Many other intermediary organizations—whether nonprofits, for-profits, or divisions of other institutions—provide education services that address specific needs—such as health, literacy, management, or arts education—either directly with local school districts or with youth and adult clients, typically on a fee or contract basis. While some LEFs provide specific fee-based services, such activities are only a part of what they do. As portrayed in the Miami example at the beginning of this report, LEFs respond to a range of needs, often by linking groups within a geographic area. In performing this linking function, LEFs can be seen as a type of intermediary organization (Blank, 2003; Rothman, 2002).

LEFs share three central roles with other intermediaries as they work to create change: broker, value-adder, and vehicle for action.

“People realize our ed fund is not the Board of Education. They know who we are and what we do. They know business people are on our board, and they understand that we are friends to the school system, ‘critical friends.’”

- **As brokers**, LEFs connect organizations with different constituencies, often playing the role of “facilitator” or “convener” in their communities (Useem & Neild, 1995, Jobs for the Future & New Ways to Work, 2003, Blank et al. 2003). They bring together an array of perspectives and resources: school personnel, parents, constituencies external to the district, including the business community, grass-roots organizations, and researchers from local universities.
- **As value-adders**, LEFs add value to education improvement efforts by generating new knowledge about best practices; offering opportunities for school staff to access new resources and expertise; and providing a window for civic groups to learn about the problems of schools in order to contribute effectively to their improvement. LEFs typically leverage a small staff and limited financial investment to generate significant returns by bringing new policies, programs, financial backing, and public support to the efforts.
- **As vehicles for action**, LEFs work independently and outside the public bureaucracy. They have clout when perceived as credible, uninfluenced by particular political interests, and efficient in carrying initiatives forward. Because of lean staffs and transparent operations, LEFs are valued for their accountability for results.

Unlike intermediaries that operate on a national basis, or are established temporarily to address a specific problem, LEFs are permanent organizations working over time in local settings to improve public education and thus contribute to the overall economic and social well-being of their local communities. LEFs argue that good public schools are worth fighting for; that they are the cornerstone of economically and socially vibrant communities; and that all children benefit from strong schools.

The Source of LEF Core Values

The earliest LEFs such as the San Francisco Education Fund and Oakland’s Marcus Foster Educational Institute, both founded in the 1970s, grew out of economic development agendas for workforce enhancement and the need to build public confidence in public schools. These pioneering local education funds sought to be “more than a mere fundraising vehicle or foundation for a local school district.” (Levine & Trachtman, 1988: 80). They worked to bring together multiple constituencies and to build bridges between the civic and school arenas. The early LEFs worked in urban communities where issues of access to quality resources and equity in public education were most acute.

The principles and values that LEFs share also derive from their common origins in the Public Education Fund, which was established in the early 1980s to seed new LEFs across the country. Public Education Network, the Fund’s successor organization, emerged later as a membership organization supporting LEFs in dealing with current issues of broad significance. While today’s LEFs work in varied environments and reflect a range of responses to local needs, they continue to address issues of equity such as the achievement gap, access to good jobs, and increasing diversity in schools.

“As a graduate of a public school, I am sadly disheartened by what is happening in public education. I’m part of the business community and have had conversations about the quality of students graduating from public schools. If businesses leave, this city will die. It’s that critical.”

“Our ed fund brings a wide range of stakeholders together—teachers, students, business educators, community leaders, union representatives, school administrators. Bringing such a diverse group to the same table provides a special level of credibility to work together to improve the schools.”

“Our mission is to mobilize resources. We look at the resources out there, pull them together, and orchestrate a forum that will have impact. We are known for being able to pull in partners that are going to do the job well.”

“We are in a region where we have committed our work to a significant number of square miles and a population that shares common issues. That commitment has been extremely important to the success of our work.”

LEFs also distinguish themselves from other intermediaries through their commitment to the core values that permeate these organizations, whether working in rural Ohio or in bustling Los Angeles. Below we present the set of underlying principles/values that LEFs share. This is not a menu of choices, but rather a holistic set of principles that identify a unique position in the movement to reform public education.

Maintain an independent stance toward schools – An independent stance enhances LEF authority and credibility because too close an alignment with either the district or with particular segments of the community would give the appearance that LEFs serve narrow interests. The option to be critical or demand public accountability even while being supportive is important if LEF efforts are to benefit all children. As nonprofits, LEFs aim for widely representative boards of directors that provide support and cover for “telling it like it is.”

Define school and community improvements as entwined goals – LEFs articulate the case that strong schools make for strong communities. They point to the connections between economic development and school programs that contribute to workforce development. This dual focus on school and community outcomes pervades how LEF staff and observers talk about their efforts.

Strive for participation by a wide range of constituents – In line with their goals, LEFs aim to include a wide range of constituents in their programs and activities. Whether initiated by a business partnership, school professionals, or by community activists and parents, LEFs seek to bring a range of people to the table for deliberations and input. LEFs enact this principle by recruiting board members from different segments of the citizenry and by working with educators from all levels of the school district.

Maintain flexibility to best perform the intermediary role of brokering relationships Recognizing the obstacles to interaction among groups from different sectors, LEFs must establish an “in between” position that facilitates cooperation and productive collaboration among organizations. In doing so, LEFs themselves must be flexible and determine how best to configure a way for a variety of groups to link together in order to take action.

Work in the local setting long enough to gain a deep understanding of community needs and a commitment to community improvement – Neither distant nor temporary, LEFs are embedded in local communities and regions and intend to stay for the long haul. This commitment to place means that relationships are extremely important because they must be maintained over time. It also means that LEF staff must develop a deep understanding of the context in which the LEF works in order to make wise decisions about whom to include, how to prioritize, and how best to target efforts.

Welcome learning opportunities as members of regional and national networks

Another distinguishing feature of LEFs is membership in Public Education Network, a national network of similar organizations. PEN membership signifies that the LEF is addressing a set of issues with national significance, plus the power of numbers lends credibility to their organization. LEFs also are members of other kinds of associations that help to increase knowledge, legitimacy, and/or access to new allies.

“PEN holds up a broad picture of what a powerful ed fund can be. They move the bar higher and higher. The opportunity to network across the country is terrific.”

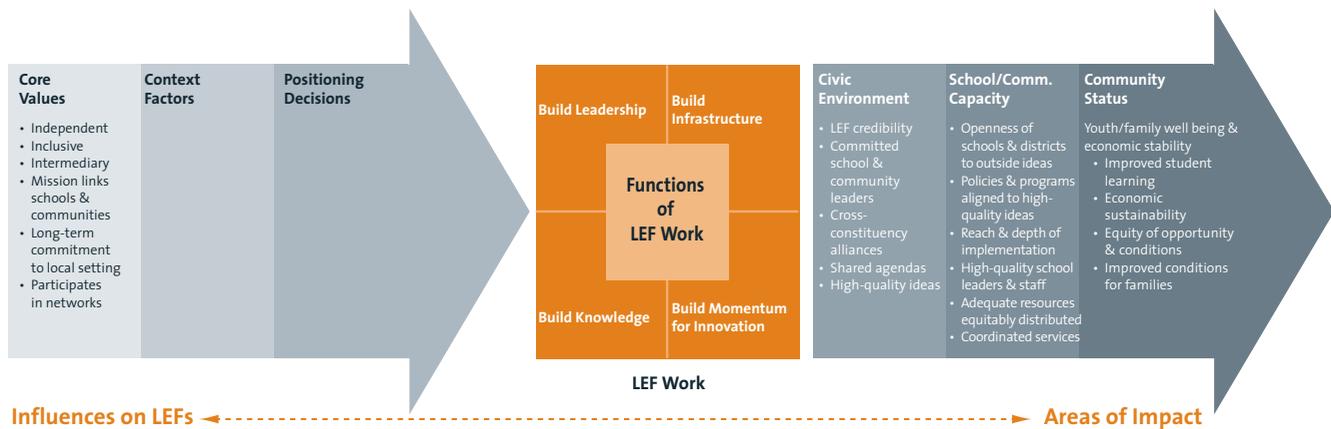
Summary

In this chapter, we portrayed LEFs as a particular kind of intermediary organization working to improve and support public education. They are distinguished by their core values of commitment to a particular local setting over time, independence, dual focus on school and community outcomes, a wide range of constituents, flexibility, and membership in networks for learning and action.

In the next chapter, we describe the theory of change that connects the work LEFs do to the accomplishments they achieve. We describe four broad functions of LEF work and point to outcomes at each of three areas of impact. In addition to examples that illustrate these concepts, we provide a detailed story of the work and accomplishments of one LEF to illustrate the theory of change.

Analyzing LEF Work & Accomplishments: A Theory of Change

A MODEL OF THE LEF THEORY OF CHANGE



The current policy environment for education puts tremendous pressure on schools and education programs to define success in terms of gains in student test scores. Although there is plenty of debate about measurement of student learning and the problems of high-stakes tests, there is no argument that advancing student learning is the end goal of any school reform effort. However, experienced educators and reformers know that the path from a new program or policy to student achievement is complex and incremental. To avoid a rush to judgment based on new initiatives, organizations engaged in education reform must be able to explain the rationale for their approach and how their efforts create pathways of influence that ultimately lead to increased student learning and other important outcomes for the entire community.

The LEF Theory of Change

In this chapter, we describe a theory of change to provide LEFs with a tool they can use to explain how their efforts lead to impacts at different areas critical to education and community improvement.¹ The theory of change identifies four functions that LEF efforts serve: building knowledge, creating infrastructure, building momentum for innovation, and developing leadership. It also illustrates how these functions result in impacts in three areas: civic environment, school and community capacity to support student achievement, and community well-being as measured by outcomes for students and families and by economic sustainability.

By situating their accomplishments at different areas of impact, LEFs can explain their work and manage the expectations of observers by showing how impacts are interrelated and how they set the stage for important long-term targets. Impacts on the civic environment for reform support the sustainability, equity, and strength of impacts on school and community capacity. Impacts on civic environment also strengthen the quality of reform ideas that emerge via contributions from a wide range of participants. High-capacity public schools and community institutions can support increased student learning more effectively. Ultimately, families and communities benefit. For example, a better-prepared workforce resulting from a high graduation rate might persuade

employers to locate or remain in a region, thus retaining jobs or creating opportunities with economic value for families and the community as a whole.

At the center of the LEF theory of change is an assumption that public education is a community enterprise with potentially widespread benefits. Our informants almost always emphasized the importance of impacts on schools, but they also stressed impacts on the civic environment—impacts that observers often do not value as critical to the work of education reform organizations. In this report, however, we show that when the civic environment supports public education, it provides an important platform for stimulating and sustaining change in schools and communities.

“It’s a brokerage role, it’s an innovator role, it’s an incubator role, it’s trying to think outside the box, it’s about partnerships and individual relationships and trying to understand the need well enough to match with the resource. It’s a Yenta role; basically we are matchmakers.”

Although it is more difficult to draw a direct relationship between LEF efforts and impacts on the community as a whole, both the LEF staff and community stakeholders who we talked to emphasized such impacts in describing the rationales for the efforts LEFs undertake. The theory of change presented here weaves together common threads in what LEFs and other informants said they were striving for, what it took to get there, and how those impacts are connected to each other.

As previously described, our theory of change is based on research and wide-ranging interviews with LEFs across the nation. To illustrate this theory, we use the story of the Mon Valley Education Consortium (MVEC), a regional local education fund that includes 25 school districts in southwestern Pennsylvania representing over 55,000 students. The MVEC story is representative of many stories that we heard from different LEF sites because it illustrates how LEF programs lead to a more supportive civic environment for school reform, increased school and community capacity, and ultimately, opportunities for students and economic benefits for the community as a whole. We begin by discussing the concepts that make up the theory of change as a basis for interpreting the MVEC story that follows.

LEF Work: Four Functions

LEF efforts are extremely varied but, from our analysis of their work across a range of settings, we suggest their programs and initiatives perform four broad functions, which are defined below. While here we describe each function as discrete, in real life these functions are interrelated and work synergistically. Any one LEF initiative can serve more than one function at the same time. For instance, a program to educate the public about school board candidates and train parents to run for the school board also builds knowledge in the community about the education issues at stake in the election and develops leadership among parents and community members. Teacher grants, an almost universal LEF program designed to support innovation, also help develop teachers’ leadership skills. Many LEFs employ strategies to convene groups of stakeholders to develop school, district, or even statewide plans and quality indicators. While these efforts build school and civic infrastructure that are vital for stimulating, monitoring, and sustaining change, participants also learn leadership skills and gain knowledge about well-regarded ideas for reform.

“Our role is to be a source of unbiased information, a resource to inform policymakers, to engage the public in policy discussions, to go on record when there is clear evidence to support a particular point of view...we’ve done that about quality teaching.”

Build Knowledge – LEF initiatives can introduce school and community actors to information about effective programs and research findings, or LEFs can conduct

“The funding comes to us, and we acknowledge our partner organizations. We are not raising the money, but we are the infrastructure—stable, coherent.”

“We took research on proficient readers and translated it into practice. When we started, the coaching model was avant garde. Now many people use coaches. Then we published books about the approach and expanded to a national stage. Now we’re training others from across the country.”

original research and disseminate their findings. Research results are used to inform LEF policy initiatives and as a basis for advocating policy change.

Create Infrastructure – LEFs work to create opportunities at different levels of scale for public discourse and problem-solving among a range of actors in schools and communities. These conversations address important issues, introduce new information or perspectives, and suggest strategies for school improvement that are linked to strengthening communities. LEFs characterize themselves as conveners, facilitators, and brokers—all different ways of describing their role in building infrastructure for local public engagement in education discussions and in the decision-making process.

Encourage Innovation – LEFs serve as guides and leaders for innovative policies and programs in schools and communities. Demonstration projects, mini-grants, model curricula and pedagogy are examples of programs that serve to encourage momentum for innovation in schools and communities. Such innovation is often based on knowledge that LEFs themselves develop or on information that LEFs bring to a community due to their connections to regional and national networks in education and in related fields such as economic development.

Develop Leadership – LEFs help increase the ranks of local leaders by providing opportunities for school and community actors to learn, participate in decision making, make public presentations, and organize others to take action on issues of concern. Leadership development occurs at two distinct levels: for school staff and administrators at the district level, and for parents, business representatives, and interested citizens at the community level. LEFs are also increasingly engaged in initiatives that target youth activism and leadership.

Areas of Impact

The four basic LEF functions—building knowledge, creating infrastructure, building momentum for innovation, developing leadership—lead to outcomes at three areas of impact:

- A civic environment supportive of public education
- School and community capacity
- Community status: i.e., student and family well-being and economic sustainability

In this chapter, we suggest outcomes one might expect to find at each area of impact and the relationships among these outcomes. One set of outcomes constitutes the elements of a supportive civic environment for public education. A major finding of our research is that LEFs distinguish themselves within the constellation of school reform organizations by their emphasis and effectiveness at creating a supportive environment for school reform. This positive environment then sets the stage for a second set of important outcomes in school and community capacity for change and improvement. Such changes in school and community capacity further lead to outcomes at a third area of impact. These outcomes are long term; they not only include improved learning for students, but much broader outcomes that contribute to the social and

“Our process lets parents take leadership by having conversations that bring the community together and then becomes the structure for the school improvement plan... we have a cadre of trained moderators we can send out practically within minutes to help lead people through this process.”

economic vitality of communities. We argue that the long-term outcome of increased student learning is more likely to result when school change occurs in the context of a supportive civic environment for reform and in connection to school and community capacity.

It is important to understand that impacts at the different areas are interrelated and reinforcing; they can take place concurrently or they can be sequential. Take the example of an LEF that convenes community stakeholders to develop criteria for measuring school quality. By creating a community-wide discourse on expectations for schools, the LEF builds relationships among diverse constituencies, which, in turn, impact the civic environment. At the same time, this effort may increase school capacity by supporting a planning process that responds to the issues raised in the community-wide discourse and assessment. Improved school capacity leads to positive student outcomes such as improved attendance, promotion rates, and achievement—impacts included in the community status area. Ultimately, community status improves as stronger ties between schools and businesses become the basis for retaining or attracting new businesses. More or better job opportunities for graduates and ultimately better economic conditions for their families are the result. But these are long-term outcomes, cited by LEF leaders as part of their mission but seen as far in the future. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that impacts in one area are related to impacts at another and that each programmatic effort has multiple impacts. Seeing LEF work as aimed at these three areas, while understanding that the impacts are interrelated in a variety of ways, helps to categorize accomplishments and put them into perspective in terms of expectations, timeframe, and progression.

A Civic Environment Supportive of Public Education

Every LEF seeks to create a positive civic environment that will provide a sturdy platform for improving public education. LEFs champion the cause of public education by arguing and demonstrating that good schools are worth fighting for; that they are the cornerstones of economically and socially vibrant communities; that, although schools and districts have problems, they nonetheless respond to concerted efforts for improvement; and that all children benefit from strong schools. Through their efforts, LEFs build public confidence in their communities’ public schools. At the same time, LEFs must press schools to do better by making performance information public so that everyone can measure progress. LEFs must also introduce good ideas on how to improve education and involve the community.

A supportive civic environment—one that fosters relationships across constituencies and opportunities for public discourse—adds value to school outcomes in terms of sustainability, equity, and the quality and ownership of ideas for change. A supportive civic environment can mitigate obstacles to school reform from taking hold, obstacles such as frequent turnover in school district administrations, inconsistent policies at various levels, insufficient public funding, and public and professional apathy toward reform efforts.

LEFs must build strong alliances across constituencies and rally school and community

leaders to work toward shared goals. As they build alliances, LEFs must develop respectful new relationships built on trust and try to mend any frayed relationships. This difficult work becomes easier when an LEF is seen as credible and influential by a wide range of public education stakeholders. Creating such an environment is central to the LEF theory of change in that it creates conditions to sustain school improvement and assures high-quality results. Such an environment is necessary if reform efforts are going to make sense to those who must implement the reform and to those who have a stake in it.²

Supportive Civic Environment Outcomes

LEF credibility – To be a reform broker and catalyst, an LEF has to establish and maintain a reputation for independence and as an organization with the best interests of the entire community in mind. Such a position enables LEFs to bring critical partners to the table and for the ideas thus generated to influence a reform agenda. However, credibility takes time to develop. As the executive director of a young LEF stated, “we have to develop our ‘chops’ or people will say, ‘who are you to bring this idea or suggestion to us?’ ”

Committed school & community leaders – For people to become fully engaged and do the difficult work of adopting new practices and supporting efforts over time, they must first feel they have a stake in the success of those efforts. Commitment translates into a sense of ownership and contributes to the depth with which reforms are implemented. Whether school-based or community-based, commitment grows from the extent to which individuals participate in decisions about reform efforts.

Cross-constituent alliances – To achieve equity, to assure that decisions are not serving narrow interests, and to assure that something actually gets done, LEFs work hard to build alliances across constituencies throughout the community. By spreading the net wide, LEFs ensure that all citizens—not just those with children in school—understand and support reforms.

Shared agenda for reform – When key stakeholders in a community agree on what needs to be done to improve schools and community conditions, they are more likely to take action and sustain momentum for reform.

High-quality ideas – While structural conditions for reform are important, ideas are equally important. The ideas that make up the reform agenda must reflect the best knowledge that exists while remaining sensitive to community needs.

School & Community Capacity

Through their programs, LEFs offer guidance, support, resources, ideas, research, and networking opportunities that help build the capacity of schools and communities to change and improve. Ultimately, LEF programs realize their impacts when the ideas and practices they advance are institutionalized through district, city, or state policy, and are incorporated as routine practice in the institutions that serve youth.

While LEF efforts can trace school and community outcomes directly from their

LEFs offer guidance, support, resources, ideas, research, and networking opportunities that help build the capacity of schools and communities to change and improve.

programs and policy initiatives, our model suggests that their accomplishments in establishing a supportive civic environment for education reform add value to building school and community capacity along three critical dimensions:

- **Sustainable reforms.** Sustainability is a function of the commitment of a broad range of community actors to a shared agenda, which results in wide ownership of reform ideas. Such commitment also enhances the breadth and depth of implementation. Engagement in planning and carrying out reform also deepens participants' understanding and ensures that reforms do not represent narrow interests.
- **Highly regarded, high-quality reform ideas.** The LEF emphasis on building knowledge ensures that programs and policies adopted by and for public schools can withstand scrutiny and are representative of practices that have been tried and tested elsewhere.
- **Equitable outcomes.** LEFs engage a broad range of stakeholders to set agendas for reform efforts, to carry them out, and to monitor results; in doing so they are more likely to reach a diverse set of students in a range of schools.

Thanks to LEF efforts, schools demonstrate an increased willingness to learn from and work with new partners.

School & Community Capacity Outcomes

Openness by districts and schools to new ideas from outside sources – One of the reasons that reform fails to take hold in schools is because they are often closed institutions, resistant to ideas from outside, particularly from those who are not professional educators. LEF efforts can result in an increased willingness on the part of schools to learn from and work with new partners and use this new information for improvement.

Policies and programs aligned with high-quality ideas for improvement – LEFs bring valid and credible information to various constituents responsible for policy decisions, program adoption, and working with youth. From research aimed at legislators to parent institutes, the practices that result should reflect the best knowledge available about needs and successful models.

Broad, deep implementation of new programs and policies – No matter how good the idea or high-powered the advocate, reforms may not reach implementation without the added value contributed by a positive environment for change that builds commitment to reforms.

High-quality school staff and leadership – Much of the work that LEFs do is aimed at developing the capacity of teachers and principals through institutes and opportunities to conduct research, experiment with new practices, and take on leadership roles. Such efforts can also result in improved strategies for hiring and retaining high-quality staff.

Adequate resources, equitably distributed – By bringing new partnerships and programs to schools and new opportunities directly to youth and parents, LEF efforts augment available resources. LEFs focus energies on ensuring these resources reach those who need them the most—low-income, minority, and immigrant youth in inner-city and rural settings.

Coordinated resources and services for children and families – In their roles as intermediary organizations, many LEFs have launched initiatives that coordinate a myriad of youth and family services thus making them more accessible and coherent for the beneficiaries.

Community Status: Student & Family Well-Being & Economic Sustainability

Because LEFs work at the intersection of schools and communities, they strive for long-term outcomes both for schools and for communities. Impacts that contribute to a supportive civic environment for public education and increased school and community capacity are the foundation for long-term outcomes for students, families, and communities. Desirable community outcomes include a stronger workforce that contributes to local economic development and an increased capacity of parents and community institutions to support children and to participate in community-building efforts. Ideally, LEF efforts result in academic and economic equity—a more equitable distribution of opportunities for youth, in that they are better prepared academically and thus have greater access to jobs and education. Returning to our central tenet, LEFs assume that public education is a community enterprise. When a positive environment for change yields expanded capacity, communities benefit as the economic well-being of all families rises.

LEFs focus on increasing the chances that graduates and their families can find well-paying, fulfilling jobs and participate fully in the local economy.

Community Status Outcomes

Improved student learning

LEF work targets student outcomes in a number of ways including, but not limited to, achievement as measured by test scores. Other measures include graduation and attendance rates, college-going rates, career awareness, and health status.

Economic sustainability

While goals concerning the economic sustainability of communities may not be explicit in the missions of LEFs, these were nonetheless emphasized by many LEF directors and knowledgeable community members who we interviewed. Most LEF boards have strong representation from the private sector and from large nonprofit employers such as hospitals and institutions of higher education. Business involvement stems from a vested interest in the economic well-being of communities, which they link to the quality of public education and its capability to generate a qualified workforce and an encouraging business climate. In turn, the economic well-being of a community strengthens outcomes for students and families by enhancing access to opportunities. Local economic development strategies are typically tied to the strength of social life and reputation of a community, qualities that a good education system enhances.

Equity of opportunity for students and community residents

With an emphasis that includes addressing achievement for all students, increasing college access and success, and making connections to local employers, LEF missions focus on increasing the chances that graduates and their families can find well-paying, fulfilling jobs and participate fully in the local economy.

Improved conditions for families

Many LEF programs directly target families by supporting early childhood education and parenting, coordinating services for children and families, building parent leadership, and increasing political will to support public education. Through these direct efforts and indirectly through economic impacts resulting from their efforts to increase school capacity, LEF work has impacts that benefit families. Families gain knowledge and resources to better support their children's education and social life.

The Theory in Practice: The Mon Valley Education Consortium

LEF directors and their community colleagues do not posit a theory of action when they talk about their programs and their accomplishments. They tell instead how particular programs were devised to address problems or needs identified in their communities and in local schools. They talk about accomplishments at many different levels, but also about how long it takes to see change and how much persistence and effort it takes to effect change. The story below describes one program by the Mon Valley Education Consortium that responded to a need to strengthen leadership and quality in the regions' schools, to increase the resources available to these schools, and to enhance their clout by connecting school districts across the Mon Valley region. It is representative of many stories we heard from the sites in our study because it shows how LEF work serves multiple functions and has impacts that bridge areas critical to a local community. In particular, it highlights how impacts on the civic environment connect with those at the school and community levels.

MVEC's leadership team initiative serves multiple functions and has impacts that bridge areas critical to the local communities.

The western Pennsylvania towns of the Mon Valley surrounding Pittsburgh are bound by their common history as thriving industrial communities that experienced precipitous decline in the late 20th century. In 1985, backed by seed money from the Ford Foundation, an association of Pittsburgh business leaders created the Mon Valley Education Consortium (MVEC), one of the first successful LEFs. The consortium faced a significant challenge: as steel manufacturing died out and well-paying union jobs vanished, the region lost half its population. Those who remained shouldered the burden for maintaining public services, including school systems, as resources continued to dwindle.

MVEC: Building knowledge, creating infrastructure, developing leadership, building momentum for innovation

All four LEF program functions can be found in MVEC's Leadership Team initiative, one of its most enduring programs. Design teams at individual schools include a wide representation of staff and an open seat for community members or students. District and region-wide teams include representatives from the building and district levels.

The design team process **builds knowledge** by engaging participants in research and in cross-site learning activities that form the basis for problem solving and new improvement strategies. "We look at research for best practices and then try to figure out if there is a way to...create a response."

The teams provide organizational **infrastructure** for planning and implementation

at different scales in the region. As MVEC's executive director stated, "We try to create a lot of spaces where people can share their thoughts. One word we use a lot is 'infrastructure.' Without a quality infrastructure, it is hard to achieve lasting improvement."

Opportunities to participate in planning contribute to **leadership development** for school staff and community members by giving them experience in planning and decision making, and by encouraging them to organize others to mobilize support or make presentations. The leadership teams were originally formed in response to a state-funded opportunity to train teachers as leaders. Rather than "pluck teachers out of the classroom, train them and put them back," the MVEC approach provided participants, whether teachers, community members, janitors, or principals, with opportunities to demonstrate leadership by forming decision-making structures as "a place from which leadership would emerge."

Finally, the plans and new policies/programs that emerge from these teams help **build momentum for innovation** in the participating districts. For example, in one district the leadership team led an effort to create a report card that would respond to requirements of the federal *No Child Left Behind* Act (NCLB), and also provide useful feedback on student performance to parents and teachers. MVEC's director described the building teams as "the core of innovative thinking [in a school or district]."

Setting the Stage for Reform

A seemingly simple project—designing a new school report card—illustrates how the right process contributes to creating a supportive environment for reform. A leadership team in one district sees a need to adapt its report card in light of NCLB. The team solicits participants and within a few months develops what the school superintendent terms "the best report card I have ever seen, and they did it with a lot of input from teachers and parents." In developing this new report card, the team carried out research and participated in a seminar sponsored by MVEC featuring a Washington, DC, lawyer who presented a clear framework for understanding the detailed requirements of the NCLB legislation. By working together to make sense of the new information and listening to each others' perspectives, the leadership team developed a new report card format that produced a collective pride among parents, teachers, and administrators.

The inclusiveness of the team infrastructure created an alliance that used high-quality information from outside sources to produce a useful, highly regarded report card and generate a sense of ownership and pride in those who participated in its development. The leadership team structure contributed to these outcomes because the membership requirements and the protocols for meetings were, according to MVEC, "meant to broaden the decision-making base, encourage trust, and provide confidence to tackle problems large and small."³ The alliance also taught differently situated participants a great deal about the perspectives and pressures of other team members, which in turn contributed to their ability to establish a shared agenda for reporting on student performance. The superintendent noted that when a decision-making process engages

MVEC strives to create spaces where people can share their thoughts, and develop quality infrastructures that support lasting improvement.

wide participation, it results in “more equality—the voices of teachers and parents are as important as the voices of the administrators and the board.”

Building Capacity In the Mon Valley

The leadership teams are illustrative of MVEC’s accomplishments in the area of school and community capacity. The team structure provides opportunities for school staff and administrators to learn and apply new ideas gained from other districts, from their own research, and from presentations on best practices organized by MVEC. The high level of commitment of the school and community actors involved, along with the level of ownership for the leadership team model, has ensured its institutionalization. Every year, community volunteers in the Mon Valley raise thousands of dollars to make their districts eligible for matching grants from MVEC to support teacher-led innovations.

Only a few years after MVEC was established, cuts in state funding forced the consortium to restructure the leadership team initiative because it could no longer afford to dedicate as many staff members to technical assistance. Districts were so committed to the process that they adjusted by shouldering the responsibility to support the teams. Today, 87 of 121 schools in Mon Valley districts participate in the MVEC leadership team initiative.

Wide participation results in more equality—the voices of teachers and parents are as important as the voices of the administrators and the board.

As a result of their work with teachers in developing the new report card, parents came to see the need for increased funding for their district and successfully organized and put pressure on school board members to increase taxes. The superintendent noted that the community members are the ones who “go out and promote and support and defend your district. They are the ones who will support tax increases. They will organize community members to attend board meetings if it is necessary.” As MVEC Executive Director Linda Croushore told us, “We have districts where the bond between boards and districts becomes clearer; they have their eyes opened about what their role is really about; they now understand the consequences of their decisions. For example, [one district] board had not raised taxes for 15 years and believed that was their job as elected officials. As they looked at quality, they took it on the chin and raised taxes more than once in a couple of years.”

A “Rising Tide” for Mon Valley Communities

Knowing the importance of being able to show gains in student achievement, MVEC has been tracking student test scores since Pennsylvania began administering its own standards-based testing program in 1995. In its 2003 annual report, MVEC proudly announced steady progress over time, noting that the improvement in test scores in all of its member districts was significant by the organization’s measure. According to the superintendent of a member district, who also sits on the MVEC board, schools and districts with high participation in MVEC initiatives make greater gains on state tests than those districts that are less involved.

In addition to the leadership team process, MVEC has other programs that are designed to improve early literacy and career opportunity. These initiatives engage a wide range of civic actors and local institutions to promote literacy and increase

student access to local career opportunities. For example, Literacy for Life distributed over 165,000 books to families in the Mon Valley, with help from local businesses in transporting and distributing them. Another early literacy initiative involved writing and distributing a booklet, *Guide to Your Child's Literacy*, to new parents through hospitals and other local institutions. Both are examples of initiatives that strengthen the capacity of businesses, parents, and community members to support children's learning.

Students with more motivation and a greater sense of efficacy have higher rates of graduation, higher rates of post-secondary school attendance, and better access to jobs.

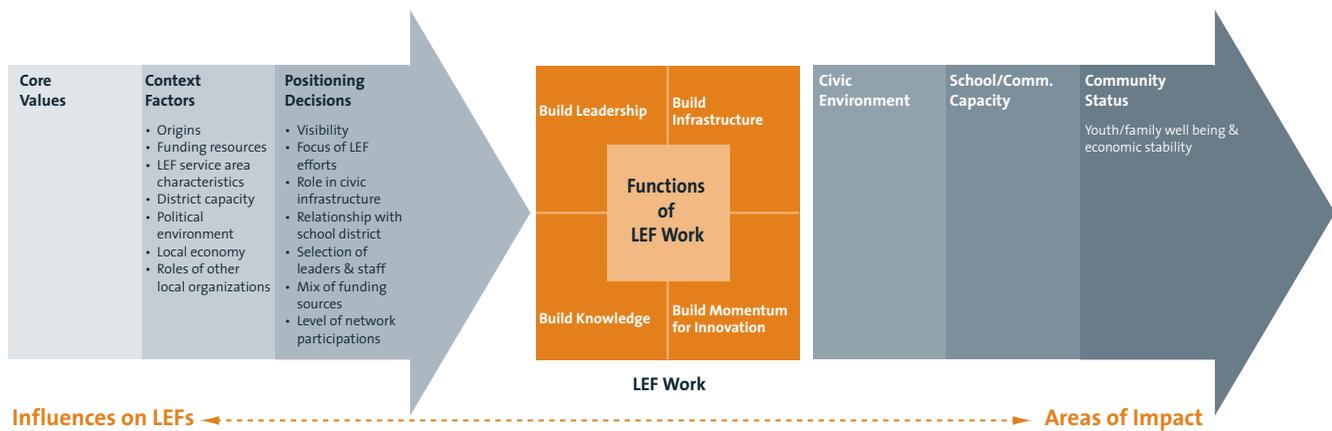
Career opportunity initiatives connect students and businesses in the Greater Pittsburgh area. With the demise of manufacturing in the region, MVEC initiated two programs—the Student Leadership Conference and “The Future is Mine”—designed to increase student awareness of job demands and of the careers that are available locally. These initiatives also build connections with employers who are recruiting from the local high schools and from post-secondary schools. Outcomes for students include more motivation and a greater sense of efficacy that translate into higher rates of graduation, higher rates of post-secondary school attendance, and better access to jobs. MVEC emphasizes the connection of its programs to regional economic development through a strengthening of the workforce that allows businesses to remain in the region and grow.

Summary

This chapter presented an analysis of LEF work and accomplishments revealing common patterns. There are, however, myriad ways in which these patterns manifest themselves in LEF programs and impacts in settings across the United States. The next chapter looks at the sources of variation, and examines the dynamics that account for LEF differences and the implications of these differences in determining how an LEF defines its mission and goals and the impacts it aspires to effect.

Accounting for Variation: The Influence of Positioning Decisions on LEF Work & Accomplishments

A MODEL OF THE LEF THEORY OF CHANGE



The two previous chapters focused on commonalities shared by all LEFs. We identified the organizational values and features that distinguish LEFs from other intermediary organizations working to improve public education and we described outcomes that could be expected as the result of LEF work. In this chapter, we turn our attention to how and why LEFs look very different from one location to another.

As an LEF defines itself and its work, it must answer some critical questions: What role will it play in the community? What role should it play the school district? How can it best position itself to achieve its goals? We call the answers to such questions *positioning decisions*. In making these decisions—whether unconsciously or deliberately—an LEF constructs its own particular approach to catalyzing change. Seven key positioning decisions emerged during our interviews with LEF staff and stakeholders. The first four relate to strategic direction, the remainder to organizational issues.

Decisions on strategic direction

- What should be the focus of LEF efforts?
- What role should the LEF play in the civic infrastructure?
- What should LEF-school district relationship look like?
- How visible should the LEF be in the community and in the district?

Decisions on operations and governance

- Who should lead the LEF and what are the desirable demographic characteristics, experiences, skills, dispositions, and knowledge base of staff and board members?

- From what sources should an LEF seek funding?
- What level of participation in PEN and in other local and regional networks is appropriate?

These decisions do not occur in a vacuum. In fact, as our diagram illustrates, they emerge from a scan of local context and a desire to maximize core values. Remember, flexibility is one of those values. Every LEF must revisit these positioning decisions again and again as it learns from experience and takes note of shifting political, economic, and social trends within its community.

Focus of LEF work

No LEF can do everything. It must identify the major issues and challenges in its community and, based on this assessment, set priorities for its work. While all LEFs have initiatives in the civic and in the district/school arenas, the intensity of those efforts varies considerably. For example, while regional LEFs like Mon Valley focus on strengthening the economic circumstances of local families, others like the Stark Education Partnership in Canton, OH, assemble corporate, civic, and higher education leaders to press for state policies that impact the college-going rate of high school students. Still others, like Achieve! Minneapolis, focus on facilitating partnerships between businesses and schools to generate funds, facilitate employee-student mentoring and tutoring relationships, and keep the corporate sector invested in public education. With a foot in both the corporate and public education sectors, such LEFs draw tight connections between public education and economic development and we found this to be true of most LEFs.

LEFs draw tight connections between public education and economic development.

Civic infrastructure role

In addition to decisions about the content of their work, LEFs must make choices about working partners. These choices position LEFs in specific ways and also shape their clout and credibility. As previously mentioned, recent research suggests that strong civic capacity—the ability of a community to mobilize cross-sector alliances around a shared agenda for reform—is crucial to sustaining education reform initiatives. Clearly, the role an LEF chooses to play in its community is influenced by many factors. For example, what are priority issues and who are the critical players around those issues? Are there other strong organizational players in the local educational landscape? What do they do? Is there a history of collaboration among groups?

The establishment of most LEFs sprang from a desire by business and civic leaders to mobilize and direct private sector resources to public education. In some of these communities, elites continue to lead and influence LEF efforts, providing them with welcome status and leverage. In other places, community-based organizations and grass-roots leaders have joined the ranks of influential LEF stakeholders. Several of the LEFs in our sample were at a moment of transition, just beginning to reach out to new groups. The impetus for broader inclusion sometimes sprang from larger forces such as shifting demographics in the student population, or new program directions that require different partners to supply missing sources of knowledge and experience.

Without the presence of trusting relationships and alliances among the diverse communities in the public school system, LEFs can become vulnerable. For example, if an LEF only has ties to the corporate sector or to white middle-class parents, its credibility could be challenged by communities of color. Trusting, authentic relationships with racial and ethnic groups can help an LEF better understand the concerns of all community members, negotiate the racial politics of a district, and build a broader political base to weather politically turbulent times.

Reaching out to parents who do not trust or understand the bureaucracy in many large urban school districts is a challenge. Parents and community members often perceive that school professionals have shown them “disrespect.” As one LEF staff member remarked, “These are difficult, really hard conversations to have.”

LEF staff and board also face knotty decisions about getting involved in controversial policy discussions. They may, in fact, find themselves in opposition to longtime supporters and funders. Several LEF leaders told us that they deliberately avoid stepping into what they perceived as “highly partisan” waters, whether the issue was charter schools, state funding formulas, or accountability standards. Others decided that the timing was propitious to organize and speak out on such issues. In some cases, the push to do so came from school districts needing leverage with state or community actors to affect policy or funding.

Relationship with the school district

Every LEF has a complex relationship with its key constituent, the school district. It must constantly negotiate its inside/outside status. While LEFs are independent, outside organizations, there are relentless, and often reasonable, tugs to move closer inside. For example, to ensure that innovations are sustained, LEFs must make sure that their goals and those of their districts are well aligned. They must be savvy about how things get done in districts and aware of how low district capacity can pull LEF staff closer inside as they offer needed expertise. In addition, the origins of some LEFs, such as Achieve! Minneapolis, lie within the school district; an early challenge for these LEFs is to develop independence from their districts.

From time to time, an LEF mission to improve achievement for all students will require it to critique the district stance on a particular issue or district activities. This inside/outside positioning requires LEFs to handle their critiques differently than advocacy or community organizing groups, which are clearly positioned outside the district. Some do their critiques behind the scenes, while others are more open. One LEF board member described how one organization navigated this complicated criticism terrain: “you will confuse funders if you ask them for money for the district with this hand while...telling them what is wrong with the district. So, we make our critiques [to the district] in private.” Useem and Neild (1995) describe this balance of critique and champion as that of a “critical friend.”

During interviews, many LEF staff spoke about the importance of “listen[ing] carefully to a school district talk about its needs.” These needs provide LEFs with entry points as they craft strategies and action plans to address them. School district staff appreciate

Trusting, authentic relationships with racial and ethnic groups help LEFs better understand the concerns of all community members.

the nimbleness with which LEFs can respond to important and emerging agendas as compared to what one LEF executive director described as the “behemoth effort of turning the school district’s armada.” LEFs are able to move quickly to research “best practices” and craft action plans that schools and even university partners “just didn’t have the time or staff to do.”

Community and district/school visibility

How visible should an LEF be in a community? As a champion and broker, it frequently works behind the scenes while shining the spotlight on district and school staff and making certain that funders are acknowledged for their contributions. “As brokers, LEFs often operate purposefully as *invisible* hands brokering partnerships among diverse groups.” (Useem, 1999) Some LEFs, though, thrive on high visibility. For example, West Virginia’s Education Alliance is well known throughout the state for many reasons, including the fact that it hosts a weekly cable TV show for residents of Kanahwa County. Executive Director Hazel Palmer is frequently interviewed on statewide radio and television programs, and she submits op-ed pieces to West Virginia newspapers on educational issues. In at least a couple of locales, LEF leaders and programs have more visibility than the district itself.

In addition to decisions concerning strategic direction, LEF staff and stakeholders elaborated on positioning decisions regarding governance and operations that were important to their work and to the ultimate impact on their communities and schools. Those governance decisions focused on leadership, funding, and participation in other networks.

LEF leadership

As LEFs answer key questions about position and approach, they create a map for decisions about organizational governance and operations. These positioning decisions will guide requirements for particular skills, expertise, and characteristics of LEF staff and board members. Several LEFs mentioned organizational by-laws that require board member representation across educational, community, and business sectors. They also spoke of the importance of recruiting volunteers with the needed skills and characteristics for specific initiatives. LEF leaders frequently reached out to their LEF peers and most were comfortable asking for mentoring or direct support (visits, sessions with staff, materials) from peers with particular expertise.

Funding sources

As with all nonprofits, funding is a continual concern. As LEFs develop initiatives and areas of expertise that are highly valued by local districts and schools, they may decide to offer these on a fee-for-service basis. Baltimore, Denver, Los Angeles, and San Francisco have all developed research-based programs that are coveted by their local districts and schools, and in some cases, nationally sought out. Some staff, however, worry that fee-for-service programs will undermine the organization’s perceived independence and credibility and potentially alienate corporate and foundation funders. It is possible that an LEF could reach a “tipping point” in which its fee-for-service work would jeopardize its ability to be a “critical friend” role to the school district. In some locations, LEFs avoid all government funding, taking themselves out

LEFs frequently work behind the scenes, keeping the spotlight on district and school staff and making sure funders are acknowledged for their contributions.

of the competition for state and federal funds. In such cases, LEF leaders have reasoned that, in the long run, this tactic increases their credibility with their core funders: foundations, corporations, and individual donors.

Participation in PEN and other networks

LEF staff and stakeholders interviewed for this report unanimously pointed to participation in the PEN network as a vital link to excellent information about best practices in public education reform; funding resources; current and provocative thinking about big ideas such as citizen participation in public schooling; and conversations about the unique roles that LEFs play in their local communities and in national conversations on public education. As one executive director put it, “We all use the PEN NewsBlast. PEN has provided tools and it functions as a kind of glue. The NewsBlast is critical. It is the best way to get your stuff out. PEN is into problem solving.” Through their participation in PEN, LEFs learn from one another and have been spurred to connect with other regional and national networks. At the same time, LEF executive directors and stakeholders indicate the importance of using an internal strategic planning process that weighs the organization’s contextual variables and asks: “Do we have the capacity to participate at this time?”

PEN is a vital link to information on best practices and funding resources, current thinking on big ideas, and conversation on LEF roles.

Decisions in the Field

In the stories that follow, we describe in greater detail how two LEFs—The Stark Education Partnership in Canton, OH, and Charlotte Advocates for Education in Charlotte, NC—have handled the four questions related to strategic direction. We point to specific circumstances that influenced how they positioned their organizations to leverage the improvements that they sought.

The Stark Education Partnership

Focus of work

The Stark Education Partnership was established in 1989 by business and civic leaders who were deeply concerned about the low education levels of residents of Stark County, OH, and the negative impact that a poorly educated workforce would have on attracting and retaining corporate investment in the county. The partnership serves 17 school districts with more than 62,000 rural, urban, and suburban students. Its two primary goals are to 1) increase the number of students who graduate from high school academically prepared and financially able to attend college; and 2) make the county an attractive community in which well-educated young people will choose to live and work.

Role in the civic infrastructure and relationship with the district

In 2002, the Stark Education Partnership formed a P-16 (pre-school through four years of college) compact in collaboration with civic, corporate, school, and higher education leaders. The compact brought together presidents of six local colleges, local government officials, corporate leaders, district superintendents, school staff, College Access staff, and officials from the state’s department of education. The goals of the compact were to achieve 100 percent high school

graduation in the 17 school districts in Stark County and increase college-attendance and college-graduation rates.

The Stark Partnership used its long-standing relationships and credibility with corporate and community leaders to draw these key stakeholders into the compact. A background in higher education by the partnership's senior staff paved the way for the participation by higher education leaders. Research sponsored by the partnership clearly identified the seriousness of the region's problem and, as the executive director explained, a shared agenda quickly emerged:

People are all having conversations about the same things: a 100 percent graduation rate, a rigorous curriculum, the supports needed to get all students through a rigorous algebra course, working on the ACT issue, working on college access and strategies to increase access.

The partnership also deftly maintained a supportive relationship with district leaders, while at the same time pulling them into public conversations where district policies were openly discussed and challenged by other community stakeholders. Members of the compact, which includes college presidents, pressed the district to add algebra to the eighth grade curriculum. Greater public accountability has led to other new policies and initiatives to support more rigorous learning standards and to better prepare students for college admission.

Greater public accountability has led to more rigorous learning standards and students better prepared for college admission.

Visibility

Because of its close ties to the corporate community, along with an endowment that affords it considerable independence, the Stark Education Partnership carries considerable clout in the region. However, it has tread carefully, nudging different stakeholders and constituencies into alliances and, as in the case of the P-16 compact, playing a behind-the-scenes role. In its relationship with the district, the partnership creates opportunities for district leaders to hold conversations with community members rather than using more confrontational tactics.

Charlotte Advocates for Education

Focus of work

Charlotte Advocates for Education (CAE) in Charlotte, NC, was founded in 1991 with major contributions from the surrounding corporate community. Charlotte-Mecklenburg County experienced a significant economic shift in the past 15 years as it became home to the national headquarters of major financial institutions and lost manufacturing jobs. Demographics in the community also changed, with a slow decrease of middle-class families and an increase in immigrant and low-income families. Job opportunities in the highly skilled professional end and in the low-wage service end grew disproportionately in comparison to opportunities for moderate-wage employment. In response to the changing economic environment and to an increasingly diverse population, CAE focused its work on “rais[ing] the standard and elevat[ing] low-performing students while still serving high-performing students.”

A central piece of CAE's efforts to raise the achievement of minority, immigrant, and low-income students is the Parent Leadership Network (PLN), an initiative aimed at preparing the parents of these students for "authentic participation in improving public education in order to enhance academic achievement for all students." PLN was modeled after the Center for Parent Leadership of Kentucky's Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence. CAE envisions previously under-involved parents who have completed the PLN training as future monitors of what happens behind classroom doors and as change agents who advocate for children in school and civic arenas.

CAE works hard at nurturing relationships with the school district, the community, the state legislature, and the corporate sector.

Role in civic infrastructure and relationship to the district

CAE created a diverse planning and design team that included stakeholders from the school district, community, higher education and corporate sectors and then spent months building a broad base of support. CAE has a major hands-on role in the PLN initiative and provided funding and technical expertise through a contract with the Pritchard Committee. Margaret Carnes, CAE's executive director, has a distinguished history as a parent activist.

In previous initiatives and research projects, CAE had demonstrated its willingness to listen to all actors involved in a particular issue and remain a critical friend to community groups and to the school district. Creating a process that is viewed as supportive of educators while simultaneously holding schools accountable for improvement is a challenge. CAE has worked hard at nurturing relationships with the school district, community, state legislature, and corporate sector.

Visibility

CAE staff identifies its primary strategy as one of educating the public and educating decision makers. As evidence of its success, CAE is often sought out by the media for clarification of issues. CAE views itself as "a change agent organization" willing to explore issues and publicly advocate for research-based strategies for improvement. Staffers acknowledge the organization's early thinking about visibility, and one staff member shared these observations:

CAE's leaders had foresight and vision. They realized that for public schools to continue to grow and improve, there needed to be an external independent voice and community organization that had the capacity to rally the community and leverage the influence of the community for strengthening the continuous improvement of the schools.

CAE has strong visibility among the general public and policy makers. As parents learn to support and challenge their schools through the Parent Leadership Network, CAE's visibility will increase among school administrators and staff. The organization bases its power to influence policy on its credibility in conducting research and on the range of its constituency. With this new direction, it will have to master the job of "do[ing] the community organizing piece in a way that doesn't have any negative effects on relationships."

LEFs situate themselves in the civic infrastructure according to their founding principles and align their programmatic focus and initiatives with local needs.

Summary

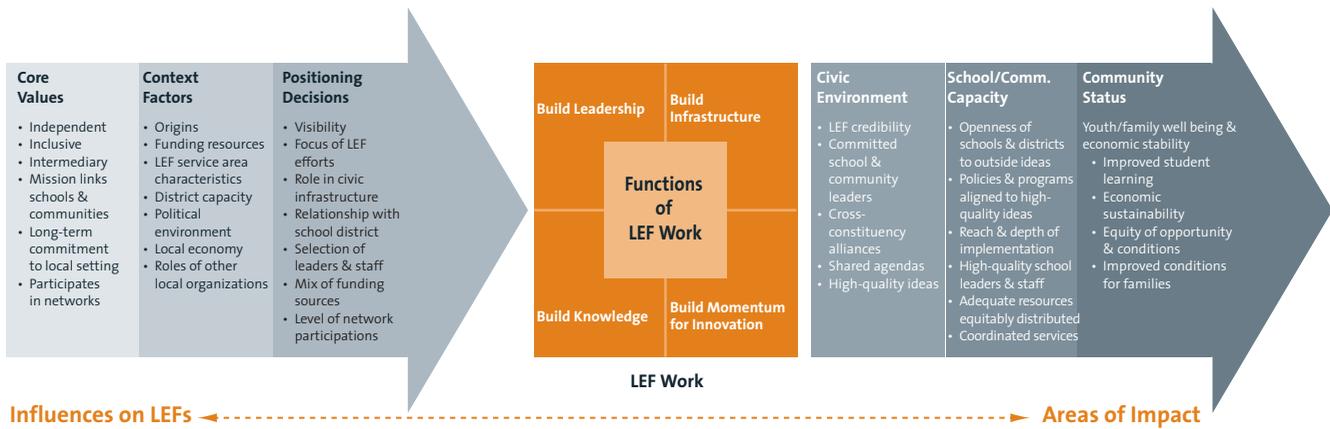
This chapter focused on LEF variation, describing how LEFs make positioning decisions that influence their strategic directions and operations and governance. Through stories about two LEFs, we highlighted decisions regarding program focus, roles in civic infrastructure, and visibility. LEFs shape their programmatic focus and critical initiatives based on their view of local needs. They situate themselves in the civic infrastructure based on founding principles and a survey of other organizations and constituencies that can advance their goals. The Stark Partnership and Charlotte-Mecklenburg Advocates for Education examples show how LEFs make choices about visibility in advocating for change.

LEFs are varied and adaptive organizations linked to particular contexts. Their positioning decisions represent trade-offs that then shape impacts. As noted in our discussion of the LEF theory of change in Chapter 2, LEF staff and stakeholders talked about accomplishments achieved and aspired to at different areas of impact including the civic environment, school and community capacity, and community status. How LEFs define their targets and how effective they are at meeting those targets are in part a reflection of their positioning decisions.

In Chapter 4, we present an indicators framework for measuring outcomes at the three areas of impact. Similar to variation in the kinds of initiatives LEFs undertake, there is variation in the kinds of goals and targets they set for change. The framework presented in Chapter 4 is sensitive to variation in goals and targets across LEFs as well as to the effort it takes to reach those goals and targets. We intend the framework to be the basis upon which LEFs can design tools to review, assess, and plan their work.

Measuring the Impact of LEF Work: An Indicators Framework

A MODEL OF THE LEF THEORY OF CHANGE



The previous chapters describe LEF work and the impacts LEFs seek to achieve. In this chapter, we provide a set of measures for outcomes—long-term outcomes, such as increasing student achievement, and intermediate outcomes, such as creating a supportive civic environment for public education—at each area of impact: the civic environment, school and community capacity, and community status. LEF executive directors can readily point to impacts in civic environment and school and community capacity, but recognize student achievement outcomes and other community status indicators, though things they certainly aspire to, are not that easy to claim or measure. Community status impacts were particularly important to the community stakeholders we interviewed so LEFs need to find ways to demonstrate a relationship among all three areas of impact and ways to describe and assess their effectiveness at each. For example, it is important that an LEF can demonstrate that a supportive civic environment for school reform will ultimately deliver long-term beneficial results for students and communities.

The indicators framework provides a basis for crafting a set of tools for LEF stakeholders to use to review, assess, and plan their work. Indicators can also be used as the basis for setting expectations for accomplishments, pinpointing not only potential long-term outcomes of programmatic efforts, but also the often invisible, less appreciated impacts that set the stage for and reinforce those long-term impacts.

These indicators should not be seen as a list of disconnected sources of evidence; they need an overarching theory that connects and explains complicated interactions for change. Our approach in this study focused on identifying an underlying theory of change (presented throughout this paper) that connects the work of LEFs to areas of impact and captures LEF variation and complexity. Therefore, these indicators will allow LEFs to see where their outcomes fall in a theory of change and help them think about where and whether they can make adjustments in their positioning and programs to attain the impacts to which they aspire.

One strength of the indicators framework offered here is that it draws upon the knowledge and experience of several LEF

stakeholder groups. The indicators were derived from interviews with LEF executive directors, community members familiar with their work, nationally known education reform experts knowledgeable about LEFs, PEN publications, and research literature on LEFs and on other intermediary and nonprofit organizations working in public education. Invested, experienced leaders pointed to the outcomes and measures presented in the charts below as important to consider when reviewing LEF work.

The indicators framework is not meant to be prescriptive or exhaustive, especially since no two LEFs are alike in that they adapt their efforts to meet the challenges of local context. The framework provides examples of the kinds of indicators that LEFs could use to measure and track the impacts of their work. LEFs can use these examples as a jumping off point or can customize them to reflect their initiatives in a way that would make sense to the stakeholders in their communities. The indicators can also be adapted to reflect reasonable expectations during the developmental stage of an organization or an initiative.

Civic Environment Indicators

LEFs seek to restore confidence in the idea that public schools can improve and all students can learn.

Through interviews, we identified several outcomes that indicate success in developing a civic environment supportive of public education. LEF executive directors told us they need credibility and clout in the civic arena before they can have an impact. Credibility and clout allow LEFs to convene and mobilize key stakeholders and to sit at the table when political decisions are being made. LEF work also results in a greater number of committed school and community leaders willing to invest time and energy in school improvement efforts. The community leaders and actors LEFs seek to engage include parents, business leaders, government officials, and other concerned citizens. School leaders include district superintendents, principals, teachers, and staff. The most successful LEFs build broad-based, cross-constituency alliances based on trust. They connect committed leaders across school and community sectors and across racial and ethnic communities in the local school district. A civic environment supportive of public education is also created when LEFs introduce highly regarded ideas and knowledge for improving schools into public conversations about school reform. As ideas gain momentum, LEFs are able to create a common vision and shared agenda for school reform among diverse constituency groups and the district. With a shared, focused agenda, disparate efforts for school reform are integrated and aimed toward shared, high-quality reform strategies. Finally, LEFs seek to restore public and practitioner confidence in the idea that schools can improve and all students can learn so that committed leaders and actors will come forward to support reform initiatives.

Civic Environment Outcomes	Indicators
LEF credibility and clout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amount and type of LEF recognition from the corporate community, school district(s), community leaders, and/or media in materials, public statements, and interviews, etc. • LEF gets requests for information, assistance in working with the district, and as a vehicle for funding programs from community leaders, parents, business leaders, and funders • LEF ideas or the ideas of program participants are adopted or institutionalized in school district(s) policies • LEF leads and participates in key coalitions for school reform • LEF has long-term partnerships with funders and others in the community • LEF board of directors includes civic and corporate leaders
Committed school actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High level of teacher and administrator engagement in school improvement efforts • Number of teachers and administrators participating in LEF sponsored or initiated professional development activities • Reduced number of union grievances
Committed community actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased number of businesses partnering with • Community forums on education attended by a significant number and wide range of constituencies • Longevity of partnerships between community groups, businesses and the district • Increased number of parents as school board candidates/members and higher turn out of voters in school board elections • Number of civic and corporate leaders and parents participating in school reform initiatives and as volunteers in schools and LEF activities • High level of knowledge and awareness of school board members and decisions among parents and community members
Public & practitioner confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of positive stories about public schools in the media • Racial and economic diversity of the district stays constant or improves • Civic and corporate leaders and parents have positive perceptions of the district and optimism about school reform
Trusting cross-constituency alliances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Size, diversity, and longevity of membership in cross-sector educational coalitions or school improvement teams • Representatives of communities most impacted by school district policies participate in significant educational reform committees • New cross-sector educational coalitions develop • Numbers of teachers involved in networks within and across schools and districts
Knowledge & highly regarded ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High level of knowledge about educational reform ideas among civic, school, and corporate leaders, parents, and policy makers • Number of media stories about education policy issues and LEF research • Number of people reading LEF research briefs • Policy makers have public dialogue about LEF research and ideas • Educators, parents, and others demonstrate increased knowledge of best practices in literacy, numeracy, etc.
Shared, focused school reform agenda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reform agenda publicly endorsed by community leaders • Media coverage of school reform consistently highlights several reform themes • Wide agreement among stakeholders about goals for improved education in the community • Key stakeholders all report similar goals and strategies for achievement

Data Sources: Media coverage of public education, surveys and interviews with parents and community leaders, organization's annual report, newsletters of the LEF and other educational groups in the region, public officials policy statements on education, records of voter turnout, petition drives etc., minutes and attendance records of educational coalition meetings, written responses to LEF publications, correspondence and minutes of meetings with policy makers, public documents about the district and schools

School & Community Capacity Indicators

Much of LEF work contributes directly to the building of school and community capacity to provide equitable, high-quality services for youth. LEF accomplishments in building school and community capacity are summarized in terms of six outcomes: Districts and schools are receptive to outside ideas. This quality of openness to external influences is identified by scholars as critical to school reform (Sarason, 1990, Fullan, 1999). Highly regarded ideas on school improvement promoted by LEFs are transformed into policies and programs. These policies and programs have significant breadth and depth, affecting thousands of children and parents at multiple district levels. LEFs attract significant amounts of direct funding and in-kind services to public school districts, providing adequate resources with an emphasis on equitable distribution. LEF work results in high-quality school leadership including administrators, teachers, and school boards who receive additional training and support from LEFs. Finally, LEFs, acting as brokers, succeed in increasing the coordination of youth and family services.

School & Community Capacity Outcomes	Indicators
Receptive to external ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of coalitions and level of involvement of school administrators in community coalitions for school reform Level of parent and community involvement in decision making at district and school levels Frequency and level of school district invitations to the LEF for trainings, partnerships Mechanisms created for public accountability of the district District changes communication policies with the intent of greater transparency External partners and stakeholders report improved communication with the district
Policies & programs aligned with highly regarded, high-quality ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LEF ideas become state and district policy A rigorous curriculum is instituted Teachers can trace their instructional strategies to teaching and learning theory
Depth & breadth of implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of students a program reaches LEF models are adopted in several districts Number of teachers participating in LEF sponsored or initiated professional development programs and using instructional resources LEF pilot programs are adopted and sustained over time by the district
Adequate resources, equitably distributed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Distribution of high quality teachers across schools Increased public funding through tax restructuring, increase or bond levies Increased private donations Grant funding for specific initiatives Amount and number of teacher mini-grants distributed Amount and number of scholarships provided to students Amount of donations of educational supplies for schools and families received and distributed
High-quality school leaders & staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Well-coordinated curriculum across all grades Teacher retention Environment focused on student learning High standards for all students Number of professional development opportunities/participation
Coordinated youth & family services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater alignment of secondary and post-secondary curriculum Increase in number of partnerships between health and career preparation providers and public schools Parents report increased access to needed services/supports in the community

Data Sources: District budgets, district records, attendance and registration information for programs, interviews with community leaders and parents, school climate surveys, absentee data, program intake and attendance data, organizational annual reports, newsletters

Community Status Indicators

Through creation of a supportive civic environment and the development of school and community capacity, LEFs look toward long-term impacts on students and communities. Improving student achievement is an outcome all LEF staff and their community partners hope to achieve. Closely related to this goal is a desire for equity of opportunities and outcomes for low-income, minority, and immigrant youth and their families. Some LEF staff and most community stakeholders who we interviewed also aspire to broader outcomes such as economic development and improved conditions for families. These impacts are detailed below.

Community Status Outcomes	Indicators
Improved student achievement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved grades, achievement test scores • Increased college-acceptance rate • Increased high school graduation rate • Reduced drop-out rate • Increased student attendance • Increased student self-esteem, efficacy, and engagement in school
Economic development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employer satisfaction with workforce preparation • Families moving to or staying in the area because of strong public schools • Civic boosters, realtors cite reputation of schools • Business attracted or retained on the basis of workforce development • Greater number of college graduates staying in the area
Improved conditions for families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High quality, well-paying jobs retained in community • Greater access to high quality jobs for minority and immigrant residents • Higher employment rates • Local residents hired for new jobs in region
Equity of opportunity & outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achievement gap between students of color and white students narrows • Schools remain integrated • More low-income, minority and immigrant students are accepted to college and graduate from college • More low-income, minority and immigrant students are prepared for and have access to high paying jobs
Coordinated youth & family services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater alignment of secondary and post-secondary curricula • Increase in number of partnerships of health and career preparation providers with public schools • Parents report increased access to needed services/supports in the community

Data Sources: Achievement test data, national college clearinghouse data, labor department statistics such as the local unemployment rate, census data, surveys and interviews with employers and civic leaders, real estate transaction records, enrollment statistics for local colleges and universities

Summary

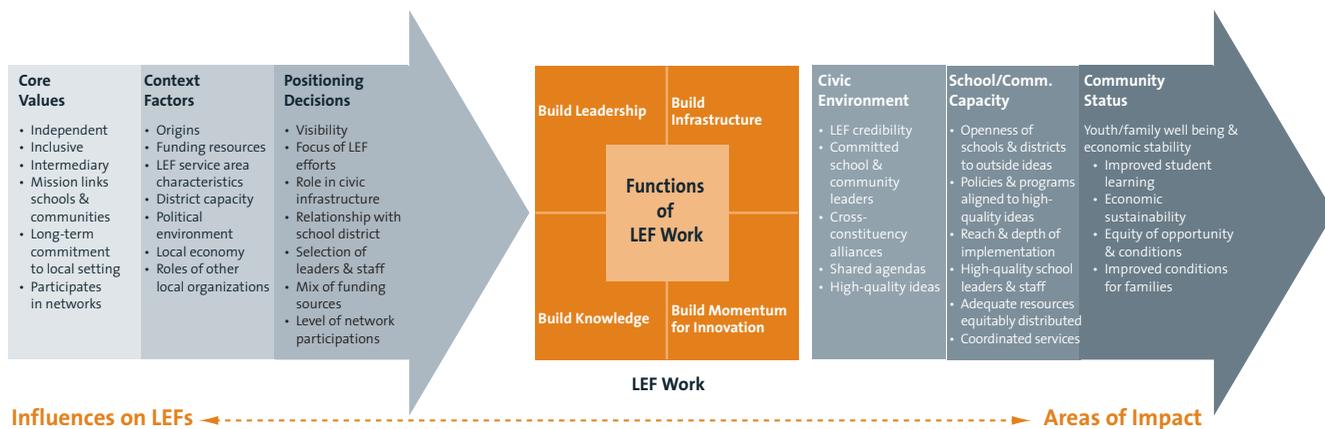
Recognizing that LEFs differ significantly from one another, the theory of change model presented here not only describes what LEFs share in common—a set of core values and organizational practices—but also what distinguishes them from one another, primarily in the ways in which they position themselves as they reconcile their core values with the constraints and opportunities in their local contexts. The positioning decisions made by LEFs drive diverse organizational structures, goals, and accomplishments. LEFs also change over time to meet key goals and to respond to new needs and changes in local context. LEF accomplishments are wide-ranging and include

those that affect civic support for education improvement, those that affect schools and community capacity, and those that directly affect students, families, and local community well-being.

The indicators framework includes a set of outcomes and measures that represent the variety of LEF accomplishments and offers a set of concepts and measures that LEFs can use for external communication, internal planning, and self-assessment. LEF leaders can choose among indicators to construct an agenda for reviewing and assessing their work in light of the positioning decisions they have made. The indicators are not prescriptive. They are drawn from stories shared by LEF staff members and knowledgeable individuals in the community. By balancing core values with practices reflecting the needs and opportunities in their local contexts, LEFs can set realistic goals that address local needs in ways that take advantage of their strengths.

Conclusions

A MODEL OF THE LEF THEORY OF CHANGE



Local education funds see education reform as a community enterprise. By crafting multi-dimensional programs operating at the juncture of the civic and school arenas, LEFs make a unique contribution within the landscape of organizations supporting education reform. They shape a civic environment supportive of reform that, in addition to adding value to their school improvement efforts, benefits youth, families, and communities. Guided by a set of core values, LEF develop varied programs and initiatives that perform several functions—creating infrastructure, building knowledge, developing leadership, and encouraging innovation—that reach three areas of impact: a civic environment supportive of reform, school and community capacity, and community status through long-term outcomes for students, families, and economic sustainability. LEFs have responded to the calls of numerous scholars by embedding strategies in their work designed to create a civic environment that is supportive of public education, which, in turn stimulates, sustains, and sensitizes reform efforts. If outcomes are to be equitable and sensible in light of community needs, setting goals requires the involvement of a wide range of constituents. If change is to have momentum, there must be wide agreement on the agenda for reform. And if reform is to be sustained, widespread, and deep, it must have the strong commitment of community and school actors. Additionally, LEFs must have the clout that comes with credibility to get constituents to the table and assure that the agenda is informed by highly regarded, high-quality ideas.

The civic environment supporting education reform acts as a scaffold for achieving other outcomes such as capacity in schools and communities and, ultimately, improved student achievement and improved conditions for families. Improvements in student learning and conditions for families are outcomes for which an education reform organization should be held accountable over the long term. But, because accomplishments that shape a positive civic environment for public education reform set the stage for these long-term goals, these accomplishments should count as well. The theory of change model provides a framework for seeing the relationship of LEF work to the different areas of impact the work reaches.

It is not sufficient to explain the common set of goals and an over-arching approach that LEFs share without also explaining what accounts for their considerable variation nationwide. As we have emphasized, LEFs are effective change agents in their

communities because they are highly adaptive organizations. They are in tune with the contours, challenges, and opportunities in their local contexts and use this deep understanding to make strategic decisions about how to position themselves in light of their core values. Often, these positioning decisions require trade-offs and, when the context shifts, changing course. Ideally, as the theory of change model suggests, LEF success will affect the local context and define new goals and strategies.

Understanding the process of change and how to identify and measure outcomes at different areas of impact should 1) provide LEF staff and boards with a framework to explain their work and its significance to critical outsiders such as funders, partners, and researchers; 2) guide LEF staff in planning by reviewing strategic decisions in light of their goals and features of the local context; and 3) provide LEFs with a framework for assessing accomplishments.

The picture that emerges from this analysis suggests that those interested in comprehensive community development should recognize LEFs as organizations with the potential to bridge the space between economic development and education improvement and, thus, contribute to both goals. Public officials and development professionals have long valued good public schools as community development assets, yet rarely are community development efforts and education reforms coordinated. Rather, they operate in separate “silos.” Because they work at the intersection of community development and education reform, LEFs are uniquely situated to connect these two strands through efforts to improve community economic and social conditions. As urban development scholars have noted, it is much easier to build momentum for development efforts that focus on physical development—housing, downtown revitalization, and recreational facilities that draw tourists—than it is to build momentum for education reform. LEFs, with their ability to create alliances and develop shared agendas, can play an important role in advancing broad civic agendas.

The theory of change and the indicators framework represent a work in progress. While the measures offered in Chapter 4 are based on actual outcomes and on goals identified by LEFs, our analysis was based on a sub-set of LEFs and the framework has not been tested. Nonetheless, we hope that LEFs will use it as a basis for developing assessment tools. In developing these tools, LEFs can choose from outcomes and indicators for each area of impact to customize the framework to fit their own programs and settings. LEFs can also use an indicators approach to establish a baseline and then collect information over time to assess their progress. Further research into how LEFs use this framework and how helpful it is would provide insight into its general applicability and into what changes would have to be made to make it more robust.

Our analysis suggests a relationship between the positioning decisions LEFs make, the strength of the civic environment for reform, and the nature and quality of outcomes in schools and communities. To understand the complexity of these relationships, and to tease out patterns that could assist LEFs in planning, this set of relationships needs to be further explored.

LEFs are vital community based civic organizations. They...sit outside of government and commerce to help affect the excellence of public institutions. – Wendy D. Puriefoy, President, Public Education Network

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Appendix I: Methodology

The empirical research had three components: 1) Key Informant interviews 2) LEF Executive Director interviews 3) Context Interviews and Site Visits. Each phase will be described below.

Key Informant Interviews (7) Through the help of PEN staff and a research advisory board, RFA identified seven individuals that had knowledge of LEFs both nationally and within local contexts. Phone interviews, lasting approximately one to two hours, were conducted. Interviews explored contributions, challenges and factors influencing the decisions LEFs make about the work they undertake.

Executive Director Interviews (14) Telephone interviews were conducted with fourteen LEF directors around the country. (Sample selection will be described below.) Directors were interviewed about the work of their organization and decisions they made regarding the direction of their work. Interviews explored the variety of contextual factors that shape the direction of an LEF. Directors were also asked a series of questions regarding outcomes and impacts of their work; the evidence they point to as signs of success.

Context Influentials (30) Each executive director was asked to identify two individuals in their community that could be interviewed about their work. Context experts were asked about their knowledge of the LEF and its work, the community context and evidence of impact of the LEF. The majority of context influentials were interviewed by phone. A total of 30 context influentials were interviewed. Interviews ranged from one to three hours.

Site Visits (3) Interviews at three sites were conducted in person during one day site visits. In the three sites we visited, three to five context experts were interviewed and observations of LEF activities were conducted.

Sample Selection

The 14 LEFs participating in the research are representative of the variation that exists in LEF organizational size and the nature of LEF work, and variation in communities and in regions of the country. Based on our preliminary analysis in the white paper, LEFs were classified into one of four categories: Civic-Corporate, Civic-Community, School-Systemic and School-Programmatic. Civic Corporate referred to organizations whose work was focused on building support for schools in the civic arena, primarily working with the business community. Civic-Community referred to organizations that focused on organizing support for schools in the civic arena through working with community groups, parents or nonprofit organizations. School-Systemic focused on organizations that worked primarily within the school system but focused on systemic reform issues. School-Programmatic were organizations that worked primarily within the school arena, developing programs and administering mini-grant type initiatives. Some LEFs were difficult to classify into one of these four areas and so we created a fifth category: “Balanced.” We used this framework to sample the variation among LEFs. Table I shows the distribution of the sites across several of the dimensions of variation that we considered. A list of sites can be found in Table II.

Appendix II: Selected Accomplishments of LEFs in the Study Sample

Local Education Fund	Summary of Work & Accomplishments
Achieve! (Minneapolis, MN)	<p>Achieve! Minneapolis was created three years ago by a merger of the nonprofit Youth Trust and Minneapolis School Foundation. It works to raise human and financial resources for the Minneapolis public schools and serves as a resource to business and community groups interested in supporting the District. It has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • successfully partnered over 200 business and community organizations with Minneapolis Public Schools; • developed a workplace tutoring program for students which was the most successful tutoring program in the city. 90% of participants increased their scores on the Minneapolis Basic Standards Test; • Raised over \$1.2 million to support Arts for Achievements, a program that brings teaching artists into schools and integrates art across the curriculum and \$4 million for high school reform and drop-out prevention.
Bridgeport Public Education Fund (Bridgeport, CT)	<p>Bridgeport Public Education has supported leadership and capacity building initiatives for educators, students, and the communities for the past 21 years. It has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provided technical assistance to hundreds of parents, school and community organizations to hold conversations about both educational issues and community concerns; • helped low-income students navigate the college access process through its program, <i>Mentoring for Academic Achievement and College Success (MAACS)</i>; • led workshops for individuals interested in becoming candidates for election to the Board of Education and partnered in the publication of a “Guide to the Candidates” in English and Spanish.
Charlotte Advocates for Education (Charlotte, NC)	<p>Charlotte Advocates for Education (CAE) has evolved over the past fourteen years and serves as a partner in school reform for the public schools of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District. It has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • spent months building a broad base of support for the <i>Parent Leadership Network (PLN)</i>, a model that prepares parents for authentic participation in improving public education; • conducted and published research that contributed to the public’s understanding of teacher retention issues by pointing to the critical role administrators play and this influenced the school district’s adoption of related curriculum components for training new school administrators; • worked with the school district on recruiting and retaining quality teachers through the <i>Teachers Keepers Pilot Program</i>.
Education Alliance (Charleston, WV)	<p>The Education Alliance is a state-wide LEF which has served the 55 districts of West Virginia for 22 years. It works to involve businesses, families and communities in public education as well as conducting research to inform state education policies. It has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnered every public school in the state with at least one business partner; • Conducted community dialogues on teacher quality in almost 75% of the state counties; • Led research with youth about their education, <i>Student Voice: West Virginia Students Speak Out About the Achievement Gap</i>.
The Education Fund (Miami, FL)	<p>The Education Fund in Miami works in one of the largest and most diverse school districts in the country to close the achievement gap. It has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • published a parent resource guide in three languages and distributed them to over 500,000 households; • held town meetings and a series of media and community events to highlight and discuss teacher recruitment and retention in the Miami-Dade public schools; • facilitated a collaborative effort that mobilized university and community partners and raised more than \$6.5 million for a multi-pronged initiative to improve achievement in all of the schools in one of Miami’s lowest performing feeder patterns.
Fund for Educational Excellence (Baltimore, MD)	<p>The Fund for Educational Excellence has worked with partner elementary and middle schools to achieve consistent achievement gains. It has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developed and implemented <i>Achievement First</i>, a research-based and highly regarded literacy initiative that established literacy rich classroom environments, • provided professional development and coaching to administrators throughout the district ; • served a major role as a partner in high school reform, through its participation in new high school small school models, <i>Innovation High School</i>.
Marcus Foster Educational Institute (Oakland, CA)	<p>The Marcus Foster Educational Institute continues its thirty year tradition of advocating and building community support for public education. It has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • spurred innovation by providing grants to classroom teachers through it hallmark initiative, <i>New Notions for Excellence</i>; • supported youth engagement and leadership through its long-standing scholarship program for post-secondary education and <i>through Children and Youth Grants</i> that provide hundreds of cultural and educational opportunities; • coordinated resources and provided educational opportunities that help parents successfully support their children’s academic and social well-being at school through the <i>Parent University</i>.

<p>Mon Valley Educational Consortium (McKeesport, PA)</p>	<p>The Mon Valley Education Consortium, established in 1987, works in three areas: school improvement, early literacy, and career literacy. In addition to increasing the capacity of schools in its region through the Leadership Teams initiative described in Chapter 2 of this report, it has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mobilized community partners to collect and distribute over 150,000 children’s books to low-income families through the used book drive of its <i>Literacy for Life</i> initiative; • increased awareness and skill in working on early literacy through distributing its <i>Guide to Your Child’s Literacy</i> to new parents throughout the Mon Valley; • facilitated career awareness in hundreds of students who participate in the annual Student Leadership Conference hosted by Pittsburgh’s major corporations.
<p>Partners in Public Education (Memphis, TN)</p>	<p>Partners in Public Education has spent over 12 years working to improve the quality of life in Memphis, by bringing together a range of resources and institutions to support the public schools in Memphis. It has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • funded the <i>Teaching & Learning Academy</i>, a new state-of-the art facility that trains teachers from across the state; • provided over 58 scholarships to area administrators to attend the <i>Harvard University Principal Center Summer Institute</i> and was selected to participate in the national, <i>New Leadership for New Schools</i> program; • partnered with the school district to promote the premier of the district literacy initiative, <i>MCS Reads</i>.
<p>Public Education and Business Coalition (Denver, Co)</p>	<p>The Public Education and Business Coalition serves public schools across the state of Colorado. It has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • staffed and developed an innovative inner-city community collaboration which brings neighborhoods and schools together to develop resources, build support for, and strengthen a highly impacted inner city school feeder system; • disseminated its landmark literacy and coaching work to educators across the country; • published and sold over two million books that teach the theory and components of its highly replicated literacy and coaching model.
<p>San Francisco Education Fund (San Francisco, CA)</p>	<p>The San Francisco Education Fund has a twenty-five year history of supporting the teachers and students of the San Francisco Unified School District. It has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developed state-of-the-art school library centers through the <i>Revitalizing High School Libraries Initiative</i>; • provided leadership training for middle and high school students across the district who serve as counselors and tutors for their peers through its <i>San Francisco Peer Resources program</i>; • provided <i>Leadership and Professional Development (LPD)</i> grants to fund teachers participation in Teachers Network Groups across the district.
<p>The Stark Education Partnership (Canton, OH)</p>	<p>The Stark Education Partnership has served the 17 school districts with more than 62,000 rural, urban, and suburban students in Stark County, Ohio. It has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • played an instrumental role in the creation of the P-16 Compact, a statewide education advocacy group; • piloted an initiative aimed at replacing the Ohio High School exit exam with the ACT college entrance test; • successfully advocated for more advanced mathematics requirements and offerings for all students and provided resources for professional development of teachers in enhanced mathematics and science curricula.
<p>Urban Educational Partnership (Los Angeles, CA)</p>	<p>The Urban Educational Partnership’s initiatives cover three important focus areas, Strategic Leadership, Transformed Schools, and Connected Communities. It has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recruited and trained math and science career-change professionals during its 12-month credentialing and professional development program; <i>DELTA (Design for Excellence: Linking Teaching with Achievement)</i>; • trained and mentored individuals interested in school and district leadership positions through the <i>School Leadership Institute</i>; • facilitated a series of parent workshops and training for schools through <i>Urban Learning Centers-Governance & Management</i>, an initiative that integrates the roles of parents in school-based educational activities with the role of school leaders.
<p>Wake Education Partnership (Raleigh, NC)</p>	<p>The Wake Education Partnership has mobilized key community actors to become involved in long-term planning for a rapidly expanding school district. It has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • led a highly successful community/district strategic planning process (<i>Education Summit</i>) that defined the mission of the district and set five year performance targets; • provided an intensive leadership training for teachers, principals and administrators through the <i>Wake Leadership Academy</i>; • led the development of a long-term capital expansion initiative that would include magnet programs, but would not jeopardize the long-standing desegregation efforts of the district.

Table I. Profile of LEFs Participating in the Study

Focus of Work	Region	Community	Size ⁴
Civic Arena, Corporate (3)	Midwest (2)	Urban (8)	Small (2)
Civic Arena, Community (3)	East Coast (3)	Suburban (1)	Medium (11)
School Arena, Systemic (4)	South/Southeast (5)	Regional Diverse (4)	Large (1)
School Arena, Programmatic (1)	West (4)	Rural (& statewide) (1)	
Balanced (3)			

Table II. Participating Sites

Baltimore, MD	Charlotte, NC	Memphis, TN	San Francisco, CA
Bridgeport, CT	Denver, CO	Minneapolis, MN	Raleigh, NC
Canton, OH	Los Angeles, CA	Miami, FL	
Charleston, WV	McKeesport, PA	Oakland, CA	

(Footnotes)

¹ A theory of change approach is an accepted model for policy research and evaluation in recent years. For example, the multi-site evaluation of the Annenberg Challenge sites used such a theory of action approach that proved useful for understanding how and what each site was trying to accomplish. The Annenberg researchers saw a theory of change approach as providing “an analytical tool that aims to help practitioners reflect upon and make explicit the knowledge that shapes what they do; ... it is a tool that helps them inquire into and learn from their own practice” (Schön & McDonald, 1998).

² There is an abundance of research and theory identifying factors in the school and community environment that account for why reforms falter or succeed. Scholars have pointed to the engagement of civic actors as a critical supplement to the efforts of schools and districts in stimulating reform and moving it forward (Stone, et al., 2001; Hill, et al., 2000). Stone and his colleagues have noted the importance of this to representative coalitions that can establish a shared agenda for reform. Bryk and Schneider have made a case for the contribution to school improvement of strong relationships of trust among school staff members and between schools and communities contribute (Bryk and Schneider, 2002).

³ Schools must set up teams at the building level that include the principal, teachers selected by their peers, support personnel in the building and an “open chair” that includes the appropriate person depending on the issues at hand. At the district level, the team includes representatives of the school board, the superintendent, the business manager, one or more administrators, principals from each building, a teacher from each building selected by his/her peers, the teachers’ association president, and representatives from the secretarial, maintenance, custodial, or bus driver staff. Schools have leeway to include others on the building team as they see fit, so some of the schools might include community members or students. (Mon Valley Education Consortium, n.d.)

⁴ According to the PEN 2004 Annual Survey, the median budget for an LEF is \$685,000. Small LEFs are those with budgets below the median. Larger LEFs are those with budgets of \$4 million or more. LEFs categorized as medium have budgets above the median but below \$4 million dollars.

AUTHORS

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Our research has revealed LEFs to be highly adaptive organizations skillful in customizing strategies to meet local needs.



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