

A COMMUNITY FOUNDATION REPORT

QUALITY EDUCATION FOR ALL

10-YEAR J URNEY to Better Public Education





A LETTER FROM NINA WATERS

The Quality Education for All initiative was a life-changing journey for The Community Foundation for Northeast Florida. Not only did it have a profound impact on the quality of public education among Duval County's 125,000 students, it also had a profound impact on The Community Foundation.

While funding public education reform might not seem to require great courage, it was a high-risk endeavor for The Community Foundation. The Foundation had not funded public education before. It had not tackled an initiative with multiple strategies before. When we began, there were no other local funders with whom to partner on the work. And the community consensus was that public education was, in the words of some, "a bottomless pit," a problem that was unfixable.

Moreover, a focus on public education reform might alienate some donors, either because it wasn't an issue they cared about or because they took exception to it. Would the Foundation have the courage to openly address issues of racial equity? And how would that play among a donor universe that included those on the far left and the far right of the ideological spectrum?

Finally, what if the outcomes weren't good? What if nothing changed as a result of the Foundation's efforts?

Today, we can look back and see that things did change—for the better. Our community has resources—strong resources—that did not exist in 2005. Our public school system has advocates and supporters who were not engaged in 2005.

And we have changed. Through our experience with Quality Education for All, we have learned enormous lessons about community work, about the multiple roles we can play and about the complexities and rewards of working across organizations and sectors.

In this report, we share a bit about the Quality Education for All initiative. This does not chronicle all we did or all that was accomplished. It is mostly about lessons learned, in hope they will be instructive to others considering this work. We are grateful for your interest.

Nina Waters, President of The Community Foundation for Northeast Florida



How We Began

The Community Foundation for Northeast Florida launched its Quality Education for All initiative in 2005, after more than a year of research and community conversations.

The Foundation learned that, overwhelmingly, public education was the No. 1 concern among community leaders and stakeholders, who saw its connections not only to student achievement but also to economic development, community health and well-being and overall quality of life. Those same stakeholders saw The Community Foundation playing an important role in improving the state of knowledge and practice around critical issues in the community.

The research showed the disturbing realities around public education in Duval County at that time:

Duval County's graduation rate was the lowest in the region and, in general, below the rate of other urban areas in the state. One out of three Duval County high school students would not graduate in four years.

Two out of three high school students could not read at grade level. One out of four elementary students could not.

Across all grade levels, students who were non-white, or who were from low-income families, or who lived in the North or West portions of the county were far more likely to attend low-performing schools than students who were white, or from average or upper-income families or who lived in the East and South portions of the county.

While there was an abundance of data about school and student performance, it was



overwhelming, confusing and not easily accessible. The community had not identified the three to five key measures of success and made them a part of the ongoing conversation. "There's no common state of knowledge" said one observer.

But the Foundation also heard from determined, hopeful voices:

"We must believe that every child can learn. We must develop ways to take what we are given and make the best of it," said another respondent.

Changes in the local education landscape presented the Foundation with a unique opportunity. A new superintendent—young, energetic and enthusiastic about the latest research and best practices in public education nationwide—was appointed.

Meanwhile, the Duval County School Board, for many years viewed as a contentious body, had been participating in special training for school boards sponsored by the Broad Institute, and it had adopted a much more collaborative attitude, and was regaining community confidence.

It became increasingly clear to The Community Foundation that improving the quality of education for all children was a "must-do" task if Jacksonville was to continue to enjoy a high quality of life. It was equally clear that public education would not experience sufficient improvement as a result of a single program, or a single strategy, or even a sizeable infusion of money. What was needed was systemic change: change within the school system and outside of the school system, and change in the way the entire community—individuals, the private sector, the nonprofit sector and the public sector—engaged with the public schools.

In early fall 2005, The Community Foundation launched Quality Education for All, a 10-year commitment that came with a minimum \$2 million investment to improve public education in Duval County.

THE QEA GOALS WERE:

- 1 Increase the graduation rate
- 2 Reduce the achievement gap between poor and non-poor students, and minority and majority students

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We heard loud and clear that we were jumping into the St. Johns River. But we chose public education, as we wanted to advance the state of knowledge and practice around what had been neglected for too long. And we were willing to deploy moral, social, reputational and intellectual capital around it.

Cindy Edelman, a Foundation trustee who co-chaired the Quality Education for All initiative with trustee Jim Van Vleck

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Strategic Approach

COMMUNITY LEARNING

The Forum on Quality Education brought together 27 community leaders for 22 months of intensive learning about public education, nationally and in Duval County. The Forum built community knowledge, networks and relationships.

“Everything we did in the 10 years of the initiative was informed by the work of the Forum. It built knowledge and it also built relationships that made things like the Jacksonville Public Education Fund possible. And those members of the Forum went on to start other organizations and be involved in public education reform in other ways,” said Nina Waters, president of The Community Foundation.

DIRECT INVESTMENT

The Alliance for World Class Education, a local education fund, was transformed into the Jacksonville Public Education Fund, a high-performing research and community engagement institution. This gave Jacksonville the capacity

it needed to gather and monitor data, connect with and listen to the community, and be both antagonist and promoter for public education.



ADVOCACY

Through a myriad of activities, The Community Foundation made public education an important local issue.

“Through the Forum, local investment and programs, polls and other actions, the Foundation raised awareness that education inequity was a serious issue and that, by learning from other communities, there were things we could do,” said Trey Csar, president of the Jacksonville Public Education Fund.

QUALITY EDUCATION FUND FOR ALL WHAT WE LEARNED:



1: COMMUNITY CHANGE INVOLVES MORE THAN MAKING GRANTS

The trustees and staff who launched Quality Education for All in 2005 recognized that they needed more than just grant dollars in their arsenal to effect real change.

In addition to financial capital, they needed to deploy:

- Social capital (the ability to build networks of people)
- Moral capital (credibility and political independence)
- Intellectual capital (knowledge, data and expertise)
- Reputational capital (the ability to influence)

The ability to build networks, coupled with knowledge and data, was critical to infusing community leaders with a more sophisticated understanding of the challenges facing

public education, and contributed to success in building the Learning to Finish Collaborative.

The political independence that comes with moral capital enabled the Foundation to successfully navigate transitions in public school administrations and to take positions on issues, through letters to the editor and public comments. Additionally, it was the Foundation’s moral capital that smoothed the politically difficult transformation of the local education fund into the newly created Jacksonville Public Education Fund.

To launch the Jacksonville Public Education Fund, the Foundation deployed both its financial and reputational capital. It not only raised the majority of the operating dollars the organization would need in its first five years, it also helped JPEF attract a strong and diverse board and

WHAT WE LEARNED CONTINUED...

build relationships with funders. *“Because The Community Foundation believed in us, it gave cover for everyone else to believe in us,”* said Trey Csar, president of JPEF.

Finally, the Foundation understood that it needed multiple strategies—Community Learning, Direct Investment and Advocacy and Public Policy.

“We chose three strategies on purpose, because we learned from our earlier work in reflective practice that in order to create a culture change you need multiple strategies and you need to align them,” Waters said.

2: BE CLEAR ABOUT THE WAYS YOU ADD VALUE

Just as there are diverse types of capital, there are diverse ways to invest—opportunities for programmatic investments as well as infrastructure investments. Funders should think carefully about the roles for which they are best suited, and the roles that are more appropriate for others.

In the early years of Quality Education for All, The Community Foundation staff was deeply involved in the programmatic aspects of the initiative.

“In years one through five, we were running a program and it was running us,” Waters said. *“When we got into this we didn’t have any idea how much work it was going to be.”*

The Foundation did not set out to operate programs. As the work evolved, the Foundation realized that there were not community partners capable and positioned to take on the work. But by operating programs, the Foundation strayed into work that detracted from its ability to focus on its broader mission.

Eventually, the Foundation took deliberate steps to grow the necessary community infrastructure, creating the Jacksonville Public Education Fund and supporting the establishment of the 501(c)(4) advocacy organization Save Duval Schools, for example.

“Our role is that of the funder, convener, change agent—not program operator,” said Foundation President Nina Waters. *“We have learned to ask ourselves, ‘WHO is going to do this work?’ Building infrastructure may not be the sexiest thing a funder can do, but it may be the smartest.”*



ABOUT DUVAL COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

With a consolidated city-county government, Duval County has one of the largest public school systems in the nation—125,000 students attending 195 schools across a sprawling 918-square mile area. Duval County Public Schools—like many public systems in the South—has a rocky history that includes loss of accreditation, years of operation under a court-ordered desegregation plan, steadily growing competition from private schools, charter schools and home-school programs, and under performance on standardized tests.

Between 1995 and 2004, the school system was the subject of five different studies that, collectively, offered 285 recommendations for change. The final two reports by Jacksonville Community Council, Inc. (JCCI), a local think tank, received particular notice, in part because of JCCI’s reputation in the community. The first report, released in 2003, stated: *“The primary challenge facing the public education system is the deplorable achievement gap between its lowest and highest achieving students.”* The second report, released a year later, called for, among other things, sustained community dialogue on public education issues.



We need community-wide dialogue, free of blame and defensiveness, to eliminate misconceptions about the school system and bring citizens into the process to improve public education.

2004 JCCI Report “Eliminating The Achievement Gap”





WHAT WE LEARNED CONTINUED...

3: COMMUNITY CHANGE WORK REQUIRES UNIQUE KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

Expertise in politics, community organizing and advocacy may not be in a funder's portfolio, but it will be required. Funders must be honest with themselves about the skills they have, and at what level, and find ways to become more adept at the subtleties of power and influence.

The Quality Education for All initiative encountered political challenges on multiple occasions. It wrestled with the task of engaging members of an elected school board as advocates for changing school system practices.

It reckoned with the ways state policies affect local educational outcomes, and sought strategies to impact those policies. Staff had to be mindful of the boundaries between lobbying and advocacy as they mapped the work, and ultimately drafted a policy to guide them in this arena.



4: BUILDING HEALTHY PARTNERSHIPS IS CRITICAL

Community change, without question, requires partnerships and, for funders, these partnerships may take different forms.

Funders typically will need to partner with their grantees and with major community institutions that they seek to influence. These one-on-one partnerships come with their own unique set of challenges—understanding the needs of the partners, finding common ground, developing clear communications and expectations among them—but they are challenges that are probably more familiar to funders.

In the work of QEA, The Community Foundation also experienced a different type of challenge—facilitating partnerships among non-aligned actors in the public education field. Through convening, coordinating and supporting, the Foundation played an instrumental role in bringing together organizations with common interests in improving public education, but with differing views, stakeholders and ownership needs. This latter work was particularly challenging.

The Learning to Finish Collaborative, which was born out of QEA and initially staffed by the Foundation, proved an ideal learning platform for the Foundation (and others) on the benefits and challenges of multi-lateral partnerships.

The LTF Collaborative, with five lead organizations, has shared the lessons it learned from the experience:

- The difficulties of building and implementing a true collaboration are underestimated.



- In true collaborations, each member holds equity. Funding is shared, control is shared, accountability is shared. To achieve that, a lead funder may have to step back and relinquish some power—a difficult act for a lead investor.
- Healthy partnerships create safe space—for thinking, for testing ideas, for sharing concerns. All partners must respect the sanctity of this space.
- The natural tendency is to say “We have an idea/resources/strategy; come join us and be our partner.” Instead, the challenge must be at the center of the conversation, with each potential partner bringing his or her ideas/resources/strategies to the table. The process of sorting may be messier and take more time, but the end result will be a stronger, more equitable partnership, more likely to survive rough going ahead.

The Forum on Quality Education

The Foundation invited 25 community leaders representing a wide array of perspectives to participate in what became a 24-month series of convenings that covered a spectrum of topics. The Forum began in October 2005 and the members met for half-day sessions 19 times, concluding in November 2007.



Importantly, Forum members included Joey Wise, the newly appointed Superintendent of Schools; Ed Pratt-Dannals, a member of his senior staff; as well as the chair of the Duval County School Board, a teacher and the District PTA president.

Robert Kronley, then an Atlanta-based consultant (www.kronley.com) with expertise in philanthropy and public

eyes—including those of leaders in the School District.”

Early sessions focused on basic information, such as the changing demographics of the school-age population and how that impacts public education, and the history of public education in Duval County, with particular attention to the impact of race and class.

teachers and teaching, strategies for closing the achievement gap, and the ways that communities build and channel public will.

As the Forum progressed, the impact of the group's learning became evident. Many members' attitudes shifted from familiar “blame” perspectives (“parents

aren't doing their jobs,” “it's because these kids are poor”) to a more complex and richer understanding of the challenge: regardless of the circumstances in which these young people find themselves, they are the students that we have today, they will be our employees and our neighbors tomorrow, and each has the capacity to learn if we take the time and care



When we started the Forum, we didn't know where it was going to go at all. We were totally trusting the process. We learned that with reflective practice. This was a 10-year process. We knew that we didn't know enough to get us there. The Forum was our way to begin learning. Nina Waters, president of The Community Foundation for Northeast Florida



education reform, was hired by the Foundation to help guide and facilitate the Forum. His expertise and contacts in the field were helpful to Foundation staff and his “outsider” status enabled him to play the role of “provocateur” during the Forum sessions.

Typically, a Forum session featured local and national experts sharing information on a particular aspect of public education, with Forum members then discussing the issue with the expert and among themselves. “It was new knowledge for the community,” said Kathleen Shaw, the Foundation's Vice President of Programs.

“Bringing in all of the speakers for Forum meetings made a huge difference. It opened people's

The Forum also examined what other communities had done in efforts to improve public education. Chattanooga Superintendent Jesse Register shared his community's experiences and Wendy Puriefoy, head of the Public Education Network, discussed ways in which communities build their capacity to support and sustain reform.

Forum members grappled with the complex structure of Duval County Public Schools and its even more complex funding streams. They wrestled with the intricacies of No Child Left Behind and Florida's state education initiatives.

Forum sessions focused on strategies for change: the important role of

to teach them and support them. Members also gained insight into one another's perspectives, enabling them to see where consensus might be possible.

At the end of the day, Forum members were not expected to come up with a strategy or game plan for Duval County. The Forum was intended to build a network of influential people who understood the challenges in a somewhat common way and who could be a foundation in the community upon which change could be built. It also was designed to help the Foundation build trust with a variety of stakeholders and to help individual donors see where and how philanthropy could be helpful.



Building Collaborations

Public education systems in communities are extremely complex, with numerous and disparate stakeholders, varied funding streams, politically intricate governance structures and high community visibility. In such a complex landscape, no single entity can be effective at driving change. The Community Foundation understood that the only realistic path to influence was through cross-sector collaborations.



During the 10-year initiative, the Foundation worked collaboratively with many community organizations.

The Learning to Finish Collaboration was one of the first—and among the most challenging—collaborative efforts. Four community entities led the collaborative—Duval County Public Schools, The Community Foundation, United Way of Northeast Florida and the Jacksonville Children’s Commission. The Foundation was deeply invested in its Quality Education for All initiative; United Way was invested in two education programs: Success by 6 and Full-Service Schools; and the Children’s Commission was invested in interventions for at-risk youth.

Achieving success in this collaborative required that funders focus less on the success of their own individual programs and more on ensuring their efforts aligned and resulted in broader community change. While that may sound obvious, it is often challenging for private funders, especially those whose programmatic achievements can be important drivers in future fundraising, and government funders, who are subject to the pressures of the political system.

Through the Learning to Finish Collaborative, the funders learned important lessons:

- It takes deliberate alignment and coordination among key institutions to create impact.
- It takes the leadership—the CEOs—of those institutions to generate real buy-in for collaboration.
- It is important to communicate the work and contribution of each partner.
- Organizations have needs. While the focus is on the common good, partners should understand that sometimes organizations can’t compromise, or must save face, or need publicity or political support, or face other insurmountable challenges. Each organization must be honest about what it needs to gain from the collaboration, and partners must respect each others’ needs.

Those lessons were reinforced as the Foundation, the Jacksonville Public Education Fund, Duval County Public Schools and a local nonprofit, The Bridge of Northeast Florida, came together to develop a new pathway to graduation for over-age students. Originally called Schools for the Future,



the effort required a shift in approach by the school district and a deep partnership between the district and the nonprofit, which would house the new program, marrying appropriate academic supports to help students catch up with the wrap-around supports that over-age students often need.

This collaboration challenged both the school district and the nonprofit, as each learned not only to work with one another but to respect the way in which each organization operated. The funders and the Public Education Fund were key partners, providing good research and data, financial support and mediating influences at critical junctures.

As the Quality Education for All initiative matured, the Foundation encountered yet another need for collaboration. Several major community donors became interested in the work—each with his or her particular perspective and interest in investing in the work. The Foundation needed to create space where multiple donors could join forces and, in an informed way, find common interests and “co-create” a body of work in which they would invest.

To accomplish this, the Foundation turned to The Bridgespan Group, a nationally recognized advisory group with expertise in public education, Bridgespan provided an independent perspective and high-level expertise. The Foundation also



brought in the leadership of Duval County Public Schools, which not only built an important bridge between theory and practice, but opened a pipeline for data that Bridgespan could access to inform its work.

By combining independent expertise, local knowledge, data and significant financial resources, the collaborative successfully created the Quality Education for All Fund, a potential \$50 million investment in Duval County Public Schools.

In each instance, the Foundation was intentional about the players at the table, cognizant of and attentive to the needs of each of those players, and focused on the ultimate outcome.

AN ERA OF CHANGE: New Challenges & Strategies



- Quality Education for All is initiated, with plans to spend \$200,000/year for 10 years to address the achievement gap in Duval County public schools.
- The Forum on Quality Education: 27 community leaders begin an 18-month journey to learn about the challenges and opportunities in Duval County schools.



‘Making the Move’: grants up to \$10,000 to middle schools to help smooth the entry for sixth graders and remove obstacles to high school success.



Duval Public Schools and members of The Forum successfully lobby Teach for America to put 50 young teachers in the Duval County schools.



- ‘Learning to Finish,’ a 5-year dropout prevention strategy, is launched.
- The Jacksonville Public Education Fund is created as a high capacity local education fund designed to advocate for public education reform.



- Jacksonville Public Education Fund launches ONE by ONE, a community campaign for public education.
- ‘Schools for the Future,’ a national pilot for over-age students opens at The Bridge, as a collaboration between The Bridge, Duval Schools and a group of private funders. Duval Schools later expands and fully funds this strategy.



Duval County Public Schools hires Dr. Nikolai Vitti as Superintendent.



Private philanthropists establish the Quality Education for All Fund, with a goal of investing \$50 million over five years. They commission proprietary research by The Bridgespan Group to determine the most effective use of philanthropic dollars. Dr. Vitti and a new School Board formulate a Duval Schools strategic plan, which aligns with the QEA Fund’s focus.



Based on The Bridgespan Group’s research, the QEA Fund begins investing in a series of initiatives focused on human capital—increasing the number of high quality teachers and leaders throughout Duval County schools.

2005

2006

2008

2009

2011

2012

2013

2014

WHAT WE LEARNED CONTINUED...

5: COMMUNITY CHANGE TAKES TIME, AND THAT'S A GOOD THING

“Community change takes time”—It is a truth that is easy to say and harder to live with. Boards of directors want to see results—before their terms expire. Investors can be impatient. And the public expects immediate results and easily loses sight of long-term goals.

For Foundation staff and trustees, QEA presented the constant challenge of maintaining the long view while wrestling with the crises of the day. But QEA also taught the Foundation staff and trustees the benefits of time.

When the Foundation established QEA as a 10-year initiative, it was not because trustees thought public education could be reformed in 10 years. Rather, the 10-year frame was the Foundation’s way of saying, *“This is long-term work, this will take time and we will stay the course.”*

The 10-year time frame worked to the Foundation’s benefit in many ways:

- It helped to build community trust. There was no question about the Foundation’s commitment to the

issue. Moreover, a 10-year commitment suggested the gravity of the situation, which helped push some donors and stakeholders from the sidelines onto the playing field.

- It positioned QEA and the Foundation as a serious presence for the school administration. This was not some do-gooder idea that could be politely ignored. This was a presence that would outlast superintendents and school board members, and must be reckoned with.
- It gave the Foundation and QEA participants time to learn. Data, exposure to new ideas and experience changed perspectives about public education.
- It gave the Foundation time to invest in infrastructure.
- It gave the Foundation and QEA stakeholders time to make course corrections. Time allows for constructive failure and subsequent adjustments.

6: COMMUNITY CHANGE WORK CAN STIMULATE PHILANTHROPIC INVESTMENT

The Community Foundation’s mission is *“Stimulating Philanthropy to Build a Better Community.”* Quality Education for All clearly belonged to the *“Build a Better Community”* side of that mission statement.



But in fact, Quality Education for All stimulated significant philanthropic investment in greater Jacksonville around issues of public education.

Within months of launching the initiative, the community raised \$5 million to support establishment of a Teach For America program in Duval County. Two family foundations have invested more than \$1 million directly in Duval County Public Schools and millions more in community infrastructure to support public education reform. Numerous other donors have invested in discrete parts of the QEA initiative, or in some other aspect of public education reform. All told, the Foundation and other philanthropic partners have been invested in public education reform in Duval County since 2005—and that does not count the \$38 million raised by the Quality Education for All Fund. This is significant private investment in a community with a limited number of institutional funders and major private donors.

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Public Opinion and Engagement

Public education is, by definition, very public, and the public will is a powerful influencer—both for action and inaction. Public support is needed to effect real change, and public apathy can make change impossible.

At the outset of the Quality Education for All initiative, The Community Foundation employed traditional methods of assessing and benchmarking public attitudes toward education in Duval County. In 2006, the Foundation engaged a national opinion research firm to survey Duval County residents’ attitudes about the quality of public education, the equity of public education and the opportunities to improve public education.

Five years later, in 2011, the Foundation engaged the same firm to replicate the survey and determine how attitudes had changed, if at all.

The results were discouraging. Though residents repeatedly listed public education as the most important issue facing the community, poll respondents’ opinions had not changed significantly or had deteriorated and, in some cases, proved unreliable. The Foundation and its partners had to confront the fact that public opinion polling might not be the most effective way to measure and/or manage public will.

What the Quality Education for All initiative sought was not so much favorable public opinion as constructive public engagement. How could the initiative connect more people to public education in a way that would be thoughtful and meaningful?

In 2012, the Jacksonville Public Education Fund launched ONE by ONE, an art exhibit that lifted the faces and voices of 20 current or former students in Duval County Public Schools who faced great obstacles to getting their education. Through photography and multi-media presentations—and in person—these students shared their stories. They proved to be powerful advocates both for Duval County Public Schools and for the power and importance of quality public education.

The exhibit toured the community for a year, and JPEF used it as an entrée into 169 small group conversations that engaged 1,600 people across the community. Their ideas and views were captured in a written report.



More importantly, in January 2013, representatives of this large group convened and identified their four priorities for the school system:

- Educate the whole child
- High quality teachers and leaders
- Policy and political reform
- Family and caregiver involvement

These pillars were considered by and became embedded in the new Duval County Public Schools strategic plan.

The One by One campaign became the foundation for a community engagement and mobilization effort of the Jacksonville Public Education Fund. Since 2013, JPEF has organized quarterly public education forums and annual summits that continue to give stakeholders a voice.

The result has been a group of citizens who feel that they have a real voice in public education, and a channel through which their voice can be heard.

FOURTH ANNUAL CONVENTION
Unlocking the Potential of Every Child: Equity in Education

ONE x ONE
Moving Public Education Forward

Saturday, January 23
9 a.m -3 p.m.

Lexington Hotel & Convention Center

APPLY TO BE A ONE BY ONE DELEGATE TODAY AT JAXPEF.ORG/CONVENTION



WHAT WE LEARNED CONTINUED...



By launching a bold initiative, with significant dollars and substantial time devoted to it, The Community Foundation attracted attention to the challenge of public education reform. In addition to attracting attention, the initiative shed light on realistic strategies for change—strategies that had been successful elsewhere, that were supported by data, that were achievable for the community. This, in turn, excited donors and gave them comfort

about the wisdom of investing private dollars—good news for the community and for the Foundation. This infusion of private funding helped to attract outside dollars, making the school system more competitive in the hunt for federal and national foundation grants.

Additionally, it influenced how local public dollars are spent. The school system has chosen to invest in programs and initiatives targeted by QEA and its sister efforts—even in tough budget years.

Not all of the dollars raised have ended up within The Community Foundation—and that was never the intention. Nonetheless, the positive philanthropic effect has added credibility to the Foundation, both as a philanthropic force and a community change agent.

FINALLY, TWO LESSONS SPECIFIC TO THE CHALLENGES OF WORKING IN PUBLIC EDUCATION:

7: RESPECT THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

While funders and community actors may disagree with policies and strategies of the school district, they should maintain a respectful approach. Oftentimes, the District is being bombarded by a host of different ideas and influencers.

“Everyone who went to public school thinks they are an expert on public schools,” Waters said. “There are multiple people with multiple ideas and they have multiple hot buttons. I think we have to imagine what it’s like being at the District.”

Many past community initiatives around education were not sensitive to this.

“A lot of the [previous] studies were an end run around the district,” Waters said. “Reports said ‘they should do this and they should do that.’ It was never done with the district. One of the things I’m really proud of about this work: for better or for worse, the District was at the table from Day 1.”

“We did it with them and in most cases they were driving the train. And a lot of times we weren’t comfortable with the direction things were going but we had to say, ‘We have



to honor that; this is their work and they are the ones who are held accountable. No, that may not be the way that we would do it but we have to trust and respect them.”



The Quality Education for All Fund

In 2012, a group of individual donors approached The Community Foundation with an interest in making a large-scale investment in Duval County Public Schools. The Quality Education for All initiative, then eight years old, had captured their attention and they felt the time was right to raise significant private capital—as much as \$50 million—to improve public education in Jacksonville.



These donors were new to the QEA initiative. Many had not participated in the Forum on Quality Education. The Foundation faced the challenge of honoring their interest and enthusiasm while elevating their understanding of the issues and finding appropriate points for investment.



By 2013, the group had established its target areas for investment—largely in the realm of human capital, providing effective teachers and leaders—and publicly announced the launch of the Quality Education for All Fund, intent upon investing \$50 million in Duval County Public Schools over five years.

The Foundation brought the donors and other key stakeholders—including the leadership of Duval County Public Schools—together to form an advisory committee, with the task of learning the local landscape and identifying potential investment opportunities. To help, the Foundation engaged The Bridgespan Group, a nationally recognized advisory group with expertise in public education.

Through its work, Bridgespan had identified six critical areas for investment in public education:

- Providing effective teachers and leaders
- Supporting college-ready content
- Engaging students
- Supporting a well-equipped central office
- Engaging parents and community
- Promoting good governance and policy

Bridgespan conducted a comprehensive community scan and assessment of Duval County Public Schools and compared its findings with what it knew about areas of critical investment. Using that analysis, the advisory committee was able to distinguish between areas where the community had resources and areas where it did not. That set the table for productive conversations about investments that would not be redundant or duplicate existing efforts, but enhance activities and fill important gaps.

In guiding the establishment of the QEA Fund, The Community Foundation drew on lessons that it had learned throughout the life of the Quality Education for All initiative:

- **CONVENING IS POWERFUL.**
By bringing together individual donors who had an interest in public education investments, the Foundation created a group that was far more powerful than any of the donors might have been individually. Bringing people together is not without its challenges, but the end result is worth the effort.
- **LEARNING IS CRITICAL.**
To make informed decisions, people must be informed. The time invested in learning saves countless errors in judgment. It also helps disparate groups build common knowledge.
- **DATA IS CRUCIAL.**
Learning without data can be risky. Knowledge building should be informed by good research and information from multiple sources.
- **CONSENSUS IS THE END RESULT.**
Bringing people together and providing high-quality information and data enables them to find common ground and reach mutual decisions. Thus aligned, such groups become powerful forces for change.

WHAT WE LEARNED CONTINUED...

8: INFLUENCE PUBLIC FUNDING

The Quality Education for All initiative called for an annual investment of \$200,000 by the Foundation. One of the common questions from skeptics was: **How can \$200,000 make a difference in a system with a billion dollar budget?**

"By shifting the way they do business," Waters said. "We used private dollars to pilot and show different ways of doing things—ways that are more effective and efficient. Then the District takes public dollars that it already is spending and moves them to a strategy that works better for more kids and actually is more cost effective."



"That \$200,000 was venture capital. It was innovation money. It was how to leverage, it was how to bring other donors to the table, it was how to make people believe that the school district isn't a bottomless pit."

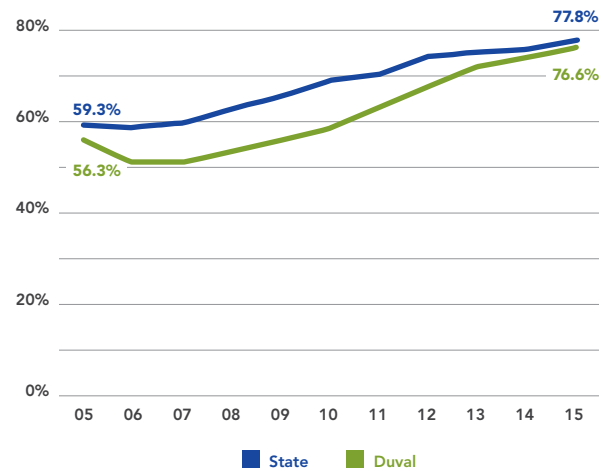
"Influencing the District to spend public dollars in a more effective way—that's the game, right? We're never going to have enough private dollars to solve the public education crisis. We have to help the District be creative and provide dollars that they can be creative with, using the good ideas that they already have, so they can say This Will Work and invest in it."

QUALITY EDUCATION FOR ALL FUND RESULTS COMMUNITY PROGRESS:



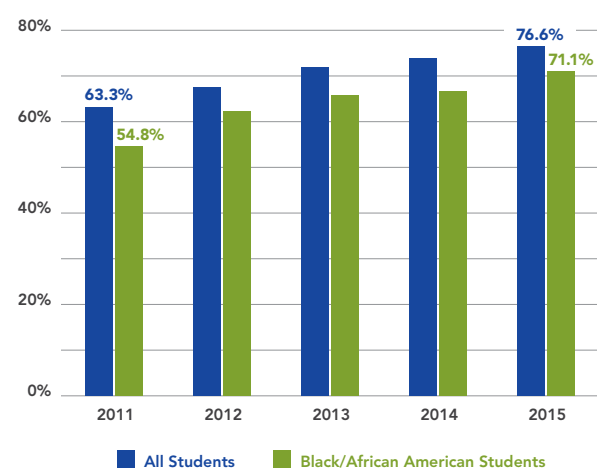
HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATE, ALL STUDENTS (Federal Graduation Rate)

Between 2005-2015, the federal high school graduation rate in Duval County improved by more than 20 percentage points. The graduation rate for African American students also improved, and by 2015 was higher than the state average.



NARROWING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP IN DUVAL COUNTY (Federal Graduation Rate)

Comparing the Duval County high school graduation rate of African American students to that of all students suggests that the achievement gap is narrowing, at least in the last five years the federal graduation rate was used to measure both groups.





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