

Responsive Philanthropy

NCRP'S QUARTERLY JOURNAL

SUMMER 2014

IN THIS ISSUE

Organizing for Educational Justice: Parents, Students and Labor Join Forces to Reclaim Public Education

1

BY ALLIANCE TO RECLAIM OUR SCHOOLS

The Ben & Jerry's Foundation: Maximizing Impact Through Employee-Led Philanthropy

3

BY REBECCA GOLDEN

Of Data, Impact and Buckyballs in Philanthropy

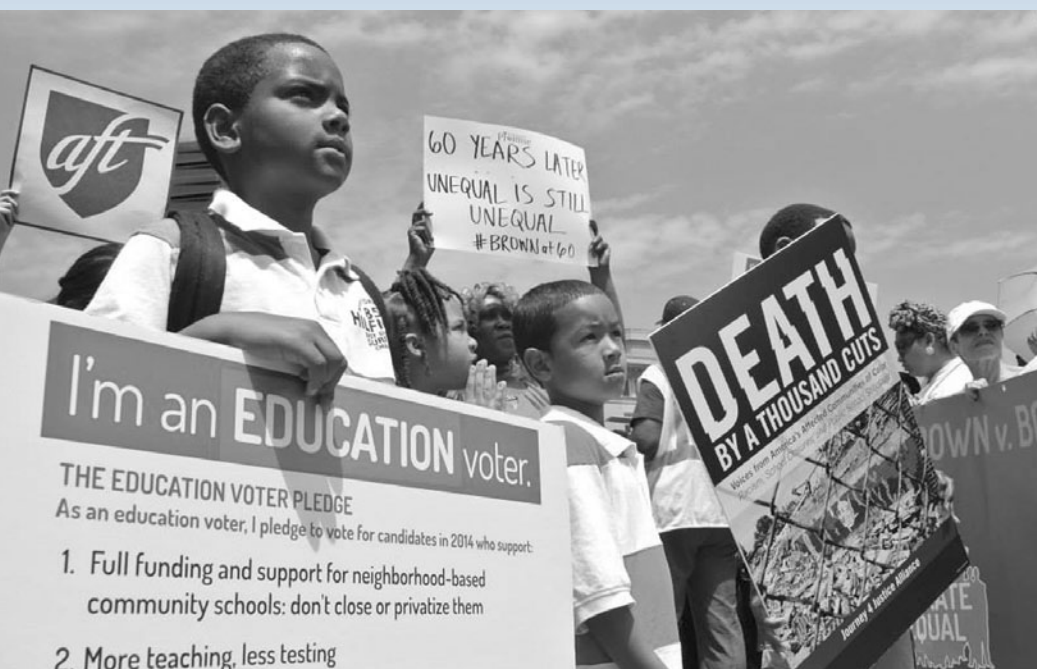
6

BY LARRY MCGILL

A Message from the Executive Director 2

Member Spotlight 11

Photo by Abbie Israel, courtesy of the Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools.



Organizing for Educational Justice: Parents, Students and Labor Join Forces to Reclaim Public Education

The future of public education stands at a critical crossroads. For over 20 years, communities of color have been the targets of a wave of market-driven education reform, rooted in corporate principles of competition, choice and consequences. Billionaires, phi-

lanthropists, policy advocates and local, state and federal elected officials have all supported this approach, funding teacher evaluations, Common Core development and implementation, charter schools and other such reforms. Importantly, they have not been responsive to what community leaders, parents and youth identify as needs for their schools, instead relying on what the market identifies. These efforts garner billions of dollars in funding from proponents whose interest in reform is economical and not personal, and whose communities are

By Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools

not directly impacted by the policies they espouse.

Within the past year, a new alliance of parents, students and labor has emerged to promote a proactive vision for public education based on equity and evidenced-based educational practices. The Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools (AROS) unites constituencies that have traditionally been at odds and articulates clear solutions to the challenges facing neighborhood schools. In this piece, AROS invites the philanthropic community to consider a new model of education reform.

(continued on page 9)



challenging grantmakers
to strengthen communities

Organizing for Educational Justice

(continued from page 1)

The market-based approach is failing the students and communities with the greatest need for excellent schools. One of its most egregious consequences has been the massive disinvestment from neighborhood schools that are in dire need of resources. Economically-driven reform is often led by individuals with little to no education background who are aiming to capitalize on public education as a new market frontier to conquer. They do so by marginalizing the voices of parents, community stakeholders and teachers unions, the last of which represent their strongest source of opposition. This approach has shuttered nearly 1,000 schools throughout the country, displacing thousands of students and starving neighborhood schools of essential resources such as critical courses, teaching staff and other vital school staff such as nurses.

While education in the U.S. has historically been unequal, with schools serving communities of color and low-income communities receiving inadequate resources, the recent market-based reforms exacerbate these inequalities. AROS's work to organize for educational justice that guarantees excellent education for all students has already experienced some early wins that show real promise for further expansion. Our unprecedented organizing philosophy is based on a common vision of the schools that we all deserve, and it is rapidly gaining momentum to challenge recent reforms that threaten this vision. We believe the only way to give every child the opportunity to pursue a rich and productive life, both individually and as a member of society, is through a system of publicly funded, equitable and democratically controlled public schools. AROS has begun to develop its infrastructure, communications plan and the strategic campaign research, mainly through in-kind donations from the member organizations. Progressive grantmakers can

speed this process along by supporting the organizing work of AROS's key impacted constituents and the local and national campaigns they are leading.

A MOVEMENT FOR GREAT PUBLIC SCHOOLS

There is great hunger for a movement to protect and revitalize the promise of public education as our nation's gateway to democracy and racial and economic justice. This movement lies in the building of a political, engaged constituency with the power to demand, support and sustain educational reform that emphasizes these key facets:

- Research-based strategies.
- Respect for the profession of teaching.
- Recognition of the role of parents and communities in successful reform.
- Support for students' social and emotional needs.
- An explicit focus on narrowing the racial opportunity and achievement gap.

Most importantly, it is grounded in collaboration and relationships among key stakeholders – particularly the parents of children who attend struggling schools, the students and the educators who work in them.

ALLIANCE TO RECLAIM OUR SCHOOLS

For too long, the relationship between grassroots community groups and teachers unions has been characterized by acrimony or distance. As communities and educators experienced the market reformers' attack on public education, they began to recognize they had more in common than not and much more power working together than separately.

Over the last year, key organizations and unions came together to form AROS, now with nine national partners representing over seven mil-

lion members. The early development of what became AROS was led by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, with funding from the Ford Foundation. These partners include networks of community organizations such as the Center for Popular Democracy, Journey for Justice and the Gamaliel Network, representing parents, youth and communities, and the national youth organizing Alliance for Educational Justice. Also part of AROS is the National Opportunity to Learn Campaign and Service Employees International Union (SEIU), as well as both national teachers unions, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and National Education Association (NEA).

The Schott Foundation has been a champion in the philanthropic community of these efforts through financial contributions, as well as extensive in-kind support to the communications work and the strategic planning process. Additionally, Communities for Public Education Reform (CPER) offered financial assistance in convening key grassroots leaders and organizers to the summit where AROS was launched in Los Angeles, while the Ford Foundation provided support for coordination of AROS's early activities. In addition, the two major teachers unions and SEIU have offered monetary support for basic infrastructure building, travel funds and other costs as they arise. While unions have made some contributions to assist with the initial establishment of infrastructure, most of the support has come from members' in-kind support, as everyone at the table feels it is critically important to build this alliance.

The support from these organizations has been bolstered by the leadership of the AFT and the NEA. In recognizing the need to improve their relationships with community groups, the two unions have intentionally shifted how they approach this work. Educators and low-income and working-

class communities of color have made real progress as committed partners, organizing around a shared vision for improving our schools and communities and creating a more equitable society. Coalitions of community-based organizations, student groups and teachers unions have developed in a number of cities across the country to rally around educational justice.

For example, the local teachers unions in St. Paul, Minnesota, conducted listening sessions by visiting parents at home and building relationships. This transformed the interactions between the teachers and the communities. Together they developed a new narrative and a collaborative platform called “The Schools St. Paul’s Children Deserve,” which called for improvements such as smaller class sizes, adequate numbers of school nurses and counselors, Pre-K and culturally relevant education. The platform was brought to the bargaining table when the union negotiated new teacher contracts and resulted in victory for teachers and the community. Similar examples are happening all over the country – from New York, Philadelphia, Chicago and San Francisco to Little Rock and Jackson, Mississippi.

AROS is working to unite those local efforts to impact the national debate about the future of public education. The Alliance started with a thoughtful community listening process through which we developed a core set of values and principles that both community and labor partners can agree will build a world-class and equitable school system. AFT contracted The Annenberg Institute to attend each of these listening sessions around the country and to use what they heard to develop recommendations on how AROS could move forward.

After an April 2013 meeting of union and community groups in Washington, D.C., the Annenberg Institute worked painstakingly over the summer to build

the *Principles that Unite Us*. This platform has been endorsed by thousands of education stakeholders across the United States, from community-based organizations to national groups. The principles, which call for strong schools in every community that give all students the opportunity to succeed, were used to organize and mobilize communities and teachers together for a Day of Action on December 9, 2013, resulting in more than 100 actions in cities throughout the U.S.

AROS organized a full Week of Action in May 2013 to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the *Brown v. Board* decision and renew the call for equitable education. The week was kicked off on the steps of the Supreme Court with over 500 parents, students, educators and community members rallying and marching to the Department of Justice. At the Department of Justice they filed Title VI complaints detailing the disproportionate harm that corporate reform strategies have on schools and communities serving African-American and Latino students. Alliance member organization Journey for Justice released a new report, *Death by a Thousand Cuts*, examining the disastrous impact of school closures and outlining a vision for education reform.

This vision is in line with the organizing work of AROS for sustainable community schools in every neighborhood that focus on providing the full funding and wraparound academic, social and health supports that schools and students need to succeed. AROS partners agree that all students have a right to an excellent education and that teachers, parents and communities must be supported by strong schools. Partners are working together at the local level to demand such schools while building momentum at the national level for the broad-based changes our communities need.

For the work of AROS to be successful, the Alliance needs increased sup-

port from progressive foundations to bolster our organizing work, messaging strategy to challenge the current narrative, development of our infrastructure and research for strategic campaign planning. With Communities for Public Education Reform (CPER) in its final stages of operations, we absolutely need philanthropy to re-engage with community organizing for progressive education reform. As Lori Bezahler of our partner the Edward W. Hazen Foundation says:

“For nearly twenty years, Hazen has been supporting parents and students in defining an agenda for change rooted in their experiences of schools and school systems. Using the tools of organizing, they are pushing back on reforms based on market notions of choice and competition that divide communities and drive a wedge between teachers and families. Philanthropic support for organizations with deep roots in their communities is critical to their ability to participate as powerful partners with teacher unions in the fight for educational justice.”

We have much work to do and know this alliance is up for the challenge. We invite the educationally-minded progressive philanthropies part of the NCRP family to get involved. ■

The Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools is made up of national groups representing over 7 million students, community members, parents and teachers that are united in a common commitment to public education. We believe the only way to give every child the opportunity to pursue a rich and productive life, both individually and as a member of society, is through a system of publicly funded, equitable and democratically controlled public schools.