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Editorial

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DEAR READERS

As a network of grantmaking organizations working to improve outcomes and opportunities for learners at all points in the education continuum—from early learning through K-12 and postsecondary, both in-school and out-of-school—Grantmakers for Education is honored to co-edit this issue of *The Foundation Review* and to highlight the work of and insights from some of our members. The articles in this issue reflect the diverse range of approaches our members are taking, leveraging their unique organizational assets in pursuit of better education outcomes.



In “The Quest for Deeper Learning and Engagement in Advanced High School Courses,” **Suzie Boss, Cynthia Johanson, and Stephen Arnold** at the George Lucas Educational Foundation, with University of Washington researchers **Walter Parker, Diem Nguyen, Susan Mosborg, Susan Nolen, Sheila Valencia, Nancy Vye, and John Bransford**, describe a model for increasing rigor in high schools via the Advanced Placement curriculum, utilizing intensive, project-based learning to improve students’ readiness for the demands of both college and employment. The model, based on contemporary research on how students learn, is showing promise, at least within the school environment of Bellevue, Washington, a well-supported district serving a diverse community of students in the suburbs of Seattle. Encouraged by these first steps, the team is hopeful that the approach can be expanded to help students nationwide better engage with—and thus learn more from—rigorous course content.

For the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation, the needs of the communities of rural Arkansas fall front and center. In “Use of Layering for Effective Partnership Building: Leveraging Positive Impact in Education Philanthropy,” **Angela Kremers** looks at the foundation’s deep commitment to making change in a particular place, capitalizing on its relationships and knowledge across sectors. The foundation has found a way—what it terms “layering”—to work with and leverage funds from other foundations, business leaders and policy makers from outside the region, each with its own agenda and reach, without compromising the integrity of its own place-based vision and goals. In contrast to coalitions or collaborations that answer to their own collectively agreed upon goals, Kremers argues that layered partnerships can strengthen the leverage potential of all partners involved while also maintaining each partner’s autonomy. Win-win.

Private funders and stakeholders within the education sector have also become increasingly motivated to work together in innovative ways to stretch resources and smooth the transitions along the educational pipeline. In “Creating and Scaling Innovative School Models Through Strategic Partnerships,” **Heather Zavadsky** writes of how grantmakers and other stakeholders in the state of Texas have been working with high schools and colleges through the Texas High School Project to enable students to concurrently earn high school and college credit at no cost to them. The project, based on the Early College High School model, has involved the participation and coordination of a number of public and private entities and has shown encouraging results statewide at improving students’ chances of college success.

And in “The Trenton Afterschool Partnership: Expanding Learning Time Citywide Through Public/Private Collaboration,” **Mark Valli, Catrin Davies, Traci Schott, and Mikaela Levons** at New Jersey After 3 tell how a strong partnership driven by the Trenton, New Jersey, school district and implemented cost-effectively by New Jersey After 3 greatly expanded high-quality after-school activities for students in the city. (Yet even after clear positive outcomes, the project was subjected to state budget cuts, leaving the authors with a clear takeaway for grantmakers: don’t shy away from advocating for what works, especially if it’s cost-effective—it’s as important to advocate for sustaining successful models as it is to advocate for new ones.)

In “Finding the Fix: Embracing Philanthropy’s Role in Transforming an Urban Education Landscape,” **Kristen McDonald** shares how the Skillman Foundation is leveraging what it’s learned from years of working to improve district schools in Detroit, and from the deep relationships it has built with community members, local institutions, businesses and political leaders, to create an ambitious coalition—the goal of which is to turn around schools in a city that recently posted the lowest scores in the history of the National Assessment of Educational Progress. It’s a big challenge, given the complexity of issues facing the down-on-its-luck city, but the foundation is placing its bets that a partnership strategy will combine enough resources—and build the necessary will—to catalyze change throughout the district.

Finally, in “Getting to Results: A Tool and Lessons from the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s K-12 Education Portfolio,” **Tory Read** and **Bruno Manno** offer an overview of a “results-based accountability” tool the Casey Foundation developed for measuring the impact of its education grantmaking (a tool it now is applying to all of its grantmaking work), and share lessons from the process. Given the strong pressures grantmakers face to achieve as much as possible with the limited dollars we have at our disposal, measuring the results of our grantmaking is key to helping us continue to hone our skills at moving our piece of the needle. One of the lessons the Casey Foundation and its grantees learned is a worthy reminder to all of us who are pursuing significant results while tackling seemingly intractable problems: as one Casey grantee put it, “Now, we set more honest, possible goals.” The issues on which we work in education are daunting, the charge gargantuan. But we shouldn’t be overwhelmed—we *can* do it, we *are* doing it, and we’ll persist so that we see that needle move from the weight of our efforts.

We at GFE are proud of our members’ continued efforts to work with one another, and with partners in other sectors, to advance the overarching goal of improving an education system that presently fails to meet the needs of too many of our nation’s children—and to continue to reflect on and learn from our work so that, together, each in our own way, we can keep moving the needle in the right direction.

p.s. Keep an eye out next month for GFE’s 2011 edition of our annual Benchmarking report mapping trends in education grantmaking. You’ll notice a few trends in common with the focus of the authors in this issue.



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