

SPEAKING OUT OF SCHOOL



PARENT VOICES ON PUBLIC EDUCATION IN CLEVELAND

A report by **Ohio Communities United**
with assistance from the **Center for Education Organizing**
at the **Annenberg Institute for School Reform** and **Innovation Ohio**



Ohio Communities United (OCU) is a statewide, community based group dedicated to organizing for social and economic justice in Ohio's communities. As a membership organization accountable directly to its constituency, it works on a range of issues that affect the quality of life of marginalized communities across Ohio. These include access to quality affordable health care and education.

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With assistance from:

Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University provided research, writing and editing support.

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Innovation Ohio (IO) provided research and writing support. IO is a nonpartisan organization that moves Ohio ahead without leaving some of its people behind. It advocates policies that strengthen the middle class, protect the less advantaged, equalize opportunity, and ensure that businesses large and small have the tools they need to innovate, compete, and create well-paying, long-term jobs.

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Parents and Community Members Speak Out on Public Education

Cleveland, like many cities across the county, is facing major challenges around public education. Budget shortfalls, increased class sizes, cuts in social and extracurricular services, massive school closures, and major teacher lay-offs are all problems facing Cleveland communities. And in Cleveland, as in many places, policy makers are increasingly making major decisions about public education with little or no parent input. Instead, decisions are driven by politicians, corporations, and business interests. We believe and research demonstrates that there is substantive value in including **Parent Voices** on education decisions.

Ohio Communities United is working to build a powerful independent program that mobilizes parents, promotes leadership development, and demands policies that will provide quality education for every child in Cleveland. Quality and equitable public education is a right that should be afforded every child regardless of geography, income, race, or language. In order to achieve equitable and quality public education, parents, grandparents, and community members must be brought into the discussion.

The fact that parents know what is needed to improve public education in their communities should come as no surprise. After all, its parents that wake up every morning with dreams for their children's future, that take unpaid time off work to attend parent teacher conferences, and experience the social and economic challenges outside of schools that directly impact what occurs within schools.

The themes, visions, and solutions contained in this report come straight from the heart of the Cleveland community. Ohio Communities United with assistance from community centers, settlement houses, teachers, after-school programs, and others conducted parent and community 'listening circles'. The 'listening circles' were small groups – generally between 8 to 12 parents, grandparents, or community members. A total of ten were conducted in different neighborhoods around the city. The listening circles were purposefully created to capture the geographic, racial, ethnic, class, and language diversity of Cleveland.



Listening circle: Lexington-Bell Community Center, Hough

The theory behind the listening circles is based on the idea of renowned Brazilian educator-scholar, Paolo Freire, that knowledge lives in the people. It is there to be drawn out should policy-makers, politicians, or academics want to hear it. The listening circles were just as the name suggests, opportunities for parents and community members to be heard. Parents, grandparents, and community members spoke and we listened.

The voices of parents and community members are reinforced with research and best-practices provided by the **Annenberg Institute for School Reform's Center for Education Organizing**. Again, unsurprisingly, the ideas and concerns cited by parents are also items that researchers have found to be effective tools and practices to develop quality and equitable public education in the United States. Many of these ideas cannot be realized without a serious examination of education funding and budgets. **Innovation Ohio** follows the money, providing details on different ways revenue can be generated to fully and effectively fund public education in Cleveland.

We intend for this report to be used as a tool to bring Parent Voice into discussions and decision-making around education reform in Cleveland. We hope that parents, grandparents, and community members will use it to engage and mobilize their neighbors and other Clevelanders' around public education.

SCHOOLS AS COMMUNITY



Listening circle: Esperanza, Clark-Fulton

Every issue identified by parents and community members – safety, teacher consistency, parent involvement, even curriculum – came back for its solution to strong communities. Elements identified as essential to community were strong relationships, inclusive communication, welcoming of cultural variation, and an environment of mutual respect between and among children, teachers, parents and administrators.

Public schools are one of few community institutions that anchor neighborhoods and community members. The success and failure of public schools are connected in indelible ways to community growth. Neighborhoods struggles with unemployment, drugs, violence and lack of basic health care or services become the struggles of schools and students. Children bring these challenges into classrooms and underfunded and ineffective schools feed into social and economic plight of low-income communities, particularly communities of color.



Listening circle: Lexington Bell Community Center, Hough



Listening circle: Lincoln-West High School, Clark Fulton

Parents want schools that reinforce strong communities in every way. In our conversations, experiential learning rose up over test taking and bubbling in answer sheets. Caring relationships rose up over money-saving cuts and school closings. Authentic communication rose up over a constant flow of new and cheap teachers. Cultural understanding rose up over policed schools that lead to disproportionate suspensions among the poorest students.

Many parent voices contributed to this conversation.

This report presents: what they know they want, a few of their stories that brought them to those understandings and the research that says they are right.

SPEAKING OUT OF SCHOOL: WHAT PARENTS WANT

Parent Voice in Education Decision-making

- Parent input BEFORE decisions are made
- Parents treated with respect at every school
- Parents trained to play specific roles in schools, such as hall monitors, classroom aides, and mediators
- Institutionalized parent engagement in program such as, School Parent Organizations or Academic Achievement Committees

Parents, grandparents, and guardians as part of the school **community** enriches it with their knowledge, skills and energy

Teachers as part of the larger **community** helps facilitate learning

Teachers Enabled to Build Strong Relationships with All Children

- Small class sizes
- Shared philosophy that every child can learn
- Teacher stability throughout the school year and year to year
- Time and resources for teachers to build relationships, including translation and interpretation

Safe Schools that Allow Children to Learn at their Best

- Stable structure and attentive leadership
- Resources for social/emotional and physical needs
- Teaching students about one another's cultures and identities to reduce violent behaviors and promote understanding
- Alternatives to discipline such as peer mediation to help avoid suspensions

Students building **community** with other students and staff creates safe schools

Curriculum that reflects the richness of **community** makes students want to learn

Engaging Research-based Curriculum

- Hands-on and applied learning and field trips
- Music, art, libraries, physical education restored/increased
- Collaborations with museums and universities for all schools
- Differentiated instruction to match learning styles, interests, and skill levels.

Parent Voices in Education Decision-Making – Parents and Research Say:

There is by now very little doubt that parent engagement in education matters, both for individual students and for school improvement. Henderson and Mapp's 2002 review of 51 studies of parent involvement found that it has positive impacts on attendance, behavior at home and school, social skills and interactions with peers, and student achievement. The Harvard Family Research Project's 2006 research review emphasized that the benefits of parent engagement hold across race, income, parent education levels, and age.

Schools that are able to establish trusting relationships between parents and staff improve their organizational capacity and lay the groundwork for more effective decision-making and broader support for innovation (Bryk and Schneider, 2002). The Consortium on Chicago Schools Research's decade-long study of elementary and middle schools in Chicago identified parent-community ties as one of the five essential supports that schools must have in place in order to sustain growth (Sebring, et al, 2006).

A recent study found that low-income schools in Chicago that were led by functioning Local School Councils (elected bodies with parent majorities that hold substantial control over principal hiring, budgets, and school improvement) outperformed demographically-similar "turnaround" schools that had received massive investments of resources but did not have active Local School Councils (Designs for Change, 2012). Parent participation in school decision-making and partnership with parents in school improvement activities is of particular importance for quality education reform (Epstein, 2010; Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2006).

Parents Speak Out: *"Parents must be heard because we know what our children need."*

Natasha Fenton is a parent in the Cleveland schools. She is also an active member of Esperanza, a community-based organization that supports Cleveland's Latino population to achieve academically.



Natasha Fenton and her family

Natasha led a parent organization in Puerto Rico that pushed the government to meet the needs of students with disabilities and their parents. Natasha says *"We succeeded at getting those parents and relatives to attend regular meetings and to share their ideas... so the voices of these parents and relatives were heard not only by the people but also by the government of Puerto Rico."* She was proud to be recognized in Puerto Rico as someone who fights for the rights of the people and her daughter.

Natasha believes that school decision-makers need to listen to parents to *"so the teachers -- together with the students -- can help our children become productive members in this society. Parents must be heard because we know what our children need. As parents, we are with our children every day and many of us face some needs that are not necessarily those faced by the people who make the decisions regarding the education of our children."*

The education budget should not be cut down because it jeopardizes our children's opportunities to learn what they need to become good citizens. For instance, if art, music and physical education classes are cut down, how can children and young people develop their skills? We don't know how these budget cuts will affect their future.

If we want to demand anything, we must educate ourselves about the resources that are available to us and also about our rights as citizens.

Parent Voices in Education Decision-Making – Parents and Research Say

Parents Speak Out: *"They make decisions and tell us after the fact like we don't have a voice. But we do have a voice."*



Marian Burge and her family

Marian Burge says she got involved in her son's kindergarten class because the teacher always had more students than she should have had. *"And the principal never told me I couldn't. If I go by a classroom and see kids out of control, I go and participate. I wish I could do it every day. They need to know that it's not just their parents who care about them. All parents care about their education."*

I went up there for a month straight. And I would tell them: 'You're smart. You don't need to get caught up in all this peer pressure. And they listened to me. You wouldn't believe how many kids talked to me. It meant a lot to them and it meant a lot to me, too.

Marian thinks that more parents would participate in their children's schools if they knew they were welcome – if they got calls from the principal or teachers to ask them to participate in things and when the children were doing well, not just when there was a problem. She said some parents get defensive because their only interaction with the school is negative. Marian says, *They [parents] get riled up and don't know how to communicate. They could have a program to teach them how to communicate with teachers."*

Parents could be trained in mediation and communication skills, helping with reading, math and social studies, chaperoning field trips. Teachers in their overcrowded classrooms, she feels, can certainly use the help. Perhaps most importantly, Marian wants to be involved in school and education decision-making. She sees the impact of increased class size, of school closures, of teachers who don't know the community, of parents feeling unwelcome. She wants systemic change, not just to patch the holes.

Lessons from Across the Country : Sacramento ACT Program

In 1998, parents involved with Sacramento Area Congregations Together (Sacramento ACT) were frustrated by finger-pointing and distrust between families and teachers in several low-income schools. Working with the local teachers union and school district, Sacramento ACT designed the Parent-Teacher Home Visit Project, which draws on community organizing principals to train teams of teachers visit students' families in their homes several times during the school year. The visits allow the teachers to learn about the school community and increase their cultural competency. Parents are approached as co-educators with valuable knowledge about their students. Based on the positive impacts on family engagement, teacher-parent trust, and academic achievement, the PTHVP now helps teachers unions, organizing groups and districts across the country implement the model. In Columbus, for example, the National Education Association Foundation has provided start-up funds for parent-teacher home visits as part of its Closing the Achievement Gap strategy.

Teachers Building Strong Relationships – Parents and Research Say:

Researchers have extensively documented the importance of high expectations for students coupled with caring relationships. Students can master ambitious content when their teachers know how to be what Lisa Delpit (2012) terms “warm demanders:” teachers who expect excellent work from all students, while providing support and seeking personal relationships.

The degree to which students feel that their teachers care about them individually and foster a classroom climate of respect significantly impacts their engagement in learning (Ryan & Patrick, 2001). From their extensive studies of Chicago public schools, the Consortium on Chicago Schools Research found that schools raised student achievement most when they offered both social support – teachers who know students well, listen to what they say, and relate subject matter to students’ interests – and high expectations (Lee, Smith, Perry, Smylie 1999; Seabring, Allensworth, Bryk, Easton, Luppescu 2006)

Parents Speak Out: *“You’ve got to come where he’s at and then he’ll come to where you are.”*

Sharina Brown is a mother of seven children in Cleveland public schools. *“These are not bad children,”* says Sharina. *“People need to realize first of all what you release out of your mouth, you are sowing the seed into this child and if you calling this child bad and if you’re telling this child they’re gonna be nothing and nobody, eventually if they keep hearing that, they gonna start believing that this is who they are and that’s not who they are. They’re trying to find out ‘who am I?’”*



Sharina Brown and her family

Sharina glows with passion for her children and their education. *“My Kinga-Binga, that’s my youngest one, my baby. His teacher basically told me that he was going to be a statistic and he would grow up to be violent. At home I watch how he learns. And I had to say, ‘Wait a minute. You’ve got to come where he’s at and then he’ll come to where you are’*

Sharina wants teachers to work under conditions that allow them to get to know their students one-on-one. She wants them to have opportunities to get to know the community they work in and their students’ families. And she wants there to be a respectful way for parents to participate in the school community and share their knowledge as their children’s “first teachers.”

She remembers that when she was growing up she saw her teachers out and about in the community. They were the same teachers who had taught her playmates and neighbors so they knew and understood her world. They knew what she struggled with and where she shined. Her teachers were invested in her success because she and they felt part of the same community and their successes were complementary.

She’s worried that with constant teacher turnover, as a result of lay-offs based on state education budget cuts, that she and her children will never have these kinds of relationships with teachers. She would like to see the district funding stabilized so that teachers would be motivated to stay in a school long enough to feel part of a community. She would like school closings to stop so that children know that their school will be there year after year.

Teachers Building Strong Relationships – Parents and Research Say

Lessons from Across the Country : Chicago Grow Your Own Program



Listening circle: Esperanza, Clark-Fulton

Chicago's Logan Square Neighborhood Association has a long history of engagement with local public schools. In the 1990s, LSNA worked with the principal of Funston Elementary to develop a parent mentor program that provided a small stipend for trained parent volunteers to work with classroom teachers and participate in leadership development. As parents learned more about the schools and deepened their work with students, several decided that they would like to become teachers themselves.

LSNA worked with Chicago State University to design a program leading to full bilingual-teacher certification for 30 parent leaders and classroom aides. The program, called Nueva Generación, provided developmental classes, childcare, tutoring and other supports. The candidates committed to teaching in neighborhood schools after graduation.

Other community organizing groups in Chicago had been struggling constant teacher turnover. The district's teacher recruitment efforts were bringing largely young, White teachers from outside of Chicago into the schools, and many of them transferred out quickly. Action Now, which organized parents on the West and South Sides, had tried neighborhood walks and home visits to overcome what they saw as new teachers' culture shock. The Nueva Generación program offered a more systematic answer to teacher turnover – developing teachers from the neighborhood, who already had strong ties to local schools, and who shared the cultural and community background of their students.

Action Now, LSNA, Chicago State, the Chicago Teachers Union, and a range of other partners developed the Grow Your Own Teacher task force to work with district and state leaders on a scalable model. In 2005, they won their first state legislative appropriation to support local Grow Your Own consortia consisting of a community group, college or university, and local school districts. The fifteen consortia recruit cohorts and support them in obtaining full certification as teachers, with a commitment of 5 years' service in local schools.

So far, 56 graduates are working in low-income classrooms, and about 400 more candidates are studying with support from 15 consortia across the state. An independent evaluation found that the graduates far exceeded expectations for content knowledge and pedagogy.



Listening circle: Friendly Inn, Central

Teachers Building Strong Relationships – Parents and Research Say:

High teacher turnover rates impose major burdens on school systems. High-poverty, high-minority schools and districts are hit the hardest by teacher attrition. When teachers leave, districts and schools lose the investments they have made in professional development and induction. They must recruit and hire new teachers, and start from scratch in their training and development. A 2007 brief from the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future estimates that the Cleveland Metropolitan School District spends \$12M each year on teacher turnover.

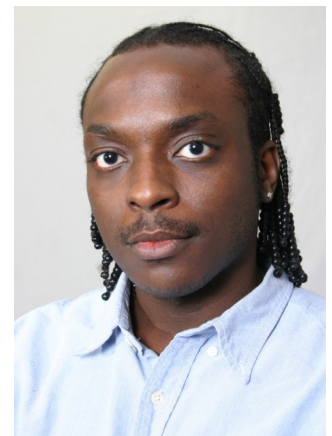
Teacher attrition harms students in many ways beyond its financial ramifications. Research has established that teachers' effectiveness steadily improves across the first five to seven years of their careers. Many high-poverty schools are staffed by inexperienced teachers who leave after just a few years and are in turn replaced by inexperienced teachers, creating a revolving door of staff who never reach their potential as effective educators.

Mutual trust, collegiality, and collaboration among teachers are crucial to school success (Leana, 2011, Bryk & Sheiner 2002; Leana, 2011). Many scholars theorize that constant turnover disrupts trust and professional community. The most recent and rigorous analysis of the impact of turnover on achievement (Ronfeldt, Loeb & Wyckoff, 2011) found that turnover negatively impacted not just the scores of classes who lost teachers, but all classes in a school – lending credence to the theory that turnover destabilizes whole schools.

Parents Speak Out:

"How can... they make a connection, when they have so much to do with so little time?"

Charles Yancey is a Cleveland parent and also a parent coach at an after-school program at a community wrap-around elementary school in Cleveland. He gets to see first-hand, not just his own children's school experiences but those of many other children, as well. Charles spends a lot of time thinking about Cleveland's schools. He is seen as a leader in the Hough community.



Charles Yancey

Charles had serious concerns about teacher turnover: *"You have new teachers all the time. Children don't think that teachers care because they don't know the teachers. And the teachers don't know the students. So you have a new teacher with 30 students, so they have to pick and choose – do I deal with this child or this one. How do I deal with the whole one-on-one situation? How do I help this student expand in his particular way? This one is good at talking but if I let this student talk, then everyone wants to talk."*

Charles also believes that teachers need the conditions that allow them to get to know students as individuals. He counts up to half a dozen teachers in a single classroom that a student might have over the course of a school year. *"Instead of thinking about the demographics, actually thinking about the students' needs, about the needs of each student."*

How, he wonders, are teachers expected to get to know students when they are in and out of multiple classrooms over the year? How are teachers expected to notice students as individuals when they have up to 50 students? How can they be expected to differentiate instruction to an individual's learning styles, interests, skill levels when they have so little understanding of their students and so many to understand? How can they be expected to call parents with good news, or just to make a connection, when they have so much to do with so little time?

Safe Schools Where Children Can Learn – Parents and Research Say:

In recent years, many school systems have begun to move from zero-tolerance policies that rely on suspensions and expulsions to investment in positive youth development, social and emotional learning strategies, and peer mediation.

The evidence strongly supports this shift. Greenberg, et al. (2003) reviewed evidence on school-based prevention and positive youth development programs and found that three key strategies mattered most for supporting positive behaviors and reducing violence: teaching students to apply social and emotional skills to daily life, building respectful and supportive relationships between students, parents, teachers and school staff, and systematically supporting and rewarding positive behaviors.



Listening circle: Lexington-Bell Community Center, Hough

Many school systems have found success with School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, a model that redesigns school systems and culture to support positive behavior and closely monitors disciplinary referrals. Students experiencing behavior or emotional difficulties receive specialized, increasingly intensive interventions. SWPBIS has reduced disciplinary referrals and suspensions and increases in academic achievement (Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2010; Lassen, Steele, & Sailor, 2006; Metzler, Biglan, Rusby, & Sprague, 2001).

Other promising models include peer mediation and restorative justice approaches. The successful Peers Making Peace program, for example, trains students in conflict prevention and resolution and uses peer coaches as neutral parties in resolving disputes (Nat. Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention, 2007). A pilot study of a restorative justice approach in an Oakland middle school found dramatic reductions in suspensions and expulsions (Sumner, Silverman, & Frampton, 2010).

Lessons from Across the Country : Colorado “Books Not Bars” Program

After the Columbine school shooting in 1999, Colorado school districts rushed to implement “zero tolerance” discipline policies that mandated suspension and expulsion for a range of infractions. Youth leaders with Padres y Jóvenes Unidos in Denver began documenting how zero tolerance policies disrupted students’ access to education, disproportionately impacted young people of color, and contributed to the over-criminalization of youth . In the decade following Columbine, 100,000 students were referred to law enforcement.

In 2010, Jóvenes Unidos hosted a “Books not Bars” conference for students across the state to kick off a legislative strategy. After an intensive public campaign, Jóvenes Unidos won passage of a senate bill in 2011 to establish a task force on school discipline reform. Youth leaders presented testimony to the task force and worked hard to ensure the recommendations would reflect young people’s experiences in Colorado schools. This spring, the Colorado General Assembly passed the Safe Schools, Smart Discipline bill, which eliminates mandatory suspension outside of firearms infractions and requires school districts to develop reasonable, graduated discipline policies. The Bill also streamlines the collection of data on discipline referrals to make it easier to track disparities by race, gender and special education status.

Safe Schools – Parents and Research Say

Parents Speak Out: “You’re better than the anger you’re showing.”

Antonio Sanford is the parent of 3 children in Cleveland schools. He also

runs the WAVE program for CMSD, which is based at Martin Luther King School. WAVE stands for Winning Against Violent Environments, a 30-year old program that trains students and adults in peer mediation skills, offers programs that address cultural and gender issues and provides a “cool down” space for students.



Antonio Sanford at a WAVE training session,

Antonio attended MLK as a high school student where he studied urban planning, intro to law and street law – none of which are taught any longer – and where he participated in the WAVE program, facilitating groups of his own peers beginning in 9th grade. He says the program kept him on track. *“People (in WAVE) kept me from being in the streets. I was starting to experiment with drugs. The one thing that kept me here was that I was a leader in this program. Upperclassmen would come up to me and say: ‘We need you.’”*

Antonio is a true believer and says that there’s nothing between students getting along but respect. He states, all conflicts pretty much boil down to respect. Once after a particularly meaty mediation between a teacher and a student, the group decided to put the question: “What is Respect?” on the walls of the school and teachers’ lounge: youth to youth, youth to adult, adult to youth and adult to adult. Students and adults alike came up with insightful answers.

In WAVE, he tells students: *“You’re better than the anger you’re showing.”* He told a girl who felt left out of the various girl cliques because she was half Latino and half white and was ready to drop out of school: *“That’s why I need you to stay as a mediator. ‘Cause there’s going to be another little girl who feels left out and she’ll need you.”*

Antonio says that students in middle school and high school are searching for their identity. *“I tell them, if you have something that you believe in and you stand firmly behind it, peers are going to do one of two things: respect you and stand with you or leave you alone.”*

Lessons from Across the Country : Louisville, Restorative Justice Program

In 2010, Citizens of Louisville Organized and United Together made restorative justice the focus of its Nehemiah Action Assembly. **Restorative justice is an alternative to punitive policies that emphasizes making amends for harm done to others and involves all those affected in resolving conflicts.** Schools committed to restorative justice often use peer mediation and peace circles, where offenders, victims, and others impacted make a plan for restitution together. They won commitments from the Jefferson County Juvenile Courts and the Jefferson County Public schools to implement restorative justice practices and reduce the referral of school-related offenses to the juvenile court system. After the assembly, school district officials and teachers union leaders traveled to Baltimore and Pennsylvania with CLOUT leaders to visit schools that had successfully implemented restorative justice. The district has hired 30 behavioral coaches to implement new practices, and has released a report documenting current disciplinary practices and data and analyzing the research base supporting restorative justice practices.

Engaging Research-based Curriculum: Parents and Research say:

Developing quality public schools that provide every child with a good education, requires resource investment that extends beyond the classroom and school building. Supporting students' socio-emotional skills is crucial to quality learning. Also, broad-based curriculum that promotes critical thinking and experiential learning is central to increasing academic achievement. Education in the arts, humanities, and physical education are critical to students' success. Decades of research demonstrate the connection between arts education and deeper learning in reading, math and science (Deasy, 2002; Ruppert, 2005). Arts and physical education and hands-on learning experiences also support socio-emotional development and civic engagement (Bodilly & Beckett, 2005; Durlak & Weissberg, 2007).

Low-income students who have less access to out-of-school enrichment also enjoy much less access within schools. A recent report from the National Center for Education Statistics found substantial disparities in time dedicated to visual arts and music instruction, the presence of specialized arts teachers, and rooms and equipment for arts instruction between high- and low-poverty schools (Parsad & Spiegelman, 2012).

Parents Speak Out: *"Because when you play the violin you're reading music – you have to know the alphabet, you have to count to keep time."*

Jill Fout-Gregory thinks that standardized testing is largely responsible for the narrowing of curriculum in schools and is thinking about opting her daughter out of testing this coming school year.

"Ok, we've gone from multiplication and adding 3-digit numbers in two months to division today. Are we retaining these skills? Or are we just making them regurgitate them and then by the time third grade comes around they're going to forget them? "



Jill Fout-Gregory and daughter

"I went to school in southern Ohio. At my high school, I was president of the Latin club, in the French club, the ecology club, vice president of the drama club, in every play, every talent show, every musical. I did make-up, I played the violin. We had a jazz band, marching band, art and by that I mean sculpture, painting, sketching – an array of things. I find that the schools that offer those types of activities have higher attendance rates, higher test scores – if you want to talk about testing – better grades overall and just more sense of community within that school.

When you play the violin you're reading music – you have to know the alphabet, you have to count to keep time. When you're in drama you have to be able to memorize your lines. And to incorporate those together, it makes kids want to come to school. It makes kids want to learn and it makes them want to get their parents involved. 'Mom, come see me in the play! Mom, I have a show tonight. Dad, we're building a rocket in science class – can we do that here?'

Jill tells a story about a TED talk she just listened to in which a teacher at a school in the South Bronx began by teaching kids to sprout seeds in paper cups and wound up building a wall in the classroom that kids could eat from. *"These kids that didn't know that a carrot grew in the ground – thought it came from aisle 3. Now, these kids are putting 'growing roofs' on houses in the Hamptons – and making money! One is the first person in his family with a bank account.*

"There has to be more than testing. We have to find their talents. The teachers – they want to do it, but they can't because it's: test, test, test."

Engaging Research-based Curriculum: Parents and Research say:

Parents Speak Out: *"You know these children are going to be running society someday."*

Luzelle Allen is part of a community that she helped to build. Luzelle is a retiree who inherited a leadership role at the East 73rd Street Community Club from her sister. The biggest role she plays is as "the playground lady." She has built a community of children, parents, and community service providers at a KaBOOM! playground. KaBOOM! is a national non-profit dedicated to "saving play for America's children."



East 73rd KaBOOM! Playground

When Luzelle talks about "her" children she almost always starts with the phrase: "Oh, so-and-so, she's SO SMART." She calls one little boy "her little Einstein." One smart girl named Jasmine figured out that rather than using plastic bottled water and creating trash, as a playground community they should recycle. *"That came from them. I mean, you got ideas, put 'em on the table."*

She teaches her Einsteins to play nicely and gives them all the bubbles they can blow. She tells the children: *"I work for you. I'll give you anything you need. But you've got to respect each other."* Luzelle models respect for the children and their parents. *"Parents get to see what I'm doing. You do not yell. These children, they're human beings. They're smarter than you think."* She teaches them to listen to their children and take a time out for themselves, if they're going to blow up.

Luzelle says, *"The first thing you have to do is create a safe space."* Once the young people and parents were treating one another respectfully, *"then the people from the Cleveland Clinic came. They were reading books to the kids and teaching about health and nutrition. Everybody said: 'That's beautiful!' The races were all mixed up. Everybody became one."* Luzelle thinks that schools should be communities, too. She says: *"You know these children are going to be running society someday and if we don't teach them about community, you know where you're going to be? Up a creek, that's where."*

Lessons from Across the Country : Cincinnati Community Wrap-Around Schools

In Cincinnati, full service community schools providing wrap-around supports are a core strategy across the district. As part of a 10-year plan to replace or renovate all school buildings in the district, each school is being redesigned as a Community Learning Center, with dedicated space for community uses.

The Community Learning Centers partner with community-based organizations to provide free meals and food assistance, health services and counseling, afterschool programs featuring arts and environmental education, tutoring, college access, and other supports. A Local School Decision-Making Council made up of school staff, teachers, parents, and community members leads a neighborhood-wide process to design each Community Learning Center to meet the particular needs of the community and establish partnerships with providers.

Since launching the Community Learning Centers, Cincinnati has become the only urban district in Ohio to earn an "effective" designation. Graduation rates have increased from 50% in 2000 to 82% in 2010, and the achievement gap between African American and white students has narrowed.

Public Schools and Public School Funding: “Where’s the Money”?

Parents Want to Know:
*Where’s the money
necessary to make the
changes we need?*



Listening circle: Lincoln-West High School, Clark Fulton

The Ohio Public schools were born out of the most important reform in all of America’s history – Horace Mann’s movement toward compulsory, publicly funded education for everyone. Alex de Toqueville wrote in *Democracy in America* that “the originality of American civilization was most clearly apparent in the provisions made for **public** education.” Central High School in Cleveland was America’s first public high school west of the Allegheny Mountains when it opened in 1846.

Parents in Cleveland are clear that they support public education because public education, a cornerstone of our democracy, is the only education that can ensure that all children get equal opportunities to learn. Given the trials they face as parents of Cleveland’s children, they know all too well that equal opportunity in education is often more rhetoric than reality. They want real equity, real opportunity.

Parents in Cleveland know what kind of public schools they want for their children – schools that feel and function as authentic communities, that pose questions as communities and look for and find solutions as communities. Parents want schools that give their children the tools to be joyful lifelong learners who can take their skills into the real work, family, faith and social justice communities and – with gusto and confidence – pose questions and look for and find solutions.

Parents in OCU’s listening circles posed questions and looked for solutions about education. But to truly solve the problems they identified, they know they will need more than good ideas – they will need the resources to implement them.

Public Schools and Public Funding: “Where’s the Money”?

One of the recurring questions parents asked in listening circles was: “Where’s the money?” So Ohio Communities United went to Stephen Dyer, expert on Ohio education funding and asked him.

Here is what he said:

The most potentially permanent solutions to education funding presented here are long term, and will require long term struggles to achieve. The District levy in November may be the only hope for funding solutions for the near future, therefore parents should approach the levy in as thoughtful a manner as possible.

Long-Term Potential Education Funding Solutions

Casino Revenue:

This is a new source of revenue that schools will benefit from fully starting next school year.¹ While 51% of the casino revenue will be split among counties by their population, 34% is to be split among counties according to their percentage of enrollment relative to overall state enrollment.

According to the most recent estimate, when fully implemented, schools will receive 34% of \$470 million in new state revenue, or \$159.8 million, split among 613 school districts.

Under the constitutional formula, using 2010 enrollment figures as provided by the Ohio Department of Education, Cuyahoga County would receive \$15.3 million, a little more than \$4.2 million of which would go to the Cleveland Municipal School District.²

Increase in Lottery Money:

In 2009, then-Gov. Ted Strickland pushed an effort to put Video Lottery Terminals in at the state’s race tracks. The move was expected to provide \$900 million in additional lottery revenue. However, the idea was scrapped after a lawsuit was filed.³

Gov. John Kasich has since allowed so-called Racinos to open around the state. The first was at Scioto Downs and exceeded projected revenues by about one-third.⁴

The problem with this proposal is the so-called Lottery Two-Step, which is how state officials have treated lottery money since it was introduced in the 1970s – they simply used Lottery money to allow the state to spend more general revenue funds on other budgetary items. So lottery money has meant no significant additional money for schools, just a change in the makeup of where the state money comes from.

1 <http://www.dispatch.com/content/stories/local/2012/05/01/schools-to-cash-in-on-casinos.html>

2 Calculated by looking at the year-end enrollment, according to the 2011 Cupp Report (<http://www.ode.state.oh.us/GD/DocumentManagement/DocumentDownload.aspx?DocumentID=124467>) and finding the percentage of the state’s total enrollment attributable to Cuyahoga County, then multiplying that percentage by the \$159.8 million expected to be available for the schools state-wide from gambling revenue (34% of \$470 million). Cleveland’s share was simply the percentage of the Cuyahoga County enrollment that can be attributed to Cleveland. Enrollment is different from Average Daily Membership, which is the calculation used by the Ohio Department of Education to calculate funding. However, the Constitution calls for “enrollment” to be the determinative factor, so it was used in this report. If, however, ADM is used, Cuyahoga County’s school districts would receive \$16.2 million with \$5.3 million going to CMSD.

3 <http://www.bloodhorse.com/horse-racing/articles/52751/oh-governor-shelves-racetrack-vlt-plan>

4 <http://www.dispatch.com/content/stories/business/2012/08/10/scioto-downs-racino-revenue-rises-in-July.html>

Public Schools and Public Funding: “Where’s The Money”?

Tax Expenditures:

Policy Matters Ohio has been reporting for some time about the number of tax expenditures in Ohio’s tax code.⁵ Currently, there are \$7 billion in tax incentives and other loopholes that could be collected without a single new tax or tax increase. And while it is unrealistic to think all \$7 billion could be closed, a substantial amount of money could be raised by shrinking, rather than expanding, tax credits and expenditures.

Increased State Commitment:

The Ohio Evidence Based Model for Education required the state to increase state share of education spending over a decade. It would have required that the state spend a little more than 1% of the state’s budget on education each year during the decade. If the state had done that, it would have reduced the need for property taxes by about \$400 per \$100,000 home and CMSD would have received an additional \$158 million in state revenue.



Listening circle: Esperanza, Clark-Fulton

Fracking:

Ohio Communities United does not support fracking, however if Ohio is to drill for natural gas and oil in Ohio’s Utica Shale deposits, returns on the revenue could be an opportunity to address many funding needs. In its report *Fracking, Fairness and the Future*, Innovation Ohio estimated that adopting Texas’ extraction fees for oil and gas would provide \$8.4 billion to \$27.8 billion in additional revenue over the next several years.

In many oil and gas producing states, those states have created Permanent School Funds that generate millions for schools separate from any general revenue or lottery funds. If Ohio put all the oil and gas revenue into a school fund, like Texas does, and the fund realized a conservative 5% return per year, schools could see \$420 million to \$1.4 billion per year, depending on the size of the oil and gas revenues produced.

Citizen Initiative:

In Ohio, citizens have the right to put initiatives on the ballot to change the state’s Constitution. Citizens could do this on school funding, as others have suggested in previous years. The effort is difficult, time consuming and expensive. However, it is the only way to more or less permanently change the way Ohio funds its schools to relieve the tax responsibility currently thrust upon the state’s property owners.



OCU Teach-In: Trinity Commons. Photo Credit: James Taylor, III

⁵ <http://www.policymattersohio.org/tax-breaks-aug2012>

Public Schools and Public Funding: “Where’s The Money”?

Businesses Pay their Fair Share:

In recent years, Cleveland’s business community has taken a keen and admirable interest in its schools.

However, thanks to major shifts in state tax policy since the 1980s, businesses now provide a much smaller portion of the share of education funding, especially on property taxes, which make up about 60% of all non-federal education spending in Ohio. Some districts went from having 40% of their property tax revenues coming from businesses to barely 20% as tax abatements and other incentive programs have hurt the collection of that tax.

In fact, even the conservative Tax Foundation found that the tax abatements and other incentives make Ohio’s property taxes “among the nation’s lowest for new manufacturing operations and distribution centers.”⁶ The Tax Foundation – which is notoriously anti-tax – found Ohio with the third-lowest tax burden on new businesses and fifth-lowest for mature businesses.



OCU Teach-In: Trinity Commons. Photo Credit: James Taylor, III

And now with the quicker-than-expected phase out of Commercial Activity Tax (CAT) reimbursement payments to replace the elimination of Tangible Personal Property Taxes in 2005, that portion will be even lower. The bottom line is that the 2005 HB 66 cut corporate taxes by \$3.8 billion saying that the eliminated monies would be replaced by another source (CAT). That source is now being eliminated.⁷



OCU Teach-In: Trinity Commons. Photo Credit: James Taylor, III

If businesses are going to be demanding better prepared workers from our schools – as they should – and take an active role in that reform – as they should – then they should also help fund that reform by paying their fair share, as they have before.

⁶ <http://www.dispatch.com/content/stories/business/2012/03/05/ohios-business-taxes-relatively-low.html>

⁷ <http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&frm=1&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&ved=0CCAQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ohioschoolboards.org%2Ffiles%2FBudget09%2FFY10-11BudgetLowdown.ppt&ei=Uew6UOW7CsTDygHup4GwCQ&usg=AFQjCNEpFYUpbAfpogEFHx-QlHQd8dwz1Q>

Ohio Communities United – Yes We Can! ¡Si se Puede!

Ohio Communities United is working to raise parent voices and bring parents' thinking into the education decision-making process in Cleveland. This report highlights the powerful insights parents have into their children's education – and it has barely scratched the surface. It also shows that parents' insights are supported by research. In other words, parents know what they are talking about. In addition, it offers examples of communities in which parents, community members and teachers are working together to put these ideas into practice.

We would like this report to encourage other parents to speak up and say what they know to be true about their schools and their children. We would like it to encourage decision-makers to engage parents before they make decisions not just to “communicate” their decisions after the fact. We would like it to serve as the basis for discussions about school change in Cleveland that gets to the heart of how children learn and the conditions that must be in place to maximize their learning. We would like it to catalyze coalition building among the various community and academic stakeholders who believe that every child deserves an excellent public education. And we would like for this report to serve as a model for other communities looking to raise parent voices that speak to what children really need in their schools.

Ohio Communities United intends to continue to organize parents and other community members until the above goals have been accomplished. Because of the passion, the energy, the understandings and the commitment of parents like those whose stories are on these pages we believe we can do that.

Yes we can! ¡Si se puede!



Listening circle: Lexington-Bell Community Center, Hough

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Speaking Out of School: Web Links and Resource Pages

Community Learning Centers Resources

Cincinnati Public Schools Community Learning Centers

<http://www.cps-k12.org/community/CLC/CLC.htm>

Community Learning Center Institute

<http://clcinstitute.org/>

Parent Teacher Home Visit Resources

Sacramento Area Congregations Together (ACT)

www.sacact.org

Parent Teacher Home Visit Project, Sacramento, CA

www.pthvp.org

Parent Organizing and Grow Your Own

Logan Square Neighborhood Association, Chicago

www.lsna.net

Action Now, Chicago

<http://actionnowdotorg.wordpress.com/>

Grow Your Own Illinois

<http://www.growyourownteachers.org/>

Safe Schools Resources

Padres y Jóvenes Unidos, Denver

<http://padresunidos.org/>

Louisville, KY

Citizens of Louisville Organized and United Together

<http://www.cloutky.org/>

Education Organizing Tools and Resources

Parent Power Video

<http://annenberginstitute.org/project/parent-power>

Center for Education Organizing Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University

<http://annenberginstitute.org/?q=project/center-education-organizing/>

Speaking Out of School: Appendix 1

Cleveland Listening Circles: Summary and Analysis

Listening Circle Participants (including Teach-In): 100

Demographics:

80% African American; 15% Latino; 5% White

Locations:

- Friendly Inn (Central neighborhood)
- Langston Hughes Library (Glenville neighborhood)
- Lincoln-West HS (Clark-Fulton neighborhood)
- Esperanza (Clark-Fulton neighborhood)
- East End Neighborhood House (Buckeye neighborhood)
- Lexington Bell Community Center (Hough neighborhood)
- Marion Sterling ES (Central neighborhood)
- Goodrich-Gannett Neighborhood Center (St. Clair neighborhood)
- Harvard Community Services Center (Harvard neighborhood)
- Trinity Commons – Teach-In (Downtown)

Speaking Out of School: Appendix 2

Cleveland Listening Circles: Sample Agenda

Introduction/Purpose (Local Host)

Community knowledge needed for improving schools

Organizational introduction

Ohio Communities United introduction

Host Organization

Participants' introduction

Name

Kids in school? What schools?

What made you come today?

Visioning Questions (break people into pairs , then share, put on flipcharts)

What is one of your or your child's most memorable/exciting learning experiences?; Describe, in lots of detail, what made it so good.

What is one way each learning experience could be applied in a classroom or school.

Video segment: *Eviction Notice* (student video about school closings)

Barriers and fixes (again pairs, share onto flipcharts)

What is one thing that is a barrier to our children having an ideal classroom? School? School system? _

What is one way to fix it?

Video segment: *Parent Power*

What can we DO as first or next steps to fix Cleveland schools?

Wrap-up

Thank yous

Next steps: how do we harness this great energy in the room? Contacts and friends?

NOTES



Ohio Communities United

<http://ohunited.nationbuilder.com/>

<http://www.facebook.com/OhioCommunitiesUnited>