COMMUNITY ORGANIZING GUIDE

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Introduction

By now you have opened the Toolkit and seen the hardware (and software) available to help communities improve education and reach the National Education Goals. Now what? Where do you begin?

A community campaign to achieve the Goals and reform education can start with one person _ one committed individual who believes that improving the education system is an important endeavor. In your community that person may be you. This doesn't mean one individual can or should take on this task alone. The challenges facing our education system today are incredibly complex. Preparing learners of all ages for the next century will require a long-term commitment and the sustained effort of a number of individuals from every sector of the community.

In some communities, efforts to improve the education system have been in place for years. In others, the conversation has not yet begun. This guide includes tools that communities can use no matter where they are in the process. Whether your community is taking a first step or the tenth step, building a long-term commitment will require careful thought and well-planned action.

Every effective campaign, like every effective business venture, must have a well-designed action plan. In the business world, this is called strategic planning, a process that helps companies define and accomplish their objectives.

Some think it is impossible to prepare for the future because it is so unpredictable. Good planners, however, know that you can influence the future by taking decisive, proactive steps. The most successful U.S. car manufacturers are succeeding today because they anticipated and planned for the long term. They took the steps necessary to reduce their erosion in market share by manufacturing smaller, better performing, more fuel-efficient cars.

Your community can succeed in improving the education system and ensuring that students are prepared to compete in a global economy. But it requires proactive and decisive behavior. You must have a community strategy _ an action plan that can guide your community towards accomplishing your goals and building a lasting commitment to improving the educational system. Each community action plan will be a road map to keep the focus on goals, help direct actions towards the people or institutions that can provide the desired results, and ensure that there are ways to measure success.

A Community Action Plan is not a static document; rather, it summarizes a process that a community can return to repeatedly in moving towards its goals. You will need to review and revise the plan continuously to ensure that each step takes your community closer to its goals.

This community organizing guide provides a systematic approach to action planning. It describes four steps to develop and implement a community action plan. The guide also includes information about key organizing techniques that can be used throughout your education reform efforts: developing organizational resources and troubleshooting.

This guide does not dictate a specific action plan. Every community's plan must be tailored to meet local needs. The only "correct" course is the one that works in your community.

Creating a Community Action Plan: An Overview

This guide identifies four critical steps in creating a Community Action Plan for education reform. They are:

Step 1: Identify a Leadership Team

Before a business can manufacture a product, there must be individuals who see the need and have the desire and the vision to make the product. Similarly, before your community can develop an action plan, there must be a core team of leaders from a diverse cross-section of your community who acknowledge a need to improve the education system. This section provides suggestions on how to find the leaders in your community.   It also includes a checklist of likely candidates _ partners for your effort.

Step 2: Develop a Common Vision

After a core team of leaders has been assembled, it is time to move from individual recognition that there are things that need to be changed in the education system, to a community vision for where the community wants and needs to be. It is unlikely that every person on the team will agree on the things that need to be changed. Some may think that fine-tuning is necessary. Others may think that a major overhaul is in order. The goals of your campaign should reflect the concerns of the entire community. It will be important to ensure that in the process of developing a common vision, a broad cross-section of the community is involved.

The National Education Goals are a good starting point for evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of your educational system. The Goals can help your community ask the right questions. This section includes a detailed description of the Goals Process as an overarching framework for vision-building.   Two specific vision-building tools are also discussed _ holding community meetings and conducting surveys.   Whatever tool is used, the key is to ensure that the process is community-based.

Step 3: Develop A Strategy

Once your team has developed a community consensus around a set of goals, it should develop a strategy to achieve them. There are five key elements to any strategy which answer the following questions: What are our specific short- and long-term goals? What resources are currently available for accomplishing them? Who will help and who will hinder our efforts? What people or institutions have the power to give us the results for which we are looking? And what action steps can we take to achieve these results? This section provides a systematic approach to answering these questions. It also includes a strategy chart that can be used to map out the various elements of a Community Action Plan.

Step 4: Implement the Plan and Evaluate the Results

Implementing the action plan will mean developing a timeline and measuring progress towards your goals. One important tool to help measure community progress is described in detail in the *Local Goals Reporting Handbook*.

Key Organizing Techniques:

The remainder of this guide provides information about two important organizing techniques that might be useful throughout the planning process.

Developing Organizational Resources.

For education reform to be effective, the goals must be embraced by an ever-widening group in your community. Your team should identify the individuals it needs to continue to influence policymakers; it must also identify long-term sources of financial resources that can be brought to bear during the campaign. This section provides hints for expanding the base of support for reform, and places to look for funding.

Troubleshooting.

Even as you are expanding the base of support, it will be important to be aware of the opposition. Keep an eye out for your opponents, respect their opinions, and try to explain yours. Understand the process of inclusion.

Whatever road map your community chooses to follow, remember that every step of the process requires communication. Communicate goals, priorities, and tactics thoughtfully and respectfully. Appeal to the concerns of allies and defend your position to critics. Careful, strategic communication and outreach to wider circles of people in your community will be an ongoing, long-term job. The *Guide to Getting Out Your Message* provides ideas about how your community team cam communicate effectively.

Step 1: Identify A Leadership Team

The people who lead the community campaign to reform education will give it inspiration, drive, and momentum. They will set the groundwork for a long-term reform strategy. This is a task that requires numbers of committed people, but it must start with a core team. In some communities a core team of leaders is already in place. In others the current team may be one or two concerned citizens. Whatever the situation, the most important qualification for membership on the leadership team is a desire to improve the education system.

Perhaps the best way to identify possible partners is to look at who has a stake in education. Who gains when local education works well? Who loses when it doesn't? While students and parents have the most to gain and lose, educators come in a close second _ make sure they are actively involved from the very beginning. They are not the only stakeholders, however. There are likely candidates for leadership in every community: the curriculum development director for the school district, school guidance counselors and other pupil service personnel, members of the PTA, the president of the Chamber of Commerce, the president of the local teachers union, and members of the social action committee of a local church or synagogue. Anyone willing to take on the issue of education reform and remain committed is a good candidate for leadership.

Remember, it will not be possible to sustain reforms of the educational system without broad-based community ownership of the reform efforts. Inclusiveness is not just a goal, but a process requirement.

Keep in mind the characteristics of individuals and the needs of the community. Leaders should command respect and be able to speak about the issues that are most important to the community, whether it's the shrinking local job market or a lack of quality child care.

It will also be important for the leadership team to work at working together. The community campaign will be most effective if the leadership team is really a "team." There are a number of guides and organizations which provide training and support for team building. Several suggestions are listed in the *Resource Directory*.

Checklist of likely candidates for the leadership team

Education

___ School board members

___ PTA/PTO

___ Superintendents

___ Other administrators

___ Principals

___ Teachers

___ Representatives of the teachers union
___ Students
___ Vocational/technical educators
___ Higher education professors

___ Adult education or literacy groups
___ School guidance counselors

Business Corporations
___ CEOs
___ Human resources personnel

___ Community affairs personnel

Other

___ Corporate foundations

___ Chambers of Commerce

___ Other business organizations

___ Organized labor

___ Plant managers

___ Sales representatives

Community

___ Community-based organizations
___ Religious groups/leaders

___ Social service/health agencies
___ Child-care groups

___ Foundations

___ Volunteer groups

___ Civic groups

___ Job training groups

___ Health care professionals

___ Law enforcement

___ Museums

Media

___ Newspapers

___ Television

___ Radio

Elected Officials
___ Municipal government officials
___ Mayors

___ State legislators

Step 2: Develop A Common Vision

Using the "Goals Process"
Tools for Developing a Common Vision
Holding Community Meetings
Conducting Surveys

> *It takes a whole village to educate a child.*
> *_ African Proverb*

How do you begin to develop a community vision for improving education and reaching the Goals? If the goals of the community action plan are to reflect the concerns of the community, the process for developing the vision must include a cross-section of the entire community. Creating a cohesive vision from the diverse perspectives represented in a community is a difficult task.

USING THE "GOALS PROCESS"

The National Education Goals provide an important starting point for evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the educational system _ for building a consensus around needed educational improvements. A necessary first step to developing a common vision for education reform is making a commitment as a community to the *Goals Process* as a central reform framework. Using the *Goals Process* means:

* adopting the National Education Goals or similar goals that ref lect high expectations for all and cover the entire breadth of focus from prenatal care to lifelong learning;

* assessing current strengths and weaknesses and building a strong accountability system to regularly measure and report on progress towards the goals over time;

* setting specific performance benchmarks to mark progress along the way and guide the change process;

* identifying the barriers to and opportunities for goal attainment in the many systems that support teaching and learning;

* creating and mounting strategies to overcome barriers, seize opportunities and meet the performance benchmarks; and

* making a long-term commitment to working towards the goals and continuously reevaluating your accomplishments and shortcomings and modifying your strategy as needed.

TOOLS FOR DEVELOPING A COMMON VISION

This section includes tips about two community-based processes for developing a vision: holding community meetings and conducting surveys. Many communities have used one or both of these tools to develop a common vision through a careful evaluation of the status quo. In addition to gathering information, holding community meetings or conducting community surveys should broaden the base of support for reform. Goals- and standards-based reform will require more than changes in the educational system. The reforms will only succeed if there are corresponding changes in the community's expectations. For information on additional tools for broadening support for reform, see the *Guide to Getting Out Your Message.*

Whatever tools your community uses, start by **adopting rigorous goals that reflect high expectations for all learners**. Work through the National Education Goals, one by one, either at a community meeting or in developing a survey. Consider what it would take to reach the Goals and the objectives and ask the questions: Has my community met this Goal or this objective? and if not, why not? If the answer is that you don't know, or the information is not available to answer the question, then gathering information may be the first step for your community. Answering these questions will help your community identify where the educational system has room to improve and it will allow your team to set priorities for action. Remember not to let early disagreements stand in the way of making overall progress.

The *Local Goals Reporting Handbook* includes additional questions your community can ask to determine how it is doing in relation to the National Education Goals, and suggestions about where to look for information. In addition, it provides a framework for community efforts to **assess current strengths and weaknesses, to build a strong local accountability system** and **to continuously evaluate accomplishments and shortcomings.**

The next section in this guide _ develop a strategy _ defines a process for **identifying barriers** and **developing strategies to overcome them.**

The National Education Goals

Ready to Learn

By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn.

Objectives

* All children will have access to high-quality and developmentally appropriate preschool programs that help prepare children for school.
* Every parent in the U.S. will be a child's first teacher and devote time each day helping such parent's preschool child learn, and parents will have access to the training and support parents need.
* Children will receive the nutrition, physical activity experiences, and health care neede d to arrive at school with healthy minds and bodies, and to maintain the mental alertness necessary to be prepared to learn, and the number of low-birthweight babies will be significantly reduced through enhanced prenatal health systems.

School Completion

By the year 2000, the high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent.

Objectives

* The nation must dramatically reduce its school dropout rate, and 75 percent of those students who do drop out will successfully complete a h igh school degree or its equivalent.
* The gap in high school graduation rates between American students from minority backgrounds and their non-minority counterparts will be eliminated.

Student Achievement and Citizenship

By the year 2000, all students will leave grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography, and every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well, so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our nation's modern economy.

Objectives

*   The academic performance of all students at the elementary and secondary level will increase significantly in every quartile, and the distribution of minority students in each quartile will more closely reflect the student population as a whole.
*   The percentage of all students who demonstrate the ability to reason, solve problems, apply knowledge, and write and communicate effectively will increase substantially.
*   All students will be involved in activities that promote and demonstrate good citizenship, good health, community service, and personal responsibility.
*   All students will have access to physical education and health education to ensure they are healthy and fit.
*   The percentage of all students who are competent in more than one langua ge will substantially increase.
*   All students will be knowledgeable about the diverse cultural heritage of this nation and about the world community.

Mathematics and Science

By the year 2000, U.S. students will be first in the world in mathematics and science achievement.

Objectives

*   Mathematics and science education, including the metric system of measurement, will be strengthened throughout the system, especially in the early grades.
*   The number of teachers with a substantive background in mathematics and science, including the metric system of measurement, will increase by 50 percent.
*   The number of U.S. undergraduate and graduate students, especially women and minorities, who complete degrees in mathematics, science, and engineering will increase significantly.

Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning

By the year 2000, every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

Objectives

*   Every major American business will be involved in strengthening the connection between education and work.

*   All workers will have the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills, from basic to highly technical, needed to adapt to emerging new technologies, work methods, and markets through public and private educational, vocational, technical, workplace, or other programs.

*   The number of quality programs, includ ing those at libraries, that are designed to serve more effectively the needs of the growing number of part-time and midcareer students will increase substantially.

*   The proportion of the qualified students, especially minorities, who enter college, who complete at least two years, and who complete their degree programs will increase substantially.

*   The proportion of college graduates who demonstrate an advanced ability to think critically, communicate effectively, and solve problems will increase subs tantially.

*   Schools, in implementing comprehensive parent involvement programs, will offer more adult literacy, parent training, and lifelong learning opportunities to improve the ties between home and school, and enhance parents' work and home lives.

Safe, Disciplined, and Drug-Free Schools

By the year 2000, every school in the U.S will be free of drugs, violence, and the unauthorized presence of firearms and alcohol and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning.

Objectives

*   Every school will implement a firm and fair policy on use, possession, and distribution of drugs and alcohol.

*   Parents, businesses, governmental and community organizations will work together to ensure the rights of students to study in a safe and secure environment that is free of drugs and crime, and that schools provide a healthy environment and are a safe haven for all children.

*   Every local educational agency will develop and implement a policy to ensure that all schools are free of violence and the unauthorized presence of weapons.

*   Every local educational agency will develop a sequential, comprehensive kindergarten through twelfth grade drug and alcohol prevention education program.

*   Drug and alcohol curriculum should be taught as an integral part of sequential, comprehensive health education.

*   Community-based teams should be organized to provide students and teachers with needed support.

*   Every school should work to eliminate sexual harassment.

Teacher Education and Professional Development

By the year 2000, the nation's teaching force will have access to programs for the continued improvement of their professional skills and the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to instruct and prepare all American students for the next century.

Objectives

* All teachers will have access to preservice teacher education and continuing professional development activities that will provide such teachers with the knowledge and skills neede d to teach to an increasingly diverse student population with a variety of educational, social, and health needs.

* All teachers will have continuing opportunities to acquire additional knowledge and skills needed to teach challenging subject matter and to use emerging new methods, forms of assessment, and technologies.

* States and school districts will create integrated strategies to attract, recruit, prepare, retrain, and support the continued professional development of teachers, administrators, an d other educators, so that there is a highly talented work force of professional educators to teach challenging subject matter.

* Partnerships will be established, whenever possible, among local educational agencies, institutions of higher education, parents, and local labor, business, and professional associations to provide and support programs for the professional development of educators.

Parental Participation

By the year 2000, every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children.

Objectives

* Every state will develop policies to assist local schools and local educational agencies to establish programs for increasing partnerships that respond to the varying needs of parents and the home, including parents of children who are disadvantaged or bilingual, or parents of children with disabilities.

* Every school will actively engage parents and families in a partnership which supports the academic work of children at home and shared educational decisionmaking at school.

* Parents and families will help to ensure that schools are adequately supported and will hold schools and teachers to high standards of accountability.

Holding Community Meetings

Convening a community meeting is an important way to facilitate the *Goals Process*. Community meetings allow you to start the conversation about what your community needs from its education system. The opportunity to talk about the current condition of your community's education system and where it should be headed can give everyone a personal stake in reforming the educational system. The meetings should include a broad range of people who can contribute their unique perspectives to the discussions. A community meeting can prove to be very beneficial. However, it will take careful prior planning if it is to be successful.

1. Setting Up a Location and Time for the Meeting:

The community meeting site should be accessible and familiar to as many people as possible. Schools, recreation centers, libraries, and the town hall are likely locations. The site should have enough room to accommodate a large number of people and also allow space for small groups to break out from the large group.

The time set for the meeting should be determined by the hour most likely to attract a good turnout. Early weekday evenings (around 7:00 p.m.) are usually the most promising. It's a good idea to contact key groups in your community who also sponsor events, such as the Chamber of Commerce, the school district, the PTA, and local service groups, to make sure the meeting will not conflict with other scheduled events. Ask those key groups to send a representative to the meeting, and notify their members about the meeting. Make sure to get phone numbers so you can call them to remind them to come.

Once you have set a location and time for the meeting, make sure to provide clear written directions to meeting participants. Make sure the meeting room is set up appropriately. You may want to arrange for a microphone and a loudspeaker system so that everybody attending will be able to hear the proceedings. You may want to arrange for someone to make a recording of the meeting and group discussions for later review.

2. Identifying Participants:

It may be useful to invite leaders from key organizations to act as spokespersons or to lead small discussion groups. Begin with the coalition of individuals and organizations that you have developed to get the community involved in improving education. That coalition should include representatives from at least these groups: parents, teachers, school administrators, representatives of the teachers union, religious leaders, local government officials, the local newspaper editor or publisher, business leaders, and representatives of local service and volunteer groups. Have a designated number of people personally responsible for bringing others to the meeting.

3. Getting the Word Out:

The Guide to Getting Out Your Message offers some useful materials and advice for letting people in your community know about local goals efforts. Everybody needs to know about the community goals meeting: when and where it will be held, what will be discussed, and why it is important to attend. Be clear about how many meetings it will take to develop the program. The more people understand the scope of the work, the fewer surprises there will be down the road.

Develop a flyer to distribute to community organizations and ask the schools to distribute it to teachers, students, and parents. Many local newspapers and radio stations have free community bulletin boards in which you can announce the meeting. Make sure to take advantage of these public service functions of the local media. Place an ad in the local newspaper. Fax or mail a press release to the education reporter at the local newspaper and the program managers at the radio and television stations, or call them. All materials you distribute should include the name of a contact person with a telephone number and an electronic mail address if they have one.

4. Developing an Agenda:

The agenda for your community goals meeting should be constructed in a way that galvanizes support for your mission and refines it where necessary. Make sure to involve the core group of leaders in developing the agenda. The agenda should make the goals of the meeting clear for every participant. Don't try to do too much at one meeting. You may need to have several.

5. Choosing a Facilitator:

An organized discussion about education reform will not happen spontaneously. It will be necessary to have a facilitator to help direct discussion around the issues related to the goals and the ways they apply to the community. The facilitator will need to encourage audience participation. He or she will need to ensure that no single person monopolizes the discussion and that shy people are encouraged to speak. The facilitator will bring discussions to a close and guide the audience to decisions about actions that need to be taken. Above all, your facilitator should have a good working knowledge of your community goals and the Goals 2000: Educate America Act, as well as the general needs and interests of the community. For more information about the Goals 2000: Educate America Act, see the U.S. Department of Education pamphlet, "Goals 2000: An Invitation to Your Community."

6. Developing Materials:

In addition to the flyers, posters, and news releases already mentioned, you should prepare copies of an agenda, a list of the National Education Goals and a description of the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* for everybody attending (the National Education Goals and a description of Goals 2000 are included as handouts in this Toolkit). You may find it useful to prepare a facilitator's guide and a small-group moderator's guide as well. The guides can be made up from selected contents from this kit and should list questions and ideas that encourage discussions and development of plans based on the National Education Goals as described earlier.

It is also important to keep a record of everyone who attends any meeting you hold. Always have a sign-in sheet which asks for names, phone numbers, addresses, and electronic mail addresses. A sample sign-in sheet is included as a handout.

Checklist for Holding A Successful Community Meeting

Adapted from "What Communities Should Know and Be Able to Do About Education," Education Commission of the States, July 1993

Select a location that:
* Is familiar and accessible.
* Is accessible to persons with disabilities.
* Has large enough space for all who might attend.
* Has smaller rooms for break-out groups.
* Has visible, adequate parking.

Select a time that:
* Is convenient to most people _ usually early evening.
* Does not conflict with other group meetings.

Set up the location, and provide:
* Clear directions to the site and specific rooms.
* Chairs or tables configured to make people comfortable.
* On-site child care if possible.
* Sign-up sheet, including phone numbers to keep track of everyone who attends.
* Agendas, or copies of materials available to all participants.
* Microphones or loudspeakers to ensure that everyone can hear.
* Tape recording of the meeting.

Ensure good turn-out for your meeting by:
* Contacting other community groups about the meeting.
* Including a meeting notice in the local paper either on a community bulletin board or through a paid advertisement.
* Asking your local radio station(s) to make a public service announcement.
* Posting notices in common locations.
* Asking your schools to distribute a flyer to students and parents.
* Making team members responsible for bringing others to the meeting.
* Calling people to remind them to come.

Set the process up to succeed:
*   Have a clear agenda and goals to accomplish.

*   Choose an experienced facilitator(s) to lead discussion.

Develop materials:
*   Create an agenda that people can keep.

*   Copy descriptions of the National Education Goals.

*   Copy a description of the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act.*

Minnesota 2000 has developed a useful agenda for a community goals meeting:

I. Introductions
Identify all people who will be leading the meeting, as well as those who have helped put it together.

II. National Education Goals: An Overview
The facilitator of the meeting will provide a brief overview of the National Education Goals and their origin, then relate them to the meeting and the agenda.

III. Community Review of Goals
Participants will be given copies of the National Education Goals and then asked to turn to the six or eight people around them and discuss the question, "How do these Goals relate to our community?" This should take no more than 15 minutes. The facilitator will then ask for a couple of key points about each Goal.

IV. Setting Priorities for Discussion
Participants will decide which of the National Education Goals are most important to the community and identify any additional goals that have not been mentioned. The meeting facilitator will read the goals one by one and ask for brief comments from those who wish to speak. The final result: a list of community education goals.

V. Community Review of Goals in Small Groups
The group will divide into smaller sections _ one for each of the goals identified in the previous discussion. It may be helpful to appoint leaders for each small group. The groups should reflect diversity. They should make any necessary revisions in the goal and then brainstorm about how the community can accomplish the needs identified in each goal. Emerging from the group sessions will be the beginnings of a community action plan and the methods for measuring progress toward the community education goals.

VI. Review of Community Goals and Action Plans
Each group will appoint a spokesperson to report briefly on their assessment of the goal's relevance to the community. This part of the meeting should go quickly, focusing on key questions and highlights of the action plan.

VII. Adoption of Goals and Community Action Plans
The meeting facilitator will ask for a motion to formally adopt the goals and action plans.

VIII. Establish Commitment
The facilitator will ask each citizen for a pledge to work toward the established goals and ask for volunteers to lead task forces or goal groups. It may be wise to identify some key individuals ahead of time. Names and contact numbers will be taken from volunteers (see sample sign-up form). The next meeting will be discussed (time, date, tentative agenda, who else to bring).

IX. Adjournment

Case Study of Allegheny Policy Council: Developing a Common Vision

   A community in western Pennsylvania answered the call to action issued by the National Education Goals to provide students with top-notch science and math education.   For the Allegheny Policy Council, a collaboration of local leaders in education, business, government and foundations working to prepare students for the future, the goal was a challenge "to determine how to best use the resources of the region to equip all its students with the math and science literacy that they will need to fully participate in the 21st century." To meet the challenge, Allegheny County developed an action plan based on the opportunities available in schools and in the region to improve science and math education.

In January 1994, the Policy Council invited each of the 43 school districts in Allegheny County to assemble a six-person team, including a school board member, a school administrator, a science teacher, a math teacher, a student, and a parent or community member.   Each team was asked to identify the strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities confronting their math and science education efforts.   In addition, the school district teams were asked to list initiatives that were under way to improve math and science education.

Following the surveys of each school district, the Council held a conference with over 200 participants from the community.   Participating school districts sent their teams to talk about the future of science and math education with representatives from businesses, professional associations, and universities.   During the day-long conference, participants crafted a plan to guide regional action.   The agenda for the conference was set by a pre-conference survey that revealed current needs, strengths, and weaknesses.   The resulting agenda for the conference was designed to give participants full input in determining what a regional effort in math and science should be like.

Participants were asked for input which would "lead directly to a regional plan for focusing our resources to improve math and science.   The resulting plan will guide regional action. It will be used to indicate regional consensus to secure national funding and to guide local allocation of resources."

Thirty-seven groups of four to seven people met to discuss the goals of the campaign and more than twenty-three of the groups identified four which needed to be given top priority: providing technology for students, creating a professional development institute for teachers, creating a clearinghouse for teaching materials in math and science, and partnering mathematics and science professionals with teachers in schools.

The groups at the conference agreed that a steering council for their reform efforts should emphasize math teachers and science teachers but should also include students, school board members, parents and community members, and representatives of higher education, corporations, nonprofit groups, and the philanthropic community.

With goals and objectives set by the key participants in math and science reform, the next steps will be coordinated by a consortium of libraries and museums which provides resources to educators, including science and math teachers. Activities will include setting up a steering council to guide the regional effort, fundraising, and advancing the effort nationally as a model of regional collaboration, and excellence in science and math learning.

(For more information call the Allegheny Policy Council: (412) 394-1200)

CONDUCTING SURVEYS

Many communities have found it useful to conduct a survey to help develop a common vision of educational reform. In particular, a survey can help you pinpoint how various segments of the community _ business and civic leaders, educators, and students _ perceive the issues in education and what they believe ought to be done to improve the educational system. For example, a poll of business people might reveal the need for higher standards in math and English so that students can compete in the work force. Similarly, a poll of working mothers could point to the need for a preschool program. Examining the attitudes and opinions of neighbors and civic and business leaders can be helpful in reinforcing your work.

In addition, the findings of a survey can help formulate and bolster positions of the campaign. For example, if one of the programs focuses on the goal of freeing schools from violence, you could poll students on how they spend their spare time, what recreational facilities they use, their awareness of violence, and what they would do about it. When the community presents its program for safe school environments, the results of the teen survey could be released at the same time, with teen spokespeople supporting the major findings.

Survey research is a rather sophisticated process with principles which cannot be learned overnight. Start by asking local newspapers to conduct the survey. Before you consider conducting a survey yourself, try to talk with experienced survey practitioners. The social science departments of the local university can help or refer you to experts. In the meantime, there are some rules to follow to draft a fair instrument and arrive at useful results.

Rule 1: Determine the Size and Scope of The Survey

The sample size for the survey depends largely on what you intend to do with the information. Be scientific for a definitive view of positions on an issue, or for information to be released to the public. If you want to get valid information for key subgroups, such as women vs. men or young vs. older citizens, be sure your sample group is large enough. For groups of about 400 people, survey about 150 from the subgroup; for 1,000 to 1,500, survey 250, increasing the number by 5 for each additional 100 people.

Rule 2: Choose a Representative Sample of the Population

In most communities it will not be possible to survey every single person. If your survey is to provide results that are generalizable to the entire community, every person in your community must have the same probability of being chosen to answer the survey. For a large community, use a random sampling by calling every 10th, 20th, or 30th name in the telephone book.

Rule 3: Choose the Best Way to Collect the Information

Surveys can be conducted over the telephone or through the mail. A mailed questionnaire costs less and is far easier to conduct, though the number of people who respond is significantly lower and the results are not as reliable as phone surveys. Aim for a response rate of at least 50%. Getting this response level may require follow-up reminders. The response rate is also affected by, among other

things, the length of the questionnaire, the ease of filling it out and returning it, the clarity of the questions, and the reasons given for responding.

Rule 4: Develop a Useful Questionnaire

The questions in a valid survey must be worded so that the answers are really meaningful. Questions should be pretested on a small group _ such as friends or family _ to see if readers understand what the writers meant to ask. Unclear questions can yield worthless responses.

Biased wording also invalidates results, so emotionally loaded or slanted questions should be strictly avoided. It may be difficult to ask neutral questions _ especially when you have strong feelings on the topic _ but that is the only way to get valid information.

Each question also must be worded to elicit a response to one idea _ combining more than one thought in a question makes it unclear as to which thought the person is responding to.

In addition to clarity and neutrality, question-writers must also consider how the answers to a question will be tabulated. Responses to totally open-ended questions _ such as, "What do you think about your local school?" _ can be time-consuming and difficult to categorize and assess. Instead, use questions with a choice of answers and ask the reader to check one, or ask for numbered levels of agreement/disagreement "where 1 is strongly agree and 5 is strongly disagree."

Rule 5: Execute and Spread the Word!

Once your survey is complete, use the media to publicize the findings and other techniques described in the *Getting Out Your Message* section to get the information out to important groups. Without publicity and interpersonal communications, your valuable information might be overlooked and have a negligible impact. Make sure to preface your results with information about your methodology and sampling pool. Hold meetings to discuss the results of the survey and to plan follow-up actions.

Survey Tips

*   Tell people why you want the information. Level with respondents about why you are
        asking their opinions and what use you intend to make of the answers. Explain your reasons
for the survey in a letter accompanying the questionnaire.

*   Don't ask too many questions. Long, involved surveys get dropped in the wastebasket.
        Especially in your initial efforts, ten simple questions should be plenty. Limit questions to
        one subject each.

*   Make it easy. Give simple directions and provide for simple responses, such as checking
        boxes or filling in spaces. Make sure the questionnaire is easy to read. Use plain type, a
        duplicating process that produces sharp copies, and a layout that leaves enough space
        between questions. Underline key words.

*   Publicize your survey. Let community members know that you are planning to conduct a
        survey and stress that its purpose is to get input from people on improving education

*   Make it easy to return. Provide an addressed, postage-paid envelope along with the questionnaire.

*   Follow up to ensure a good response rate. There are a number of ways to do this
        _bulletin-board notices, reminders by phone, or additional mailings. Some pollsters send a
        second copy of the questionnaire stamped: "Second request. Please disregard if you have
        already returned the completed questionnaire." Others find that a postcard reminder brings
        results and avoids the danger of some people absentmindedly returning two questionnaires.

*   Report the results of your survey to the community. However, keep in mind that raw
        numbers can be misleading. Discuss your findings within an interpretative framework. If,
        for example, there is criticism of a program, it may not mean that the program is de ficient
        but that you may need to do a better job of explaining it. Also, answers to related questions
        may need to be looked at in tandem, or the impact on attitudes of an unusual situation may
        need to be considered.

*   Translate your findings into action. Once you have used the survey information, feed the
        findings into your next analysis step and adjust the planning and action/communication steps
        accordingly. Then, survey on the same points during the next evaluation stage. Periodic
        formal feedback will either substantiate the informal readings you take or alert you to
        problems in your day-to-day communications channels.

(Adapted from the Communications Workers for America)

CASE STUDY: Omaha 2000, A Survey Helps Paint the Common Vision for Education Reform

When Omaha 2000, a National Education Goals effort started by the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce in Nebraska, needed to choose a direction for change, they turned to those most in touch with what was important in Omaha _ the citizens themselves.

"We wanted to know where are we now, and where do we THINK we can go," said Connie Spellman, vice president for education for the Chamber of Commerce.   The Chamber formed a core coalition of community leaders from education, business, labor, civic, government, religious, and parent organizations.   Over 400 Coalition volunteers produced a preliminary report of 125 strategies the community could follow to help achieve the National Education Goals.

Though the volunteers were a reflection of the whole community, Spellman recognized that the report was only preliminary.   For real change to take place, there had to be a stronger mandate based on community consensus.

Out of the 125 strategies, the core coalition of Omaha leaders selected the 55 strongest to create a "consensus ballot."   With the help of a local printing company, they produced a survey that was distributed in the *Omaha World-Herald* newspaper and through the network of organizations that were involved in drafting the preliminary report.

During the survey campaign, over 200,000 homes in the community received the ballot, and over 50,000 people shared their views on the recommendations.   The response to the survey was greater than the turnout for Omaha's primary municipal elections!

The leaders of the Omaha 2000 effort used the survey responses to choose reform initiatives on issues important to the community.   Spellman found that the survey "helped validate that we were on the right track." People become more involved in the reform efforts, talking about education and how everybody in the community could help out.   Initiatives were much more easily accepted because people felt that the survey made them a part of the decision-making process.

Among the crucial issues brought to light by the survey were the need for children to be better prepared to begin school, and the need for students to be ready for work after graduation.   In response, Omaha 2000 launched two initiatives: a pilot project to teach students the most critical skills required in over 50 of the most prevalent jobs in the community, and a model program that aims to double the number of children served by early childhood care and education.

One of Connie Spellman's favorite sayings is, "Coming together is beginning, keeping together is progress, and working together is success." The success of the Omaha 2000 survey brought that wisdom to life.

(For more information contact Winnie Callahan (402) 557-2222 or Connie Spellman (402) 346-5000 at the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce.)

Sample Survey

Omaha 2000, a community education reform effort in Nebraska, has developed a survey that might be used as a model. Following are the cover letter and excerpts from the questionnaire.

Sample Cover Letter for Survey

Thank you for taking time to respond to our community survey. We are looking for your help in learning about the issues that members of our community find important in the lives and education of our children. We will use these responses to develop programs targeted toward the issues identified by citizens like you.   The survey is made up of a series of statements related to aspects of children's lives and education. All you need to do is read each statement and decide whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree.

Code your responses as follows:
  1 = Strongly agree
  2 = Somewhat agree
  3 = Somewhat disagree
  4 = Strongly disagree

Please circle the appropriate number for each response. Thanks again for being a part of our community effort to provide children with the best education possible.

Healthy Kids
All children should be immunized by age 2.
1   2   3   4
School nutrition services should include breakfast.
1   2   3   4
Prenatal care should be accessible to all pregnant women.
1   2   3   4

Drug-Free Kids
Anti-drug and anti-violence education programs should be presented to all youth.
1   2   3   4
Parents' actions should support anti-drug and anti-violence policies.
1   2   3   4
Chemical dependency treatment programs should be available and affordable for all youth.
1   2   3   4
Community standards should enforce strong anti-drug, anti-violence policies.
1   2   3   4

Family Support

The family should be the primary center for learning.

1   2   3   4

Parenting education programs should be available for all parents.

1   2   3   4

Preschools and parenting education programs should encourage family literacy.

1   2   3   4

Math and science refresher courses should be available for all adults.

1   2   3   4

Community Support

Our community should appreciate and embrace the growth of diversity.

1   2   3   4

Every citizen should be responsible to assist students and support education.

1   2   3   4

Head Start programs should be available for all eligible 3- and 4-year olds.

1   2   3   4

Preschool programs should be available in all school districts.

1   2   3   4

All children should have a personal mentor available to assist them.

1   2   3   4

Step 3: Develop A Strategy

Specify Goals
Evaluate the Context for Change
Set Specific Benchmarks or Milestones
List Organizational Considerations
Describe Allies and Opponents
Identify Change Agents
Develop Action Steps
Use a Strategy Chart

Once the team has developed a community consensus around the issues it hopes to address, it is time to develop a strategy. For many issues there will be significant institutional barriers to any change you hope to initiate. A strategy can help the community team overcome those barriers. A strategy chart is included at the end of this section. It can be used to map out the various elements of your strategy, from planning the overall campaign to planning for action on individual issues.

SPECIFY GOALS

It is important to start the strategy session by listing the long-term goals of the campaign. These goals may be one or more of the National Education Goals, or they may be similar goals tailored to your community. One of the long-term goals of every campaign should be to build an organization that will foster a community commitment to continuously improving the education system. Think about how other goals contribute to building the organization.

The goals will drive the strategy. They will help establish priorities. Since financial resources, leadership, and energy are often limited, it's not a bad idea to get in the habit of setting priorities to increase your chances of success. Goals also will provide a focus for examination of the current community context.

EVALUATE THE CONTEXT FOR CHANGE

In developing your strategy it is important to evaluate the context for educational change in your community. This will mean gathering information about the current educational system and other systems that support education (law enforcement, health care, employment training, etc.), the existing procedures for making changes within the system, and the general demographics of your community (data on graduation rates, reform initiatives that are currently in place, etc.).

It will also be important to understand the state and national context for reform. The federal government and the governments of many states have been very active on education reform in recent

years. Make sure to take advantage of the opportunities that recent legislation has created, and be aware of the limitations.

Think of the goals- and standards-based reform campaign as a house-building project. When a house is built on a plot of land, one of the first tasks is to survey the area and determine the best place to lay a foundation. To build a solid goals- and standards-based reform campaign, it is also important to know where to put the foundation.

If your community is focusing on standards-based reform of K-12 schools, include the following as part of describing the context:
* Copies of the proposed national content standards for various subjects. (See the Resource Directory for who to call.)

* Copies of standards documents developed by your state department of education or by the local district administration.

* Information about who within your school district has done work on standards. Make sure to include these educators as part of your community discussion.

SET SPECIFIC BENCHMARKS OR MILESTONES

Benchmarks or milestones are the incremental steps that will move the community towards the long-term goals. The benchmarks should be specific, achievable, and results-oriented. If adult illiteracy is an important problem in your community, and reaching a 100% literacy rate is the long-term goal, set a benchmark of increasing the literate adult population by a certain percentage. These milestones or benchmarks will serve as checkpoints on the journey toward reforming the system.

Elements of Systemic Reform of K-12
(Adapted from the State Goals 2000 Action Plan)

1. **Teaching and learning, standards and assessments.** What are we doing to raise expectations for every child? Are we improving the curriculum, instructional materials, professional development, student assessment, use of technology, and more? Is our state developing high standards in core subjects, and are our improvements in teaching and learning directed at helping all children reach those high standards? Are we creating time for teachers to share ideas?

2. **Opportunity-to-learn standards or strategies and program improvement accountability.** Are all our students getting quality instruction? Do all our teachers participate in quality professional development? Are all our schools safe, disciplined, and drug-free? How do we help low-performing schools?

3. **Technology.** How are our teachers and students using technologies? What is our plan for helping them use technologies more powerfully? Is our planning related to technology integral to, and integrated with, our work to move all children toward high academic standards?

4. **Governance, accountability, and management of schools.** Does each school have the authority and capacity to make its own decisions about staffing, budgets, and other issues? Does each school have strong leadership? Does our school district have a coherent system for attracting, recruiting, preparing and licensing, evaluating, rewarding, retaining, and supporting teachers, administrators, and other school staff? Is this system tied to high academic standards? Do we provide incentives for students, teachers, and schools to work hard and reach high levels of performance? Are we encouraging schools to seek waivers from rules and regulations that stand in the way of excellence?

5. **Parent and community support and involvement.** Are we taking steps to help families so that all children enter school ready to learn? Are we improving communication between school and home? Are we creating a "whole community" partnership to improve teaching and learning? Are we enlisting partners throughout the community_grandparents and senior citizens, employers and volunteer groups, libraries and community colleges, churches and media, social service agencies and law enforcement, and others? Are we reporting regularly to the community about our progress?

6. **Making improvements system-wide.** Are we encouraging innovation_and making time for planning it_in every school? Are we providing opportunities for all teachers and school staff to learn and continuously improve instruction? Are there vehicles by which teachers and principals can share ideas and models_newsletters, computer networks, and conferences?

7. **Promoting grass-roots efforts.** Does our local school district respond to the needs and experiences of parents, teachers, students, business leaders, and other community members?

8. **Dropout strategies.** What are we doing to help all schools become places where learning is meaningful, and where all students feel they belong? Do we reach out to students who have left school, and invite them to earn their diploma through a range of educational options?

9. **Creating a coordinated education and training system.** Does our community have programs to help students make the transition from school to work? Are these programs designed to provide participating students with multiple career options (i.e., immediate employment in a high-wage, high-skill, career-oriented job; further education and training; or postsecondary education at a four-year institution)? Do these programs hold participating students to the same high academic standards called for in Goals 2000? Are these programs built around a multi-year sequence of learning at work sites and at school_learning that is connected and coordinated?

LIST ORGANIZATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Before deciding on the action steps to meet milestones or benchmarks, your team will need to assess the help and resources available to achieve them. Having a firm understanding of organizational considerations is an important part of laying the foundation for reform. It also might help your team identify barriers to reform.

Be specific about the resources the organization has to offer.   This includes money, time, facilities, supplies, etc. The final section of this guide has a section on *Developing Organizational Resources* which addresses some ways to expand organizational resources.

It is also important to be aware of organizational limitations.   For example, if all of the members of the organization work full-time, your team would not want to choose action steps that required daytime activities.

DESCRIBE ALLIES AND OPPONENTS

There may be other organizations in the community that share part of your organization's goals. These allies may be unwilling to focus all of their organizational resources on the goals you have developed, but still could contribute to the effort.   Allies may include the local PTA or the Chamber of Commerce.   Look to the same groups from which you sought your leadership team to serve as allies for various aspects of your campaign.   Ask the following questions: Who cares about this issue? Who wins when our goals are met? List these allies and, when appropriate, seek their assistance. Being aware of allies can also prevent duplication of effort.

On the other hand, there may be people or organizations in the community who will oppose the reforms you are attempting to institute.   Some of these opponents simply may not understand the goals of the campaign.   Others will persist in their opposition.   Before your organization takes any action, you will need to anticipate the potential reaction of opponents.   List your opponents and what your success might mean to them.   Refer to the *Troubleshooting* section for suggestions on how to deal with opposition.

IDENTIFY CHANGE AGENTS

Change agents are people who _ through their actions, behavior, attitudes, or opinions _ can help achieve the community goals.   One change agent could be the superintendent of schools because she or he has the power to institute a district-wide policy to include community members in the standards-development process.   Another change agent could be a member of the school board because she or he will cast the deciding vote on whether or not the school district will devote resources to improving technology. A third change agent could be parents of elementary school children who have a significant effect on academic achievement through the expectations they communicate to their children.

Change agents are not usually institutions. Institutions are made up of people, and institutions change only if the people that are a part of them change. If it seems that your change agent should be the school district administration, then you need to figure out who within the school district administration actually has the power over the decisions your team is interested in effecting. Identifying a change agent really translates into analyzing who has power over the decisions your organization hopes to effect.

DEVELOP ACTION STEPS

Action steps are the things that your organization and your allies will do to create the desired changes in the actions, behavior, attitudes, or opinions of the change agent(s).   These action steps should be geared towards a particular change agent and they should be possible given particular organizational considerations.   Action steps can include things like proposing a resolution at the school board meeting, instituting a program that brings parents into the classroom, or writing a series of editorials for the local paper.   When developing action steps, take advantage of the creativity and the diversity of the people involved in the effort.

By understanding the stages people go through as they learn about an issue, thinking about the consequences of taking action, and deciding what should be done, you can significantly increase the success of your action steps. Action steps are designed to create a change in actions, behavior, attitudes, or opinions. The Public Agenda Foundation has developed a framework for thinking about how opinions and decisions lead to real action. This framework is described in detail in the *Guide to Getting Out Your Message*. The steps that people go through are listed below:

*   Awareness. It will be important to design action steps that allow people to begin to become aware of and understand the issues _ but people who are simply aware will need more help before they are able to adopt and make decisions about goals for education.

*   Urgency. People need to feel a sense of urgency before they begin to think about their choices and make decisions.

*   Looking for Answers.   When people believe that the schools in their own community are inadequate, they will search for ways to improve them. They will begin to convert their free-floating concern about the need to do something into proposals for action. This might be the time to hold a community meeting.

*   Resistance. This will be the most difficult stage. The public will be reluctant to face the trade-offs that come from choosing a specific plan of action.   Resistance is heightened when people feel excluded from decision-making on matters that affect their lives. The *Troubleshooting* section includes suggestions on how to deal with this stage.

*   Weighing the Choices.   When people have moved beyond initial resistance to change, they begin to weigh their choices rationally, balancing the pros and cons of the alternatives. At this stage, people should feel they have a reason to make a choice. This decision- making process can succeed if the pros and cons of a plan are clear, and if people feel that   they are making decisions on plans they helped develop.

*   Intellectual Acceptance and Full Acc eptance. In these final stages, people will undergo a basic change in attitudes. They will understand the need for adopting programs to meet the National Education Goals, but still will put their own needs and desires before those of the community. Over time, they should be able to reflect on the benefits to the overall community of implementing the Goals. Be patient and wait for people to come to terms with your goals-based programs.

USE A STRATEGY CHART

A Strategy Chart is an important tool that can be used to map out the various aspects of a Community Action Plan. A blank strategy chart has been included as a handout at the end of this section for your team to use in the action planning process.

CASE STUDY: Allegheny Policy Council Strategy Chart

This sample strategy chart demonstrates how the Allegheny Policy Council might fill out the chart. It takes one of the four objectives identified at the Allegheny Community meeting as a long term goal_providing technology for students.

Goals

Long-Term Goal: Provide more technology for our students.

Milestones

Medium-Term: Ensure that every high school math class has a full class set of graphing calculators.

Short-Term: Include graphing calculators in the School District budget for next year.

Organizational Considerations

We have a lot of time, but not a lot of money.

Several members have personal computers at home that they are willing to use to make fliers, etc.

One of our members is a math teacher who has some experience working with the school district budgeting process.

Allies *and Opponents*

Allies: High school students who don't have calculators, and their parents. Their math teachers. The local math teachers organization. Business leaders from the local Hewlett Packard plant.

Opponents: A group of parents who believe that calculators in the classroom keep students from learning how to do basic math. This group has organized on other

educational issues before. District personnel who would like to use the money for something else.

Change Agents

School district math curriculum specialist who usually drafts the budget requests for the high school math departments of the district.

The chair of the school board has been willing to support technology budget items in the past but is sympathetic to the parents who oppose the use of calculators in the classroom. her position usually carries budget item votes at school board meetings.

Action Steps

1.   Set up a meeting with the Math curriculum specialist to gauge her support for this measure. Request that she include graphing calculators as part of her budget proposal.

2.   Meet with the chair of the school board to determine her position on the issue. Ask to put the issue of funding graphing calculators on the School Board agenda.

3.   Seek the assistance of the local math teachers association to ensure supportive math teachers attend the school board meeting when they will vote on this issue.

4.   Get the president of Hewlett Packard to write the chair of the school board a letter supporting the proposal.

5.   Get several members of the organization to draft editorials to appear in the local paper the week before the school board meeting.

Strategy Chart
Goals

What are the long-term goals of the campaign?
Remember that building your organization is always one of the long-term goals.

Milestones
What are the steps to get you to your goals?

Organizational Considerations

List the resources your organization has to offer including: money, time, facilities, supplies, etc.

List the ways you want to strengthen your organization through this campaign.

List your organizational limitations.

Allies & Opponents

To describe allies and supporters, answer these questions:

Who has a stake in this issue?

Who gains when we accomplish our goals?

Which organizations are concerned with education?

List the useful resources of your supporters.

To describe opponents answer these questions:

Who would loose if your effort succeeds?

Who might be afraid your effort will challenge their agenda?

List the resources of your opponents.

Change Agents

Who through their actions, behavior, attitudes or opinions can achieve your objectives? Remember change agents are usually people not institutions.

Action Steps

For each change agent, list the action steps your organization and your allies will take to create the desire changes in his or her actions, behavior, attitudes or opinions.

Step 4:
Implement The Plan And Evaluate The Results

Create a Timeline
Measure Results

CREATE A TIMELINE

Remember to set a timeline for achieving your short- and long-term goals. It is critical that realistic dates be assigned to measurable and achievable goals.

MEASURE RESULTS

It is critical to set determinants for measuring the success of the objectives and action steps. It is one thing to declare support for the National Education Goals and announce that your community will adopt a goals- and standards-based reform process; it is quite another to hold yourself accountable for success.   Local communities can and should produce goals reports _ scorecards of where their effort is succeeding and where it still faces obstacles. For your effort to be taken seriously, and to keep you focused on results, you will have to show that you are aiming at real, achievable objectives.

Keeping the community informed on a regular basis will ensure that citizens maintain an interest in seeing the effort succeed and are able to track progress. In addition, any documented achievements can spur more reluctant participants into action.

You can use as a model the reports produced every year by the National Education Goals Panel. These reports provide data on the progress toward achieving the National Education Goals and goals in individual states. For example, on the goal of making all schools safe, disciplined, and drug-free, the report measures the number of high school students who reported using marijuana, cocaine, or alcohol. On the goal of readiness for school, the report measures indicators such as child health and nutrition data and numbers of disabled children in preschool programs. For assistance in developing a local goals report, refer to the *Handbook for Local Goals Reporting*, a step-by-step guide in this kit.

Case Study of Lehigh Valley 2000

How One Community is Reporting Progress

The Task Force

In late 1991, the Lehigh Valley 2000 Business-Education Partnership established a Community Report Card task force and charged it with developing a reporting process that would track the community progress in attaining both the National Education Goals and the community goals. The task force, consisting of more than sixty volunteers representing a diverse community base, joined the partnership effort. Realizing that education is a joint responsibility and a lifelong process, the team centered its approach on engaging the entire community in the educational process, rather than just the school systems. To that end, the task force identified eight stakeholders who were customers and suppliers of education: parents, students, teachers, schools, higher education, community organizations, business, and industry.

Data Gathering

The task force decided that, to the extent possible, objective data would need to be gathered (e.g., how many times a week do you spend talking with your child about school-related events), so that the community report card would be based on fact, and not subjective judgment. The task force also felt strongly about using indicators that were directional _ that is, if there was an increase or decrease on a particular indicator, it was clear whether the change was positive or negative. Finally, the task force recognized the importance of keeping a large percentage of the questions constant (realizing, however, that some fine-tuning may be necessary for clarification, or new questions added in the future) so that progress could be measured over time.

With the *Handbook for Local Goals Reports* serving as a principal resource, the task force began to generate "key questions" (for examples of key questions asked by the Goals Panel, please refer to each National Education Goal chapter in the *Handbook for Local Goals Reporting*). Seven surveys were developed _ each tailored to address issues of concern to each stakeholder group and centered around the National Education Goals and those goals specific to the Lehigh Valley community. For example, teachers were asked about adequacy of training, student completion of homework, and disruptions in the classroom; parents were asked how often they talk with teachers about their child's performance; whether they provide certain "learning resources" at home, such as a dictionary, encyclopedia, magazines, newspapers, and books; and how much time they spend with their child discussing school events. Students were asked about homework, how much they do and how often they do it; they also were asked whether they felt challenged at school, how much TV they watch, and how much they read for fun. Certain questions were asked of all groups, including, "Are today's students and graduates being adequately prepared for employment, citizenship, and responsibilities of adulthood?"

The Results

Nearly 9,000 surveys were distributed in late 1992.   Some of the results included:

* 27 percent of the teachers surveyed responded that they frequently deal with verbal abuse and discipline issues.

* Only 35 percent believe that they received excellent training in teaching techniques.

* Six out of ten parents reported limiting the number of hours their children watch TV, while 95 percent reported listening to their children's work and school experiences.

* Two-thirds of students reported that other students' misbehavior interferes with their ability to learn.   Nearly one-fourth reported that threats or injuries by other students affected their ability to learn.

* More than one-third of parents and 60 percent of higher educatio n institutions believed that students were adequately prepared for employment, citizenship, and responsibilities of adulthood.   However, only one out of ten community organizations and business and industry groups reported these same beliefs.

"Responses to the survey have driven the creation of our community report card," says chair of the task force, Janet Stainbrook.   "It has provided us with a snapshot of the community's perceptions of where we are, and where we need to go.   We have perceptions of its education system _ many believe ours is fine, it's the other communities that need improvement.   We expect the report card to be a vehicle to get the entire community involved in our education system and allow for communication to expand among our stakeholders."

(For more information on the process, the data gathering, and the results, please contact Lehigh Valley 2000 at (610) 954-0330.)

Community Organizing Tips

If you are ready to begin the process of improving education in your community, don't forget the following:

Identify a Leadership Team.
The first step on the road to improving education in your community is a group of committed people saying, "We can do better for our community and our kids." Pick members for your leadership team who have the time and energy to stick with the task.

Develop a Common Vision.
Use the National Education Goals as a framework to help you decide what needs to be done in your community.

Hold a Community Meeting.
You need to get the whole community involved in developing and implementing activities.

Conduct Surveys.
Surveys can do more than help you gather information, they can also build community ownership of reform.

Set Goals for your Community.
Make sure your campaign is about winning concrete victories so that it does not die after an initial push for recognition.

Develop a Strategy.
Without a plan for accomplishing your goals, you will lose momentum quickly.

Implement the Plan and Evaluate the Results.
Find out where your schools and community stand on meeting the National Education Goals.

Keep Up the Momentum.
While coalition-building, town meetings, and a local goals report are important, attaining the goals and meeting standards will require a long-term effort.

Key Organizing Techniques

Developing Organizational Resources
Troubleshooting

DEVELOPING ORGANIZATIONAL RESOURCES

   Restructuring your schools will require a long-term commitment. This means building a real support network and continuous work to expand your organizational base.

Sustaining Momentum

You can expand on your initial efforts through the following initiatives:

* Form partnerships. Bring together several complementary efforts or programs so that they can share resources and build on each other's strengths.
* Secure extra time and resource commitments.
* Develop networks to communicate with other National Education Goals community programs in your state and across the country.
* Develop a process to help other communities adopt your goals programs.
* Ask the local newspaper, radio, and television stations to run stories about community goals programs.
* Get members of your team to talk to groups in the community about goals programs.
* Hold more community goals meetings to solicit input from community members on how programs are doing and what remains to be done.

Expanding Your Base of Support

Cast a wide net for potential supporters. Focus on what they can do for your goals campaign, as well as what they might get out of becoming active partners. What kind of influence do they wield over the system and the important players? How will their involvement benefit students, teachers, and administrators?

You might construct a checklist for people who are just starting to engage in the reform effort. The list should reveal what attributes each would bring to your campaign. At the same time, you can use it to remind your potential supporter how he or she can be helpful. Providing potential supporters with a checklist of activities they can explore on their own can open the door for greater participation

later.   Begin with the most obvious groups: educators, businesses, and parents. Then move on to the next phase, exploring some less obvious possibilities.

The following sample checklists for educators, business leaders, and parents are only the tip of the iceberg of what these community members can do to support education reform. However, for the community member who has not completely committed to your reform effort, these lists may be an important first step.

Educators' Checklist

Educators are closest to the students in the academic environment. They have the best sense of what is needed to improve education. They can:

*   Set clearly defined standards for what they expect their students to know in each class.

*   Establish a Goals Action Committee in their school made up of key teachers and
          administrators.

*   Examine the evolution of their personal expectations for students. Have their
          standards risen or fallen?   Would a student's work that earned a "B" years earlier receive
          a better or worse grade today?

*   Work with other staff members to develop interdisciplinary curriculum that is aligned
          with the National Education Goals and Standards. An English teacher might think of
          creative ways to include science in the curriculum.

*   Make school more relevant for students by inviting local business leaders into their classes
to explain how they use their education in the workplace, why a high school diploma is critical to
finding a good job, and what they look for in hiring new employees.

Business and Labor Leaders' Checklist

American business and labor participation is vital to Goals- and standards-based reform. Governors and planning committees can suggest ideas, but no sector of society has greater potential energy in this crusade than the business and labor communities. Business and labor can make the goals work by building community support, helping to measure effectiveness, and defining required workforce skills that could be matched to academic achievement targets.

How can business and labor leaders implement the National Education Goals? They can:

*   Spread information about the Goals throughout their corporate communities _ starting with teaching their employees/union members what they can do to help their children attain the Goals.
*   Form coalitions with other businesses, schools, and community organizations to involve them in local goals- and standards-based efforts community-wide.
*   Identify the skills and knowledge businesses require of workers; work with local education agencies to ensure that these skills are incorporated into the content standards.
*   Work with other business and labor leaders to develop a school-to-work transition program for high school age students.
*   Start a mentor program where employees work with students.
*   Lend employees to the local school district to teach classes in their area of expertise once each month.
*   Facilitate challenging teacher training programs.
*   Ask to see grades, work portfolios, and other progress reports when interviewing potential employees.
*   Donate computers, televisions, VCRs, satellite dishes, and other materials to schools.
*   Allow flexibility for employees who are parents to attend conferences and other events at their children's schools.

Parents' Checklist

Parents are vital to a Goals- and standards-based reform campaign. Parents can:

* Spend at least half an hour of personal time every day talking with their children about his or her accomplishments, plans, and worries, without distractions like the TV or radio.

* Make homework a priority. They might consider keeping the television off until all homework has been done, or requiring their children to post the night's assignments on the refrigerator for review.

* Explain to their children the reasons why drugs are unacceptable.

* Think of activities around the home to do with their children that are related to their children's schoolwork or skills their children are learning in school.

Parents of preschool-age children can also:
* Make sure their children have received all of the appropriate vaccinations and health care to arrive at school with healthy minds and bodies.

* Give their children a balanced and nutritious diet.

* Consider preschool options in their area. Low-cost alternatives are available through Head   Start and many local churches, synagogues, and civic organizations.

Parents of grade-school children can also:
* Get library cards for their children.

* Regularly touch base with their children's teachers to monitor their children's progress and get ideas for how they can support their children's work.

Parents of high school students can also:
* Find out from their district office how their children's school compares academically to others in their area and whether it is improving or worsening and why.

* Push their children to take the most difficult classes offered.

* Encourage their children to sign up for extracurricular programs and classes and limit after-school jobs.

Other Sources of Support

Potential allies for your effort are everywhere. They include universities, professional and civic organizations, religious institutions, and trade unions. Consult the resource directory in this handbook for other leads.

Also, do not overlook other goals- and standards-based reform campaigns as a source of information and support. School officials and community leaders in Edmonds, Washington; San Antonio, Texas; Omaha, Nebraska; Bangor, Maine; and hundreds of other municipalities can offer their assistance. Consult the Resource Directory for other names and organizations.

Identifying Financial Resources

As you begin your search for funding, remember the federal government. With its passage of the comprehensive *Goals 2000: Educate America Act,* Congress has made it easier for communities to restructure education. What's more, the legislation takes a big-picture view of education that goes beyond the traditional K-12 focus of past administrations. Education is defined as a process that begins in early childhood and continues to adulthood through lifelong learning situations. It emphasizes the connections between preschool, school, and work.

If your state participates in Goals 2000, your community can compete for funds to help you accomplish your ambitious agenda. The most competitive plans will provide long-term efforts to establish an education goals process and move children to higher levels of achievement.

Much of the federal money will be spent at the school level. The funds will support school restructuring to accomplish high academic standards for students through better teaching techniques, improved textbooks, parent and community involvement, better use of technology, and extended career training for teachers.

In addition, the *School-To-Work Opportunities Act* provides grants to states and communities for school-to-work transition activities.

Other possible resources for funding abound. In communities across the country, business coalitions have donated time, money, and expertise to school restructuring projects.

In Cincinnati, for example, the Cincinnati Business Committee has been an indispensable ally of the schools. In 1979 the Cincinnati, Ohio, district declared bankruptcy and closed down the schools for 15 days. With the help of the business partnership, the district inched its way back into solvency. The committee contributed 90 percent of the funds necessary to support 12 tax levy campaigns, 10 of which were successful. The committee also issued a critical audit of the schools' operations, which has resulted in a major restructuring of the central office, the development of a professional teaching academy, and numerous other reforms.

You may find that organizations like the Cincinnati Business Committee also exist in your region. Perhaps all they need is an invitation and a strong reason to join your effort.

TROUBLESHOOTING

You are likely to face opposition any time you try to introduce change into a community. Therefore, as you work to get your community to adopt a Goals- and standards-based reform campaign, some people will be resistant. Their concerns may be based on confusion over what goals and standards are. Or they may be satisfied with the current state of learning in your community.

Following are tips on how to explain the National Education Goals and standards, and how to build your community goals campaign to involve everybody, including those who may not be committed to reforming education. For a fuller description of the relevance of the National Education Goals and the standards-based reform movement for improving education in your community, please see the *Guide to Goals and Standards* booklet in the Toolkit.

Tip 1:Know The Facts

   For example, be clear about what you mean when you describe standards.   Vague descriptions can cause people to lose interest or misinterpret your intentions.   Standards are levels of performance that specify what students should know and be able to do. They are a way of measuring progress toward achieving the goals. Unlike minimum competency standards, which usually just ask the student to pass a simplistic test, the standards set for the National Education Goals expect high performance and advanced knowledge. They define the meaning of success so that all students will know what they are expected to learn. The development of standards is still a work in progress at all levels _ national, state, and local. For definitions of many of the other terms of the debate, see the Glossary of Terms at the end of the *Resource Directory.*

Tip 2:Give Everyone A Role

   Successfully turning your hometown schools into ones that have targeted goals and high standards means ensuring that everybody has a voice in the process. Not everybody has to share your views. Be sensitive to the concerns of your opponents. Talk about what offends them and address their issues. If you listen to their criticism, you can use it to strengthen your Community Action Plan.

Tip 3:Avoid Loaded Words And Phrases

Words and phrases like "outcomes," "outcome-based education," "self-esteem," and "attitudes" may mean different things to certain groups of people. Remember, if you stick to clear, concrete terms that everyone comprehends, not only will you be better understood, you may also avoid serious conflict down the road.

Tip 4:Keep Your Perspective

Opposition may come from only a small part of the community. Balance their concerns appropriately and reinforce the fact that the National Education Goals have widespread support. You might think of inviting opponents into the schools to let them see for themselves how your community action plan is improving education.

Tip 5:Explain That This Is More Than A Fad

People may express concern about the National Education Goals because they have seen education reforms come and go far too many times. Explain that your community goals process is not the "next fad" in education that will disappear when something else comes along. The National Education Goals were developed by and have the support of a bipartisan group, including the nation's governors, President Bill Clinton, and former President George Bush. The Goals are a national framework for constructive reform at the local level.

Tip 6:Beware Of The One-Size-Fits-All Argument

Reassure your opposition that the National Education Goals, the framework for your community's education reform effort, are not trying to establish a national curriculum for all schools. The Goals acknowledge that changes in education cannot be carried out through a national "one-size-fits-all" program. The Goals confront national concerns about education by providing a framework for communities to implement using many different local solutions. When a state or community adopts a Goals- and standards-based process, it adapts the National Education Goals to local needs.

Likewise, the National Education Goals do not seek to take over parental responsibilities or undermine local control of schools. A community goals campaign invites parents to become a part of local efforts to help their children achieve.

Tip 7:Establish Achievable Milestones

   People may be resistant to adopting a community-based goals- and standards-based reform campaign because they do not believe that the community will actually make progress toward reaching the goals. That is why it is important to establish milestones that are achievable and measurable. When your community decides how to adapt the National Education Goals in a local plan, everybody should agree on how they will be able to "see" change.   For example, if your community wants to reduce violence in schools, you could chart changes in the number of acts of vandalism.

Tip 8:Remember the Equity Issue

Confront concerns about the even handedness of a goals-based reform campaign.   The National Education Goals aim to lift the academic achievement of all students. Every child will be expected to meet higher standards. No students will be denied the opportunity to learn. Students who learn their lessons quickly can go on to more advanced concepts that will better prepare them for the next lesson. Students who need more help will get it. The bottom line is: students who have not been achieving will achieve; those students who have been achieving will achieve more.

Tip 9:Ask for Help

   There are many national, regional, and local groups that can help guide your efforts. They have strategies that work, materials to use, and experience to lend. See the *Resource Directory* for lists of groups and background reading materials.

Case Study of Edmonds, Washington: A Community Conversation about Education

The Edmonds School District in Washington successfully took on the challenge of education goals- and standards-based reform by making its effort as inclusive as possible. The district invited everyone to share ideas about student learning.

Edmonds school officials began the process with a district-wide mailer asking residents to contribute to the discussion. The mailer included a timeline explaining the process of reforming education and detailing how community members could participate at each phase. Sylvia Soholt, who works in Edmonds' planning and community relations division, says they deliberately chose a process involving multiple drafts of each phase because "it gives the message that you are open to change."

At the first meeting, the discussion focused on student achievement and learning. Participants drafted a list of the skills and academic studies they wanted for their students and then sent the draft to the entire community. The text was not presented as a writ from the school district, but rather as "this is what your neighbors said students should learn and be able to do."

By sending the draft to everybody in the community, the school district was able to deflect charges of being exclusive. District officials carefully documented the originator of each idea to demonstrate that the plan was developed by the community, not by school officials.

In a meeting to discuss the first draft, some raised religious doubts about the reform effort. They said they feared the schools would take charge of rearing children, teaching non-Christian values instead of improving academic skills. Some suggested that computers would monitor and mold children into automatons.

Faced with these objections, the superintendent, Brian L. Benzel, knew he could not just dismiss the criticisms as misguided. He felt that the school district needed to clarify the purpose behind the reform effort before releasing a second draft of the document. Benzel approached Edmonds' ministers and invited them to a meeting on the education reform efforts.

At the meeting, the superintendent addressed the expressed fears and explained what the reform movement was really trying to do. He said he believed that they misunderstood the district's intentions, but thought their concerns were important. He let the ministers talk about education. They all agreed that education needed to be improved and that it was important to define student skills.

In the course of the conversation, it became clear that the religious community was not walking lockstep against reform. Reform meant something different to each minister. It appeared that the ministers simply wanted to be part of the debate. As a result of this positive meeting, they carried the message back to their congregations that the school reformers were willing to listen and be inclusive.

Following these meetings, the school district made revisions that incorporated the objections and reflected the concerns of the whole community. The district removed confusing jargon from the draft. For example, people had objected to defining "critical thinking" as a skill _ they believed it suggested that children should be taught to be critical of their parents. So the second draft defined "thinking and problem-solving" as the ability to "think creatively and develop innovative ideas and solutions" and to "think critically and make independent judgments."

To address the concern that the district was stressing some skills over others, it developed a poster depicting the skills and abilities a student needs as a "tapestry of learning," where all the elements have equal importance and are woven together.

The school district is now moving to the next step. They are creating assessment tools to measure the standards they have developed, using the same strategy of full community involvement.

(For more information contact Sylvia Soholt (206) 670-7044 at the Edmonds School District.)