

# **THE STRATEGIC PLAN OF THE PUBLIC EDUCATION FOUNDATION**

## **FOREWORD**

In the winter of 2011, the Public Education Foundation began a strategic planning process to define what it needed to do to maximize its ability to improve our public schools.

As the planning began, it became clear that PEF's strategic plan had to be grounded in the extraordinary circumstances surrounding public education today at the national, state and local levels.

So, we began our planning with a comprehensive review of the current public education environment. We call it, "A moment in time."

PEF Board and staff members, with assistance from Education First, a nationally respected consulting firm, gathered extensive comments and input from local, state, and national leaders involved in public education and public education reform.

The analysis of the environment surrounding public education today and the extensive input from others resulted in a new approach to our work as well as new mission, belief and vision statements and the identification of four core areas for PEF's path forward. Together they form the backbone of PEF's new strategic plan.

PEF's new strategic plan was unanimously approved by its board of directors in December, 2011.

## A moment in time

Our community is at a crossroads. Where we go from here will define our collective future and determine if we become the place we've always dreamed of being.

Over the last five years, an extraordinary group of large companies has moved to our region: Volkswagen, Wacker, Amazon. Lots of small companies like Tricycle, Access America Transport, Smart Furniture have sprung up as well. Several of our largest employers—Alstom, Blue Cross Blue Shield, Chattem, Unum, -- have doubled down on our region and expanded their offices and their staffs. This growth sets the stage for amazing job opportunities and economic vitality—as long as these firms can attract and hire the skilled workforce they need.

During this same period, major changes have begun in Tennessee's public schools. In 2009, Governor Bredesen led an effort that dramatically raised our academics standards. Tennessee went from having some of the lowest standards in the country to having some of the highest. In 2010, our legislature passed a set of bold new laws that require all teachers and all principals be evaluated every year and ensured that student achievement—how much students learn-- counts for half of those evaluations. The higher standards and the increased accountability helped Tennessee become one of only two states in the nation to win a first-round Race to the Top grant. Ultimately, Tennessee's award was, by far, the largest per capita grant and provides half a billion dollars of support for a series of deep reforms.

Locally, our schools have also made some solid progress. Our lowest performing elementary schools posted dramatic gains and were featured in a host of national reports. Our high schools increased their graduation rates-- and the number of students going on to college grew significantly. Our middle schools have recently made sizeable gains. Our students now exceed the state average in math.

Now, a simple question remains: will we seize the moment? Will we capitalize on the economic opportunities and the on-going school reform in our community—and do so in a way that brings a true renaissance for our region? Or will we let this opportunity slip away?

At Public Education Foundation, we believe that our community must seize this moment. We believe that there is nothing more important to our community's future than strengthening our public schools. PEF is an independent, non-profit, community based organization that, for twenty-five years, has worked in partnership with Hamilton County Schools. We provide training, research, and resources to teachers, principals, and schools. Our mission is simple: to increase student achievement so all students succeed in learning and in life.

Over the last five years, we worked closely with the district on projects that yielded quantifiable progress in Hamilton County's high schools, middle schools, and high poverty elementary schools. PEF and the district also worked together to launch a "teacher residency" program that is now training a new generation of math and science teachers. During these five years, PEF also merged with another community organization so that we could dramatically increase the support that students get as they

apply to college. We also partnered with the school district, the Greater Chattanooga Area Chamber of Commerce, and University of Tennessee at Chattanooga to create an academy that trains aspiring principals. We are fiercely proud of what we've accomplished over the last half-decade, yet we also recognize that much more needs to be done.

In the winter of 2011, we began to develop a strategic plan for what we will do to improve our schools over the next five years. In the pages ahead, we describe our goals for the future. As you will see, we have identified four core areas of work. Each of these core areas builds on the success we've had as well as the lessons we've learned when things haven't gone as well as we had hoped.

In the next five years, we plan to expand the training we provide to principals. We will continue our work with aspiring principals, and we want to provide more support for rookie and veteran principals. Their jobs are exceedingly difficult, yet they rarely get opportunities to learn cutting edge best practices and new ways of doing things. We also plan to expand the training we provide directly to teachers. In the past, we've worked broadly with schools—for example, we've provided grants to schools so that they could bring in trainers who work with all their teachers at once. In this next body of work, we want to use fewer trainers and work more closely with our community's best teachers. We want to build networks of great teachers who will train their colleagues. We also want to work directly and intensely with groups of teachers facing similar challenges—first year teachers, teachers whose students speak Spanish at home, teachers whose students are economically disadvantaged.

We plan to expand our programs that help students apply to college and develop programs that help students who want to go into the workforce or into apprenticeships or certification programs right after graduating from high school. We also want to work collaboratively with the business community to ensure that both groups of students—those going to college and those going directly to work—have the math and science skills they need to excel in the many new and existing local companies that demand these skills.

Finally, we want to build our community's understanding of and support for public schools. We believe that the only way to improve our schools is for the public to better understand the challenges schools face and support their improvement.

We have ambitious goals. To accomplish them will require great focus, great energy, and great support. We hope you'll join us in this work!

## How this strategic plan was created

This strategic plan benefited from an enormous amount of time, energy, and thought from more than 1,000 people - principals, teachers, national and community leaders as well as the board and staff of Public Education Foundation.

Work on this plan began in January of 2011 and continued full throttle through August. PEF hired Education First to lead the planning process; Education First is a nationally respected consulting firm that led Tennessee's successful effort to win a Race to the Top grant. The planning process was overseen by a committee of PEF's board and senior staff. Key elements of the process included:

- Benchmarking what the most respected Local Education Funds, school reform organizations, and national foundations had done in the last five years and were planning to do in the decade to come. This work included personal interviews with the executive director of more than two dozen of these leading organizations.
- Interviewing more than sixty leaders from our community. PEF board and staff members conducted private interviews with a wide array of our community's business, civic, and philanthropic leaders as well elected officials at the state, county, and local level.
- Surveying principals, teachers, and central office staff from Hamilton County schools. In April of 2011, Public Education Foundation sent out a six page survey with five open-ended questions to more than 3000 employees of Hamilton County Schools. We received more than 1000 responses. Their answers were tabulated and analyzed and their written comments—which numbered over 5,000—were read by every member of PEF's staff.
- Analyzing and discussing PEF's work. Our board and staff spent many hours reviewing the data, what we had done, what had worked, and what hadn't worked over the last ten years.
- Developing goals, strategies, a work plans, a five year budget, and a new organizational chart. Based on meetings of PEF's Board, Strategic Planning Committee, and staff, we drafted all these elements during the summer and early fall of 2011.

In September, 2011, PEF's Board reviewed a draft of this plan and recommended several changes. Senior members of PEF staff spent much of the subsequent fall polishing the plan and discussing it with key community leaders. At its December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2011 meeting, Public Education Foundation's Board of Directors unanimously approved the document you hold in your hands. We welcome your comments, your suggestions, and, most of all, your support.

## **Our Mission**

The Public Education Foundation's mission is to improve student achievement in public schools through highly effective teaching, strong leadership, and strategic partnerships so that children succeed in learning and in life.

## **Our Beliefs**

- All children are curious and eager to learn and will succeed at very high levels when held to the highest expectations, taught with a rigorous curriculum, and nurtured in welcoming schools, engaging classrooms, and supportive communities.
- All schools must have visionary leaders and skillful teachers, who, in turn, must have on-going training and support.
- High performing schools succeed on the assessments required by state government but they are not focused exclusively on test scores; high performing schools also provide skills, experiences, and relationships that help students succeed in their career, their community, and their life.
- Creating and sustaining high performing schools demands the support of an entire community.

## **Our Vision**

From 2012 to 2016, our children will dramatically improve their level of academic achievement. More and more of our children will surpass Tennessee's new, rigorous learning standards, and virtually all of our young people will graduate from high school. A large majority of these graduates will enroll in a wide array of colleges and universities, where they will excel and earn a degree. The students who do not go on to college will graduate from high school well prepared for the many new jobs and careers that have come to our community during a period that will be known, in retrospect, as our region's renaissance. This extraordinary progress will be fueled and sustained by outstanding principals and teachers who benefit significantly from effective, focused professional training and wide spread assistance from a community that appreciates and supports its public schools. The Public Education Foundation will be instrumental in this progress as a trusted advocate and a leader of professional training for principals and teachers and support for students. During these years, the people who govern and work at Public Education Foundation will steadfastly devote energy, passion, and resources—both human and financial—to achieving this vision.

## Goal One:

### **Develop and support leaders who create superb schools where every student meets Tennessee’s rigorous new standards**

Great schools demand great leaders. Time and time again, we’ve seen tremendous results when schools have strong leaders. And time and again we’ve learned the hard way that investing resources into schools with weak leaders is a fool’s errand. So our first goal focuses on developing leaders and helping our community create a comprehensive “pipeline” that trains education leaders in all phases of their career, from the classroom to the principal’s office to the central office.

In 1999, PEF began a modest program called Leadership Fellows. Its goal was to develop a cadre of teachers who understood basic tenants of leadership and who could help lead complex changes that are critical to successful school reform. Twelve years later, more than 300 teachers have graduated from Leadership Fellows program—and more than half of Hamilton County’s principals and assistant principals are graduates of the program. In 2010, PEF partnered with the school district, Chamber of Commerce, and University of Tennessee at Chattanooga to create the Principal Leadership Academy. Six of the first graduates became principals within a month of completing that program. While both of these programs have great value, our community has never developed a comprehensive plan for leadership development. Thus, our new principals often do not get the support they need as they adjust to the demands of their new job. Veteran principals rarely get an opportunity to continue their own learning and often stagnate. And district level leaders rarely get the coaching and feedback they want.

So, given our history and the needs described above, we propose that by 2016, PEF will:

- **Help to create a comprehensive, sustainable leadership development plan:** We will collaborate with Hamilton County Department of Education and the business, civic, and philanthropic community to develop a comprehensive and fully funded plan for leadership development at all levels of a school system.
- **Provide support for school-level leaders at all stages of their careers:** PEF will continue and strengthen our Leadership Fellows program, learning networks for instructional coaches, principal networks, and the Principal Leadership Academy, and we will initiate networks for new principals and assistant principals and begin work with a select group of leadership teams from schools that are committed to transformational change.
- **Collaboratively design and provide support for central office leaders:** We will work collaboratively with school districts that want to provide professional support to their senior staff members

## Goal Two:

### **Develop and advance highly effective teaching so that all students learn in classes that are engaging, relevant, and rigorous**

The most effective way to increase student learning? Improve teaching. Dozens of studies prove this. So, too, does our own experience. We saw first-hand the extraordinary improvement in the Benwood Schools when we focused resources on improving teaching. We've seen dramatic gains in our middle schools, thanks in large part to instructional coaches who work, every day, with teachers. We are committed to providing outstanding training and coaching to a wide span of teachers in the next generation of our work.

We also want to help interested districts develop a comprehensive plan for ensuring that every child is taught by an outstanding teacher. A few districts across the country have developed a comprehensive plan for identifying, hiring, and supporting teachers throughout their careers. In the world of educational jargon, this is called a "human capital plan." Whatever you call it, the plan ensures that teachers with the strongest skills are hired and then provided, at every stage of their career, coaching, training, and rigorous evaluation to help them become stronger and stronger teachers. It is no surprise that districts that have paid attention to hiring the right people and then supporting them have seen impressive improvement in student learning. We think all districts should develop a comprehensive plan for teacher hiring and development, and we want to help any district that are wants to develop one of these plans.

Consequently, by 2016, PEF will:

- **Help interested districts develop a comprehensive human capital development plan:** We will collaborate with Hamilton County or any other district that wants to develop a comprehensive plan for hiring and training teachers so that every student is taught by an excellent teacher.
- **Provide highly effective professional development for targeted groups of teachers:** We will provide teachers from Hamilton County and other communities with outstanding training that demonstrably improves student achievement; our work will include expanding our induction program for new teachers and establishing networks for teachers with similar responsibilities, such as middle school instructional coaches, elementary literacy leaders, or teachers whose students live in extreme poverty or whose first language is not English.
- **Recruit, train, and support teachers in high needs areas:** With TEACH/Here, our program to recruit and train a new generation of math and science teachers, we began this work; in the years to come we want to expand our reach and recruit, prepare, and support not only a new generation of math and science teachers but also teachers in other areas in which districts find it difficult to hire strong teachers.

### Goal Three:

#### **Prepare every student for success as a learner, a citizen, an employee, and a leader**

Chattanooga used to be known as “The Dynamo of Dixie.” Manufacturing jobs were plentiful, and it was very possible to get a good job and live a good life without ever earning a high school diploma. Unfortunately, many of those manufacturing jobs have disappeared. But, fortunately, lots of new companies have sprung up or moved into our community and some of our most established firms have expanded. They all need highly-skilled and well educated employees, especially those with strong capabilities in math and science.

In 2009, PEF merged with the College Access Center, and we began providing every high school with a college advisor and an array of programs that help students go to college. The results have been good. Last year, more than 65% of our public high school graduates enrolled in 160 different universities in 37 states. We are proud of this progress, but we are concerned that so many of these students—almost a quarter—don’t come back for a second year of college and fewer than half ever graduate. We’re also concerned that the students who decide not to go to college don’t get the guidance they need to ensure that they are prepared for and able to secure a good job with a good future. We must better serve both groups of students, and we want to work with the community to ensure that our students have the math and science skills they will need to succeed in learning and in life.

Consequently, by 2016, PEF plans to:

- **Help create a comprehensive plan so that our children benefit from the region’s economic renaissance:** We will collaborate with regional businesses, the civic community, school districts, institutions of higher education, elected leaders, citizens, and students to develop a comprehensive plan to ensure that our students are prepared to benefit fully in this new economy, especially in emerging STEM fields and careers.
- **Expand our College Access and Success Programs:** We will continue to make sure that every student benefits from college access programs and expand our focus on college success programs—efforts like our SOAR program that pairs new students with older students to ensure the success of both.
- **Support Career Success Programs:** We will collaborate with a wide variety of institutions, organizations, and business to guide students who are going directly to work to be well prepared for and aware of the many new career options, apprenticeships, and certification programs.
- **Help create community Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) initiatives:** We will work collaboratively with a wide array of community partners to capitalize on initiatives that will improve student achievement in science, technology, engineering, and math. These opportunities may include a STEM High School and a center for improving STEM teaching.



## Goal Four:

### **Inform the public about what does—and what does not—work in the world of school reform and become an even stronger advocate for great public schools**

There is no getting around it. The public—in our region, our state, and our nation—is dissatisfied with public schools. No doubt, some people admire their neighborhood school or the high school they graduated from, but for the most part, when people talk about public schools, they criticize them. Until our public schools—and people’s attitudes about public schools—change, other nations will continue to pass us by.

PEF plans to step up its efforts to inform the public about what is working and what is not—and by doing this, help the public become more knowledgeable, hopeful and committed. Until 2005, we had spent no energy describing our work or advocating for public schools. In 2006, we took our first step in this direction and launched a web site, began a monthly newsletter, paid for a billboard campaign, filmed teachers at work, and stepped up our press releases. We made some progress, but we know that it wasn’t enough. Too many people still don’t know what is working and what needs changing. And we still do not have enough advocates for public schools and their improvement.

We’re not talking about a PR campaign. We will step up our efforts to inform the public—help more and more people understand what is working, what is needed, and what must be changed. Our goal is to help the public better understand its public schools—and move citizens from inertia to advocacy.

To achieve this by 2016, we will:

- **Provide more research, data, commentary, and analysis:** We will regularly share research that shows what’s working in the nation, in Tennessee, and in Hamilton County—and we’ll discuss what isn’t working and why.
- **Establish and maintain more external partnerships:** We will build relationships with local, state, and national partners to increase our resources, both in information and funding. As part of this strategy, we will expand where we work and secure revenue of up to 20% of our total annual budget from districts beyond Hamilton County. This will build our revenue stream and also allow us to share and learn best practices from other counties.
- **Redesign our internal infrastructure:** Within PEF, we will reorganize how we work so that we are more effective and efficient; our board will continue to evolve to ensure that PEF is led by a diverse set of community leaders whose talents are used strategically and wisely.