

National \$6 Million Fund Backs Local Efforts to Organize Communities Around Public Education Reform

Funders including Ford, Bill & Melinda Gates and William Penn Foundations support grassroots groups in Philadelphia and three other U.S. localities through a new fund for education organizing.

PHILADELPHIA – Communities for Public Education Reform (CPER), a coalition of grassroots education organizing groups backed by forty local and national funders, launches today here and in three other U.S. localities. CPER seeks to improve education for all students by giving community residents a stronger voice in shaping the policies that affect their public schools.

CPER is contributing \$450,000 to the Philadelphia area groups – members of the Philadelphia Cross-City Campaign for Urban School Reform – to work to unite community leaders, parents and students to help shape school reform efforts in the greater Philadelphia metropolitan area.

The effort represents an important new philanthropic investment in community-based public education reform. Chicago, Denver and New Jersey are also part of the \$6 million CPER fund for education organizing, which provides direct support to grassroots and allied education groups, plus opportunities for all four localities to share ideas and strategies. “Being chosen as one of the sites for this important national venture validates the exceptional work being done on behalf of education reform in the Philadelphia area,” said Andi Perez, executive director of Youth United for Change, one of the funded organizing groups.

The Southeastern Pennsylvania Communities Public Education Reform groups include: Philadelphia ACORN, the Eastern Pennsylvania Organizing Project, Philadelphia Student Union, Youth United for Change, Good Schools Pennsylvania, Education Law Center, Philadelphia Public School Notebook, and Research for Action.

“This collaborative of education organizing groups has the potential to affect significant change in the policy environment and, ultimately, the educational experience of disadvantaged students across the region,” said Candace Bell, program officer for the William Penn Foundation, which supports CPER locally.

“All students deserve the opportunity to receive a high-quality education,” said Kelly James, program officer for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. “By empowering local residents to connect with grassroots efforts and fully engage in the reform process, communities truly can achieve meaningful, lasting change.”

Specifically, the southeastern Pennsylvania coalition will target school funding and high school reform policies. The ultimate goal of organizing community support around school funding is to comprehensively revise the state’s school funding formula to ensure a more equitable distribution of state resources. For the past four years, the state has ranked as one of the worst four in the nation when it comes to educational equity, according to Education Week’s “Quality Counts” report.

The coalition members have begun to address the issue of high school reform in Philadelphia. Their efforts forced mayoral candidates to directly speak to student concerns about school quality and safety at a recent public forum. With CPER, the group is poised to go further. “Being part of Communities for Public Education Reform will allow us to coordinate our efforts, support one another and take the work to the next level – reaching into the suburbs around Philadelphia, with their increasing low-income populations of color,” said Ali Kronley, head organizer of Philadelphia ACORN.

In addition to the William Penn Foundation, local Philadelphia-area funders include the Advanta Foundation, Allen Hilles Fund, Annenberg Foundation, Douty Foundation, Samuel S. Fels Fund, Lanham Fund and Western Association.

The national funders are: Ford Foundation, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Carnegie Corporation of New York, Marguerite Casey Foundation, Edward W. Hazen Foundation, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Prudential Foundation and Surdna Foundation.

The fund is administered by Public Interest Projects, a New York-based public charity that operates grantmaking, technical assistance and strategic planning programs for institutional and individual donors interested in social justice, human rights, education and environmental issues.

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For more information, contact Julie K. Kohler, Ph.D., Program Manager & Director of Evaluation, Public Interest Projects, Tel. (212) 764-1508 x231, jkohler@publicinterestprojects.org.