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EDUCATION CHALLENGES FACING NEW YORK CITY

Building Local Leadership for Change: A National Scan of Parent Leadership Training Programs

Anne T. Henderson

in collaboration with
Annenberg Institute research staff

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AT BROWN UNIVERSITY

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About the Annenberg Institute for School Reform

The Annenberg Institute for School Reform is a national policy-research and reform-support organization, affiliated with Brown University, that focuses on improving conditions and outcomes for all students in urban public schools, especially those serving disadvantaged children. The Institute's vision is the transformation of traditional school systems into "smart education systems" that develop and integrate high-quality learning opportunities in all areas of students' lives – at school, at home, and in the community.

The Institute conducts research; works with a variety of partners committed to educational improvement to build capacity in school districts and communities; and shares its work through print and Web publications. Rather than providing a specific reform design or model to be implemented, the Institute's approach is to offer an array of tools and strategies to help districts and communities strengthen their local capacity to provide and sustain high-quality education for all students.

A goal of the Institute is to stimulate debate in the field on matters of important consequence for national education policy. This report provides one such perspective but it does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform.

Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University

Box 1985
Providence, Rhode Island 02912

233 Broadway, Suite 720
New York, New York 10279

www.annenberginstitute.org

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About the Author

Anne T. Henderson is a senior consultant for the Community Organizing and Engagement program at the Annenberg Institute for School Reform. Recently, she has worked with the Institute to develop a series of tools to help local communities prepare more students for college and a career. *Putting Kids on the Pathway to College* is based on a study of New York City high schools that are "beating the odds" in bringing low-performing ninth-graders to timely graduation and college entrance. The tools include a framework of effective strategies for improving college access, a rubric for evaluating current practices, and survey and *focus group tools* for gathering data from students and families. They are designed for a wide audience, including school districts, community and parent organizations, researchers, and policy-makers.

Henderson also recently worked with the institute to create a series of research-based workshops that focus on community organizing strategies in four communities. These "jigsaw" reading-and-discussion activities help participants understand the organizing efforts of one community, explore the implications those efforts may have on their own community, and identify next steps they want to take. The workshops are based on an Annenberg study of the impact of community organizing on student, school, and district outcomes entitled *Organized Communities, Smaller Schools*.

Henderson's research interests focus on the relationship between families and schools. Her most recent book, *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships* (written with Karen Mapp, Don Davies, and Vivian Johnson), was published by The New Press in 2007. Her publications also include the *Evidence* series, which reviews the research on parent involvement and student achievement. The latest edition, *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family and Community Connections on Student Achievement*, written with Karen Mapp, was published by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory in 2002.

About the Series

Education Policy for Action: Education Challenges Facing New York City is a series of research and policy analyses by scholars in fields such as education, economics, public policy, and child welfare in collaboration with staff from the Annenberg Institute for School Reform and members of a broadly defined education community. Papers in this series are the product of research based on the Institute's large library of local and national public education databases; work with the Institute's data analysis team; and questions raised and conclusions drawn during a public presentation and conversation with university and public school students, teachers, foundation representatives, policy advocates, education reporters, news analysts, parents, youth, and community leaders.

Among the issues that the series addresses are several pressing topics that have emerged from the Institute's research and organizing efforts. Some of the topics covered in the series are:

- Confronting the impending graduation crisis
- The small schools experiment in New York City
- Positive behavior and student social and emotional support
- Modes of new teacher and principal induction and evaluation

Many thanks to the Robert Sterling Clark Foundation for its support of the public conversations from which this report and the other publications in the series grew.

For a downloadable version of this report and more information about the series, please visit <www.annenberginstitute.org/WeDo/NYC_Conversations.php>.

Acknowledgments

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Introduction

The New York State Senate has given New York City an unprecedented opportunity – to create a Parent Training Center that will build cadres of parent leaders across all five boroughs. The legislation, which places the responsibility for the Center at the City University of New York (CUNY), mandates that the program train and support parents to increase their capacity to participate in school governance and to support their children's success in school.

The purpose of this report is to identify parent leadership training programs around the country; examine their structure, curriculum, and evaluation results; and discern lessons for New York City in implementing its own Parent Training Center.

Investing in families is both sound public policy and a productive investment. Thirty years of research demonstrates that engaging families in their children's learning at home and at school, connecting families to community resources, and organizing parents to hold their schools accountable has a lasting, positive impact on student outcomes. Recent reviews of the research have found that students whose families are engaged in these ways are more likely to:

- earn higher grades and test scores and enroll in higher-level programs;
- be promoted, pass their classes, and earn credits;
- attend school regularly;
- have better social skills, show improved behavior, and adapt well to school;
- graduate and go on to post-secondary education (Henderson & Mapp 2002).

New research also finds that parent and community organizing efforts are improving schools. This type of engagement, led by parents and community members, is growing nationwide. Aimed mainly at low-performing schools, strategies of community organizing are focused on building low-income families' power and political skills. Unlike traditional parent involvement, parent and community organizing intends to create mutual accountability for school performance.

Recent studies have found that community organizing has contributed to the following changes in schools (Mediratta, Shah & McAlister 2009):

- upgraded school facilities;
- improved school leadership and staffing;
- higher-quality learning programs for students;
- new resources and programs to improve teaching and curriculum;
- increased funding for after-school programs and family supports.

The authors of the recent book on Chicago school improvement *Organizing Schools for Improvement* identify strategies that engage parents as essential to school improvement. The Chicago book argues that in schools that are successful in raising student achievement, school leadership focuses on "encouraging new relations with parents and local communities to repair the longstanding disconnect between urban schools and the children and families they are intended to serve" (Bryk et al. 2009, p. 46). Preparing parents to engage with schools in these new ways should be the mission of the Parent Training Center.

Evaluations of the parent leadership and training programs found positive effects on participants' attitudes, expectations, and behaviors that are linked to improved student achievement.

Evaluations of the parent leadership and training programs profiled in this report found positive effects on participants' attitudes, expectations, and behaviors that are linked to improved student achievement. In addition, studies of the Parent Institute for Quality Education in California found that participants' children had significantly higher grades and fewer absences, as well as higher enrollment in college prep courses and higher graduation rates, than students in the comparison group.

The potential of parent leadership training for improving schools and student outcomes makes it imperative that the new Parent Training Center be designed and implemented thoughtfully, carefully, and with close collaboration between CUNY and the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE). The recommendations presented at the conclusion of this report are grounded in the research on successful programs and in parent and advocate input at a policy forum convened by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform.[1]

This report is organized into the following sections:

1. The mandates in the New York Senate law
2. Results of the scan of related programs
3. Brief descriptions of leading national examples of parent leadership training programs and their relationship to the New York Senate law
4. Key practices of these programs that are associated with their success
5. Recommendations for the design and implementation of the Center

[1] On December 14, 2009, the Annenberg Institute for School Reform convened a Policy Conversation at the CUNY Professional Staff Congress about the Parent Training Center. The two panelists, Zakiyah Ansari and Kim Sweet, as well as many participants, offered several excellent ideas about how the Parent Training Center should be developed. These ideas are incorporated into this publication, particularly the recommendations section.

1 The Parent Training Center Law

According to New York Senate Bill 6107, CUNY is authorized to operate a Parent Training Center for parents of public school students in all five boroughs of New York City. The Center has four major mandates:

- Conduct training and support programs for parents to increase their capacity to participate in local, district, and citywide school governance and participatory structures.
- Conduct outreach and recruitment to increase diversity in these governance and participatory structures.
- Implement programs to enhance parents' ability to support students' educational success.
- Assist parents and students in interacting with school district staff and understanding the function, structure, and operations of the NYCDOE.

In designing and implementing parent programs, priority must go to high-needs schools and districts. These are defined as having low overall student achievement, a high density of English language learners (ELLs) and low-income families, and schools with ineffective or absent parent associations. The legislation gives specific examples of topics that parents need to understand:

- Special education, gifted and talented, and ELL programs
- School improvement strategies
- School budgets
- Enrollment procedures
- State and city structures and policies that impact education

The bill also requires the Center to encourage student-based college counseling initiatives designed to increase the rate of college enrollment and to train students to become youth leaders. These initiatives should include (but not be limited to) Student Success Centers.

In designing and implementing parent programs, priority must go to high-needs schools and districts.

Funding for the Center is limited, about $800,000 per year from the state, to be matched by the New York City school district.[2]

[2] Funding for the Center is limited, about $800,000 per year from the state, to be matched by the New York City school district. This implies a total of $1.6 million dollars in funding for the centers, of which $600,000 is to be dedicated to Student Success Centers, leaving $1 million for the parent center.

2 Methods and overarching themes of the national scan of exemplary programs

To provide examples of best practices, the research team conducted a national scan that identified and examined parent leadership training programs around the country that have goals, functions, or mandates similar to the proposed New York City Parent Training Center.

Selection Criteria

The research team found many examples of programs that offer training and information to families, but we selected for a closer look only those meeting the following criteria:

- a mission to help parents/families and other community stakeholders to become involved in and work to improve their public schools and school district;
- a sustained, formal program, preferably with a name and identity;
- a curriculum that matches the goals of the program, delivered by facilitators who are either trained or have experience;
- inclusive but explicit selection criteria for participants;
- reliable data on outcomes for participants and schools, preferably from an outside evaluation.

Not included are programs with a principal goal of developing families' capacity to promote children's learning and development at home. In addition, the team did not include training offered by community organizing or advocacy groups unless they provide a specific program for parents on engagement in education that meets the criteria above. Also excluded were programs that train parents for general civic leadership, such as the Connecticut Parent Leadership Training Institute and Leadership Plenty.

Although programs to train and offer technical assistance to members of school-based decision-making councils and school boards were considered, they were too general in their orientation and too narrow in their focus to be pertinent to this scan.

Program Types

Among the programs that met our criteria, we identified four major types.

Type 1. Parent leadership training programs

These programs prepare parents to play leadership roles in a variety of formal entities, such as parent associations, school councils, district committees, and school boards. They are clearly aimed at engaging parents in increasing student achievement and improving school, school district, and even state policy and practice. A leading example is the Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership (CIPL), a statewide program in Kentucky. There are several offshoots of this program in Delaware, Mississippi, Ohio, Oklahoma, and Texas.

Type 2. Parent training programs aimed at immigrant families and families with limited English

These programs are designed to assist marginalized and "outsider" families, as well as those who have been poorly served by their public schools, to understand the school system, to promote their children's advancement to college, and to improve school and district policies and practices that produce poor outcomes for their children. A leading example is the Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE), a program offered across California. This pro-

gram has inspired several others, developed both by national organizations and local school districts.

Type 3. Parent academies or universities

These programs offer a broad range of learning and leadership opportunities, including home learning, skills and opportunities for participation in the school system, and earning education credits to increase employment opportunities. A leading example is the Parent Academy (TPA) in Miami-Dade County Public Schools. This type is the most numerous, with many good examples; some are based on the Miami model (Boston); others are unique (San Diego).

Type 4. Parent leadership training to understand and influence the system

These programs help families to collaborate with educators in developing policies and programs to improve student learning and promote the knowledge and skills needed to become leaders, change agents, and active participants in education policy development and governance. Leading examples are Parents Seeking Excellence in Education (Parents SEE) in Connecticut and Families in Schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District.

From an initial list of ten, we selected four programs that exemplified each of these themes. Figure 1 names these programs and shows how the four program types are aligned with the major mandates in the Senate bill.

The research team decided to focus on these four leading examples rather than try to describe more programs in each category for two major reasons. First, other examples in each category are mostly inspired by the flagship program; and second, these programs have a rich history and robust development.[3]

[3] The PIQE program is also offered in Texas, Arizona, and Washington, DC.

Figure 1.
Types and examples of parent training programs, by mandate

Mandate	Type and Example of Parent Training Program
Develop leadership structures	Parent leadership training programs Example: Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership (CIPL), Kentucky
Support immigrant families	Parent training programs aimed at immigrant parents Example: Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE), California
Support children's learning	Parent academies or universities Example: The Parent Academy (TPA), Miami-Dade County, Florida
Understand and navigate the system	Parent leadership training to understand/influence the system Example: Parents Supporting Educational Excellence (Parents SEE), Connecticut

3 Descriptions of program examples

This section contains brief descriptions of the programs identified in the scan. Program Profiles with more detailed information about each program, including funding sources and contact information, are scheduled for release in fall 2010.

A few overall points: All the programs are offered free to participants in return for their commitment to attend the sessions and complete the work assigned. All have requirements for graduation and award certificates of completion. And all are offered in a variety of settings, in places and at times that are convenient to their participants.

All the programs are offered free to participants in return for their commitment to attend the sessions and complete the work assigned.

Type 1: Leadership Training – Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership, Kentucky

> *Our aim is to create an army of self-confident and well-informed parents to focus on improved student achievement for all Kentucky students.*
>
> — Robert Sexton, Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence

Founded in 1997 by a citizens group, the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, the Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership (CIPL) is a direct response to passage of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA). An early standards-based education reform law (1990), KERA has several leverage points for parent engagement, the most notable of which is mandated school-based decision-making councils that govern the school and hire the principal. Each council must have five members, of whom two must be parents elected by other parents. As Prichard Committee executive director Bob Sexton said, Kentucky needed "an army of well-informed and highly motivated parents" for the law to work. Since 1997, the program has graduated over 1,500 "Fellows" from all income and education levels.

CIPL is held regionally across the state. Although CIPL is focused on parents, anyone who works with public school students may apply. All participants are expected to make a two-year commitment, attend all sessions, and complete a project to improve achievement in their schools. Each Institute is limited to thirty people and consists of three two-day sessions spaced about a month apart. Participants stay overnight at the training location (college, state park, or motel/conference center). Between sessions, parents do "homework," such as obtaining copies of their school's improvement plan, completing an assessment of their school's openness to working with families, and attending a school council meeting. After graduating, participants work with their local Prichard Committee coordinator to carry out their projects.

The CIPL curriculum is organized around a three-part framework that guides participants in developing their projects.

- Improving student achievement Parents learn how to design and carry out school-based projects that will have an impact on student achievement, using school performance data.
- Increasing parent involvement Parents learn how to engage other parents, especially those from different cultural, racial, and

socio-economic backgrounds whose children may be struggling. This includes running effective meetings using group process techniques.

- Having a lasting impact Parents learn to become – and help other parents become – powerful advocates for higher achievement for all students, including how to use leverage points in the state's reform law, get their project adopted by the school, and write proposals for funding.

CIPL has expanded its reach and funding base by partnering with federal programs such as Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR-UP) and Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM), as well as state Early Childhood programs, and serving their participants. In each case, CIPL staff modify the curriculum to align with the goals and audience of the partner program.

Two outside evaluations have found that CIPL Fellows' perspectives shift from trying to do what's best for their own children to promoting the best interest of all children. Many have been elected to school councils and to leadership positions in school PTAs, then have branched out to take part in school and district committees, school board activities, curriculum task forces, and regional and state advisory councils.

Fellows reported that their new activism stemmed directly from the knowledge, confidence, and competence gained from CIPL training. Many marveled at their new roles in life, saying, "Never in a million years did I think I'd be doing this." While most CIPL graduates have some college education, many have not completed high school, yet both groups remain active in the same proportion.

Many projects have become permanent fixtures at their schools (e.g., college information center, mobile science lab, after-school tutoring, outdoor classroom, elementary to middle school transition program). (Program Profiles with more information on these studies are scheduled for release in fall 2010.)

CIPL has several notable features, including:

- a detailed explanation of how the state education reform system works and ways to use leverage points in the law;
- demonstrating how to access, analyze, and use state assessment data, starting with participants' own school's report card;
- requiring projects designed to improve achievement at participants' schools, engage more parents, and have a lasting impact (the program provides a mini-grant to implement the project);
- follow-up from community support coordinators for two years;
- recruiting parents in teams from schools and districts to create "critical mass."

Fellows reported that their new activism stemmed directly from the knowledge, confidence, and competence gained from CIPL training. Many marveled at their new roles in life, saying, "Never in a million years did I think I'd be doing this."

KERA requires that we have high expectations for all students; we must also have high expectations for their parents.

— Beverly Raimondo, founding CIPL director

Type 2: Immigrant Families – Parent Institute for Quality Education, California

> *There is no force on earth more powerful than the love of a mother for her children.*
>
> — Vahac Mardirosian, PIQE founder

The Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE) was founded in 1997 after community activists Vahac Mardirosian and Alberto Ochoa conducted discussion groups among Latino families at a very low-performing school in San Diego. What started out as an evening meeting grew into eight weeks of extended discussions. Dr. Ochoa documented fifty-four different topics that came up, from which he designed the PIQE curriculum. Since then, almost 500,000 parents have graduated from the program across California. The program is designed to give low-income immigrant families the information and skills to support their children to do well in school, graduate, and attend college.

Instructors are held to strict accountability standards. If fewer than 70 percent of the participants graduate from a class, the instructor's pay is docked; if fewer than 50 percent graduate, the instructor is dropped.

The program is offered in nine sessions that meet two hours once a week. Each class is limited to twenty to twenty-five people. After an introductory first session, the next six sessions cover the curriculum. The eighth is a planning session with school staff to discuss how to work together to ensure children's success; and the ninth is the graduation.

The curriculum covers:

- creating a positive home learning environment;
- understanding the K–12 school system and expectations for parent involvement;
- supporting the child's academic, social, and emotional development;
- communicating with teachers and initiating meetings to track child's progress;
- preventing gang affiliation and drug use;
- preparing in advance for college, monitoring courses children take, and financial aid.

PIQE recruits and trains instructors from the same backgrounds as the families they will teach. To serve as an instructor, a person must be a parent and a PIQE graduate, must have experienced poverty, and must have earned a college degree. In addition, instructors must understand and be able to explain how the U.S. school system works and know how to listen (defined as speaking only half the time). Instructors are held to strict accountability standards. If fewer than 70 percent of the participants graduate from a class, the instructor's pay is docked; if fewer than 50 percent graduate, the instructor is dropped.

The target audience is low-income and immigrant families, and the program is open to all who make a commitment to attend the full nine weeks. Although most PIQE graduates are Latinos, the program is offered in several languages and includes Asian, Pacific Islander, and African American families. Parents must attend at least six of the nine sessions, including the graduation, to receive a graduation certificate.

Three outside evaluations have found positive impacts on families' attitudes and behavior. PIQE graduates were more likely to engage in home learning activities, contact their child's teacher, observe in class, and volunteer. They also expressed more confidence in their ability to help their children and be involved in learning.

Two studies found positive impacts on student outcomes. A case study of two high schools found that students whose family members were PIQE graduates took 50 percent more college prep classes and had significantly higher grades and fewer absences. A retrospective study of Latino PIQE families in San Diego found that their children had a 93 percent high school graduation rate, compared to 63 percent rate for all Latino students. (Program Profiles with more information on these studies are scheduled for release in fall 2010.)

PIQE's notable features include:

- a powerful focus on high school graduation and college attendance;
- instructors with backgrounds that match the participants, but who have "made it";
- partnerships with twenty-three campuses in the California State college system to offer PIQE in feeder communities, and with GEAR-UP to offer PIQE in middle schools;
- a four-month Parent Coach follow-up program to reinforce what parents have learned and report issues and concerns to principals;
- recruiters (all PIQE graduates) paid according to numbers of people who sign up.

My goal is to find the 20 percent who make 80 percent of the sales, like real estate agents.

— Vahac Mardirosian, PIQE Founder

Type 3: Support Children's Learning – The Parent Academy, Miami-Dade County, Florida

"Demand parents" understand that their children deserve a good education and that it's their responsibility to make sure they get it.

— Rudy Crew, former superintendent, Miami-Dade County Public Schools

Launched in 2005 under then-superintendent Rudy Crew, the Parent Academy (TPA) has expanded from its initial focus on creating "demand parents" to become part of the district's overall reform initiative, Plan for Success. TPA is housed in school district offices but supported entirely with private funding. Funders include major foundations, local businesses and corporations, and community partners who offer in-kind contributions such as space, materials, and instructors. In its first three years, TPA has served more than 100,000 parents through about 3,000 events.

PIQE graduates were more likely to engage in home learning activities, contact their child's teacher, observe in class, and volunteer; students whose family members were PIQE graduates took 50 percent more college prep classes and had significantly higher grades and fewer absences.

The offerings of TPA are organized around three areas:

- supporting children's learning and development;
- navigating the education system and other related systems;
- workforce and educational development for families.

The original TPA curriculum was centered around three sets of workshops: *Core Courses* for parents to help their children, *Growth Courses* for parents to learn new skills and opportunities, and *Certification Courses* for parents to increase their employment opportunities. Since then, the curriculum has grown to a menu of courses requested by participants, but with appeal to future parents, child caretakers, and community members. These are organized into five strands: Arts and Culture, Help Your Child Learn, Health and Wellness, Parenting Skills, and Personal Growth.

Classes include transportation and childcare and are offered at various times and in multiple languages. The "campus" of TPA is spread throughout the community, and courses have been held at schools, libraries, parks, colleges, museums, the zoo, and local gathering places such as barbershops. Workshops are developed and taught by school district staff and community partners. Others are part of the district's Adult and Career Technical and Education program (EdWorks!).

TPA had an impact on parent's attitudes, expectations, and behaviors that made a difference in their children's education.

Participants do not have to be Miami-Dade Public Schools parents, but priority goes to parents and family members of current and former students or of children under school age. Additional guardians and surrogate parents are welcome, along with school volunteers.

In 2008, the district targeted nine low-performing schools for comprehensive reforms under Plan for Success. At each school, TPA offered Saturday workshops for families about improving their children's learning while their children attended extra classes. District officials credit this intervention with contributing to increased student achievement. The district plans to expand TPA offerings to thirty-five schools in the Plan for Success initiative.

Two evaluations of the program assessed participant and school administrator perceptions of the program's value and impact. The consensus was that TPA had an impact on parent's attitudes, expectations, and behaviors that made a difference in their children's education, and that the program should be expanded. (Program Profiles with more information on these studies are scheduled for release in fall 2010.)

Some notable features of TPA include:

- an extensive "listening" phase across the community before offering the program;
- the concept of "the campus is the community";
- integrating TPA into the district school reform initiative;
- linking TPA to adult and career education;
- developing a partnership with local colleges to offer credits to families.

Building a connective tissue between home, school, and community will demand serious expectations and serious commitments, financial and otherwise.

— Rudy Crew, *Only Connect: The Way to Save Our Schools*

Type 4: Understanding and Navigating the System – Parents Supporting Educational Excellence, Connecticut

> *Parent leadership is the capacity for parents to interact in society with purpose and positive outcomes for children. Parents, children, and communities all benefit from parent involvement.*
>
> — Connecticut Commission on Children, *The Values and Results of Parent Involvement*

Parents Supporting Educational Excellence (Parents SEE) is a twelve-week leadership development program for parents. The program was developed by the Connecticut Commission on Children, a state agency that promotes public policies in the best interests of children, and the Connecticut Center for School Change, a private nonprofit organization that partners with school districts on leadership development and educational improvement. Staff from the Commission and the Center make up the Parents SEE Steering Team, which oversees the program. About 300 parents have graduated from Parents SEE since 2006. Parents SEE is related to the Commission's flagship program, the Parent Leadership Training Institute, which has a civic engagement focus.

The program begins with a five-hour Saturday retreat, followed by twelve weekly three-hour sessions offered in the evening. Each class has about twenty participants. Participants are selected from a diverse pool of parents, grandparents, guardians, and family members through an application and interview process.

The goals of the program are to:

- provide parents with the skills and understandings to become civic leaders, change agents, and active participants in education;
- facilitate partnerships between school staff and parents to improve student learning.

Parents SEE is offered in collaboration with a local community sponsor, with the support of the school system. The Parents SEE Steering Team provides and certifies the facilitators and materials and provides quality assurance and support for the program and the sponsoring agency. A Local Community Design Team that reflects community demographics must secure funding, inform local stakeholders (the board of education, school administrators, civic and business leaders, PTO/PTA, and community groups), and provide a local site coordinator. The local coordinator is responsible for planning, organizing, and coordinating the program (recruitment, site, food, childcare, and transportation), the graduation, and alumni follow-up and support.

The program is built around four themes: leadership, partnering, change, and educational policies and practices. Sessions cover:

- what effective schools look like;
- how and why schools change;
- how a school district functions;
- roles that a parent can play in improving; student achievement;
- why some children succeed and others don't;
- what improvements are needed in schools;
- what it means to be a parent leader in education.

In each session, participants gain information and new skills, discuss and work together in a way that encourages understanding of diverse viewpoints, and practice the skills needed to partner effectively and to bring about change.

To graduate and receive a certificate, participants must attend the retreat and at least ten of the twelve sessions, take part in session activities, and complete assignments, such as interview a school leader, ask for the school's parent involvement policy, and take an informal poll. More than 75 percent of participants graduate. There is no requirement to design and complete a project.

A team of two trained and certified Parents SEE facilitators presents the Parents SEE program; at least one will have a background in education. The Parents SEE Steering Team matches facilitators with communities. In addition to preparing and guiding activities in each session, facilitators provide support and individual resources to participants.

An outside evaluation conducted in 2008 found that parents perceived growth in knowledge, skills, leadership, and experience. The greatest gains were: knowledge of how the education system works, comfort level in using skills, and using data to make decisions about school improvement. Parents reported that they intended to use the training to become more involved in their children's schools, work with others to increase parent involvement, and become more active in the parent organization and school board activities. (Program Profiles with more information on these studies are scheduled for release in fall 2010.)

Some notable features of Parents SEE include:

- a design team of local stakeholders that reflects the community responsible for putting on the program;
- a focus on parents as advocates for change and partners in school improvement, rather than parents as helpers at home;
- cultivating relationships with the school districts, requiring their support and buy-in to the program;
- devoting one class to attending a school board meeting and talking with members and the superintendent afterwards.

Large-scale instructional improvement requires parents with the knowledge, skills, and tools to be effective leaders, change agents, and active partners with their schools and districts. Districts need an inside/outside strategy that mobilizes political will and parent and community support to ensure sustained improvements in teaching and learning for all students.

— Andrew Lachman, Connecticut Center for School Change

4 Key practices related to program success

The previous section described the unique features of the four parent leadership training program examples and their evaluation findings. This section looks across the programs at the common practices linked to their success – in recruiting, retaining, and motivating participants, as well as having a lasting, positive impact on their attitudes, behavior, and civic engagement.

Successful programs seek parent and community input into their program structure, content, design, and delivery.

TPA conducted the most extensive "community listening process." A planning committee composed of 100 stakeholders (parents, businesspeople, community members, and school district staff) oversaw seven town meetings and seventy-five community forums throughout Miami and Dade County. The information gathered was processed by six committees, which together designed the program.

PIQE began with an intensive series of conversations with low-income Latino parents in a profoundly low-achieving school, and these conversations formed the basis of the PIQE curriculum. That parents valued extended and intimate discussions with an instructor from their own background who had achieved success had a powerful impact on the design of the program. PIQE also maintains an advisory board that represents the California State University system and a board of directors that is a who's who of successful immigrants across the state.

The Prichard Committee not only convened representatives of key stakeholder groups to design the CIPL program, but also conducted focus groups with parents around the state for advice about how to offer the program and what it should cover. For example, an issue that arose in the focus groups was that many parents were reluctant to travel outside their communities to attend the program and be away from their families overnight. This feedback was addressed in two ways. A regional structure for the program was created, so that parents (mostly women) could attend at a nearby site. Also, reimbursement for childcare expenses made it easier for parents to stay overnight.

Parents SEE shared several drafts of its curriculum with stakeholders such as school board members, school district superintendents, principals, and community leaders, then piloted the program with a class of parents. At the end of the first pilot, Parents SEE invited parents and other community members to a dinner meeting to get feedback.

Successful programs devise innovative strategies for outreach and recruitment to capture their target audience.

The programs use social marketing principles in sophisticated ways. The Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership deliberately borrowed its name from a prestigious institute for teacher leadership to convey that participation is an honor and would confer respect in the community. The "parent academy" name also conveys a serious connection to learning, as do the many related "parent universities" offered by other school districts. The TPA symbol is a columned portico that resembles a Greek temple.

All the programs have relied on new graduates to recruit their friends and neighbors and build a "buddy system" to maintain participation and continued involvement after they complete the program.

COLLABORATION COUNTS	
One parent	A fruitcake
Two parents	Fruitcake and friend
Three parents	Troublemakers
Five parents	Let's have a meeting
Ten parents	We'd better listen
Twenty-five parents	Our dear friends
Fifty parents	A powerful organization

SOURCE: Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership

The graduation ceremonies provide a platform for local officials and dignitaries to reach parents, and then to spread the word among their social groups about the value of the program. Principals, school district administrators, religious leaders, college officials, school board members, city council members, aspiring officeholders, and local media personalities have been converted to strategic program allies and social capital for participants.

Building on the principle of strength in numbers, CIPL coordinators focus on recruiting teams of parents from schools or neighborhoods to build a critical mass of Fellows in a school and across a district (see sidebar). All the programs have relied on new graduates to recruit their friends and neighbors and build a "buddy system" to maintain participation and continued involvement after they complete the program.

To allay the anxiety of educators about what to expect from newly energized parents, all the programs build alliances with principals and teachers who have experienced the value of the program to recruit more parents and reassure their colleagues in other schools. Many CIPL Fellows tap their networks in the community in developing projects, building an extended recruiting base.

[4] Concha Delgado Gaitan is an educator, ethnographic researcher, and professor of socio-cultural studies. See her 2004 book, *Involving Latino Families in Schools: Raising Student Achievement through Home-School Partnerships* and her Web site, <www.conchadelgadogaitan.com>.

Successful programs use motivational strategies to build and sustain parents' engagement.

All the programs strongly emphasize the importance of parent involvement for improving their children's prospects for success. For example, at the first session of PIQE, instructors draw a large circle on a piece of newsprint, inviting parents to write their children's names inside the circle. Then the instructor draws a thick black line through the circle, dividing it in half, and warns, "The graduation rate of Latino students in California is 50 percent – what side of the line will your child be on?" Early in the CIPL program, participants write letters to their children explaining why they are taking the program; the letters are mailed after the graduation.

Another important motivator is the prospect of graduation and earning a certificate of completion. PIQE adds a gold seal to the certificates of participants with perfect attendance, and over 80 percent earn them. The graduation ceremony itself is a festive and moving experience – the graduates' children and families attend, along with speakers, community partners, school staff, and occasionally members of the press. Dinner is served, and usually there is musical entertainment. TPA has designed a focused workshop series for families in its lowest-performing schools, which concludes with a graduation and celebration.

Providing access to people with power and influence is another draw. Both CIPL and Parents SEE invite district and state officials to its classes to provide information and explain policies and practices. Participants can ask questions and make suggestions for improvement. One session is devoted to a "round table" of state and local community organizations that provide services to families and students, where parents can get more information and make contacts. Parents SEE devotes one class to attending a school board meeting and staying afterwards to speak with board members and the superintendent.

All the programs have sophisticated relationships with local media and have attracted favorable coverage.

Class leaders serve as role models and cultural brokers. According to researcher Concha Delgado Gaitan, a cultural broker is one who can explain the system to families and then explain families to the system.[4] Providing the opportunity for parents to form relationships with people like them who have been successful is a powerful motivator and helps parents with their own role construction and sense of efficacy.

TPA emphasizes personal growth and development of marketable job skills. In the listening phase of the program's development, families frequently requested classes to advance their personal goals and their capacity to support their children. The prospect of economic enhancement also helps to build buy-in from spouses and children for women to attend the classes.

In addition, the programs provide clear communication about what is expected of participants during the application process. Parents must agree to the terms before they are accepted. CIPL requires all applicants to attend an orientation where the CIPL coordinator explains all the terms, answers questions, and helps people to fill out the application form.

Successful programs employ flexible modes of delivery that build relationships and are respectful of families' backgrounds and circumstances.

What parents requested during focus groups and listening sessions has been heeded. Parents SEE, TPA, and PIQE are offered in a weekly series of workshops in nearby settings, in the morning or evening. Class sizes in all four programs are small; if more applicants apply than a class can hold, additional classes are added. To build connections among participants, two programs (CIPL and Parents See) hold at least one daylong session with frequent small-group interactions.

The PIQE and TPA programs accommodate language differences by offering classes in the families' home language by instructors proficient in that language. CIPL offers extra support to parents with limited literacy skills.

All the programs cultivate relationships with local and state policy-makers and office-holders to raise the visibility of the program and build its reputation.

Follow-up support is a part of each program. CIPL community support coordinators work with Fellows to implement their projects over a two-year period. Because the Fellows often work in teams at their schools, they develop joint projects, which allows them to pool the mini-grant funds and share the work. PIQE has a four-month follow-up program. TPA offers a range of classes, so that parents can continue with the program. All the programs have Web sites where graduates can get information and stay in touch.

Successful programs build the influence of the program and power of their graduates.

Program staff develop relationships with local media and attract coverage of classes, activities, graduations, convenings, and projects. Milestones, such as attaining a notable number of graduates, opening a new program site, or celebrating an anniversary of the program, and other newsworthy items are recognized with press releases and photos. In 2007, PIQE held a twentieth-anniversary celebration in Los Angeles and presented awards to the California State University chancellor and the Los Angeles school board president, as well as to major financial supporters.

All the programs cultivate relationships with local and state policy-makers and office-holders to raise the visibility of the program and build its reputation. As a result, the programs are perceived as pipelines that recruit qualified candidates to fill spots on task forces, boards, committees, commissions, and advisory groups. For example, the Commissioner's Parent Advisory Council in Kentucky is composed of representatives from the state PTA, CIPL graduates, and members of the Kentucky Association of School Councils (KASC). Many of the PTA and KASC representatives are also CIPL fellows.

Successful programs develop and leverage connections with government officials to give the program legitimacy and access.

Parents SEE and TPA have official government sponsorship, which confers built-in credibility with potential partners such as schools and community organizations. PIQE and CIPL have worked hard to develop strong, but unofficial, relationships with school districts, state and regional agencies, federal programs, and colleges and universities, with some success. Developing these connections has allowed all the programs to have access to local and state resources, such as the CIPL and PIQE relationship with GEAR-UP and the PIQE–Cal State campus agreements.

PIQE founder Vahac Mardirosian describes the early days of PIQE as having to go "hat in hand" to school principals and beg for access to a list of parents and a classroom to hold the program. The district raised objections about training parents to request meetings with teachers, for fear of a union backlash. After the program proved to be a success, PIQE was viewed as an acceptable service provider and a memorandum of agreement was developed to facilitate placing the program in local schools.

Recommendations

This section presents four major recommendations:

- Develop the authority and credibility of the Parent Training Center.
- Relate the Training Center to the New York City education context; build on and enhance the parent training work already under way.
- Set priorities for the limited current funding; and develop an expanded fundraising strategy.
- Follow sound design guidelines that have been used by effective programs.

Develop the authority and credibility of the Training Center to offer programs that will command respect from city and state public officials, the NYCDOE, public school parents, and the city's parent activist and advocacy community.

- Secure the support of the State Legislature, governor, and New York State Education Department (NYSED) for the Center's work. At this point, only the New York State Senate has approved legislation authorizing the Parent Training Center, but ideally the Center should be authorized and supported by the New York State Assembly and the governor.

> The training center should be a dynamic space that generates "an army of self-confident and well-informed parents" who understand how to use power.

- Create a design team to develop the Center's programs and set its priorities. Once the Center is fully authorized and funded, the CUNY officials designated to develop the Center should appoint a design team that includes representatives of key stakeholders, including community organizations that work with parents and families, parent advocacy and parent education and support groups, key NYCDOE and federal programs (Title I, Office of Family Engagement and Advocacy, GEAR-UP), and local funders active in this area. The design team should not be primarily specialists or technicians but should include a broad representation of parents and community members.
- Embark on a feedback process by holding town meetings and forums across the city to get extensive input.
- Create an Advisory Board to the Center that represents key partner organizations to build a productive relationship among CUNY, the NYCDOE, and the NYSED, as well as with other parent and stakeholders. This Advisory Board should include several members of the design team.
- Make it clear from the very first that this is not to be just a training center, but a dynamic space that generates "an army of self-confident and well-informed parents" who understand how to use power.

Relate the Training Center to the New York City education context; build on and enhance the parent training work already under way.

- Build on the new NYCDOE-CUNY College Readiness and Success Initiative, a partnership that is developing college pathway programs to increase students' preparation for college entry and college success. Incorporating the work of this partnership should inform the Center's parent training programs and enhance NYCDOE support for the work of the Center.

- Build on already established parent training programs. Many programs across New York City provide information, education, and skills to the city's parents. Given limited resources, the Center should complement, support, and augment existing programs. Ideally, the Center should initiate its work by identifying current parent education and training providers and outlining what they offer. The following examples suggest the range of programs already in operation:
  - The Parent Training and Information Center operated by Advocates for Children (AFC) of New York focuses on parents of students with disabilities. AFC's Center has trained more than 6,000 parents and professionals and operates the Insideschools.org Web site.
  - The federally funded Parent Information and Resource Center (PIRC) is a "center that meets the unique training, information, and support needs of parents of children enrolled in elementary schools and secondary schools, particularly such parents who are educationally or economically disadvantaged."
  - Learning Leaders, the city's network of school volunteers, supports parents who want to be active participants in the day-to-day activities of the city's public schools.
  - The NYCDOE Office of Family Engagement and Advocacy supports and serves the needs of New York City public school families.
  - A wide variety of community-based organizations serve immigrant parents, often supported and coordinated by the New York Immigration Coalition.
- Take advantage of the Center's placement at CUNY to engage the city's higher-education institutions in providing training and support for parents. Design the Center's programs to provide a pipeline of well-prepared candidates for varieties of roles within the city's schools.

  Some examples:
  - Link the Center's classes to CUNY's continuing education programs to prepare parents to enroll in higher education programs.
  - Integrate the Center's programs into CUNY course offerings so that parents can earn college credits.
  - Offer in-service professional development for parent coordinators and other staff who work with public school families, as well as for parents who serve on Community Education Committees (CECs) and School Leadership Teams (SLTs).
  - Create linkages between Center programs and teacher recruitment, preparation, and training programs to encourage Grow-Your-Own-Teacher pipelines that bring community parents into teaching and help to fill shortage areas such as bilingual education.

The Center's programs should be designed to provide a pipeline of well-prepared candidates for varieties of roles within the city's schools.

- Engage the NYCDOE as a partner in the Center to ensure that its programs provide vital information and support. For example:
  - Negotiate an information-sharing agreement to allow the Center to access updated information on PTA and Parent Association leaders, current CEC and SLT members, and parent coordinators.
  - Designate an NYCDOE liaison between the Center and the relevant NYCDOE offices so that all parent education, information, and training events can be coordinated.
  - Develop a memorandum of agreement that would provide the Center access to information on high school applications, graduation rates, pre-K enrollment, ELL services, and other vital data.

Set clear priorities for the limited current funding and develop an expanded fundraising strategy.

- Develop a parent leadership training program to fill the gaps left by other programs. If, as many parent activists have already noted, the area of greatest need is preparing parents for leadership and governance, use the examples of parent training programs across the country, such as Kentucky's CIPL or Connecticut's Parents SEE, as building blocks. Given that the Parent Training Center is a provision of the revised mayoral control "governance law," and considering the limited resources currently at hand, the Center should begin its work with this focus.

Parent activists have noted that the greatest need is to prepare parents for leadership and governance; successful parent training programs across the country can be used as building blocks.

- In training parents to sit on governance structures (parent associations, school leadership teams, district leadership teams, community and citywide councils, and the Panel for Education Policy), ensure that the curriculum covers a broad range of skills for effective leadership. For example, although CIPL prepares parents to take part in formal governance structures such as school councils, the program also prepares parents to take advantage of more informal opportunities to influence policy and practice.
- Form strategic partnerships with other organizations to bring in more resources and build political support for investing in parent leadership training. For example, the Center could form a partnership with the school system's Title I program to provide training to immigrant and marginalized families in the city's neediest schools using the one percent minimum set-aside for parent engagement. CIPL and PIQE have tapped federal program funding (Title I, GEAR-UP, TRIO, Early Childhood) by offering training to their parent participants. Local businesses and foundations provide funding for the Parent Academy in Miami.
- Leverage resources by offering the Center's programs in Title I schools with a negotiated agreement of terms (see the description of PIQE's programs in the Program Examples section), including recognition from the principal, a contact list of parents, meals and childcare, and access to teachers. Some variations include:
  - Train and hire teachers to deliver workshops, matching teachers' backgrounds

with those of families, and pay them a stipend.

– Offer professional development for teachers and other school staff to work with families as partners and include cultural competence training, strategies for engaging families in improving achievement, and what to expect from parent graduates in that professional development.

– Tap the school system's professional development funding to educate teachers about the centrality of parent involvement to student achievement and develop their capacity to maximize effective parent participation.

Follow sound design guidelines that have been used by effective programs.

- Parent Training Center programs should convene where parents are and when they are available – in community centers, preschools, foster care agencies, homeless shelters, health clinics, family courts – wherever the Center's programs can engage parents.
- The most effective trainers of parents are other parents. Parents can best mobilize their communities and reach other parents. The Center's program should extend beyond already involved and active parents to reach the far larger numbers of parents who need much more information, encouragement, and support to become engaged in improving the city's schools.
- Pay attention to language issues and literacy levels. Parents whose literacy levels are low are often quite sophisticated about how the school system works. For these parents, rely less on written materials and more on discussion. Don't underestimate parents.
- Make sure that immigrant parents and parents of students with disabilities participate fully and effectively in the Center's programs. These parents may have unique training needs, and their participation and leadership is crucial in improving our schools.
- Keep the focus of the Center's programs on improving student academic achievement and other important educational outcomes. The research clearly indicates that parents are willing and able to support their children's learning and progress in school and that this form of engagement has the greatest impact on student outcomes.
- Consider the Center's work as a coordinating effort that promotes, supports, and expands the efforts of parent training programs across the entire district. Develop a Web-based information clearinghouse that identifies the range of program offerings the city's parents can access. Identify areas that need additional programming and define and provide resources to address these training gaps.

The Center's program should extend beyond already involved and active parents to reach the far larger numbers of parents who need much more information, encouragement, and support to become engaged in improving the city's schools.

Conclusion

The prospect of a Parent Training Center funded in part by the State is both an enormous challenge and a marvelous opportunity for New York City. The experience of such programs that are well-designed and effectively organized demonstrates the benefits of equipping parents with the knowledge, skills, and support to be strong leaders and active partners with their schools and local districts.

For this potential to be realized, it is essential that the State Legislature, the NYSED, CUNY, and the NYCDOE collaborate to develop the authority and credibility of the Parent Training Center. The work that other organizations in New York City are already doing to train and support parents should be recognized, coordinated, augmented, and enhanced to leverage resources and further develop the asset their efforts have created. If the design team to be designated by CUNY follows the guidelines developed by the effective programs profiled above, they can transform the often-difficult relationship between the city's public schools and the families of the children they serve.

The work that other organizations in New York City are already doing to train and support parents should be recognized, coordinated, augmented, and enhanced to leverage resources and further develop the asset their efforts have created.

Although the funding for the Parent Training Center is small, the potential for its impact on families, students, and schools is huge. The examples of the program in this scan show that a small amount of start-up funding and a dedicated core of committed advocates can attract partners and leverage resources into a powerhouse program.

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Institute for
School Reform

AT BROWN UNIVERSITY

Providence
Brown University
Box 1985
Providence, RI 02912
T 401.863.7990
F 401.863.1290

New York
233 Broadway, Suite 720
New York, NY 10279
T 212.328.9290
F 212.964.1057

www.annenberginstitute.org