Duquesne University, School of Education
Words + Work = Action

A Public Policy Town Hall Community Forum on Poverty and Educational Transformation with Pennsylvania State Representative, Dave Reed
October 14, 2015

Final Report of Findings Presented on Behalf of Duquesne University to State Representative Dave Reed

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY/INTRODUCTION

“When it comes to the future of our nations, especially with an eye toward combating poverty, all educational options must be on the table” - Rep. Dave Reed

Since 2013, the Canevin Center for Educational Transformation and Social Justice in the School of Education at Duquesne University, through its initiatives—specifically the Dr. Barbara A. Sizemore Urban Education components; the Professional Doctorate in Educational Leadership (ProDEL); the Duquesne University Educational Leadership Symposia (DELS); five (5) Community Forums on Educational Transformation; and the development of the Youth and Community Stakeholder Strand—have determined multiple foundations on the future of education. They are as follows:

• The conversation about public education reform and the disparity of student achievement needs to expand beyond an academic conversation to be a larger conversation inclusive of youth, business, government and the broader community of schools.

• In order to tie what has been learned about public education as a social justice right, we must develop youth and community leaders similar to the ways in which faculty, pre-service urban education teachers, and educational leadership candidates are developed in order to prepare them to engage in state conversations that transform public education.
Background from the State Legislature

Two years ago, the Pennsylvania House Majority Policy Committee began its Empowering Opportunities: Gateways Out of Poverty policy initiative, led by then Majority Policy Chair, and now Majority Leader, Rep. Dave Reed (R-Indiana). Designed to study the current policies in place related to poverty in Pennsylvania, the initiative crisscrossed the state to learn about barriers individuals face on their road to self-sustainability.

On October 14, 2015, at the invitation of Dr. Olga Welch, dean of the School of Education and the Canevin Center, Rep. Reed joined community stakeholders (See Appendix A) to receive feedback focused on the intersection of educational transformation, poverty and social justice. The Words + Work = Action: A Public Policy Town Hall Community Forum on Poverty and Educational Transformation sought to transform conversations and to formulate recommendations to guide our local, state, and federal leaders, such as Rep. Reed, in education policy decision making. Table discussions were uniquely designed to offer policy recommendations that Rep. Reed could use to further his work in eradicating poverty in Pennsylvania. The community leaders were charged with outlining their recommendations based on the four principles outlined in Rep. Reed’s poverty report:

- Constant Program Review
- Leadership Matters
- Coordination and Duplication
- Flexibility

Specifically, how could these stakeholders help to change policy so that all children have equal access to education, regardless of their socioeconomic background?

II. RECOMMENDATIONS

“Educating for Opportunity” is named in the Beyond Poverty report as a lever for eradicating poverty in Pennsylvania. Specifically, the following three questions initiated the discussion of education as a means to disrupt poverty:

1. Is education the single, most accurate determination of one’s future?
2. Are we looking at our educational system from the broad perspective we need to in order to ensure no one is left behind?
3. Are we educating for success in today’s global economy?
Following the Town Hall Meeting with the participants, community leaders drafted the recommendations to speak to *Educating for Opportunity* in the Pittsburgh Region/Allegheny County. These recommendations are based on the conversation at the Town Hall, and do not necessarily reflect the views of all those present, or Rep. Reed.

**Comments/Feedback/Recommendations from October 14, 2015**

**Community Forum/Town Hall Meeting**

**Family/Parental Involvement:**

General Conversation:

- Parents need support. Students need supports; help with JD [juvenile delinquency] issues.
- All the resources, technology, etc. thrown at a school does little if it falls dead outside school - due to issues of poverty, hunger, and/or lack of parental education.

Recommendations:

- We must engage the parents/caregivers/community in a way that is meaningful to them.
- Create schools to be community centers, ie: “spark” from early childhood through elementary, middle, and high school.
- Create culture in homes and communities where family/community educate our children.
- Encourage teacher “supports” as a resource for parents.

**Constant Program Review:**

General Conversation:

- Children achieve when their backgrounds are reflected in their instruction and educational environment.
- We should be interested in the transformative change of individuals becoming self-sufficient and off of entitlement programs.
Recommendations:

- Review Charter School Laws (Article 17-A) and revise the charter school special education tuition formula.
- Mandate training, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of culturally relevant and responsive teaching and building practices.
- Create evaluation tools that measure impact instead of numbers of people who receive services from the government.
- Implement a yearly request for proposal process to avoid “grandfathered funding.”

**Leadership Matters:**

Recommendations:

- Find a way to encourage capable leaders (political, administrative, and pedagogical) to serve in poverty dominant school districts.
- Utilize university social policy and research centers to guide our local, state, and federal leaders in policy decision making.
- Include community stakeholders in the beginning of the conversation by creating advisory boards that review and evaluate change proposals – Town Halls, Think Tanks, and Deliberative Forums can facilitate those processes.

**Coordination and Duplication:**

General Conversation:

- Many, if not most, children who live in poverty, are in financial recovery or distressed school districts. Therefore, focus on duplicating finance and reform of financially and educationally failing school districts, like Duquesne City, Chester Upland, Philadelphia- and several more.

Recommendations:

- Create a matrix heat map of services to identify areas of duplication and where resources are needed.
• Coordinate stakeholders and strongly encourage them to design a continuum of services that are focused on an agency’s strength and core mission.

• Partner with Health and Human Services (HHS) professionals in developing a universal services plan.

**Flexibility:**

General Conversation:

• Of 500 school districts in Pennsylvania, there are few similarities in all 500. Therefore, legislation ought to be flexible to accommodate differences.

• How can we get the state to have more flexible spending priorities that cover the whole community?
  
  o Education
  o Health care
  o Prevention care, day care, dental, etc.

Recommendations:

• Coordinate efforts across state agencies and school districts in a more focused and efficient manner.

• Create models of communication and efforts for schools that can be replicated but never fully duplicated.

• Promote community Educational Centers that provide adult and youth services all day.

**Other:**

• Reclaim education as a technocratic endeavor and reclaim it as a social, civic, and academic endeavor. The over-concentration on testing has created an educational atmosphere that centers on standards and not children and their families.

• Create a humanized educational system, as opposed to a technocratic one.

• Reduce the amount of testing required for schools to ensure teachers are able to teach lessons, not simply prepare students for standardized tests.
Future Efforts:

“By narrowing the discussion to...Educating for Opportunity, we hope to now engage in a meaningful discussion with all interested parties on specific remedies...” Rep. Dave Reed

From the Town Hall, it became apparent that there was a greater need to boost engagement of community, non-profit, elected, and faith based officials to further the cause of eliminating poverty in Pennsylvania. The groups present also recommend a deliberative Pre-K-20 Educational Opportunity Think Tank comprised of community stakeholders drawn from, for example, those present at the October Town Hall event.

The Educational Opportunity Think Tank will serve to further collaborative thinking and advance actions toward naming and solving problems that are barriers to activating education as a lever to eradicate poverty. The Think Tank will also continue to identify and refine the strategies to further progress toward educational opportunities for all students and youth. An outcome of the Educational Opportunity Think Tank will be for educational stakeholders to create an improvement plan that addresses the agreed upon problem of educational practice and policy reform.

This Educational Opportunity Think Tank will then be tasked to:

- Identify PreK-20 educational opportunities that are most in line with the principles outlined in Beyond Poverty.

- Locate the most immediate problem of educational practice to accessing these opportunities.

- Design an implementation plan to respond to the problem of practice.

For further report details, contact: Dr. Olga M. Welch, Dean and Professor, School of Education, Duquesne University, 412-396-6102, welcho@duq.edu
APPENDIX A
Community Forum Invitees/Participants

1. 501 (c) (3) 2, Duquesne University School of Education Advisory Board
2. 90.5 WESA
3. A+ Schools
4. Allegheny Conference on Community Development
5. Allegheny County
6. Allegheny County, Office of County Executive Rich Fitzgerald
7. Allegheny Intermediate Unit
8. Apangea Learning Inc.
9. Avonworth School District
10. Begandy Enterprises
11. Bethel Park School District
13. Catholic Charities, Diocese of Pittsburgh
14. Center of Life
15. City Charter High School
16. City of Pittsburgh
17. City of Pittsburgh, Office of Mayor William Peduto
18. Community College of Allegheny County
19. Consortium for Public Education
20. Delany Scholars Program
21. Duquesne City School District
22. Duquesne University
23. Duquesne University School of Education
24. Emory University
25. Entrepreneuring Youth
26. Environmental Charter School at Frick Park
27. Family Services of Western PA
28. Fox Chapel Area School District
29. Gateway School District
30. Grable Foundation
31. Heinz Endowments
32. Higher Achievement Pittsburgh
33. Hill House Association
34. Holy Family Institute of Pittsburgh
35. Homeless Children’s Education Fund
36. Homewood Children's Village
37. Junior Achievement of Western Pennsylvania
38. Manchester Academic Charter School
40. McKeesport Area School District
41. My Brother’s Keeper
42. Neighborhood Academy
43. Neighborhood Learning Alliance
44. Penn Hills School District
45. Pennsylvania House of Representatives, Office of Representative Dan Frankel
46. Pennsylvania House of Representatives, Office of Representative Jake Wheatley
47. Pennsylvania State Government
48. Pittsburgh Board of Education
49. Pittsburgh Foundation
50. Pittsburgh Promise
51. Pittsburgh Public Schools
52. Pittsburgh Social Venture Partners
53. PNC Grow Up Great
54. Propel Schools
55. Propel Schools Foundation
56. Proteus Counsel
57. Ralph A. Falbo, Inc.
58. Randall Industries
59. Remake Learning Council
60. RiverQuest
63. Sprout Fund
64. Steel Valley School District
65. Sto-Rox School District
66. Three Rivers Community Foundation
67. Three Rivers Youth
68. United Way of Allegheny County
69. University of Pittsburgh
70. University of Pittsburgh, Medical Center
71. University of Pittsburgh, School of Education
72. Urban Innovation21
73. Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh
74. Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh Charter School
75. Urban Pathways Charter School
76. Verizon
77. Woodland Hills School District
78. YWCA Greater Pittsburgh