

INFORM. INSPIRE. DEVELOP CIVIC LEADERS.

THE POLICY CIRCLE SCHOOLS IN COMMUNITIES





REFUGEE CRISES AROUND THE WORLD



IT IS DIFFICULT TO IMAGINE A TYPICAL COMMUNITY IN AMERICA WITHOUT A PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT AND THE SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE IT PROVIDES TO CHILDREN AND FAMILIES. IN ADDITION TO EDUCATION, PUBLIC SCHOOLS PROVIDE A SAFE CHILDCARE OPTION FOR WORKING FAMILIES TO PLAN THEIR WORK SCHEDULES AROUND. SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN DEPEND ON PUBLIC SCHOOLS FOR MANY ASPECTS OF THEIR HEALTH AND WELL-BEING FROM SOCIAL CONNECTIONS TO ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES AND EVEN NUTRITION.

WHEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS ACROSS AMERICA CLOSED IN MARCH 2020, AND HOMES ACROSS AMERICA BECAME MAKESHIFT CLASSROOMS, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES FACED THE MASSIVE DILEMMA OF REPLACING OR SUBSTITUTING FOR THE LEARNING, PEER TO PEER RELATIONSHIPS, AND SOCIAL SERVICES THAT SCHOOLS PROVIDE. LIVING WITH THE CHALLENGES PRESENTED BY THE PANDEMIC HAS MEANT REIMAGINING SCHOOLS AS A "LEARNING COMMUNITY" RATHER THAN A PHYSICAL LOCATION WHERE LEARNING HAPPENS.

➤ FACTS TO CONSIDER ◀

GIVEN THAT STUDENTS BETWEEN AGE 5 AND AGE 18 HAVE A 7 OR 8 HOUR SCHOOL DAY AND SPEND 180 DAYS PER YEAR IN SCHOOL, CHILDREN UP TO AGE 18 SPEND 20% OF THEIR TIME IN SCHOOL. THIS MEANS THAT ACHIEVEMENT GAPS THAT EMERGE AND GROW OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM CANNOT NECESSARILY BE CLOSED BY WHAT HAPPENS DURING THE SCHOOL DAY. "LIFE-WIDE LEARNING" THAT EMBRACES LEARNING EXPERIENCES OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM CAN HELP CLOSE ACHIEVEMENT GAPS.

SCHOOL DISTRICTS THAT SERVE 9 MILLION RURAL STUDENTS ARE A KEY SOURCE OF EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND CIVIC EDUCATION. SCHOOL DISTRICTS ARE THE LARGEST EMPLOYER IN SOME RURAL COMMUNITIES. ACROSS RURAL AMERICA, SMALL TOWNS WITH A SCHOOL DISTRICT TEND TO HAVE HIGHER PROPERTY TAXES AND MORE MUNICIPAL SERVICES, AND MORE HOUSEHOLDS WITH SELF-EMPLOYMENT.

5.7 MILLION STUDENTS ACROSS AMERICA ATTEND PRIVATE SCHOOLS. THESE SCHOOLS PROVIDE SERVICES BASED ON A VARIETY OF BACKGROUNDS, LEARNING STYLES, AND ABILITIES, FROM FAITH-BASED SCHOOLS AND SCHOOLS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES TO MONTESSORI SCHOOLS BUILT AROUND A SPECIFIC LEARNING STYLE. A SMALLER PORTION OF HOUSEHOLDS (3-4% ON AVERAGE ANNUALLY) CHOOSE TO HOMESCHOOL THEIR CHILDREN.

THE PANDEMIC CREATED A MASSIVE INCREASE IN HOMESCHOOLING. IN SPRING 2020, ONLY 5.4% OF U.S. HOUSEHOLDS WITH SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN REPORTED HOMESCHOOLING, AS OPPOSED TO PUBLIC OR PRIVATE SCHOOLS. BY FALL 2020, THIS REACHED 11.1% OF STUDENTS OUTSIDE OF PUBLIC OR PRIVATE SCHOOLS.

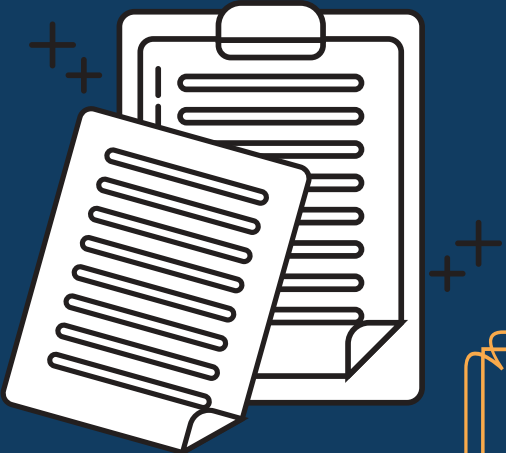
➤ GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT ◀

IN 2019, TOTAL EDUCATION SPENDING ON PUBLIC ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION AMOUNTED TO \$50 BILLION. ONLY 8% OF THIS FUNDING CAME FROM THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT, MAINLY CONSISTING OF SUPPORT FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION AND CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAMS. THE VAST MAJORITY OF EDUCATION SPENDING HAPPENS AT THE STATE AND LOCAL LEVEL.

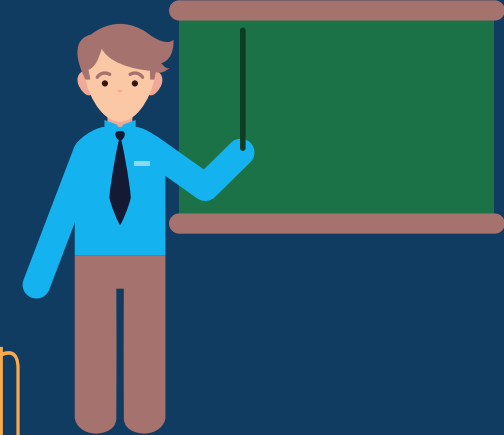
STATE-LEVEL DEPARTMENTS OF EDUCATION, SOMETIMES CALLED STATE BOARDS OF EDUCATION, CONTROL POLICIES LIKE HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS, ACCREDITATION AND LICENSING OF ALL PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS, AND THE QUALIFICATIONS FOR TEACHERS AND OTHER EDUCATION PERSONNEL. STATE GOVERNMENTS ALSO SUPPLY 45% OF SCHOOL FUNDING, MAINLY THROUGH STATE INCOME AND SALES TAXES.

21ST CENTURY COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTERS ARE THE SINGLE LARGEST FEDERAL EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM. THE PROGRAM ALLOCATES FUNDING TO AFTERSCHOOL, BEFORE SCHOOL, AND SUMMER LEARNING PROGRAMS. ABOUT 80% OF COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTERS ARE BASED IN SCHOOLS AND SERVICE TWO MILLION CHILDREN THROUGH PHYSICAL AND NUTRITION EDUCATION, ART AND MUSIC CLASSES, AND CAREER READINESS PROGRAMS.

SCHOOL DISTRICTS ARE SPECIAL-PURPOSE GOVERNMENT ENTITIES, ORGANIZED BY GEOGRAPHY, FOR ADMINISTERING ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS. DISTRICTS ARE RUN BY SCHOOL BOARDS THAT SET PERFORMANCE STANDARDS, DETERMINE BUDGETS AND SPENDING PRIORITIES, AND HOLD MONTHLY MEETINGS TO RECEIVE PUBLIC INPUT FOR THEIR DECISIONS. SOME SCHOOL BOARDS HAVE THE ABILITY TO LEVY TAXES, BUT MOST SCHOOL DISTRICTS RELY ON LOCAL-LEVEL PROPERTY TAXES FOR FUNDING.



➤ FRAMING THE ISSUE ◀



PARENT TEACHER ASSOCIATIONS

RESEARCH SHOWS THAT WHEN PARENTS ARE MORE INVOLVED IN EDUCATION, STUDENTS HAVE HIGHER ATTENDANCE RATES, BETTER GRADES, AND A MORE POSITIVE ATTITUDE TOWARDS SCHOOL. THE LEGAL DECISION-MAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR SCHOOL POLICIES FALLS TO SCHOOL BOARDS, BUT PARENT TEACHER ASSOCIATIONS (PTAS) CAN PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN FUNDRAISING, DISTRICT-LEVEL DECISION-MAKING, AND EVEN NATIONWIDE POLICY ADVOCACY.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL OWNERSHIP

PUBLIC EDUCATION IS THE AREA WHERE ENGAGEMENT IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT CAN MAKE THE BIGGEST DIFFERENCE. COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS THAT IDENTIFY LOCAL NEEDS AND RESOURCES CAN WORK WITH LIBRARIES, SOCIAL SERVICE AGENCIES, AND PRIVATE STAKEHOLDERS TO PROVIDE A VARIETY OF SERVICES AND OPPORTUNITIES. THE HARLEM CHILDREN'S ZONE IS AN EXAMPLE OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS COMBINED COMMUNITY OUTREACH, HEALTH AND WELLNESS PROGRAMS.

PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

SCHOOLS THAT ARE OPEN TO PARTNERSHIPS WITH LOCAL BUSINESSES AND NONPROFITS CAN PROVIDE ENHANCED OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERNSHIPS AND CAREER READINESS PROGRAMS, AND MAKE BETTER USE OF EXISTING HEALTH AND WELLNESS RESOURCES. FLORIDA'S FLAGLER COUNTY EDUCATION FOUNDATION HELPS LOCAL BUSINESSES PARTNER WITH SCHOOL DISTRICTS TO PROVIDE MENTORSHIP AND INTERNSHIP OPPORTUNITIES, AS WELL AS CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES.

CROSS-SECTOR COALITIONS

SCHOOLS CAN PROVIDE THE BEST EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES WHEN PARENTS, EDUCATORS, AND COMMUNITY LEADERS WORK TOGETHER AND DRAW ON RESOURCES OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM, FROM NONPROFITS AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR TO SOCIAL SERVICE PROGRAMS. SCHOOLS CAN FUNCTION THE BEST WHEN STAKEHOLDERS TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE LEARNING THAT HAPPENS OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM, AND SEAMLESSLY INTEGRATE WHAT HAPPENS INSIDE THE CLASSROOM WITH SOCIAL SERVICES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING IN THE BROADER COMMUNITY.



➤ SOLUTIONS ◀

LEARNING FROM THE DIFFERENT MODELS

THERE ARE MAJOR LIMITS TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES DIFFERENT PARENTS HAVE ACCESS TO, BUT MANY ELEMENTS OF DIFFERENT LEARNING OPTIONS OFFER A MODEL FOR WHAT A POST-COVID SCHOOL SYSTEM CAN LOOK LIKE. FOR EXAMPLE, RELIANCE ON EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES, COMMUNITY RESOURCES LIKE PUBLIC LIBRARIES AND MUSEUMS, AND SOCIAL GROUPS FOR HOMESCHOOLED STUDENTS PROVIDE LESSONS FOR MAKING THE MOST OF VIRTUAL LEARNING AND TAKING ADVANTAGE OF LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM.

PROVIDING CAREER EDUCATION WITH LOCAL BUSINESSES

SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS CAN MAKE THE MOST OF LOCAL BUSINESSES IN THEIR COMMUNITY BY PROVIDING A PIPELINE FROM CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION TO LOCAL EMPLOYERS, OR PROVIDING HANDS-ON LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNGER STUDENTS. FOR INSTANCE, FIELD TRIPS TO A LOCAL ROBOTICS OR ENGINEERING FIRM FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SCIENCE STUDENTS CREATES OPPORTUNITIES TO REINFORCE CLASSROOM LEARNING THROUGH HANDS ON EXPERIENCES AND INSPIRE SOME STUDENTS TO PURSUE CAREERS IN STEM (SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING, AND MATHEMATICS).

PROVIDING SOCIAL SERVICES AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES THROUGH SCHOOLS

STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE IN THE CLASSROOM AND ACHIEVEMENT GAPS ARE OFTEN THE RESULT OF A STUDENT'S LIFE AND ENVIRONMENT OUTSIDE OF THE CLASSROOM. SCHOOLS THAT PROVIDE HEALTH, NUTRITIONAL AND WELLNESS SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND MAKE PARENTS AWARE OF SOCIAL SERVICES CAN IMPROVE STUDENT PERFORMANCE AND MORE EFFECTIVELY ADDRESS SOCIAL NEEDS IN COMMUNITIES THAT SCHOOL DISTRICTS SERVE.

➤ WHAT YOU CAN DO ◀

MEASURE -

FIND OUT WHAT YOUR STATE AND CITY ARE DOING ABOUT WELCOMING REFUGEES.
DO YOU KNOW WHERE REFUGEES ARE LOCATED IN YOUR STATE OR CITY?
IS THERE A NEARBY MILITARY BASE THAT HAS HOUSED REFUGEE FAMILIES?
HOW ARE REFUGEES INTEGRATED INTO THE COMMUNITY?
WHAT PROJECTS AND AGENCIES EXIST, OR DOES ONE NEED TO BE FORMED?



IDENTIFY -

WHO ARE THE INFLUENCERS IN YOUR STATE, COUNTY, OR COMMUNITY? WHO ARE THE MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION OR CITY COUNCILS IN YOUR STATE?
WHAT STEPS HAVE YOUR STATE'S AND COMMUNITY'S ELECTED OR APPOINTED OFFICIALS TAKEN?



REACH OUT -

FIND ALLIES AND BUILD COMMUNITY NETWORKS. ALL IT TAKES IS A SMALL TEAM OF TWO OR THREE PEOPLE TO SET A PATH FOR REAL IMPROVEMENT. FIND ALLIES IN YOUR COMMUNITY OR IN NEARBY TOWNS AND ELSEWHERE IN THE STATE.

PLAN -

SET SOME MILESTONES BASED ON YOUR LOCAL SCHOOL BOARD MEETING CALENDAR



EXECUTE -

GIVE IT YOUR BEST SHOT. YOU CAN:
ENGAGE WITH YOUR SCHOOL DISTRICT,
ENGAGE WITH PRIVATE SECTOR BUSINESSES TO SEE IF THERE ARE OPPORTUNITIES FOR APPRENTICESHIPS OR INTERNSHIPS, AND INVESTIGATE COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS EXIST IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD.