

# Grassroots Voices Listening Projects

## "Facilitator's Guide"

For communities of color, education is almost a religious experience. For generations, education was viewed as a necessary ingredient to escaping suffocating oppressive conditions and provide our children with a chance at a better life. Quality education helps to develop competent, confident and compassionate human beings by providing opportunities for inspiration such as challenging and relevant curriculum, art, music, worldview development and cross-community experiences. Our communities have been denied these experiences through education policy that is failed, top-down, standardized test-driven and racist. If we look at the current state of education through



this lens, it destroys the excuses that blame teachers, parents and students. We don't have failing schools; we are subjected to failed education policy from broken school systems. Our children and our communities deserve better. Grassroots Voices is a collection of "Listening Projects" from around the country with community members; the people directly affected. Each Listening Project is a meeting of organizations and individuals with a primary focus on, but not limited to communities of color. Each listening project will seek to highlight how people's daily lives, their hopes for the future and their communities are impacted by:

1. School closings, turnarounds, phase-outs, co-locations and charter school expansion.
2. Inequitable school funding and budget cuts
3. Mayoral control and the lack of meaningful parent and community engagement in school decision-making.
4. Zero-tolerance discipline policies and the push-out crisis.

The goals of the Grassroots Voices Listening Projects are to:

1. Effectively document the impact of current education policy on the lives of families and their communities for local, national and international organizing efforts.
2. Unify the voices of an emerging national education organizing network that is working to address institutional racism that informs local and national education policy.
3. Collect authentic stories (qualitative evidence) to align peer reviewed research (quantitative evidence) strengthening the demand for the Sustainable School Success proposal as a viable solution to help improve struggling schools.
4. Make the connection between viable, effective neighborhood schools and healthy, safe prosperous communities.



## The Process

The **Grassroots Voices Listening Projects** utilizes a seven-step process that insures that the grassroots voices of the people directly impacted by corporate education policy are effectively secured, heard, documented and reported. The more representative bodies that can be assembled to comprise a Listening Project, the better.

1. Outreach-Listening projects should be done with a diverse set of people impacted by the issue. Organizers can schedule listening projects with as few as 10 and as many as 100 people. Organizations should develop a Listening Project calendar, with confirmed dates listed.
2. Logistics-Organizers must worked with interested individuals and groups to determine the date, time, location and duration of the listening project. Organizers are responsible for making sure each listening project is documented (transcribed, video-taped and/or photographed) and that a trained facilitator is present.
3. The Listening Project-Each listening project lasts from 45 minutes to 2 hours, depending on the size of the group. Participants should know the questions before the listening project. The format for the Grassroots Voices Listening Project is as follows:
  - Introductions-Each individual (if group is 30 or less) will introduce themselves and briefly state how they are impacted by corporate education policies. **(10 minutes)**
  - Overview-Brief description of the Journey for Justice Alliance and how the Global Voices Listening Projects honor our local struggle and connect them to a national campaign to stop these policies. **(10 minutes)**
  - Purpose-Discuss the Global Voices Listening Project as a tool to vehicle to support our assertion of corporate takeover of schools in Black and Brown communities as a civil and human rights issue. Participants need to understand how the information from the listening projects will go into a report produced in April calling for a moratorium on corporate interventions such as closings, turnarounds, phase-outs and charter expansion and replace them with our proposal for Sustainable School Transformation. This report will be released at a congressional hearing on the human rights implications of corporate education interventions and during this process, we will engage the U.N. Rappateur for Education and representatives of the World Court to examine this as an international human rights issue.**(10 minutes)**
  - Review Background Material-Review Article 26 of the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights (education) and key components of the Title VI Civil Rights Act. Review the guidelines for the listening project which are; 1) Limit statements to no more than 3 minutes, 2) There is no debate. People's experience is their experience. 3) Respect people's viewpoint and their voice by not talking during testimony. **(10 minutes)**

- Interactive Response to Questions-This section will be facilitated by a moderator who will ask the following questions for each topic area-respondents will have 3 minutes to reply.
  1. How has corporate education policy (school closings, turnarounds, phase-outs, charter expansion, appointed school boards) impacted your life personally?
  2. Who are the perpetrators, and who are the victims?
  3. How does racism and classism drive these corporate education interventions and how has it impacted your ability to work and address community issues?
  4. What do you want the U.S. Department of Education and the United Nations to do to effectively address this issue?
  5. What would be your dream educational experience? **(60 minutes)**
- Submission of personal statements/testimonials-For those individuals or groups who have prepared written statements. Each statement should include email where follow up can be sent. **(10 minutes)**
- Follow Up-Announcement of when participants will get copies of the listening project summary, how they can be involved in the next steps (Grassroots Impact Tour, state advocacy for Sustainable School Transformation, federal hearing). **(10 minutes)**

4. Documentation and Summation-After each Listening Project, the information must be properly documented. All testimony has to be transcribed and a listening project summary must be completed 2 weeks after completion of the Listening Project, answering the Listening Project questions and giving specific logistical information; how many people participated, location and who facilitated.

5. Participate/Follow Grassroots Impact Tours-All listening project participants should be invited to participate in the Grassroots Impact Tour, which be scheduled for a time after the projects are completed. They should be encouraged to testify and organizers should make sure they see the connection from the individual Listening Project to the Grassroots Impact Tours, to state advocacy and finally to the congressional hearing.

6. Follow Up-Listening Project participants will receive monthly email updates on the state of the Sustainable School Transformation campaign and an invite to all meeting and events. One of the goals of the Listening Projects is to deepen and expand participating organization's local base.

7. Evaluation-Participants will be encouraged to evaluate their experience in this process. Did they see the Listening Projects as a viable tool to address the issue they are concerned about? Was there effective communication between them and the organization sponsoring the Listening Project? Was there a focused, clear organizing strategy to address these issues and did they feel connected to it?



It should be noted that while all the components are listed chronologically, some of the activities may occur simultaneously. For example, it is very likely that outreach and logistics may feed into each other.

## THE JOURNEY FOR JUSTICE ALLIANCE

Journey for Justice is an alliance of grassroots, community-based organizations from around the United States, committed to organizing for community-driven school improvement throughout the United States. We are the people directly impacted by education policy; therefore, we must be at the center of any school policy decision-making process. The following organizations make up the Journey for Justice Alliance:

1. Alliance for Quality Education-New York, NY
2. Coalition for Education Justice-New York, NY
3. Urban Youth Collaborative-New York, NY
4. P.U.L.S.E (Parents United for Local School Education)-Newark, NJ
5. Camden Education Assoc.-Camden, NJ
6. Parent Advocates for Children's Education-Jersey City, NJ
7. Concerned Citizens Coalition-Jersey City, NJ
8. Patterson Education Organizing Committee-Patterson, NJ
9. Citizens for Quality Education-Englewood, NJ
10. Keep the Vote; No Takeover-Detroit, MI
11. Detroit Life Coalition-Detroit, MI
12. Action Now-Chicago, IL
13. Kenwood Oakland Community Org.-Chicago, IL
14. Action United-Philadelphia, P.A
15. Philadelphia Student Union-Philadelphia, PA
16. Youth United for Change-Philadelphia, PA
17. Action United, Pittsburg, PA
18. Neighborhood Organizing for Change-Minneapolis, MN
19. Boston Parent Organizing Network-Boston, MA
20. Boston Youth Organizing Project-Boston, MA
21. Empower DC-Washington, D.C
22. Project South-Atlanta, GA
23. C6 (Conscious Communities Controlling Community Changes)-New Orleans, LA
24. Coalition for Community Schools-New Orleans, LA
25. Baltimore Algebra Project-Baltimore, MD
26. Fannie Lou Hamer Center for Change-Euphora, Mississippi
27. Parent Power-Hartford, Connecticut
28. Labor Community Strategy Center-Los Angeles, CA
29. Alliance for Education Justice-National
30. Center for Popular Democracy-National



While these organizations and cities will spearhead the listening projects, other cities where there are strong community and/or labor groups will also participate. By March, 2013, we will complete no fewer than 200 listening projects around the country, which will be compiled into a report released in April 2013, calling for an end to top-down, corporate education policy and implementation of our proposal for *Sustainable School Transformation*.



# Our Children Are Not Collateral Damage!

A call for

## SUSTAINABLE SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION

For decades, schools that serve African American and Latino students have been denied their fair share of education resources. Without libraries, without a full range of college, career and enrichment course offerings, without counselors or supported teachers, students in our urban districts have had little to no opportunity to meet their full potential. Now, corporate education reformers are destroying our public schools altogether, closing them, turning them over to private management, firing our teachers and squeezing education budgets in the name of “reform.” This assault on public education is happening almost exclusively in communities of color. *It must stop.*

Closures, charters, firing teachers and other “dramatic interventions” haven’t worked in the past, and they aren’t working now.<sup>1</sup>

The Journey for Justice is a national alliance dedicated to ending discriminatory assaults on public education and inspiring a new approach to school improvement. We oppose the wholesale closure of public schools. We oppose the destabilizing, top-down interventions required by the federal School Improvement Grants (SIG) program. These interventions not only don’t improve our children’s educational outcomes, they destabilize our communities, increase violence, and shut out democratic voices in public education. Diane Ravitch recently stated that when you close a school it is like “sticking a knife in the heart of a community.” This is not school improvement. But we have a plan.

Two years ago, Communities for Excellent Public Schools (CEPS), a campaign waged by 35 community-based organizations in low-income communities of color across the country, developed “The Sustainable Success Model” –a call for locally controlled design for school improvement. That campaign ended when Congress failed to act on reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2011. Many of the groups that now make up the Journey for Justice were part of that effort. And we stand by the Sustainable Success Model. As Congress reconvenes, President Obama begins his second term and Secretary Duncan contemplates how to move forward with school improvement, we who are directly impacted are calling with renewed urgency, for change.

### **The Sustainable Success Model requires school districts to:**

- 1) Undertake a comprehensive needs assessment—done in partnership with parents, educators, students and community members—so that local solutions are tailored to local problems,
- 2) Implement research-based instructional and educational reforms,
- 3) Address essential social, emotional and physical needs of students, and
- 4) Recognize parent, student, and community leadership as key to sustainable student success.

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<sup>1</sup> Trujillo, T. & Rénee, M. (2012). Democratic School Turnarounds: Pursuing Equity and Learning from Evidence. Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Center. Retrieved 12-18-12 from <http://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/democratic-school-turnarounds> .

The Journey for Justice is calling on Congress, and the Department of Education to implement The Sustainable Success Model as a fifth option under SIG. We believe it offers more comprehensive and lasting improvement.

## **Key Provisions of the Sustainable Success Model for School Improvement**

### ***1. A collaborative process that creates public accountability by engaging parents, students, educators, and communities in designing and implementing reforms.***

A growing body of research shows that parent and community buy-in and support are essential to sustainable school transformation. Our proposal calls for:

- ◆ Timely and meaningful notification of parents that their school has been designated or identified for transformation, and a school site meeting to inform parents of options;
- ◆ Local “School Transformation Teams” made up of parents, students, community members and school staff with the power to design and implement a reform plan with the support of state and district resources;
- ◆ A comprehensive, full-year process of assessment and planning so that reforms are tailored to the specific needs of the school;
- ◆ A requirement that ongoing parent and community engagement be part of the reform plan.

### ***2. A focus on research-based strategies within the school, including a strong focus on instruction, college and career-ready curriculum for all students, a collaborative environment for high quality teaching, and a positive climate for student learning.***

In order to close the achievement gaps that exist in our schools, school improvement must be comprehensive and research-based. In addition, schools must allow, support and model a collaborative work environment focused on optimal teaching and learning conditions. Our proposal calls for:

- ◆ A well-rounded, culturally relevant and enriched college and career-preparatory curriculum available to all students;
- ◆ The use of research-based strategies for instruction, school organization and student support;
- ◆ Staffing structures that facilitate collaboration and the development of a professional learning;
- ◆ The use of data to inform and differentiate instruction;

### ***3. Wrap-around supports to ensure that students are healthy, nurtured and ready to learn and thrive.***

As critical as good teachers are to improving student achievement, students cannot learn to their full potential when they are hungry, exhausted or ill; when their parents cannot support them at home, or when they feel unsafe or disrespected in school. Sustainable Success requires a full range of supports available to students and their families. Our proposal requires:

- ◆An assessment process to identify students' non-academic needs, and asset mapping to determine possible providers and partners in service delivery;
- ◆ College and career counselors to support students in developing post-graduation plans;
- ◆Collaboration and partnerships with community and corporate providers to ensure that students' health and emotional needs are met;
- ◆Extended school days and years, to provide students with additional academic supports, and to provide teachers with (and fully compensate them for) more time for planning and collaboration.

We call on Secretary Duncan to work with members of Congress to include the Sustainable Success Model as an option under the School Improvement Grants program.

## EDUCATION AND TITLE VI OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964

Title vi of the civil rights act of 1964 prohibits discrimination based on race, color or national origin in programs or activities which receive federal financial assistance

Title vi and race, color and national origin discrimination

Title vi of the civil rights act of 1964 protects people from discrimination based on race, color or national origin in programs or activities that receive federal financial assistance. Title vi states that:

- No person in the united states shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.
- Programs and activities that receive federal financial assistance from the united states department of education (ed) are covered by title vi. Ed maintains an office for civil rights, with 10 regional offices and a headquarters office in Washington, d.c., to enforce title vi.

Education programs and activities covered by title vi

- Agencies and institutions that receive ed funds covered by title vi include: 50 state education agencies, their sub recipients, and vocational rehabilitation agencies; the education and vocational rehabilitation agencies of the district of Columbia and of the territories and possessions of the united states; 16,000 local education systems; 3,200 colleges and universities; 10,000 proprietary institutions; and other institutions, such as libraries and museums that receive ed funds.

Programs and activities that receive ed funds must operate in a non-discriminatory manner. These may include, but are not limited to:

- admissions, recruitment, financial aid, academic programs, student treatment and services, counseling and guidance, discipline, classroom assignment, grading, vocational education, recreation, physical education, athletics, housing and employment, if it affects those who are intended to benefit from the federal funds. Also, a recipient may not retaliate against any person because he or she opposed an unlawful educational practice or policy, or made charges, testified or participated in any complaint action under title vi. For a recipient to retaliate in any way is considered a violation of title vi. The ed title vi regulations (volume 34, code of federal regulations, part 100) provide a detailed discussion of discrimination prohibited by title vi.



# THE UNITED NATIONS UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

## PREAMBLE

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,

Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people,

Whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law,

Whereas it is essential to promote the development of friendly relations between nations,

Whereas the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

Whereas Member States have pledged themselves to achieve, in co-operation with the United Nations, the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms,

Whereas a common understanding of these rights and freedoms is of the greatest importance for the full realization of this pledge,

**Now, Therefore THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY proclaims THIS UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS** as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction.

## Article 26.

- Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.
- (2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.
- (3) Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.