



# ***Education is EVERYBODY'S Business***

Arizona Business and Education  
Coalition

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# Objectives: Leadership + Collaboration = Results

Using a case study of The Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence:

(details excerpted from *Mobilizing Citizens for Better Schools, 2004, Robert F. Sexton*)

- Understanding that transforming the system of education is complex and isn't "owned" by educators, parents, business, the public, but is Everybody's Business and responsibility
- Understanding that building "civic capacity" for collective action is essential

# Who Am I? Why Am I Here?

- Retired after serving 32 years as an educator at all levels in Kentucky
- Deputy Commissioner in the KY Department of Education under three Commissioners during the pre- and implementation years of KERA as a participant-observer of all aspects of the work
- Directly engaged with The Prichard Committee in development and implementation of the Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership (CIPL)
- “Retired” in 2003 and joined the Council of Chief State School Officers directing and supporting leadership development, outreach and partnerships, educator workforce development, next generation learning, and global education efforts.

# What is CCSSO?

- A membership organization of 57 individuals and their staffs responsible for elementary and secondary education in their respective agencies (50 states, DC Public Schools, Department of Defense Education Activity, 5 extra-state jurisdictions)
- We provide leadership, advocacy at the Federal level, and service in creating collective state action to improve education for all students



# Setting the Context: 3 C's

- Often told that there are 3 C's we must never forget in order to get something done:
  - Communication
  - Communication
  - Communication

I would propose we need to think about it a little differently, and hope you keep this in mind throughout today--



# Learning from Circles:

- Keeping something in OR out;
- Circle your wagons and talk to yourselves;
- Going full steam ahead in a circle;
- Protecting AND isolating;
- Defining with whom we want to “hold hands”;
- Circles, independent or intersecting?



# COMMUNICATION

- Communication is something we DO to others or have it DONE to us;
- Dialogue is something we do WITH others;
- Initiated by those who need to have others understand what they are planning to do



# COOPERATION/COORDINATION

- Cooperation assumes common understanding of the issues;
- Defining who needs to cooperate requires agreement and interest;
- Could be initiated jointly by those with a common issue;
- Could also be thought of as coordination



# COLLABORATION

- Requires that everyone come to the table with an open mind and willingness to be honest and open with ideas and resources
- It is hard work to reach common goals, define actions, and accountability
- Sometimes taking the lead and sometimes being a follower



# CIRCLES

- Who is in yours and why?
- Who is missing and why?
- Where do intersections need to occur?



# The Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence

- 1980: Commission of citizens appointed by the Kentucky Council on Higher Education—*The Commission on Higher Education in Kentucky's Future*
  - after issuing their report on higher education they recreated themselves
  - frustrated with elected officials' indifference to education
  - knew that KY's historic educational deficits would not solve themselves
  - sick of complacency
  - believed they could create a compelling vision of a future with excellent schools
- 1983: Established as an independent, private, nonprofit corporation, with broadened agenda to include elementary and secondary education.

# The Prichard Committee

- Outside-in, not inside-out approach
- Made education quality the central public concern
- Created a citizen voice that operates at the grassroots and policy levels
- Activists believing that the problems with the system could not be solely solved by governmental actions, but needed a reinvestment in civic capital
- Volunteer members decided to take personal responsibility for changing the state's direction



# Getting Started

- 1980 report on the future of higher education reform received accolades, but no action by the politicians
- 1983 created independent, private corporation
  - leadership of chair critical—selected a highly regarded non-educator who brought credibility, intellectual power, eloquence and contacts
  - invitation to 30 other volunteers, all private citizens who were statewide leaders in business, former elected officials, local/regional activists
  - working committee which needed to meet often enough to make its own recommendations, understand staff suggested recommendations and be fully engaged

# Getting Started (con't)

- Needed self-confidence, fortitude, values, deep involvement to be fully engaged in serious intellectual work in order to build interest and commitment
- Effective use of the media was critical
  - meetings open to media and broadcast statewide on educational television as the initial report on the future of higher education in KY was developed
  - ideas being discussed and shared as formulated
  - leaked stories to build interest or head off opposition

# Getting Started (cont)

- Education problems were serious
- Politicians were reluctant and cautious and had little political incentive to act boldly
- Public and parents were feeling shut out and hopeless—PC needed to create hopefulness
- Reinvestment by citizens in their civic capital
- Committee members knew they had the right to express their views and did not easily defer to professional expertise, authority or power



# Credibility

- Central to the success of any organization, particularly one with no official status or authorization
- Citizen groups have the power to win the public's attention and trust; to raise disturbing questions; to focus on a single issue; to set the pace of the work; to get reliable frontline information



# Principles Leading to Credibility

- More of a movement than an organization to “lead the parade” or find someone to be the lead for a compelling vision;
- Speaking as the “citizens’ voice”, not the experts;
- Building alliances and maintaining them;
- Using data to define the problem and set the agenda around it;
- Discussing issues at the level of principle in order to set the general direction



# Principles Leading to Credibility (con't)

- Being good listeners and having others see it and believe it;
- Staying focused;
- Confronting without being confrontational;
- Giving lots of credit;
- Working behind the scenes;
- Media is our friend, not the enemy;
- Representing the general population by focusing on the policy and grassroots levels
- Most effective lobbying is through others;
- Speaking about the needs of all children, not just the disadvantaged

# Defining the Agenda and Getting Attention

- Public engagement to improve education formed the goal around which solutions worth fighting for were developed;
- Study, analysis, reflection, debate builds solidarity;
- Four subcommittees of the 70 members met 60 times over 2 years in order to distill hundreds of problems and solutions into a handful of key points;
- Specific recommendations were made at the principle level rather than boxing the group in with a specific recommendation (ie. Improved instruction for all children, rather than a specific teaching method)
- Doing the thinking gave public volunteers the confidence, skills and knowledge to engage others beyond their small circle

# Defining the Agenda and Getting Attention (con't)

- Planned events—i.e.. forum for gubernatorial candidates, broadcast statewide on educational television called attention to the agenda, just as surveying teachers for their ideas through the largest statewide newspaper, and the production and dissemination of a statewide report of the problem statement and recommendations continued to widen the circles of informed citizens
- Media attention: 6-month investigation and series of feature articles on the condition of Kentucky education by the one of the state's largest newspapers resulting in six-part expose, followed by recommendations and editorials; followed by the next largest newspaper producing a Pulitzer Prize-winning series that exposed inequities among school districts, misspending, and flagrant favoritism in tax collections throughout the state. Both resulted in stirring public support for the subsequent 1989 Kentucky Supreme Court ruling on school finance that accelerated passage of KERA.

# Defining the Agenda and Getting Attention (con't)

- Building bridges with the business community strengthened the committee, encouraged volunteers, and increased credibility and perception of substantial influence;
- Energizing and mobilizing the larger public through a one-night statewide town forum of citizens' meetings in every school district throughout Kentucky
  - local organizers and leaders in each community
  - highly structured discussion process to involve people with trained facilitators
  - opened by the Governor, and broadcast on KET
  - spontaneous enthusiasm across the state, with over 20,000
- Kentuckians in 145 locations, representing 176 of the state's school districts
- Governor picked up the movement and led dignitaries and celebrities across the state to build more support, and called a special legislative session to introduce her education reform agenda

# Blowing on the Embers

- Three core strategies had driven the work:
  - agenda setting through public study and recommendations;
  - openness with the media to encourage attention to education;
  - mobilizing the larger public by open forums that were safe places for frustrated people to express themselves
- Two years of intense effort had not produced legislative action, so one big push was not the answer. **COMMITMENT OVER THE LONG RUN WAS REQUIRED!**



# Blowing on the Embers (cont)

- Turning up the heat and stirring the pot, while creating constructive dissatisfaction
- Providing data (high school completion, test scores, college attendance, adult illiteracy, school spending, teacher salaries, poverty rates, unemployment, welfare dependency, teen pregnancy, health statistics, etc.)
- Maximizing local efforts through development of local citizen's Committees
- Sharpening the Focus through newsletters, *The School Answer Book: A Citizens' Guide to Kentucky School Law* helped shape and focus the conversation with common themes and same bottom line—reducing child poverty, improving teacher quality, eliminating political corruption and raise student achievement.

# Blowing on the Embers (cont)

- Entering the Political Arena through establishment of debate among gubernatorial candidates, volunteering to serve on task forces, testifying before legislative committees
- Defining the Policy Agenda through keeping education on the front burner of all politicians
- Forming a Coalition of 10 education interest groups, the KY Department of Education and the KY Chamber of Commerce to forge consensus positions on general values on decentralizing decision making, setting high academic standards, limiting political abuses, increasing rigor for teachers
- Moving Ahead after the KY Supreme Court declared Kentucky's school system unconstitutional, opening the door for the passage of the comprehensive and systemic 1990 Education Reform Act

# Everything Changes: The Kentucky Education Reform Act

- The achievement of passage of one of the “most comprehensive restructuring efforts every undertaken by a legislature”, which included:
  - focus on high achievement for all students
  - system of accountability to increase academic achievement
  - anti-nepotism policies for school boards and superintendents
  - state commissioner of education hired by the state board of education, not elected
  - measures to ensure property would be taxed at its full market value for schools
  - local control given to school comprised of educators and parents
  - preschool for disadvantaged children
  - Family Resource/Youth Service Centers at high-poverty schools to work past some of the outside barriers to learning
  - vastly increased and more equitable funding

# Everything Changes: The Kentucky Education Reform Act (con't)

The Lawsuit – brought pro bono by former Governor Bert Combs on behalf of 66 property-poor school districts seeking financial equity, with the response being that the KY Supreme Court ruled the entire system of education unconstitutional and ordered the legislature to rebuild it within a year

- Rethinking the Role of the Committee to support implementation of comprehensive school reform and the \$1.27 billion in additional revenues for elementary and secondary education, higher education and vocational education, while countering resistance and inertia.



# Creating an Environment to Sustain Change

- A comprehensive challenge in implementation of a system transformation of the system—both a virtue and a liability
- Organized opposition came in many forms as people tried to maintain the myth of the “good ole days”
- Instructive missteps pointed out the disconnect between what schools were and what they were becoming
- Dynamics of a difficult climate required the PC to be realistic about expectations and make sure the good, and the bad news was made known
- Crafting a new approach brought the PC from being an outsider railing against the system to being an insider encouraging, monitoring, and constructively criticizing

# Creating an Environment to Sustain Change (con't)

- Systemic obstacles for systemic reform became apparent because:
  - The reform was much bigger than education as it was social and political action
  - What KY was trying ran against the current political grain
  - It's hard to get people's attention and their memories are short
  - The political clock runs faster than the administrative clock
  - Effective communications were important, but hard to deliver
  - Stumbling blocks were inevitable
  - Kentucky school reform was not a panacea
  - Improving student achievement requires aggressive advocacy for children, improved family conditions, and more involved parents
  - School performance and results were central to improved education

# Creating an Environment to Sustain Change

True accountability is a civic action, that requires civic capacity

-high academic standards and reliable student achievement data are first steps before schools change

- people must use the data
- parents and public get most information about schools from their teachers
- KERA pushed more responsibility and decisions to local level than ever before
- Campaigns to block change are easier than to campaigns to promote change

# Responding to the New Challenges

- Informing the public through strengthened Community Committees who cared about and were knowledgeable about Kentucky reforms, as well as advertising in collaboration with the Partnership for Kentucky Schools advertising campaign, and with the media for balanced media coverage of reform issues, organizing debates and conferences, meeting with citizens to present the case for reform, encouraging and supporting research, encouraging public conversations, promoting the cause and not the organization
- Shaping the agenda by being a voice of history, being at the table, forming strategic alliances, influencing the bureaucracy
- Engaging parents through the development of the Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership to involve parents in much more structured local advocacy work through targeted training on the key aspects of the Reform and how to lead through knowledge and skills in their local schools

# Summing Up: The Lessons Learned

- Get people's attention
- Set a clear, but not necessarily detailed agenda
- Be a symbol of hope
- Engage people on a personal level
- Build and maintain credibility by protecting your independence
- Give credit to others
- Maintain cooperative, open relationships with the media
- Meet people's needs
- Pick issues and fights strategically
- Create a web of relationships
- Be persistent
- Stay focused yourself so everybody else can stay focused

# For More Information

*Mobilizing Citizens for Better School*

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