

A new Heinz Endowments grant-making agenda for realizing the goal of equal access to the best available learning opportunities for *all* students in Allegheny County schools.

# education



# The grant-making mission of the Heinz Endowments' Education

**Program:** To ensure that African American students and those living in poverty in Allegheny County have full access to high-quality educational experiences, and to support efforts that affirm them as individuals and validate their ability to achieve, attain, contribute to and thrive in society.

mission



## EQUITY IN EDUCATION:

### THE HEINZ ENDOWMENTS' NEW GRANT-MAKING AGENDA



**OVERVIEW** Although this country's education system has been the primary means for achieving a more inclusive society, its public school systems have failed to provide African American students and students who live in poverty, with equitable, high-quality learning experiences.

This long-standing failure has perpetuated, through systems of mostly segregated schools with inadequate funding, social injustices based on race and socio-economic status. Among the most damaging effects are policies and practices that encourage low expectations on the part of both educators and students. The end result is a destructive pattern where shockingly high percentages of African American students and those in poverty disengage from the learning process, fail to achieve, drop out of high school and experience diminished life outcomes.

The starting point for this depressing pattern is traced most often to the country's middle and high schools where preschool and early elementary learning successes are squandered. It is in this sixth- through 12th-grade period that students all too often face non-challenging, depersonalized environments that lead to a stalling of their earlier academic progress. Too often, expectations differ based upon a student's socio-economic circumstances or ethnic identity. Opportunities to engage in culturally responsive, rich and collaborative educational experiences are rare for the very students who need them most.

Volumes of research and expert observation establish that the quality of the entire education track—from preschool through high school—is a key determiner of how well these students will be able to attain broader social engagement and life fulfillment. Educators in the best school systems understand that providing a solid foundation of learning success for these students in their early years is essential to ensure continued academic success. But they also realize that the early foundation is only the beginning of a learning process that is strong enough to enable these students to graduate and reach their best life potential.

After months of evaluating its grant-making history in pursuit of the goal of education equity in southwestern Pennsylvania, especially in supporting efforts to provide high-quality learning experiences to all students, The Heinz Endowments is recommitting to achieve this goal. The Endowments recognizes that each stage of the educational process needs to play its part in sustaining learning progress, and is, therefore, focusing its attention on middle schools and high schools throughout Allegheny County, with a special concentration on the Pittsburgh Public Schools and organizations that partner with the city district.

By supporting the development of secondary school environments that respond to a range of needs, abilities, experiences and interests; respect racial and cultural differences; and value the contributions of all students, the Endowments believes that African American students and students at the low end of the economy can be affirmed in their abilities, graduate high school, successfully complete post-secondary education and have fulfilling lives.

# goals

**THE NEW FRAMEWORK FOR EDUCATION GRANT MAKING** A six-month review of the Education Program's 25 years of supporting efforts to make southwestern Pennsylvania a center for learning excellence shows that achievement of that goal has been stymied by the educational systems' failure to overcome long-standing inequities in educational opportunity.

As a result of the grant-making review and an exhaustive analysis of the effects of sub-standard learning environments experienced primarily by African American students and those living in poverty in Allegheny County, the Endowments is re-dedicating its efforts to eliminate the education-equity deficit for these students.

Working with a sharper focus—secondary education—and in a smaller geographic area—Allegheny County—Endowments staff will be identifying programs, initiatives and services that will allow these disadvantaged students access to high-quality learning experiences and resources. Full participation will enable these students to achieve, attain, contribute to and thrive in society.

## **Grant Making Grounded in Education-Equity Research**

The program's new plan is based on a thorough analysis of programs, policies and academic studies that have:

- >> Supported African American students and others in poverty situations;
- >> Enabled administrators and teachers to become more effective leaders in secondary education;
- >> Educated policymakers about the special ability of charter schools to close the education-equity deficit for African American students and those living in poverty;
- >> Identified programs that engage historically underserved students and enable their voices to influence policy.

## **Goals and Strategies**

The Endowments' grant making will strive to change the dynamics of the school-reform dialogue in Allegheny County. Support will go to programs and services that cover African American and economically disadvantaged students in middle school and high school learning environments: the Pittsburgh Public Schools, other public

districts in the county, charter, faith-based and independent schools. Partners include school districts, intermediaries, universities, and organizations working within districts or directly with these students. In addition to these institutional partners, Endowments support also will be directed to efforts that encourage parents and concerned citizens to raise their voices as a community determined to have equity-focused education systems.

## **Goal: Eliminate Policy and Structural Barriers to Education Equity**

Grants will be made in support of a strong, coherent policy framework to promote inclusive teaching and learning practices that lead to academic success and the realization of life-fulfillment dreams for students, their families and communities.

*Strategies include:*

- >> Encouraging development of African American identity frameworks<sup>1</sup> in school curriculum to better enable student achievement and counter assumptions in some circles of intellectual inferiority on the part of African American students and those who are economically disadvantaged;

<sup>1</sup> This refers to Dr. Theresa Perry's African American Theory of Education and the notion of the counter narrative which Perry asserts African American students must develop in order to achieve in a culture that assumes they have no capacity to learn. The more detailed theory can be found in "Young, Gifted and Black" by Theresa Perry, Asa Hilliard III and Claude Steele.

- >> Endorsing initiatives, systems and policies that support three key transitions: elementary to middle school, middle to high school and high school to post-secondary education;
- >> Promoting and sustaining efforts to build a community voice for equity in education opportunity, and relying on it to define and support teacher effectiveness and student success;
- >> Enabling the design of data systems that not only accurately measure academic performance but also identify areas where African American and economically disadvantaged students would benefit from professional intervention;
- >> Removing financial barriers to quality secondary and post-secondary learning experiences for African American and economically disadvantaged students.

**Goal: Advance Effective Teaching**

Grants will be made to ensure that teachers in public school systems and certain private school settings in Allegheny County are well-prepared, culturally aware, willing to collaborate for positive change and advocate for student success.

*Strategies include:*

- >> Promoting teacher supervision and evaluation linked to student achievement;
- >> Sponsoring strong, consistent, equity-focused professional development aligned with National Staff Development Council Standards that prepare teachers to work in culturally diverse settings;
- >> Galvanizing efforts to recruit, prepare and support African American teachers in secondary schools;
- >> Ensuring that use of data is standard practice for improving teaching.

**Goal: Empower Youth as Education Reformers**

Grants will be made to support initiatives that engage young people as champions for change in improving public education, eliminate anonymity and apathy in middle school and high school learning settings, and address school issues related to equity and fairness.

*Strategies include:*

- >> Enabling youth and their adult allies to implement co-created initiatives that address core equity issues in schools, including curriculum choices, rigorous course offerings, assessment measures and discipline policies;
- >> Facilitating the adoption and creation of culturally responsive leadership models that explicitly address identity, disempowerment, oppression, and racism for African American students and those in economically disadvantaged communities;
- >> Encouraging the production and distribution of media that address equity-in-education issues, and that also elevate the voices of young people;
- >> Commissioning research and convening local and national experts to effectively contribute to the national discourse on youth empowerment in education reform.

More information on the Education Program's new goals and strategies is available on the Endowments' website: [www.heinz.org](http://www.heinz.org).

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strategic

All research material used in the Education Program's planning work can be viewed in the Education Program section of the Endowments' website, [www.heinz.org](http://www.heinz.org).

# Guiding Principles

**HEINZ ENDOWMENTS' EDUCATION PROGRAM: GUIDING PRINCIPLES** As it begins to implement its new grant-making plan, the Endowments will be engaging with potential grantees, other funders, and the general public to ensure clarity about the program's rationale for moving ahead with an aggressive agenda on eradicating inequities in educational opportunity based on race and economic status in Allegheny County's school systems.

To begin that communication effort, the foundation has developed a list of belief statements and convictions, which are the underpinnings of the Education Program's new goals and strategies. In the next several years, the grant making will be continually measured against these guiding principles to improve effectiveness and shorten the timeline for success. We believe that equitable access to world-class learning experiences in and outside of traditional school settings is the essential element for preparing all children in southwestern Pennsylvania for future excellence in higher education and careers.

*We believe* that education for African American students should be a vehicle by which children are affirmed in their heritage, identity, achievement and creativity. The content taught and materials used should be culturally responsive,<sup>2</sup> and teachers and administrators recruited to work with African American students should reflect the students' culture and/or be trained in effective culturally responsive pedagogies.

*We believe* that a teacher's effectiveness has more impact on a student's ability to learn and achieve than any other factor in the classroom. Effective teachers are key to efforts directed toward eliminating education-equity deficits. They must be placed in our region's struggling schools where they are needed most. The job of training, supporting, assessing, compensating and hiring effective teachers is the joint responsibility of schools of education, school districts, educators, school boards and teachers unions.

*We believe* that all children, regardless of race, ethnicity, ability or socio-economic status should have access to quality educational options and not be subjected to one-size-fits-all programs. This should be the norm in a public school system, a public charter school, an alternative learning environment, a faith-based institution or a private school.

*We believe* that charter schools have special flexibility to provide educational opportunities to students who have been denied them in other settings. Charters are part of public school systems

and deserve appropriate funding. To succeed, charters must be respected and affirmed by their authorizing districts. They must have realistic accountability measures from state and local authorities, and they must be able to acquire and maintain appropriate facilities.

*We believe* that parents, community members and youth must all be engaged as equal partners and decision makers in the efforts to reform public education at individual schools and within larger school districts. The community's voice is a key determiner in how well schools are providing the best educational opportunities to all students.

*We believe* that technology is more than a tool for learning. It is also a strategy that should provoke higher intellectual expectations and innovations in traditional classroom settings. It also should test teachers' assumptions and instructional practices, and enhance all students' abilities to communicate, create, collaborate, think and engage civically within the context of a global continuum.

*We believe* in sustained coordination and collaboration of efforts with our internal and external foundation colleagues. As part of that interaction, we will use rigorous, appropriate methods to assess our grant making. These are essential to achieving greater efficacy in systemic reform and the myriad challenges and issues in schools and communities that affect the quality of public education available to African American students and those in poverty.

<sup>2</sup> As defined by "Cultural Responsiveness, Racial Identity and Academic Success: A Review of Literature" by Mary Stone Hanley and George W. Noblit. Commissioned by the Heinz Endowments and available on its website [www.heinz.org](http://www.heinz.org).

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## Questions?

Education Program Director Stanley W. Thompson and Education Program Officer Melanie R. Brown welcome questions and comments on the Endowments' new grant-making plan for education.

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Among the programs that the Endowments supports to promote education equity in Allegheny County are the African American Male Mentoring Initiative, sponsored by the Negro Emergency Education Drive, or NEED; and Wireless Neighborhoods, an afterschool educational services provider. On the cover, Oliver High School students Curtis Brown, foreground, and DeAndre Yarbrough, center, take part in a NEED mentoring session last year about preparing for successful futures. James Mathis, pictured opposite the "Mission" page, also is a participant in the NEED program at Oliver. Shown on the "Overview" page are, from left to right above, Peabody High School students Courtney Christian and Amber Craig and Perry High student Taquesha Neal, as they study during a Wireless Neighborhoods after-school tutorial; below, tutor José Rodríguez shows former Wireless program participant Cidney Christian materials that will be used this year.