



# CRITICAL ISSUES

## in school reform

An eight-part series  
presented by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform  
at Brown University  
produced by the Annenberg/CPB Channel

### FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

with Activities  
and Resources

STORIES OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

## The Patrick O'Hearn School

Over the past several years, researchers have begun to notice a fundamental shift in the actions of Americans on behalf of their children and their public schools. The collaborative constituencies that come from the efforts of educators, parents, and the public working together for change and improvement in schools are part of the movement called public engagement. These purposeful efforts can start in the school, the district, or the community.

The story of the O'Hearn School and the issues that it raises will be useful for administrators, board of education members, teachers, parents, and community members – anyone interested in understanding the dynamics of public engagement and the positive benefits that can result for school improvement and student achievement.

This video can be used to:

- Provide an example of a school in which public engagement has been successfully used to develop and implement innovative programs and strong parent/educator interactions.
- Help viewers understand the roles of parents, teachers, and administrators in a collaborative process in which all parties are involved in decision making and program development.
- Raise questions about the important roles that parents play in their child's education and the valuable information about their child that they can contribute to the learning process.
- Discuss the flexible interchange of roles and responsibilities when principals, teachers, and parents choose to work together.

## **I. ABOUT THE VIDEO**

The Patrick O'Hearn School offers an example of the effective use of public engagement at the school level. The video profiles the unique partnerships that exist among the principal, teachers, parents, and students at O'Hearn. The presentation about O'Hearn is followed by discussions among two parents, an administrator, and a teacher and among a group of experienced public engagement practitioners.

### **The Patrick O'Hearn School, Boston, Massachusetts**

O'Hearn is a K–5 public elementary school of 250 students, located in the Dorchester section of Boston. The school draws students from neighborhoods across the city as part of Boston's school-choice plan. O'Hearn serves a diverse group of families of multiple ethnicities and economic backgrounds. Over 65 percent of O'Hearn's students qualify for free or reduced lunch. O'Hearn is also an inclusion school, integrating large numbers of children with exceptionalities and learning disabilities in its programs.

Nine years ago a new principal began working with the faculty to determine new directions to raise student achievement. After a school evaluation process, the faculty decided that O'Hearn parents needed to play a greater role in the learning of their children. They were determined to develop a "parent-friendly" school, one in which parents would play an active role in student learning and in managing the school in partnership with teachers. With the establishment of a working group of teachers and parents, the creation of a parent center, and the adoption of a reading contract program, O'Hearn parents began to learn new roles of active participation in their children's learning and in the school.

Today O'Hearn parents are fully involved in the education of their children. Over 95 percent attend parent-teacher conferences. Fully 100 percent of children and their parents participate in the school's reading contract program. Parents and teachers are equal members of curriculum and school site councils, and parents participate in everything from textbook and materials selection to teacher selection and program development.

O'Hearn uses a broad range of assessment and accountability devices to determine student success. Student achievement has shown steady improvement, and O'Hearn ranked highest of any Boston school in recent Massachusetts statewide performance tests.

## **II. AN ON-LINE DISCUSSION (MARCH, APRIL & MAY 1999)**

You can participate with viewers from around the country in an on-line discussion about public engagement and the issues in this program. The discussion will be moderated by researchers in public engagement at the Annenberg Institute.

Where: [www.learner.org/channel/workshops/criticalissues/pubengage](http://www.learner.org/channel/workshops/criticalissues/pubengage)

When: March 2 to 25 *and* April 6 to May 6

## **III. SUGGESTED VIEWER ACTIVITIES**

### **A Viewers' Workshop**

This workshop is designed for educators or others interested in viewing the video as the start of an ongoing, in-depth discussion about public engagement in their school or community, but the outline can readily be adapted to your particular situation. (For example, parts 1 and 2 can be used to structure a more general conversation about the video.)

The workshop takes between one and a half and two hours, including the 30-minute video.

### Part 1: Preparing to Watch the Video (15–20 minutes)

Before viewing the video, invite participants to discuss a few of the following questions:

- What does public engagement mean to you?
- How could family involvement help increase student achievement?
- What can schools do to encourage family involvement?
- What can schools do that discourages family involvement?
- What is a role for families in understanding school and student accountability?
- What are ways to measure the impact of family involvement on student achievement?
- What resources are needed for family involvement?

#### **Ensuring a Good Conversation: A Few Basic Groundrules**

Identify a facilitator and a timekeeper.

Set norms for the discussion. Be sure all participants have an opportunity to understand and agree to these norms. They may want to add others.

- Focus on the video and the discussion in it. Refer to specific examples from the video in your discussion.
- Build on what others say.
- Listen carefully and do not “step on” one another’s talk.
- Converse – no need to raise your hand, but don’t interrupt either.
- Expose and challenge your own assumptions.
- Watch your airtime.

### Part 2: Watching the Video (30 minutes)

Ask participants to consider the following questions as they watch the video. Make clear that these questions will be discussed after the video.

- What roles do you see parents playing at O’Hearn?
- In what ways do parents share the role of teacher in this school?
- In what ways do you notice school personnel interacting with parents at O’Hearn? Can you tell who are the teachers and who are the parents?

### Part 3: Discussing the Issues Raised in the Video (45–60 minutes)

The purpose of this discussion is to gain a deeper understanding of the work of O’Hearn and the issues that it raises about public engagement. It offers a way to begin a conversation about the implications of this work in your own school or community.

Present or elicit several focus questions for the discussion. Here are some suggestions.

- What excites you about the story of O’Hearn?
- What did you see happening that made you think you might do something differently in your own school?
- What did you see happening that you hadn’t thought was possible?
- What could your school do to get more parents involved in meaningful decision making?
- What could your school do to help teachers work with parents and communities as partners?
- Did watching this video change your definition of public engagement? In what way(s)?

- What might be the benefits to your school of engaging the community in decision making?
- Teachers and parents at O’Hearn are focused on serious student learning and achievement issues. Why is this important? How can this be difficult sometimes?
- Which of the following characteristics of successful public engagement initiatives (based on research by the Annenberg Institute) did you see at O’Hearn?
  - inclusive, in-depth dialogue
  - dedication to real improvement in schools
  - commitment to creating dynamic partnerships
  - working to find common ground
  - candor and mutual trust

### **An On-going Dialogue about Public Education in Your Community**

Public schools are crucial to the sustained vitality of American democracy, and a supportive and involved public is crucial to the survival of public schools. For many, an ongoing and open discussion about their public schools is an important first step toward greater involvement and action on behalf of children and public education. Such a dialogue enables everyone to share their views, find common ground, and ultimately work toward the kind of community consensus that is a vital part of American democracy.

Facilitation suggestions for a dialogue are available in a guide – *Local Conversations About Education in Your Community* – prepared by the Annenberg Institute in collaboration with Study Circles Resource Center. *Local Conversations* is available from the Institute on-line at the Public Engagement Resource Center (see Resources below) or in a print version.

Study Circles Resource Center (SCRC), a program of the Topsfield Foundation based in Pomfret, Connecticut, helps local communities organize and conduct meaningful conversations on difficult issues, including race, diversity, social justice, education, and community revitalization. For information about forming a Study Circle or to request technical assistance for a community initiative, contact SCRC at <[www.scr.org](http://www.scr.org)> or at 860-928-2616.

## **IV. RESOURCES FOR LEARNING MORE ABOUT PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT**

*Reasons for Hope, Voices for Change: A Report of the Annenberg Institute on Public Engagement for Public Education.* Providence, RI: Brown University, Annenberg Institute, March 1998.

This first published analysis of the emerging public engagement movement is available on-line as a PDF file at <[www.aisr.brown.edu/PE](http://www.aisr.brown.edu/PE)>. Print copies can also be ordered on-line (single copies are free of charge).

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STORIES OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

## Pattonville Community Schools

Over the past several years, researchers have begun to notice a fundamental shift in the actions of Americans on behalf of their children and their public schools. The collaborative constituencies that come from the efforts of educators, parents, and the public working together for change and improvement in schools, are part of the movement called public engagement. These purposeful efforts can start in the school, the district, or the community.

The story of the Pattonville (Missouri) Community School District will be useful for administrators, board of education members, teachers, parents, and community members – anyone interested in understanding the dynamics of public engagement and the positive benefits that can result for school improvement and student achievement at the district level.

This video can be used to:

- Provide an example of a district in which public engagement has been successfully used to develop and implement innovative programs and strong parent/educator interactions.
- Help viewers understand the roles of parents, teachers, and administrators in a collaborative process in which all parties are involved in decision making and program development.
- Discuss the multiple constituents involved in a district, and the roles and responsibilities that each must assume in a concerted, districtwide effort to tackle tough issues facing a concerned school community.

## **I. ABOUT THE VIDEO**

The Pattonville school district offers an example of the effective use of public engagement at the district level. A “culture of engagement” infuses the way this district approaches the education of its children, the decisions that impact their achievement, and the ongoing relationships between the district, its employees, parents, and members of the Pattonville community. The presentation about Pattonville is followed by discussions among two parents, an administrator, and a teacher and among a group of experienced public engagement practitioners.

### **Pattonville Community Schools, St. Louis County, Missouri**

In the mid-1980s, the Pattonville Community Schools, a suburban district just outside St. Louis, confronted a demographic reality facing many school systems today. The percentage of households with school-age children had sharply declined, and local bond issues, previously passed with enthusiastic majorities, had begun to fail.

When Roger Clough became Pattonville’s superintendent in 1985, he made a conscious decision to engage community members, and particularly senior citizens, as resources for the district. Instead of being the problem, citizens and seniors were seen as part of the solution. This strategic direction has paid significant dividends over the last fifteen years.

Today, community members and parents volunteer in each of Pattonville’s eleven schools and serve on all of the district’s task forces and advisory committees. They play important roles in key decisions about the district – from adding a character-values program to the curriculum to plotting reorganization plans. Parents, senior citizens, and students also serve on school councils and share responsibility for budgeting and other policy matters. Recent bond issues have passed successfully. A new community education center offers a wide array of services and programs for seniors as well as students.

Pattonville has made a special effort to engage the parents of the nearly 1,100 students voluntarily bused to its schools from center-city St. Louis. PTA meetings and parent-teacher conferences are regularly held in downtown St. Louis, and the school board holds regular meetings in all the neighborhoods served by the district. This effort is one of the reasons students living outside the district graduate at rates similar to the rest of Pattonville students.

Pattonville has been recognized with a Magna Award from the National Association of School Boards. But despite its successes to date, Pattonville still faces serious challenges. A proposed expansion of the St. Louis airport threatens to seize one-fifth of the homes in the district. State subsidies for busing have come under attack. And while better than the national average, student test scores have been flat for the last five years. Nevertheless, Pattonville remains optimistic. Says Roger Clough, “We have opportunities here, not problems.”

## **II. AN ON-LINE DISCUSSION (MARCH, APRIL & MAY 1999)**

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When: March 2 to 25 *and* April 6 to May 6

### III. SUGGESTED VIEWER ACTIVITIES

#### A Viewers' Workshop

The following workshop is designed for educators or others interested in viewing the video as the start of an ongoing, in-depth discussion about public engagement in their school or community, but the outline can readily be adapted to your particular situation. (For example, parts 1 and 2 can be used to structure a more general conversation about the video.)

The workshop takes between one and a half and two hours, including the 30-minute video.

#### Part 1: Preparing to Watch the Video (15–20 minutes)

Before viewing the video, invite participants to discuss a few of the following questions:

- What does public engagement mean to you?
- What are local examples of honest and effective public engagement?
- How do you engage all parents and families?
- How can a district build relationships for change and achievement with many different constituencies?

#### Part 2: Watching the Video (30 minutes)

Ask participants to consider the following questions as they watch the video. Make clear that these questions will be discussed after the video.

- What elements of engagement did you see there?
- What did you think was most powerful?
- What concerns did it raise for you?
- What would have to happen to make this systemwide approach possible?

#### **Ensuring a Good Conversation: A Few Basic Groundrules**

Identify a facilitator and a timekeeper.

Set norms for the discussion. Be sure all participants have an opportunity to understand and agree to these norms. They may want to add others.

- Focus on the video and the discussion in it. Refer to specific examples from the video in your discussion.
- Build on what others say.
- Listen carefully and do not "step on" one another's talk.
- Converse – no need to raise your hand, but don't interrupt either.
- Expose and challenge your own assumptions.
- Watch your airtime.

#### Part 3: Discussing the Issues Raised in the Video (45–60 minutes)

The purpose of this discussion is to gain a deeper understanding of the work in Pattonville and the issues it raises about public engagement. It offers a way to begin a conversation about the implications of this work in your own school or community.

Present or elicit several focus questions for the discussion. Here are some suggestions.

- What excites you about the story of Pattonville?
- What did you see happening that made you think you could do something differently in your own district?
- What did you see happening that you hadn't thought was possible?
- What could your district do to get more parents and community members involved in meaningful decision making?
- What could your district do to help teachers work with parents and communities as partners?

- Did watching this video change your definition of public engagement? How?
- What might be the benefits to your district of engaging the community in decision making?
- What is “community-asset mapping”? How is it done? Why would you do it?
- An administrator has to have courage to address engagement and relationships. How is this evident in Pattonville?
- What happens if public engagement efforts go wrong? How do you avoid developing cynicism?
- Which of the following characteristics of successful public engagement initiatives (based on research by the Annenberg Institute) did you see in Pattonville?
  - inclusive, in-depth dialogue
  - dedication to real improvement in schools
  - commitment to creating dynamic partnerships
  - working to find common ground
  - candor and mutual trust

### **An On-going Dialogue about Public Education in Your Community**

Public schools are crucial to the sustained vitality of American democracy. And a supportive and involved public is crucial to the survival of public schools. For many, an ongoing and open discussion about their public schools is an important first step toward greater involvement and action on behalf of children and public education. Such a dialogue enables everyone to share their views, find common ground, and ultimately work toward the kind of community consensus that is a vital part of American democracy.

Facilitation suggestions for a dialogue are available in a guide – *Local Conversations About Education in Your Community* – prepared by the Annenberg Institute in collaboration with Study Circles Resource Center. *Local Conversations* is available from the Institute on-line at the Public Engagement Resource Center (see Resources below) or in a print version.

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## **Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development**

Over the past several years, researchers have begun to notice a fundamental shift in the actions of Americans on behalf of their children and their public schools. The collaborative constituencies that come from the efforts of educators, parents, and the public working together for change and improvement in schools are part of the movement called public engagement. These purposeful efforts can start in the school, the district, or the community.

The story of B.U.I.L.D. and the issues that it raises will be useful for administrators, board of education members, teachers, parents, and community members – anyone interested in understanding the dynamics of public engagement and the positive benefits that can result when communities come together to work on behalf of children and their future.

This video can be used to:

- Provide an example of a community in which public engagement has been successfully used to develop and implement innovative programs and strong community relationships for education change.
- Help viewers understand the roles of parents, teachers, and community members in a collaborative process in which the confidence and leadership of all people, many new to the process of education and engagement, are key components of program success.
- Discuss the multiple constituents involved in a community, and the roles and responsibilities that each must assume in a community-based public engagement effort.

## **I. ABOUT THE VIDEO**

Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development exemplifies the effective use of public engagement at the community level. The video profiles the powerful collaboration among parents, families, and a network of community organizations in Baltimore, Maryland, to create an infrastructure for community improvement and student achievement. The story of B.U.I.L.D. is followed by discussions among two parents, an administrator, and a teacher and among a group of experienced public engagement practitioners.

### **Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development**

B.U.I.L.D. grew out of the commitments by parents, families, and community organizations in Baltimore, Maryland, to create a partnership around the issues of security for children, their education, and the academic and physical challenges facing a large urban school district. It is one of the largest predominantly African American local community organizations in the country, with a membership drawn mainly from religious congregations. Over its twenty-year history, it has championed community involvement in education and pioneered large-scale initiatives for change.

In 1995 B.U.I.L.D. helped create the Child First Authority in response to parents' concerns about education and their stated need for after-school activities for their children. Child First, which is funded through contributions from organizations that receive city subsidies, now has after-school centers in eight schools, with plans to expand to more schools in the coming years. Parents coordinate and teach in the programs, in cooperation with each school's faculty. Parents working together at Child First centers are now able to mobilize around emerging issues facing their children and their schools. Child First's organizing strategy reflects B.U.I.L.D.'s affiliation with the Industrial Areas Foundation, a national network of community advocacy groups.

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### **A Viewer's Workshop**

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The workshop takes between one and a half and two hours, including the 30-minute video.

### Part 1: Preparing to Watch the Video (15–20 minutes)

Before viewing the video, invite participants to discuss a few of the following questions:

- What does public engagement mean to you?
- What is the appropriate role of “outsiders”?
- What role does tension play in creating an energy for action? How can it help? How might it hinder?
- When are different types of action – adversarial, consensus-based, gradual – appropriate? When can adversarial actions help move communities?

### Part 2: Watching the Video (30 minutes)

Ask participants to consider the following questions as they watch the video. Make clear that these questions will be discussed after the video.

- What elements of engagement did you see there?
- What did you think was most powerful?
- What concerns did this story raise for you?
- Do parents have power? When?

#### **Ensuring a Good Conversation: A Few Basic Groundrules**

Identify a facilitator and a timekeeper.

Set norms for the discussion. Be sure all participants have an opportunity to understand and agree to these norms. They may want to add others.

- Focus on the video and the discussion in it. Refer to specific examples from the video in your discussion.
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- Listen carefully and do not “step on” one another’s talk.
- Converse – no need to raise your hand, but don’t interrupt either.
- Expose and challenge your own assumptions.
- Watch your airtime.

### Part 3: Discussing the Issues Raised in the Video (45–60 minutes)

The purpose of this discussion is to gain a deeper understanding of the work of B.U.I.L.D. and the issues it raises about public engagement. It offers a way to begin a conversation about the implications of this work in your own school or community.

Present or elicit focus questions for the discussion. Here are some suggestions.

- What excites you about the story of B.U.I.L.D.?
- What did you see happening that you hadn’t thought was possible?
- How could you reach out to schools and community-based organizations more effectively to improve achievement?
- Who has the power: Parents? Community? The district?
- How could you get more school people to see the advantage(s) of bringing in community voices?
- How could you get more superintendents to believe that, by sharing decision making, they actually gain the power of constituencies rather than losing face?
- Is the question of “power” more difficult in urban districts?
- Did watching this video change your definition of public engagement? How?
- What is “community-asset mapping”? How is it done? Why would you do it?

- Which of the following characteristics of successful public engagement initiatives (based on research by the Annenberg Institute) did you see in B.U.I.L.D.?
  - inclusive, in-depth dialogue
  - dedication to real improvement in schools
  - commitment to creating dynamic partnerships
  - working to find common ground
  - candor and mutual trust

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