About the American Association of School Administrators

The American Association of School Administrators (AASA), founded in 1865, is the professional organization for more than 13,000 educational leaders across America and in many other countries. The mission of the AASA is to support and develop effective school system leaders who are dedicated to the highest quality public education for all children.

About the National Superintendent of the Year Program

Established in 1988, the National Superintendent of the Year Program recognizes outstanding leadership among superintendents. State selection committees choose the state winners and a national blue ribbon panel selects four finalists from whom the National Superintendent of the Year is chosen. The 2007 National Superintendent of the Year is Krista Parent, South Lane School District 4513, in Cottage Grove, Oregon.

About the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation

The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation (C.S. Mott Foundation) is a charitable foundation founded in 1926 by Charles Stewart Mott of Flint, Michigan. The foundation administers funds through four programs: Civil Society, Environment, Flint Area and Pathways out of Poverty. The foundation is committed to supporting projects that promote a just, equitable and sustainable society.

About Philip Morris USA

Philip Morris USA’s (PM USA’s) goal is to be the most responsible, effective and respected developer, manufacturer and marketer of consumer products, especially products intended for adults.

In 1998, PM USA created a Youth Smoking Prevention department and supports programs and initiatives that take a positive youth development approach to reducing underage tobacco use.

About the Forum for Youth Investment

The Forum for Youth Investment (FYI) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to helping communities and the nation make sure all young people are ready by 21 — ready for college, work and life. FYI provides youth and adult leaders with the information, technical assistance, training, network support and partnership opportunities needed to increase the quality and quantity of youth investment and youth involvement.

Acknowledgments

AASA would like to thank the C.S. Mott Foundation and PM USA for their generous support of the Leadership for Change Forum as well as for the publication and dissemination of this white paper. We are also deeply grateful to FYI and the C.S. Mott Foundation for their role in the design of the youth development section of the forum, and FYI for summarizing the content for this white paper.

Editorial content: Karen Pittman, Merita Irby and Sharon Adams-Taylor
Credits: Schoolhouse Communications and KSA-Plus Communications

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| CONTENTS |
|------------------------|--------|
| Introduction         | 2      |
| Wanted: A New Learning System | 3      |
| On Effective Leadership: 40 Years of Reflection | 12     |
| No Child Left Behind: Next Steps | 15     |
| Conclusion           | 17     |
| 2007 State Superintendents of the Year | 18     |
The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) invited the 2007 state winners to gather in Denver, Colorado, for three days of intensive dialogue about the challenges facing today’s superintendents. We partnered with two of the leading organizations on the topic of extended learning opportunities — the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation (C.S. Mott Foundation) and the Forum for Youth Investment (FYI).

State superintendents of the year from rural, urban and suburban districts came to the forum eager to listen, share and learn more about collaboration to expand learning in school and out. And they left the forum ready to act. Not only did they accept every challenge put to them by nationally renowned speakers from business, education and community mobilization, they owned them with passion.

The forum also featured both an interactive discussion about the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the poignant reflections on leadership from Paul Houston, executive director, AASA, as he retires from the association. This resultant white paper is both broad and deep, and is much more than an internal report of a meeting. We encourage all educators, businesspeople, community organizations, advocates and the larger policy community to read it, take it to heart and utilize it for joint action in your communities.

AASA wishes to thank the state superintendents of the year who participated in the forum and offer special thanks to the speakers who traveled to join them. We hope we have captured your observations and conclusions with the same vigor and integrity with which you shared them.
Superintendents have one of the toughest jobs in the country, and one of the most important. They run some of the largest and most complex businesses in their communities. And they do so often within a context of increasing challenges and declining resources.

“One of our problems is that we are overcome by standards and accountability data,” said Krista Parent, 2007 National Superintendent of the Year. “Requirements have been piled on in a way that has beaten the passion and love right out of us.”

Why would overburdened school district leaders jump at the chance to talk about a new learning system? Why would they want responsibility for orchestrating communitywide solutions? Because, in their words, this shift would create a true opportunity to meet the needs of all students, and motivate and re-energize work for students and staff.

Two stellar panels led the discussions that would help superintendents address this shift to communitywide solutions. The first panel, with Eugene Hillsman, associate program officer with the C.S. Mott Foundation, and Susan Zelman, Ohio state superintendent of public instruction, and a member of the New Day Task Force, led a discussion of the task force report and the role of superintendents in ensuring a new day for learning. The second panel, facilitated by Karen Pittman, CEO of FYI, offered examples of schools and communities working together and featured

**“Children learn and develop in categorized and disjointed ways because that is the world we have constructed for them ... We are proposing a different culture of communitywide responsibility for providing children with the means to become successful learners and citizens.”**

— “A New Day for Learning,” C.S. Mott Foundation

**“Requirements have been piled on in a way that has beaten the passion and love right out of us.”**

— Krista Parent, 2007 National Superintendent of the Year

WANTED: A NEW LEARNING SYSTEM
leadership for change

speakers Hugh Price, a Brookings Institution fellow, and former president and CEO of the National Urban League; Donna Klein, president and CEO of Corporate Voices for Working Families; and Mark Levy, president of the United Way of Greater Dayton, Ohio.

As a result of the panels and small group discussions that followed, superintendents identified five avenues for the creation of a new learning system: reframe the challenge; re-envision the structures; redefine the goals; recalibrate the learning environments; and redefine leadership.

1. Reframe the Challenge

Two years ago, the C.S. Mott Foundation brought together leaders in education, afterschool, research and philanthropy to create a new vision and consider the elements of time, learning and afterschool. The end result of their deliberations about how to connect the complementary systems of in-school and out-of-school learning was the recognition of a need for a “new day for learning” — a comprehensive, seamless approach to learning that values the distinct experiences that families, schools, afterschool programs and communities provide for children.

A new learning day and system require schools and communities to overcome traditional resistance because it is not up to just schools or districts, or community-based organizations, or social services, or philanthropy, or business and civic leaders to make it happen. Schools and communities must work together as equal and committed partners to provide children with meaningful learning experiences throughout the day and year-round.

“If you don’t like the results, you have a design problem. Improving what happens after school is good, but if what’s happening during the day is not so good ... .”

— Paul Houston, executive director, AASA

Leadership for Change
At the forum, C.S. Mott Foundation Associate Program Officer Eugene Hillsman offered strong, new evidence that high-quality afterschool programs can improve student learning, improving social skills and work habits, reducing misconduct and boosting math scores of elementary and middle school students from 12 to 20 points. The challenge, Hillsman suggested, is not simply to expand afterschool opportunities, but to ask why these programs achieve such success and bring those lessons into the school day.

According to the New Day Task Force, this is not just a crisis for our schools. All stakeholders involved with the development of children — whether it is educational, emotional, physical or creative — need to tear down the barriers we have imposed on ourselves and partner more effectively to create a new learning day for children.

According to Karen Pittman, CEO of FYI, reframing the challenge also requires schools and communities to “think outside the box and create a new, bigger one that we can all own.” School, as currently structured, takes up only one-quarter of students’ waking hours. What fills the rest of the time?

What is the foundation of this new learning system? The New Day for Learning Task Force suggests five key elements:

1. Broaden the definition of student success. Current definitions narrowly equate student success with test scores and focus on two subjects: reading and math. Since assessment drives instruction, many teachers are being required to teach to multiple-choice tests, avoiding exposing students to the richness of language and literature or the relevance of mathematics to daily life.

2. Use research-based knowledge about how children learn best. There is a growing body of research evidence that supports a richer curriculum, multiple types of assessments and greater engagement with subjects through authentic work, such as project-based learning.

3. Integrate proven strategies to acquiring and reinforcing knowledge throughout a student’s learning day. For example, the arts, technology and service learning are tools to heighten core academic learning, not merely “frills.” When these resources are available in classrooms, students become more active learners, and reading and writing skills improve substantially.

4. Build new, collaborative structures across communities and up and down governance levels. Community-based organizations, city agencies, nonprofit organizations, for-profit organizations and schools are looking beyond the school unit to include the entire community. Neighborhood assets are linked to citywide assets so students receive support from learning inside and outside the school.

5. Create new opportunities for leadership and professional opportunities for teaching. While most leadership development programs and certifications are school-based, the importance of training educators to build community partnerships is growing.
“Young people get up every morning looking for people to talk to, places to go and things to do that respond to their interests and build their skills,” explained Pittman. “This is developmental space. Superintendents are really the only leaders who can invite the community to think about building one big system to support learning.”

2. Re-envision the Structures

The superintendents noted, with humor, that education is one of those topics about which everyone is an expert. Does everyone have a say in how schools are run? No. But making the shift to a student-focused learning requires, according to Pittman, “getting consensus on the full list of desired student outcomes and community supports, taking stock of the current status of each, making a plan that makes effective use of all resources and regularly assessing progress.”

Susan Zelman, Ohio state superintendent of instruction, shared Ohio’s response to the challenge to build a new learning system. It features a systemic approach for diagnosing academic and nonacademic needs along with a learning day that goes beyond the traditional school day and year. Zelman, along with the New Day Task Force, acknowledges that there is no complete model of this new day for learning. There are efforts across the country, however, that point the way toward restructuring and redesigning the education of children so that they have access to the best that communities offer and can develop fully as learners and future citizens. In all of these examples, effective partnerships between the school and its community are critical for success.
The superintendents quickly affirmed this vision and in small group discussions, agreed on the assets and challenges.

3. Redefine the Goals

**Assets.** Applied skills. Soft skills. 21st century skills. Work force readiness. Whatever the term, the superintendents agreed that high school graduation is not, in and of itself, a measure of our success. Few were surprised by the data presented by Donna Klein, president and CEO of Corporate Voices for Working Families, that showed employers rate four in 10 of the high school graduates who apply for entry level jobs “not ready for work.”

What does it mean to be “ready” for work? Klein suggested that the skills young people need to be ready for work are the same that they need to be ready for college and for life on their own. These include the 3 Rs but go beyond them. Employers and colleges are looking for young people who are good problem-solvers, decision-makers, communicators and team members; young people who have strong work ethics.

**Challenges**

Challenges are to be expected in building a completely new system for learning:

- Consensus within the education community may not be easily achieved.
- Parent support isn’t automatic.
- Adult expectations are still too low.
- Community self-interest has to be addressed.
- Changing what happens in schools and classrooms is critical.
- Managing territorial and cultural boundaries between organizations and systems is tricky.
- Incentives have to be restructured.
- NCLB must be revamped.

“The biggest task in creating a new learning system is defining what we want kids to know and be able to do. This is the million dollar question.”

— Work Group Conclusion, Day One
Superintendents noted that these are not the skills measured by NCLB. They are, however, the kind of skills that once defined and measured, can galvanize the community. “The development of youngsters is the responsibility of everyone — not just the schools,” said Kirby Lehman, superintendent, Jenks, Oklahoma, School District.

Mark Levy, president of the United Way of Greater Dayton, Ohio, supported Lehman’s comment and argued for a focus on positive youth development. “The positive youth development framework focuses on the development of assets, tells us that kids aren’t developing and calls on the community to align all of its resources on behalf of children,” said Levy.

Research-based frameworks like the Search Institute’s 40 Assets™ give communities practical indicators against which to set goals and track progress. Noted Levy, “Students with 31 to 40 assets are six times more likely to do well in school than those with zero to 10 assets. Schools can handle 20 to 25 of these assets.” The rest have to come from families and the community. That sends a powerful signal that families and communities are equal partners in determining youth success.

### 40 Developmental Assets™

**Internal**

1. Family Support
2. Positive Family Communication
3. Other Adult Relationships
4. Caring Neighborhood
5. Caring School Climate
6. Parent Involvement in Schooling
7. Community Values Youth
8. Youth as Resources
9. Service to Others
10. Safety
11. Family Boundaries
12. School Boundaries
13. Neighborhood Boundaries
14. Adult Role Models
15. Positive Peer Influence
16. High Expectations
17. Creative Activities
18. Youth Programs
19. Religious Community
20. Time at Home

**External**

21. Achievement Motivation
22. School Engagement
23. Homework
24. Bonding to School
25. Reading for Pleasure
26. Caring
27. Equality and Social Justice
28. Integrity
29. Honesty
30. Responsibility
31. Restraint
32. Planning and Decision-Making
33. Interpersonal Competence
34. Cultural Competence
35. Resistance Skills
36. Peaceful Conflict Resolution
37. Personal Power
38. Self-Esteem
39. Sense of Purpose
40. Positive View of Personal Future

Source: Search Institute®, 2004.
Hugh Price, former vice president of the Rockefeller Foundation, former head of the National Urban League and currently senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, delivered this simple message about learning environments: We can learn from the military. They know how to get the best out of young people.

Price offered data to show the gains young people made while enrolled in quasi-military programs like the National Guard Youth Challenge program and shared program attributes.

Price’s argument was not that the military run schools. His recommendation was that superintendents and community leaders examine the models currently in practice across the country; engage in active dialogue with the military to learn and probe what they know about creating the conditions and motivation for learning, especially among low-achieving youth with a history of failure; and consider strategies for engaging retired and/or returning military personnel in creating these environments.

“I began my teaching career in the Indianapolis inner city — 67 percent dropout rate. But the students who were in ROTC were rarely in trouble and very few dropped out. I know why. Even in a big school, those kids were made to feel physically and psychologically safe. They were engaged, part of a team. More importantly, they recognized that there was someone who cared about their success ... .”

— Kirby Lehman, superintendent, Jenks, Oklahoma, School District

After discussion, the superintendents identified seven concrete strategies for creating seamless learning experiences for each student:

- Value and give credit to learning experiences that occur in a variety of places, not just the classroom.
- Spread school staff across the whole system — into the afterschool hours, out of the building.
- Give credit for proficiency and experience, not just seat time.
- Embed learning experiences in real-life contexts, in school and out.
- Offer college credit while in high school.
- Provide all students with access to technology.
- Ensure vertical articulation.
James Halley, superintendent, North Kingstown, Rhode Island, pushed the conversation even further. “Not only should we look at how the military trains people,” said Halley, “we should look at how the military organizes themselves … how they integrate all of the services.”

Price’s answer: They envision the whole, do what they know how to do and work with others to do the rest.

5. Redefine Leadership

Changing the conversation to be about children versus schools requires a redefinition of leadership where collaboration is key. Superintendents echoed this sentiment throughout the forum.

“If the ‘we’ is larger than just schools, then the conversation, vision and the commitment has to come from all.”

“When one agency leads the conversation, they end up with their feet planted in cement.”

“The mayor led the conversation in our community.”

“We brought in a facilitator to ensure neutrality.”

The new learning system requires shared responsibility for solutions which, in turn, requires understanding the strengths and the interests of each partner. Bryan Blavatt, superintendent of Kentucky’s Boone County Schools, knows that partnering with business requires careful listening and concrete plans. “We asked several local businesses what they wanted rather than told them what we wanted,” said Blavatt, describing the district’s business partnerships. “Then together, we designed a program that produced tangible results for kids.”
According to Robert Copeland, superintendent, Piscataway, New Jersey, the reality is “most communities don’t have the option of partnering with Fortune 500 companies. We need a strategy for engaging the dozens of small- and mid-size businesses in our communities.”

In the end, someone has to orchestrate the partners, implement the big plan and track the overall results, and superintendents concluded that the buck stops with them.

Accountability, however, should be for things that matter:

“We have a plethora of measures that are imposed on us but don’t tell us much about whether there is good learning going on in our systems. We’re partially responsible for this situation. We haven’t stepped out and said, here’s what we think is important, what we need to measure ….”

— Krista Parent, 2007 National Superintendent of the Year

“We will have to shepherd and lead innovation if we are to get any fidelity to our efforts or returns on the investment. There has to be a clear vision and a master plan. There has to be accountability.”

— Kevin Settle, superintendent of Mount Vernon City School District 80 in Illinois
For more than 40 years, AASA Executive Director Paul Houston has been involved in various roles in public education. He has served as both a superintendent and the head of the largest association representing district leaders across the country. In his remarks to superintendents of the year, Houston shared his observations about how the profession has been affected by change, including the social conditions affecting families and the increased focus on high stakes testing. These changes and others have demanded strong, courageous leadership from superintendents. But despite these pressures, Houston said, superintendents embrace their jobs more than ever. The profession offers a meaningful sense of purpose: to ensure that all children — no matter what their backgrounds or challenges — succeed.

Houston also acknowledged the challenges. When he began working in education 40 years ago, he used to worry about “the enemies” of public schools. Now, he said, he worries more about its “friends” who take a simplistic approach to complex problems. He called it “amateur-led school reform.”

“You don’t have to be an expert, and that attitude leads us down some difficult paths,” Houston said.

Houston expressed concern that today’s school improvement efforts focus on the wrong areas. “We spend a lot of time trying to make schools like they used to be. Schools today are better than they have ever been. Yet social conditions have deteriorated. Extended families no longer live by each other. And the expectations of what people want from their schools have exceeded our capacity to change.”
The result: Some have lost sight of the difference between reforming schools and reform school. “Uniforms, metal detectors, lockdowns, zero tolerance — sometimes you wonder if we’re not in the incarceration business instead of the education business,” Houston said.

Addressing Today’s Challenges Head-on

Today’s leaders in public education must challenge faulty assumptions and have the courage to talk about hard truths, said Houston. That means acknowledging that money does matter in public education and that testing alone will not close the achievement gap. It also means delving into deeper, more sensitive issues related to race and income such as whether we as a society are prepared to have a level playing field. “I’m not convinced that some of the people who talk about helping poor kids want them competing with their own children for jobs, and that’s a real leap in social consciousness in this country,” Houston said.

The new task for superintendents, urged Houston, is to recognize that their role is about making connections for staff, parents, students and the community. “You are in the sense-making business. You are the ones who have to connect the dots for people.”

Key to this work is helping others understand that efforts such as “drill and kill testing” are moving public education in the wrong direction. Instead of focusing on children’s deficits, educators must focus on their strengths and build from there. “We need to take the assets kids bring, celebrate them and help them grow.”

Leaders must also motivate their staff and community to embrace change that makes schools more meaningful and relevant to kids for the long haul. “Your legacy as a
“Your legacy as a leader is in the people you leave behind.”
— Paul Houston, executive director, AASA

leader is in the people you leave behind,” said Houston. “Everything you build, someone else will take apart. But if you leave something of yourself in those with whom you work, you will have made an impact.”

Houston introduced another aspect of leadership to those attending this year’s forum — the spiritual dimension of leadership, which is also the title of a new book he has co-authored. “We get squirrely in our profession because it sounds like religion, but it’s about delegating work to others and trusting them to do it. If you can’t forgive them for not doing it the way you want them to, you can’t lead.”

Staff members need to know that their leaders trust them to get the job done. Intention is another critical element. Houston encouraged superintendents to think deeply about the intentions behind their actions. “Is your intention for raising test scores to get your contract renewed or to help kids?” asked Houston.

Ultimately, the job of superintendent is one of the most challenging and rewarding. District leaders have the opportunity to take children whose assets may not be obvious and make them incredible human beings. “That’s a powerful gift,” said Houston.

Superintendents of the Year
Strategies to Stay Engaged and Proactive as Colleagues:

- Create a blog to share best practices and incite provocative discussions.
- Reconnect during AASA’s national conference and discuss progress.
- Communicate as one voice about NCLB reauthorization.
- Circulate reading lists relevant to leadership, school improvement and other timely topics.
- Promote the role and value of the superintendent’s leadership more broadly among staff and the community.
Leaders of the Senate and House Education committees are signaling that time has run out for reauthorizing NCLB, leaving prospects for rewriting it uncertain during the 2008 presidential campaign. AASA Associate Executive Director Bruce Hunter posed questions to state superintendents of the year about NCLB’s future that ranged from how the federal government can best work with states to what accountability system will result in the best outcomes for low-income students. (See a sampling of questions on page 16.)

“For this to work, it has to deeply resonate with all of you as well as with moms and dads,” said Hunter. “If we can clearly say what we want, we’ll be successful.”

In response, superintendents identified the following issues for consideration:

- Continue to place attention on closing the achievement gap and better serving special education students.
- Expand NCLB to include birth to age 21.
- Place high stakes testing on the table and take a more measured, thoughtful approach to how we diagnose student achievement.
- Harness technology to focus more effectively on individualized learning and assessment.
- Invest more in preschool.
- Tap community resources and organizations focusing on health, activities, arts, sports and other areas to enhance and enrich what public schools can offer students.
- Let funding follow each student from school to school.
Provide incentives that encourage states to take legislative action that is supportive of excellent public schools.

Encourage greater student and parent accountability.

Factor in poverty within the district and show how much value is being added on an annual basis in terms of student achievement.

Invest in sound, reliable research that tracks progress.

Offer more opportunities for excellent professional development.

Explore how to provide greater equity of investment and resources for schools with low-income student populations, including how poverty is defined.

Provide access to technology for all kids — from rural to urban areas.

AASA has several months to synthesize ideas from its members and weave those ideas into the presidential and congressional campaigns. “We really have to say what we want because if we don’t, people in Washington are going to write the bill for us,” cautioned Hunter. Superintendents were encouraged to reach out and work closely with their local teachers unions and school boards to identify a platform of NCLB changes. AASA also plans to introduce legislation that will freeze sanctions against schools and districts.
The demands and challenges facing today’s superintendents are extensive, but the superintendents of the year who gathered in Denver in December 2007 are moving forward in their efforts to ensure every child receives an education that will best prepare him or her for the 21st century. They are focusing on the development of a new learning system, acknowledging the importance of broad ownership and collaboration for student success, and sharing strategies for expanding opportunities for learning in school and out. They are reflecting on their approach to leadership and rethinking what effective leadership looks like. Increasingly, they are “sense-makers” who are helping to connect the dots for staff members, parents and the community about why meaningful education improvements are needed. Together, they committed to work closely with AASA and their local school boards and teacher union associations to ensure that the next chapter of NCLB better serves students. And finally, they understand that to accomplish any of the recommendations they have outlined, that your voice is needed for action.

“We’ve started this conversation, but we need a gang of 1,000 good voices to make this happen.”

— Kirby Lehman, superintendent, Jenks, Oklahoma, School District
The National Superintendent of the Year Program is in its 20th year and is co-sponsored by AASA and ARAMARK Education.

The following superintendents were selected as the 2007 state superintendents of the year:

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<th>STATE</th>
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<td>Spring Lake Park Schools</td>
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<td>William Gerritz</td>
<td>International School of Bangkok, Thailand</td>
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