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Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky have, like many communities, a diverse array of education initiatives focused on improving the lives and, more specifically, educational outcomes of children and youth. These resources are supported by a wide array of public and private institutions who share a common interest in the success of youth to lead to a more vibrant community and, speaking as a representative of the business community, creating a more educated workforce.

Unfortunately, we have not seen the dramatic improvements we would desire in the education system. We know this, in part, because key components of No Child left behind, such as requiring every child to be tested, have helped provide a better understanding of how every child is or is not being served.

When we looked at this data in our region, we came to the realization about four years ago that we needed to focus the time, energy, and talent of our entire community on specific strategies in a very coordinated manner to achieve the improvements that students and parents deserve. We needed to focus our work starting at birth through some form of college—cradle to career as we have called it. As a result, the community created something called the Strive Partnership. The Strive Partnership looked to bring the key leaders from the education, business, non-profit, philanthropic, and civic sectors together to create a common vision for education and set some concrete goals for improvement.

We then set five ambitious goals – every child will be prepared for school, supported inside and outside school, succeed academically, enroll in some form of college, and graduate and enter a career. We selected concrete measures related to each goal and put them in a report card published annually—capturing trends and guiding collective decision making around where our community need to focus and strategies critical for improving future student outcomes.

Many of the strategies being pursued by the Strive Partnership are consistent with the direction that President Obama and Education Secretary Duncan are pursuing through policy and the Race to the Top funding, including:

- The development of data-driven action plans and continuous improvement strategies to enhance social services and academic instruction;
- Better connecting health and social services to schools through our Community Learning Centers;
- Placing a significant emphasis on improving teacher quality and effectiveness; and
- Promoting the developing a “portfolio” of high performing schools that turnaround our lowest achieving schools.

Business leaders in Cincinnati have been engaged in and supportive of the abovementioned strategies being pursued by the Strive Partnership on various levels.

A recent example, of how the Strive Partnership has helped bring the community together to unite and advocate behind a common agenda has been in the area of improving teacher quality. Acknowledging that teacher quality matters more than any other school factor in student success or failure; Strive partners, including the Cincinnati Business Committee, Haile US Bank Foundation, Greater Cincinnati Foundation, and JP Morgan Chase helped to commission a comprehensive study by The New Teacher Project focused on improving the human capital system in Cincinnati Public Schools. This study included a comprehensive survey of teachers and principals and focused on teacher hiring, placement, evaluation, professional development, compensation, retention, dismissal, leadership and working conditions.

With the support of the Cincinnati Public School Board, the Superintendent and the Cincinnati Federation of Teachers, the recommendations from this report are now the focal point of many reforms currently being considered in the district. The Strive Partnership has played a critical role in bringing the broader community together to unite behind the specific action items in the report to improve teaching and learning within CPS. Some key recommendations include:

- Strengthening teacher and school effectiveness by adopting an evaluation system based on results as well as practice linked to a system that rewards excellent teachers, encourages innovation, and ties teacher compensation, development and advancement to student achievement;
- Providing greater flexibility to address chronically low-performing schools through alternative structures, school redesigns, adaptable staffing and new school options for parents and their children; and
- Increasing the supply of the best teachers in high-need schools.

This example highlights the important role that organizations like Strive can play in connecting leaders from all levels and sectors across the community around a common education reform effort to drive improved educational opportunities in our community.

As you work toward renewing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, it will be important to talk with leaders in organizations like the Strive Partnership to understand how they are working effectively with diverse groups of community leaders to drive education reform efforts on the ground. As with any new organization, there are many challenges to overcome, but the goal of providing every child with access to high-quality educational opportunities can only be achieved through a concerted, community-wide effort.