

STATE OF NEW MEXICO
LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION STUDY COMMITTEE

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Mimi Stewart
Jack E. Thomas

State Capitol North, 325 Don Gaspar, Suite 200
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501
Phone: (505) 986-4591 Fax: (505) 986-4338
<http://lesc.nmlegis.gov>

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November 8, 2010

MEMORANDUM

TO: Legislative Education Study Committee

FR: Pamela Herman, J.D.

RE: STAFF REPORT: COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS PROCESS FOR SCHOOL REFORM

During its September 2010 interim meeting, the Legislative Education Study Committee (LESC) heard a presentation from Dr. Sheri Williams, Superintendent, Carlsbad Municipal Schools, regarding the Carlsbad Graduation Summit that occurred in May 2010. According to her testimony, the summit was convened to engage the Carlsbad community in:

- improving the 75 percent graduation rate in Carlsbad;
- reducing the 15 point disparity in graduation rates between Hispanic and Caucasian students; and
- decreasing the rate (nearly 50 percent) at which Carlsbad high school graduates require remediation in their first year at a state public postsecondary institution.

The presentation also described the year-long process of organizing the summit, and outcomes that included a long-term plan and ongoing community-based initiatives to address the issues on which the summit focused. In response to the testimony, the LESL requested more information on how to create a community conversation process.

According to Dr. Williams, the Carlsbad Graduation Summit was organized in Carlsbad with support from Public Agenda, a nonpartisan, nonprofit research and public engagement organization founded in 1975 by former US Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and social scientist Daniel Yankelovich “to help the nation tackle tough issues by bridging the gap between leaders and the public.”

- Public Agenda states that its work includes:
 - in-depth, unbiased public opinion research on critical public policy questions;
 - public and stakeholder engagement that brings together people with diverse perspectives to build common ground and solve problems; and
 - broad-based communications, including websites and multimedia products.
- According to Public Agenda, the organization receives support from private foundations, such as the Kellogg Foundation, which provided part of the funding that made the Carlsbad Graduation Summit possible.
- Public Agenda states that its work of building public and stakeholder engagement revolves around three interrelated practices:
 - 1) framing issues for deliberation in “accessible and evenhanded ways” that help people understand their stake in an issue and a range of ideas for addressing it. This step includes the use of “Choicework Discussion Starters” such as *A Quality High School Education for All* and *A Great Education Starts at Home* (see Attachments);
 - 2) working with communities to engage citizens and leaders for democratic problem-solving and change. Public Agenda provides tools for this process including moderator training, online collaboration, and discussion; and
 - 3) building or strengthening local capacity for engagement beyond the organization’s direct involvement through tools, training, and support networks.

Presenter:

Dr. Will Friedman, Chief Operating Officer and President-designate of Public Agenda, will provide the committee with an overview of the organization’s process for developing issue-oriented public engagement, with a specific focus on public education issues. Dr. Friedman founded the public engagement department at Public Agenda in 1996, and established the organization’s Center for Advances in Public Education, which conducts action research to assess impacts and improve practice.