



OVERVIEW OF GRANTMAKING 1997-2007

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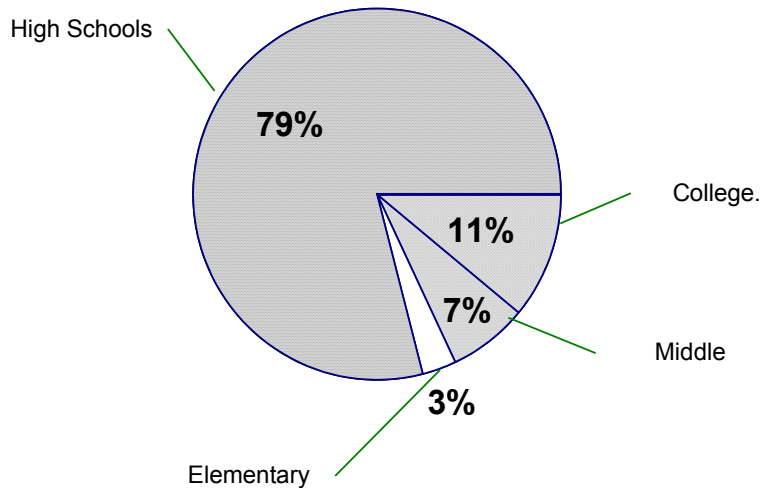
REVIEW OF THE TREFLER FOUNDATION GRANTMAKING 1997-2007

OVERVIEW

The Trefler Foundation was established in 1995 with a mission to improve educational opportunities for Boston's urban youth. In its mission statement, the Foundation states that it:

"...supports and expands the learning environment for Boston's high school students by promoting partnerships between schools, nonprofit and for-profit organizations, and institution of higher education. The Foundation's objective is to provide the necessary frameworks and resources for students high academic and personal achievement."

Between 1996 and 2004, The Trefler Foundation made nearly \$9 million in grant commitments. Consistent with its mission, the focus of the Foundation's giving was on public education, with a very strong emphasis on school reform at the district high school level. The Foundation concentrated its attention primarily on the Boston Public Schools and on the nonprofits and other partners whose support was viewed as integral to achieving the Foundation's objective. The following graph shows the distribution of grant dollars by grade level during this period.



A Engaged Approach

In addition to its direct philanthropic contributions, the Foundation employed a "high engagement" approach, through which Foundation staff, including the donor/president, was deeply involved in grantee activities, functioning in some cases as "loaned executives" (contributing an estimated 6,000 hours over a six year period) and in other cases, becoming part of grantee governance or volunteer structures. With respect to the latter, Foundation staff served on the Board of 10 of its 13 nonprofit grantees.

During this period the Foundation's operating style can be characterized as:

- Action and high engagement oriented
- Willing to take risks
- Focused on measurable results
- Seeking leverage
- Focusing public attention on school issues
- Operating outside mainstream systems

In choosing a significant financial and well-publicized commitment to public education, and a "venture philanthropy" approach (although this phrase had not been coined at the time the Foundation began its work), the Trefler Foundation occupied a unique position in Boston philanthropy. Adding to this characterization was the Foundation's dedication to district high schools rather than the prestigious and well-resourced exam schools. Moreover, the Foundation demonstrated a willingness to fund early stage nonprofits as well as mature organizations and to provide sustained funding over time.

Building a High School Portfolio

The Trefler Foundation began its work on high school reform in earnest in 1997. The first school to benefit from the Foundation's involvement was Dorchester High School (DHS), where the donor had been a student teacher. Building on an existing relationship with a group of veteran teachers at DHS the Foundation made a long-term commitment to supporting the transformation of this school.

Following the establishment of its work at Dorchester High School, the Foundation issued an RFP in 1999 seeking additional district high school partners interested in working on reform and restructuring in the Foundation's model. Several high schools applied and were brought into the portfolio, most notably East Boston High School, where the Foundation was able to replicate many of the elements it had piloted at DHS..

The Foundation's RFP to high schools describes the Foundation's giving interests. As this RFP demonstrates, The Trefler Foundation describes high performing high schools as having:

- Strong leadership
- Clear change plan
- Small learning communities
- Teacher engagement
- Parent involvement
- Supportive and vigorous partnership

Core beliefs and values

The Trefler Foundation based its approach a several key beliefs that reflected both research concerning education reform and the donors personal experiences with public schools. Some of these beliefs have been generalized into wide acceptance by other foundations, including large national foundations.

The foundation was an early proponent of the small schools movement, which has now been taken up by many large national foundations.

Working with teacher-leaders at Dorchester High School, the Foundation helped create a "coalition of will" among administration and teachers to transform DHS into a small learning communities model.

The Foundation held a core belief that students need to be surrounded by caring adults and that schools alone could not adequately meet this need.

The Foundation supported a group of nonprofit partners with the intent that these partners bring new skills and resources to the school, specifically to students inside the building during school hours and outside in the context of afterschool and summer programs. Nearly 50% of all Foundation grants between 1996 and 2004 were made to non-profit partners.

The Foundation likewise was strongly supportive of teachers and believed that teaching was a cornerstone of school improvement.

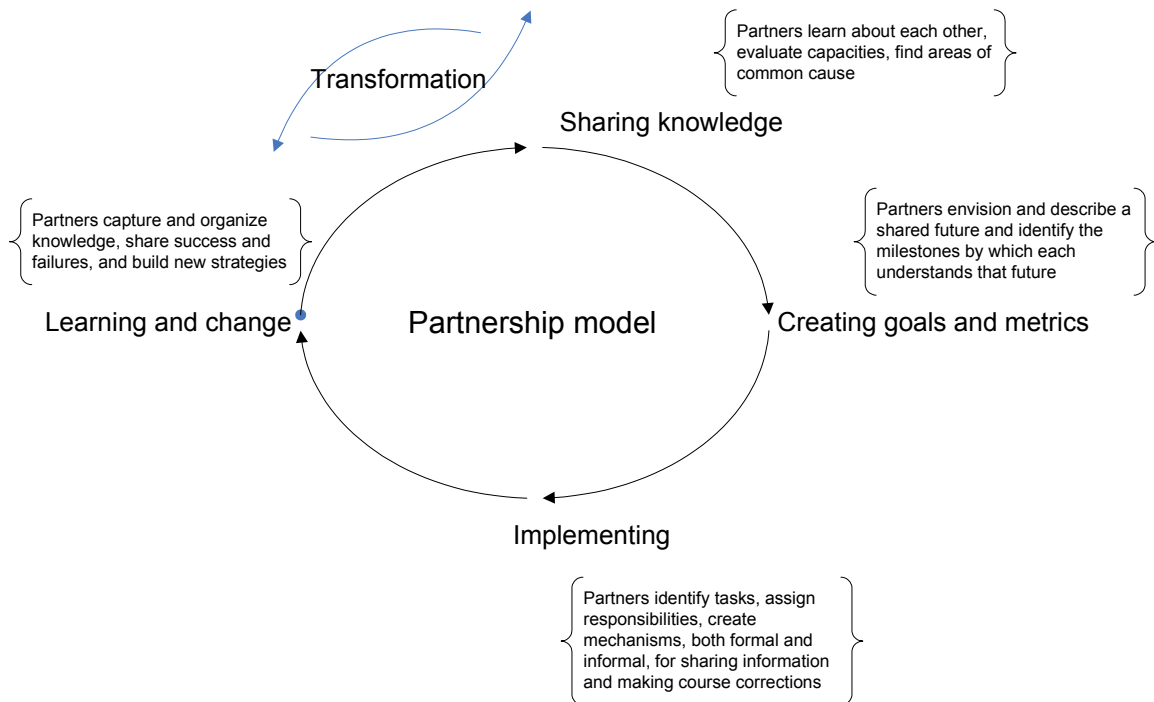
The Foundation worked with U/Mass Boston to create a new program fashioned on the professional development school model that brought new classroom capacity to Dorchester High School. Teach Next Year has proved to be a powerful model for preparing urban teachers.

Dorchester High School – A Case Study in Transformation

When the Trefler Foundation began its strategic work with the Boston Public Schools in earnest, it focused its attention on Dorchester High School, a school with a troubled history that was on the verge of losing its accreditation. While the Foundation added other high schools to its "reform portfolio, DHS was and is the centerpiece of the Foundation's work.

While DHS in 1995 faced significant challenges, it also had strengths to build on. DHS had a group of teacher/activists who were loyal to each other and to the school and who wanted to be change agents. It had a new headmaster who was supported change. It had several important external relationships, including (now) Verizon that is one of the longest business partnership in Boston. It had a long-standing relationship with UMass Boston, which became a key driver in reform at all levels, within the building and at the central administrative level.

Perhaps, most important, DHS welcomed a high engagement model, where Foundation staff would be deeply involved in the school culture. It was at Dorchester that the Foundation's implicit partnership model was most fully realized. The graphic below demonstrates this model:



During the course of its work at Dorchester High School, the school made considerable progress toward its reorganizing and restructuring goals. Its enhanced visibility and enlarged capacities attracted additional partners and external resources. At the same time, external forces beyond the sphere of influence of the Foundation were at work, both in terms of increased national philanthropic interest in school change and systemic interest in generalizing promising strategies.

As a result, in 2003, Dorchester High School became the first of the district high school in the system to be transformed into small academies, each with its own headmaster.

The Dorchester Conversation

To illuminate the Foundation's work during this period, we conducted a series of 15 group and individual interviews with individuals who were involved at Dorchester High School during this period. We recruited interviewees from within the school and from partner organizations. Taken together, these interviews offer a picture of a school that moved from a struggling and chaotic position to one that was engaged in self-transformation and ultimately to one where the external forces of change pushed a dramatic restructuring.

1. The experience of the Foundation and others partners at Dorchester High School during its period of restructuring created a learning system, one that as all dynamic systems do, evolved over time. As a dynamic system, all parties are engaged in learning and through shared experiences all are transformed.
2. Schools have a "culture" that must be understood in order to effect change.
2. When the Foundation began working at DHS, many nonprofit organizations and many universities, view public schools as passive receptacles either for programming or research. Many public schools, desperate for resources, accepted external organizations into the schools without a real strategy. Partnerships require new knowledge and skills on both sides of the equation. The Foundation helped strengthen or create enduring partnerships at Dorchester High School. Some organizations, however, were not well positioned to work at the school and despite significant pressure (coupled with significant financial support) by the Foundation could not succeed. Additionally, the administration at DHS evolved in its own capacities. Today, one former administrator at DHS, who continues in a role at the Dorchester Education Complex, states that going forward, he will be selecting partners for their strategic value and will be proactive rather than reactive, seeking out partners who have skills and capacities his students need.
3. Leadership is critical to the change process and leadership in a school building happens a different levels. At DHS, activist teachers were change agents, while it required a headmaster willing to let change occur and willing to be a partner to make the process work.
4. Teaching and teacher training are mobilizing forces that can change schools. UMass Boston's work with Teach Next Year, gave pre-service teachers a powerful developmental experience and gave seasoned teachers a sense of value as mentors.

When asked for recommendations to the Foundation, interviewees expressed a variety of different ideas.

1. More attention to planning at the earliest stages for partners. Interviewees acknowledged that the Foundation's up-front commitment approach helped gain visibility and momentum. However, in retrospect, several interviewees suggested spending more time planning, creating relationships and network and identifying shared milestones, before moving to the action stage.

2. Add a focus information capture and dissemination. Interviewees recommend that the Foundation include documentation, evaluation, and other research techniques as part of future grantmaking. As technology has increased the speed with which information can be shared, there is an opportunity for the Foundation to play a role in making its experiences and ideas known to broader audiences.

3. Become a "critical friend". Interviewees suggest that the Foundation can play an important role in the larger dialogue about schools and school reform by taking on the role of "critical friend", having a greater voice at the policy level (both inside the school system and in government), as well as in the community as a whole.

4. Find additional points of leverage. When the Trefler Foundation began working on school reform, it was ahead of a curve for private philanthropy. Many foundations, some with extraordinary resources, have taken up the cause. Yet, even foundations like Gates have come to acknowledge that it needs to pay attention to public policy and that private grant dollars are simply not enough to create systemic change. A nimble and entrepreneurial foundation, like the Trefler Foundation, can take risks that others cannot and find points of leverage that can be mobilized.

5. Focus on capacity and sustainability for public school partners. Nonprofit and university partners expressed eagerness to continue work at Dorchester High School and other Boston Public Schools. At the same time, the need for resources in an endless drumbeat. In a next stage of Foundation funding, including capacity building that will allow organizations to transition off Foundation resources while retaining their level of engagement will be helpful.

6. Build interest and confidence among other private funders. There is an interest among many of the newer funders, especially trustees and individual donors, in taking different approaches to their philanthropy. The Foundation, because of its

Next steps for the Foundation

In reviewing its historic grantmaking and by taking a deep look at its work in Dorchester High School the Foundation has determined continue to be an advocate for the School and to encourage on-going partnerships. In addition, the Foundation has explored several new directions that it might choose to pursue that are drawn from its work. As the Foundation celebrates its 10th decade. The following are ideas that are being developed for prospective activities.

TEACHER TRAINING – Teach Next Year was an important factor to the success of the Foundation's work at DHS and also helped UMB develop a deeper connection to one of its core constituencies. Teacher training has become prominent in the literature as an important focus of school change. The Boston Teacher Residency Program, which borrows liberally from TNY but which focuses exclusively on Boston teachers, is an example of another, albeit derivative program. It is evident that training high school teachers for placements in urban systems is a matter of singular importance, great urgency, and complexity.

LEADERSHIP – A key lesson from the DHS experience focuses on the importance of leadership both among teaching staff and within building administration. New styles of leadership emerged through the process of change at DHS. Crisis management that characterized the period in 1996/97 when accreditation was at stake evolved into open and supportive leadership over time. Creating education leaders at every level who are equipped to manage the new reality of public

education poses an interesting opportunity. As important, philanthropic leadership continues to be in high demand as private resources drive much of this new reality.

SUSTAINABLE PARTNERS – As schools focus on their core mission of teaching and learning, community capacities to support that mission and to contribute to the out-of-school needs of students have grown. The question of how these partnerships can survive and flourish remains. How do nonprofit managers gain the skills to succeed inside public schools and how does that funding community gain an appetite for the kind of long-term support needed to embed these organizations deeply enough in the schools to be effective?