National Civic Index for Quality Public Education

Toolkit Introduction—Text Only Version

Created by Public Education Network (PEN)

This text version of the Public Education Network's National Civic Index for Quality Public Education Toolkit Introduction has been created for those who do not have access to a high-speed Internet connection, find this format easier to read, or want an easy reference or facilitation tool. There are slight modifications in the formatting of this version since it is not a web-based product; however, it contains the same content as the online version.

National Civic Index for Quality Public Education Introduction

As you move through this introduction, you will learn more about actions that organizations can take to ensure that every child has a quality education. You will

- develop an appreciation of what the Civic Index is designed to do,

- gain an understanding of the Civic Index and its components, and

- explore the Civic Index's strategies and tools.

When you finish this introduction, you will have the knowledge to take your first steps in using the National Civic Index for Quality Public Education and an understanding of additional information you will need to make this effort a success.

Introduction

It is commonly assumed that the responsibility for education lies solely with schools. However all educators, students, family members, community members and organizations, public officials, businesses, media, policy makers, and postsecondary institutions share responsibility for providing a quality education to all our children and youth. Each of us has to step up and fulfill our role in supporting quality public education.

The **National Civic Index for Quality Public Education (Index)** is a tool to help identify the areas in which communities excel and the areas where communities need assistance in supporting public education.

This introduction is the gateway to using the Index in your community as well as the nation. As you work your way through these materials keep this question in mind:

How can you use the information and suggestions included in this material to help you build stronger community involvement in public education?

Contents of National Civic Index for Quality Public Education

Your first step in using this Toolkit is to determine how your community engages in public education.

- ✓ How does your community define and measure community participation in supporting quality schools?

- ✓ What are the strengths and weaknesses in your community's support for quality public schools?

- ✓ What actions do you take or foster to increase community participation in public education?

As you progress through this introduction, we hope you will learn more about community engagement in public education, and also how you can use this information.

What is your experience with public education?

As you continue, you will see how your experiences fit with what the National Civic Index for Quality Public Education has learned about how to increase community engagement in public education.

Take a moment to consider

- ✓ What actions you take to support public schools?

- ✓ What activities take place in your community to support public schools?

What is your experience with public education?

Check all that apply and then award the number of points allotted to each descriptor. The numbers reflect what the National Civic Index Poll has learned about what types of support have the most impact on supporting quality public education.

To support public schools, I have

Voted for an official who strongly supports public schools	☐	12 points
Joined an organization that supports public schools	☐	8 points
Experienced or known someone else who has experienced a positive interaction with a teacher or school administrator	☐	14 points
Talked to others about academic performance information published each year about local schools	☐	10 points
Followed the actions and decisions of my local school board as well as voted in school board elections	☐	10 points
		Total Points for Individual Support

In my community, I know about

Programs or strategies my school district uses to meet the needs of every student, no matter the background or ability level of the student	☐	14 points
School-sponsored programs that involve students in community activities	☐	8 points
Opportunities for high school students to engage in college-sponsored activities	☐	8 points
Workplaces who contribute to schools	☐	8 points
An educational issue that the media covered well	☐	8 points
		Total Points for Community Support

Are your efforts and the efforts of your community having an impact? Do you see any gaps?

The National Poll has revealed the importance of taking both a strong personal stance for education and a strong community stance for education by voting and participating in activities that support education. Every individual in the community needs to take responsibility for keeping informed about public education and sharing information with others. Efforts may be sponsored by schools, colleges, organizations, businesses, or the media. They may target young children or adolescents. However, efforts, that have the greatest impact, share one commonality—they seek to ensure that all children and youth attend quality public schools.

The Index recommends that individuals, community members, and organizations provide opportunities that encourage citizens to engage and support efforts to promote educational issues by

- reaching out and supporting local officials, businesses, and organizations to support education,
- learning how to read and use data about student and school performance,
- fostering youth development,
- getting involved with schools in a wider variety of ways, and
- encouraging and following media coverage of education.

Consider your experiences and how you can continue to support public education. Then, in the text box below, record two goals you feel are vital in creating quality public schools.

1.

2.

National Civic Index Categories

To create the **National Civic Index for Quality Public Education**, Public Education Network conducted nation-wide public opinion polls over 6 years and worked with over 30 national experts from university and research organizations.

Based on these polls, the public identified 10 community-based conditions necessary to support quality public schools. Without the presence of these conditions, it is virtually impossible to ensure that every child and youth has a quality public education.

We call these conditions *Categories*.

Educational Leadership of Locally Elected Officials at every level of government is critical to ensure that every child and youth attends quality public schools. While public education is still the responsibility of local communities, the influence of state and federal laws also has a direct impact on the schools.

Therefore, the leadership actions of our elected officials need to reflect the community's educational priorities. The community can help to focus these efforts by

- creating opportunities for the public to share their viewpoints on educational issues with the locally elected officials and

- insisting that officials report to the public on their efforts to foster quality public education.

When the community actively engages with elected officials to promote quality schools, they create a stronger foundation for public education.

Commitment to the Values of Tolerance and Inclusiveness is a keystone in ensuring that every child and youth in the community has a quality education. We hear leaders use the phrase "closing of the achievement gap" when they talk about this commitment. But, what does this mean to you and me, to the children and youth in our community?

This means we make sure that culture, language, physical disability, or any other difference does not create a barrier to learning. Parents and families and the community can support this effort by creating structures and processes that encourage the following:

- providing time for different groups to interact and exchange dreams, beliefs, and plans

- honoring the hopes and dreams of all who join the effort

- exploring the differences in culture, classes, race, economics, and education

- eliminating blocks to participation immediately

- establishing multiple levels of action for each effort

- acknowledging differences and similarities openly

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When communities make these actions a priority and commonplace practice, they can create a community-wide voice that provokes the conditions to support a quality public education for each and every child and youth in the community.

Active Parents typically come to mind when we look at efforts to support education from the wider community. There are four roles parents and family members commonly take on to support quality public schools, starting with their own child as the focus, and branching out to school, district, and beyond:

1. They support their own child's learning by communicating with their child's classroom teacher, overseeing their child's homework and class projects, and volunteering in their child's classroom.

2. They volunteer to work on school-wide activities such as fundraising events or sporting and cultural events.

3. They are involved on school-based improvement teams, advisory committees, or other initiatives that help to frame school- or district-wide decisions that support quality public schools.

4. They advocate for improvement efforts with the school board or other local government agencies to ensure that every child and youth attends a quality public school.

Each role can have a positive impact on local schools and build the conditions necessary for quality public schools. However, parents and families have an even stronger impact on these conditions when they assume several or all of these roles.

In fact, in the public polling conducted by the Public Education Network, active engagement of parents and family members to support public education ranks as the most significant condition of high performing schools. For as parents and family members take on roles that directly affect student learning through 1) setting shared goals, 2) raising awareness of important educational concerns, 3) learning more about the structures and performance of local schools, or 4) fostering public discussion of key issues, their efforts have a greater impact on the education of children and youth in the community.

Strong Civic Organizations have a critical role to play in supporting and reforming public education. With their variety of resources, networks, and expertise, they are able to create pathways for information exchange, relationship-building, and leadership development in and out of schools. For example, groups such as Local Education Funds (LEFs) are able to support public education by

- serving as intermediaries in community-wide planning,
- directing attention to key issues, and
- establishing connections across different groups.

Using strategies like these, community organizations can build school-community partnerships that involve parents, family members, other community groups, and educators in supporting quality public education.

Moreover, the conditions identified in the Civic Index naturally align to the qualities we would find in Strong Civic Organizations. Civic organizations will find that using the tools provided to measure the conditions necessary for supporting public education through the National Civic Index Poll may also help them shape the work of their organizations.

Utilization of School Performance Data to Improve School Quality is a vital tool in supporting public education. We assume school staff are the only ones who need to review school performance data, but they are not. Collecting, analyzing, and using student performance data should always drive community-wide decisions and actions related to education. Parents, family members, community members, local officials, media groups, and others interested in supporting schools need a clear picture of what is and is not happening in schools before they can effectively support quality public education.

However, if we expect the community to engage in using data, we need to ensure that data reports are

- accessible and easy to understand by the community at large,
- translated into other languages as dictated by community needs, and
- visually meaningful to the community.

Youth Involvement is an emerging area of concern and need for our nation. We often hear that our youth aren't involved. In truth, they are less knowledgeable about political news and the actions of civic government. In comparing by age group participation, youth voters have a significantly lower turnout rate. However, these facts do not provide the total picture of our youth.

Looking at youth involvement from their perspective—when educational issues are raised, we seldom ask our youth to participate in exploring these issues or for their viewpoints. Is it any surprise that they are not engaged?

There are communities that actively reach out to youth: Their efforts address the social, physical, health, and mental needs of youth and provide assistance to them in planning for the future. When communities make these efforts a priority, we see more youth involved in service learning and as volunteers than at any time in recent history. These activities demonstrate how youth involvement can support the conditions that impact public education.

It is the community that creates the structures that promote the following efforts that foster youth involvement:

- reach out to youth and engage them in activities to demonstrate the function and value of our political and governmental systems

- include youth in decision-making teams and efforts that directly impact their lives—educationally, socially, physically, and mentally

- provide real-life experiences for youth that prepare them for their future roles as citizens and advocates for public education

- provide access to information and assistance to youth and their families in planning for education after graduation

- engage youth in a variety of volunteer activities to broaden their understanding of the community, the needs of the community, and the ways in which they can support the community

When communities engage youth in community events that foster service learning, political activism, civic education, and youth transition to public life, they address the needs of the present generation of youth and also strengthen civic involvement for generations to come.

Partnerships with Higher Education provide communities with a wide range of resources to support public education that often go unnoticed. Higher education-public school partnerships commonly provide joint credit classes and promote advanced coursework for all students. However, community organizations also join with higher education to provide new resources for public education.

For example, colleges and universities partner with community organizations to

- offer college credit classes in high-need locations;

- provide job shadowing experiences;

- open their campuses for events to promote the value of post high school education;

- provide facility space for programs and events that serve the needs of the greater community; and

- provide expertise in a wide range of topic areas; and

- offer other services to the community.

Through these partnerships, higher education institutions are able to share a wealth of human and facility resources in support of public education.

Knowledge of and Voting for School Boards is another pathway for the public, community organizations, businesses, and other groups to influence what happens in public education. School boards directly and indirectly affect the quality of student learning through negotiating teacher contracts, approving budgets, addressing facilities issues, establishing or changing curriculums, setting academic standards, choosing textbooks, deciding on funding sources, and hiring superintendents. These actions are the backbone of any educational system.

On election, each board member commits to representing the community's views about quality public schools. However, the community also plays an important role in the

school board process—holding the board accountable for decisions and actions that reflect the views and needs of the community. The community does this by

- increasing their awareness of the actions and decisions made by board members,

- reaching out to board members and sharing their perspectives on important issues, and

- expressing their views openly and ardently.

When communities reach out to boards and increase board members' awareness of community priorities, they foster the conditions that are necessary to support public education.

An Active Business Community is another resource that is often underutilized in public education. Typically, our first image of business involvement in education is fundraising. In reality, the business community can support public education in other ways that have a significant impact on student lives.

When businesses have a culture that recognizes the importance of supporting public education,

- they allow employees time off to participate in school activities.

- they offer knowledge, skills, and services as a resource to districts, schools, and students.

- they provide materials, volunteers, work experience opportunities, and "real world" experiences to schools and students.

- they align their support for public education to the educational goals of the community.

However, schools are also a resource for business. Businesses may locate or relocate based on a community's educational resources: Will the quality of the schools help them recruit the best employees? Do the public schools and higher education facilities create a pool of employees who can meet their needs? The businesses and schools in the community have unique relationships that foster the conditions necessary for quality public schools.

Media Coverage in a democratic society is expected to raise public awareness and inform the public about important social issues. For educational issues, there are two expectations for the media.

First, they provide timely information to the public on critical educational events and concerns.

Second, they serve as a watchdog to hold officials and institutions publicly accountable for their actions related to public education.

Coverage can take the form of paper, broadcast, or electronic tools, as well as other media streams. No matter the format, the media is often the public's only source of information on key on educational issues including released data on school-, district-, and statewide performance.

However, both the public and the media share responsibility for promoting this condition in the community. The public's expectation for timely and accurate information on public education encourages the media to fulfill its role. At the same time, the media is responsible to be objective and thorough in reporting.

Media coverage should provide

- a balanced view of public schools,

- useful data about the performance of public schools,

- accessible information for all members of the community, and

- thoughtful analysis of educational issues.

National Civic Index Category Indicators

Now, that you have begun to understand the conditions that are necessary in a community to support quality public schools, how do you know the status of these conditions in your community?

In the next section, you'll learn about the indicators that demonstrate this status. The National Civic Index Poll uses a two-step process to help you explore the conditions in your community that support quality public schools.

1. **Administer the Poll**—By using the poll, you will gather information through a survey tool and generate a report indicating the degree to which conditions that support public education are present or absent in your community

2. **Collect Additional Data**—Though the poll allows you to look at the conditions necessary to support quality public education, collecting additional information related to the conditions will add clarity as you begin to interpret the poll data.

For example, through the National Civic Index Poll, you may learn that a low percentage of your community feels that there is adequate media coverage of educational events. However, through the additional data you collect, you find that a large percentage of your community speaks Vietnamese as a first language and has limited skill in reading English—**there are no media outlets translating information into Vietnamese.**

When you combine the data from the Poll and the additional information collected, there is more clarity about why the community believes that the media does not provide adequate coverage of educational issues. As you take your steps to address this low percentage, you can use the strategies provided in this toolkit more successfully since you have a better understanding of the real issues.

In the next section, you will learn more about the value of the Poll results and the additional information to be collected for some of the categories.

Indicators for Educational Leadership of Locally Elected Officials

When **Elected Officials** support public education by 1) making it a community priority, 2) increasing the flow of information about educational issues to and from local elected officials, and 3) supporting partnerships between local elected officials and school leaders, they are adopting **Educational Leadership Roles.**

The following indicators demonstrate the conditions necessary to foster **Educational Leadership of Locally Elected Officials:**

Indicators Presented in the National Civic Index Poll Report	Additional Data to be Collected Regarding the Following Indicator
☐ Elected officials demonstrate a sustained commitment to education and make public education a top priority. ☐ Elected officials advocate for adequate funding. ☐ Elected officials effectively communicate with constituents on education issues. ☐ Elected officials promote a clear agenda that advances student achievement.	No additional data is needed for this category.

Indicators for Commitment to the Values of Tolerance and Inclusiveness

When a community **Commits to the Values of Tolerance and Inclusiveness,** the public engages in activities to address issues that come from differences in culture, race, class, and language among school staff, student population, and community population, make sure that all students have a quality education, and encourage representation of all stakeholder groups in decision-making opportunities.

The following indicators demonstrate the conditions necessary to foster **Commitment to the Values of Tolerance and Inclusiveness:**

Indicators Presented in the National Civic Index Poll Report	Additional Data to be Collected Regarding the Following Indicator
☐ Schools provide the same educational opportunities to students of all backgrounds. ☐ Schools provide quality services for special needs students (English language learners, special education students, etc.).	☐ School board members reflect the diversity of the families in the school district. ☐ Low income and racial/ethnic minority organizations have a say in school and school district decision-making. ☐ The student population in local public schools reflects the diversity of the community.

Indicators for Active Parents

When **Parents Actively** engage in public education, they participate in activities to share information, become involved in a variety of ways, and participate in decision making.

The following indicators demonstrate the conditions necessary to foster Active Parents:

Indicators Presented in the National Civic Index Poll Report	Additional Data to be Collected Regarding the Following Indicator
☐ Parents participate in school-related parent organizations. ☐ Parents stay informed about key education issues. ☐ Parents participate actively in their child's education, such as volunteering in the school, getting their child to school on time, or doing homework with their child. ☐ Schools encourage active parent participation/contributions.	☐ Parents participate in school district policy making, governance, and decision-making. ☐ Parents participate in school governance and decision-making.

Indicators for Strong Civic Organizations

When **Strong Civic Organizations** engage in public education, their membership and organizational priorities promote activities to involve the public in education reform, identify and advocate for important education issues, and build and help resource networks to last.

The following indicators demonstrate the conditions necessary to foster Strong Civic Organizations:

Indicators Presented in the National Civic Index Poll Report	Additional Data to be Collected Regarding the Following Indicator
☐ Local organizations create opportunities to gather citizen input on education issues and to inform community members about where candidates for elected office stand on these issues. ☐ Local organizations provide help for those most in need and pay special attention to low-performing schools. ☐ Local organizations share resources with schools, including expertise, funding, volunteers, and coordination of health and social services.	☐ Community organizations define and advocate for public school accountability. ☐ The public is actively involved in community organizations that partner with the schools.

Indicators for Utilization of School Performance Data to Improve School Quality

When communities **Utilize School Performance Data to Improve School Quality**, they take two approaches: Organizations, parents, family members, community members, business, and other groups engage in activities that include the presentation of data about local schools as well as prepare those involved to explore data in a meaningful way. By using data for these two purposes, communities are able to focus on the academic progress of all children and youth.

The following indicators demonstrate the conditions necessary to foster Utilization of School Performance Data to Improve School Quality:

Indicators Presented in the National Civic Index Poll Report	Additional Data to be Collected Regarding the Following Indicator
☐ Information about school performance is widely communicated and readily available in a form and language that the community can understand.	☐ Schools make parents and the community full partners in developing and supporting strategies for student academic progress. ☐ Information about school performance is explained to the community through a variety of channels, including the school district, local government, nonprofit organizations, and the media. ☐ Teachers and school staff are properly trained in how to use data to engage parents and the community to improve student achievement.

Indicators for Youth Involvement

When communities provide opportunities for **Youth Involvement**, youth are engaged in activities to increase their participation political and civic events and to address their academic and social needs.

The following indicators demonstrate the conditions necessary to foster Youth Involvement:

Indicators Presented in the National Civic Index Poll Report	Additional Data to be Collected Regarding the Following Indicator
☐ Community and schools provide students with the education and skills to effectively participate in the political and civic process. ☐ Schools encourage students to participate in school and local district governance through such activities as student council, student advisory boards, and/or student members of the school board. ☐ Youth regularly engage in community service and volunteer activities. ☐ Youth are perceived as assets and contributors to the community.	No additional data is needed for this category.

Indicators for Partnerships with Higher Education

When community groups, schools, and others **Partner with Higher Education**, these efforts result in greater support for quality public education, shared institutional resources, and coordinated efforts for students across institutions.

The following indicators demonstrate the conditions necessary to foster **Partnerships with Higher Education**:

Indicators Presented in the National Civic Index Poll Report	Additional Data to be Collected Regarding the Following Indicator
☐ Higher education institutions partner with school districts to resolve school improvement challenges, including bolstering the quality of teaching and learning, and supporting schools that need special assistance. ☐ College or university students provide support to local schools through volunteering, service-learning, and internships.	☐ Institutions of higher learning provide shared use of college facilities, college faculty, and courses.

Indicators for Knowledge of and Voting for School Boards

When communities create activities to increase **Knowledge of and Voting for School Board**, they increase public participation in school board activities, establish relationships with individual board members, and strengthen networks between the school board, local leaders, and the community.

The following indicators demonstrate the conditions necessary to foster **Knowledge of and Voting for School Boards**:

Indicators Presented in the National Civic Index Poll Report	Additional Data to be Collected Regarding the Following Indicator
☐ Individuals monitor school board decisions and policies. ☐ Individuals vote regularly in school board elections.	☐ Individuals have the means to regularly address the school board or discuss school board policies.

Indicators for Active Business Community

 An Active Business Community participants purposefully in supporting public education and engages in activities that allow them to share their resources to support education in innovative ways.

The following indicators demonstrate the conditions necessary to foster Active Business Community:

Indicators Presented in the National Civic Index Poll Report	Additional Data to be Collected Regarding the Following Indicator
☐ Local business leaders work closely with other community and civic leaders to identify school needs and address critical school issues. ☐ Local businesses offer paid time and other incentives for their employees to be regularly involved in school activities.	☐ Local business leaders provide resources and expertise to school boards and district administrations around school improvement.

Indicators for Media Coverage

When **Media Coverage** is used to support quality public education, community organizations, schools, families, businesses, and others foster improved and increased local media coverage of education and initiate strategies to establish and maintain open communication between educators, local elected officials, the public, and media sources.

The following indicators demonstrate the conditions necessary to foster Media Coverage:

Indicators Presented in the National Civic Index Poll Report	Additional Data to be Collected Regarding the Following Indicator
☐ The local media reports on the education positions of candidates for school board, mayor, state legislator, and other key offices. ☐ The local media provides in-depth reporting about how elected officials vote and the extent to which they keep their promises.	No additional data is needed for this category.

What's Important in Your Community?

Take a moment to consider what you have learned about the National Civic Index.

What did you learn that you feel is important in helping your community support quality public education?

Record your answer in the *Text Box* below.

More Information

First, take a moment to review the responses you've recorded on the worksheet as you've moved through this introduction.

You've learned about the conditions that help to support quality public education.

If you've completed this introduction with others . . .

You've already taken the first step in using this material to support your public schools. Your next step is to take this information and share it with an even larger group and begin to plan to use the National Civic Index for Quality Public Education to improve the conditions needed to support quality public education in your community.

If you've completed this introduction as an individual . . .

You need to recruit others in your community and either share the information you have gained or create an opportunity for them to explore the introduction as a group themselves. Once this is done, your group can begin to plan how to use the National Civic Index for Quality Public Education to improve the conditions needed to support quality public education in your community.

To implement the National Civic Index for Quality Public Education, Public Education Network has created a set of tools:

A Public Opinion Poll—a complete polling kit with detailed directions to explain how to conduct the poll and analyze results. This poll will help your community explore the current status of the conditions to support public education and what conditions needs to be addressed.

A Report Card—an online process that will generate a report card for sharing the results of the poll. This online tool helps you to quickly analyze the data collected through the survey and provides strategies for using the additional data collected.

Detailed Descriptions of Categories and the Conditions for Engaging in Public Education—a detailed explanation of each category that includes the most important issues to consider and what experts say about this topic. These descriptions will help you understand the implications of your poll results and next steps to take.

Tips to Improve the Conditions that Support Quality Public Schools—a detailed list of strategies and help documents for each of the categories. These tips and the lists of resources that accompany them will provide a wealth of tools to strengthen the conditions necessary for quality schools in your community.

Explore Other Resources—a list of annotated resources for each category. Many of them are available at no cost on the Internet. These annotations provide resources for relevant research and theory. While not everyone involved needs this type of information, some will.

Local Education Funds (LEF)—a group of community-based groups who support public education. The Public Education Network has worked with community-based organizations across the

U.S. as they support public education. Our Web site will provide contact information for LEFs in your state. Many of these LEFs have experience and knowledge that will help you create the conditions necessary to support quality public schools.

Steps to Measure Your Community's Civic Involvement in Support of Quality of Public Schools

We hope you have enough information to take the first steps in measuring the conditions in your community that are necessary to support quality public schools. If not, you will find the resources listed on the previous page to be very helpful.

If you are ready, here are your next steps:

1. Review the National Civic Index (NCI) Toolkit and share it with your organization's board of directors, program committee, or members who would help you plan to administer the index in your community.

2. Develop a plan to administer the NCI. Include budget information, along with ideas as to how the index will integrate with current work, timelines, and the capacity of your organization to assume this project. Sources of funding could come from your own budget, involve *pro bono* help from a college or a community foundation, or may be granted to your group by your partner organizations.

3. Select a planning committee. Your committee should include at least one representative from each NCI category, including parents, business leaders, community members, elected officials, higher education faculty, media, students, and an assessment expert.

4. Identify the geographic range of the "community" that you wish to poll. This could be a school district, a county, a region of the state, a consortium of school districts, or an entire state. The number of people you poll will depend on the size of the "community" that you define.

5. Develop a news release and other communications to make the community aware that you will be measuring the level of their civic activity that leads to quality public schools for all children.

6. Select a polling firm to conduct the ready-made poll contained in the NCI toolkit. You may wish to select a sample size that allows you to disaggregate by gender, geography and region, race, ethnicity, income or other factors. Also, you may wish to add poll questions pertinent to issues in your own community that are not reflected in the NCI poll questions.

7. Conduct other research to obtain data that cannot easily be gathered by polling. These additional research areas are cited in the NCI.

8. Analyze the data collected from the poll and the research, share it with the planning committee, and decide on a composite score for each of the index categories. Your committee can either include the poll results AND the additional research (which will require your planning committee to make some judgments about the score for each category), or you can report the additional research as separate information.

9. Determine a score for each category. Determine the community's strengths and weaknesses. Your planning committee can determine next steps and how to engage the community in improving its score.

10. Develop a communications and news media plan to broadly disseminate the NCI results along with the recommendations for improvement. Use the NCI toolkit section on the media for guidance.

11. Have the planning committee develop and approve a plan that will engage the public in improving its score. The plan should identify roles for various community stakeholders, and include timetables and benchmarks for progress. Remember, you want the community to take responsibility for improving its score.

12. Monitor implementation of the communities' plan for improvement; and plan to re-evaluate and re-poll the community in several years to determine progress.

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3. They are involved on school-based improvement teams, advisory committees, or other initiatives that help to frame school- or district-wide decisions that support quality public schools.

4. They advocate for improvement efforts with the school board or other local government agencies to ensure that every child and youth attends a quality public school.

Each role can have a positive impact on local schools and build the conditions necessary for quality public schools. However, parents and families have an even stronger impact on these conditions when they assume several or all of these roles.

In fact, in the public polling conducted by the Public Education Network, active engagement of parents and family members to support public education ranks as the most significant condition of high performing schools. For as parents and family members take on roles that directly affect student learning through 1) setting shared goals, 2) raising awareness of important educational concerns, 3) learning more about the

structures and performance of local schools, or 4) fostering public discussion of key issues, their efforts have a greater impact on the education of children and youth in the community.

Strong Civic Organizations have a critical role to play in supporting and reforming public education. With their variety of resources, networks, and expertise, they are able to create pathways for information exchange, relationship-building, and leadership development in and out of schools. For example, groups such as Local Education Funds (LEFs) are able to support public education by

- serving as intermediaries in community-wide planning,
- directing attention to key issues, and
- establishing connections across different groups.

Using strategies like these, community organizations can build school-community partnerships that involve parents, family members, other community groups, and educators in supporting quality public education.

Moreover, the conditions identified in the Civic Index naturally align to the qualities we would find in Strong Civic Organizations. Civic organizations will find that using the tools provided to measure the conditions necessary for supporting public education through the National Civic Index Poll may also help them shape the work of their organizations.

Utilization of School Performance Data to Improve School Quality is a vital tool in supporting public education. We assume school staff are the only ones who need to review school performance data, but they are not. Collecting, analyzing, and using student performance data should always drive community-wide decisions and actions related to education. Parents, family members, community members, local officials, media groups, and others interested in supporting schools need a clear picture of what is and is not happening in schools before they can effectively support quality public education.

However, if we expect the community to engage in using data, we need to ensure that data reports are

- accessible and easy to understand by the community at large,
- translated into other languages as dictated by community needs, and
- visually meaningful to the community.

Youth Involvement is an emerging area of concern and need for our nation. We often hear that our youth aren't involved. In truth, they are less knowledgeable about political news and the actions of civic government. In comparing by age group participation, youth voters have a significantly lower turnout rate. However, these facts do not provide the total picture of our youth.

Looking at youth involvement from their perspective—when educational issues are raised, we seldom ask our youth to participate in exploring these issues or for their viewpoints. Is it any surprise that they are not engaged?

There are communities that actively reach out to youth: Their efforts address the social, physical, health, and mental needs of youth and provide assistance to them in planning for the future. When communities make these efforts a priority, we see more youth involved in service learning and as volunteers than at any time in recent history. These activities demonstrate how youth involvement can support the conditions that impact public education.

It is the community that creates the structures that promote the following efforts that foster youth involvement:

- reach out to youth and engage them in activities to demonstrate the function and value of our political and governmental systems

- include youth in decision-making teams and efforts that directly impact their lives—educationally, socially, physically, and mentally

- provide real-life experiences for youth that prepare them for their future roles as citizens and advocates for public education

- provide access to information and assistance to youth and their families in planning for education after graduation

- engage youth in a variety of volunteer activities to broaden their understanding of the community, the needs of the community, and the ways in which they can support the community

When communities engage youth in community events that foster service learning, political activism, civic education, and youth transition to public life, they address the needs of the present generation of youth and also strengthen civic involvement for generations to come.

Partnerships with Higher Education provide communities with a wide range of resources to support public education that often go unnoticed. Higher education-public school partnerships commonly provide joint credit classes and promote advanced coursework for all students. However, community organizations also join with higher education to provide new resources for public education.

For example, colleges and universities partner with community organizations to

- offer college credit classes in high-need locations;

- provide job shadowing experiences;

- open their campuses for events to promote the value of post high school education;

- provide facility space for programs and events that serve the needs of the greater community; and

- provide expertise in a wide range of topic areas; and

- offer other services to the community.

Through these partnerships, higher education institutions are able to share a wealth of human and facility resources in support of public education.

Knowledge of and Voting for School Boards is another pathway for the public, community organizations, businesses, and other groups to influence what happens in public education. School boards directly and indirectly affect the quality of student learning through negotiating teacher contracts, approving budgets, addressing facilities issues, establishing or changing curriculums, setting academic standards, choosing textbooks, deciding on funding sources, and hiring superintendents. These actions are the backbone of any educational system.

On election, each board member commits to representing the community's views about quality public schools. However, the community also plays an important role in the school board process—holding the board accountable for decisions and actions that reflect the views and needs of the community. The community does this by

- increasing their awareness of the actions and decisions made by board members,
- reaching out to board members and sharing their perspectives on important issues, and
- expressing their views openly and ardently.

When communities reach out to boards and increase board members' awareness of community priorities, they foster the conditions that are necessary to support public education.

An Active Business Community is another resource that is often underutilized in public education. Typically, our first image of business involvement in education is fundraising. In reality, the business community can support public education in other ways that have a significant impact on student lives.

When businesses have a culture that recognizes the importance of supporting public education,

- they allow employees time off to participate in school activities.
- they offer knowledge, skills, and services as a resource to districts, schools, and students.
- they provide materials, volunteers, work experience opportunities, and "real world" experiences to schools and students.
- they align their support for public education to the educational goals of the community.

However, schools are also a resource for business. Businesses may locate or relocate based on a community's educational resources: Will the quality of the schools help them recruit the best employees? Do the public schools and higher education facilities create a pool of employees who can meet their needs? The businesses and schools in the

community have unique relationships that foster the conditions necessary for quality public schools.

Media Coverage in a democratic society is expected to raise public awareness and inform the public about important social issues. For educational issues, there are two expectations for the media.

First, they provide timely information to the public on critical educational events and concerns.

Second, they serve as a watchdog to hold officials and institutions publicly accountable for their actions related to public education.

Coverage can take the form of paper, broadcast, or electronic tools, as well as other media streams. No matter the format, the media is often the public's only source of information on key on educational issues including released data on school-, district-, and statewide performance.

However, both the public and the media share responsibility for promoting this condition in the community. The public's expectation for timely and accurate information on public education encourages the media to fulfill its role. At the same time, the media is responsible to be objective and thorough in reporting.

Media coverage should provide

- a balanced view of public schools,
- useful data about the performance of public schools,
- accessible information for all members of the community, and
- thoughtful analysis of educational issues.

This text version of the Public Education Network's National Civic Index for Quality Public Education Category Indicators has been created for those who do not have access to a high-speed Internet connection, find this format easier to read, or want an easy reference or facilitation tool. There are slight modifications in the formatting of this version since it is not a web-based product; however, it contains the same content as the online version.

National Civic Index Category Indicators

The National Civic Index Poll uses a two-step process to explore the conditions in your community that support quality public schools.

1. **Administer the Poll**—By using the poll, you will gather information through a survey tool and generate a report indicating the degree to which conditions that support public education are present or absent in your community

2. **Collect Additional Data**—Though the poll allows you to look at the conditions necessary to support quality public education, collecting additional information related to the conditions will add clarity as you begin to interpret the poll data.

When you combine the data from the Poll and the additional information collected, there is more clarity about why the community believes that the media does not provide adequate coverage of educational issues.

Indicators for Educational Leadership of Locally Elected Officials

When **Elected Officials** support public education by 1) making it a community priority, 2) increasing the flow of information about educational issues to and from local elected officials, and 3) supporting partnerships between local elected officials and school leaders, they are adopting **Educational Leadership Roles.**

The following indicators demonstrate the conditions necessary to foster **Educational Leadership of Locally Elected Officials:**

Indicators Presented in the National Civic Index Poll Report	Additional Data to be Collected Regarding the Following Indicator
☐ Elected officials demonstrate a sustained commitment to education and make public education a top priority. ☐ Elected officials advocate for adequate funding. ☐ Elected officials effectively communicate with constituents on education issues. ☐ Elected officials promote a clear agenda that advances student achievement.	No additional data is needed for this category.

Indicators for Commitment to the Values of Tolerance and Inclusiveness

When a community **Commits to the Values of Tolerance and Inclusiveness,** the public engages in activities to address issues that come from differences in culture, race, class, and language among school staff, student population, and community population, make sure that all students have a quality education, and encourage representation of all stakeholder groups in decision-making opportunities.

The following indicators demonstrate the conditions necessary to foster **Commitment to the Values of Tolerance and Inclusiveness:**

Indicators Presented in the National Civic Index Poll Report	Additional Data to be Collected Regarding the Following Indicator
☐ Schools provide the same educational opportunities to students of all backgrounds. ☐ Schools provide quality services for special needs students (English language learners, special education students, etc.).	☐ School board members reflect the diversity of the families in the school district. ☐ Low income and racial/ethnic minority organizations have a say in school and school district decision-making. ☐ The student population in local public schools reflects the diversity of the community.

Indicators for Active Parents

When **Parents Actively** engage in public education, they participate in activities to share information, become involved in a variety of ways, and participate in decision making.

The following indicators demonstrate the conditions necessary to foster Active Parents:

Indicators Presented in the National Civic Index Poll Report	Additional Data to be Collected Regarding the Following Indicator
☐ Parents participate in school-related parent organizations.	☐ Parents participate in school district policy making, governance, and decision-making.
☐ Parents stay informed about key education issues.	☐ Parents participate in school governance and decision-making.
☐ Parents participate actively in their child's education, such as volunteering in the school, getting their child to school on time, or doing homework with their child.	
☐ Schools encourage active parent participation/contributions.	

Indicators for Strong Civic Organizations

When **Strong Civic Organizations** engage in public education, their membership and organizational priorities promote activities to involve the public in education reform, identify and advocate for important education issues, and build and help resource networks to last.

The following indicators demonstrate the conditions necessary to foster Strong Civic Organizations:

Indicators Presented in the National Civic Index Poll Report	Additional Data to be Collected Regarding the Following Indicator
☐ Local organizations create opportunities to gather citizen input on education issues and to inform community members about where candidates for elected office stand on these issues.	☐ Community organizations define and advocate for public school accountability.
☐ Local organizations provide help for those most in need and pay special attention to low-performing schools.	☐ The public is actively involved in community organizations that partner with the schools.
☐ Local organizations share resources with schools, including expertise, funding, volunteers, and coordination of health and social services.	

Indicators for Utilization of School Performance Data to Improve School Quality

When communities **Utilize School Performance Data to Improve School Quality**, they take two approaches: Organizations, parents, family members, community members, business, and other groups engage in activities that include the presentation of data about local schools as well as prepare those involved to explore data in a meaningful way. By using data for these two purposes, communities are able to focus on the academic progress of all children and youth.

The following indicators demonstrate the conditions necessary to foster Utilization of School Performance Data to Improve School Quality:

Indicators Presented in the National Civic Index Poll Report	Additional Data to be Collected Regarding the Following Indicator
☐ Information about school performance is widely communicated and readily available in a form and language that the community can understand.	☐ Schools make parents and the community full partners in developing and supporting strategies for student academic progress. ☐ Information about school performance is explained to the community through a variety of channels, including the school district, local government, nonprofit organizations, and the media. ☐ Teachers and school staff are properly trained in how to use data to engage parents and the community to improve student achievement.

Indicators for Youth Involvement

When communities provide opportunities for **Youth Involvement**, youth are engaged in activities to increase their participation political and civic events and to address their academic and social needs.

The following indicators demonstrate the conditions necessary to foster Youth Involvement:

Indicators Presented in the National Civic Index Poll Report	Additional Data to be Collected Regarding the Following Indicator
☐ Community and schools provide students with the education and skills to effectively participate in the political and civic process. ☐ Schools encourage students to participate in school and local district governance through such activities as student council, student advisory boards, and/or student members of the school board. ☐ Youth regularly engage in community service and volunteer activities. ☐ Youth are perceived as assets and contributors to the community.	No additional data is needed for this category.

Indicators for Partnerships with Higher Education

When community groups, schools, and others **Partner with Higher Education**, these efforts result in greater support for quality public education, shared institutional resources, and coordinated efforts for students across institutions.

The following indicators demonstrate the conditions necessary to foster **Partnerships with Higher Education**:

Indicators Presented in the National Civic Index Poll Report	Additional Data to be Collected Regarding the Following Indicator
☐ Higher education institutions partner with school districts to resolve school improvement challenges, including bolstering the quality of teaching and learning, and supporting schools that need special assistance. ☐ College or university students provide support to local schools through volunteering, service-learning, and internships.	☐ Institutions of higher learning provide shared use of college facilities, college faculty, and courses.

Indicators for Knowledge of and Voting for School Boards

When communities create activities to increase **Knowledge of and Voting for School Board**, they increase public participation in school board activities, establish relationships with individual board members, and strengthen networks between the school board, local leaders, and the community.

The following indicators demonstrate the conditions necessary to foster **Knowledge of and Voting for School Boards**:

Indicators Presented in the National Civic Index Poll Report	Additional Data to be Collected Regarding the Following Indicator
☐ Individuals monitor school board decisions and policies. ☐ Individuals vote regularly in school board elections.	☐ Individuals have the means to regularly address the school board or discuss school board policies.

Indicators for Active Business Community

An Active Business Community participants purposefully in supporting public education and engages in activities that allow them to share their resources to support education in innovative ways.

The following indicators demonstrate the conditions necessary to foster **Active Business Community**:

Indicators Presented in the National Civic Index Poll Report	Additional Data to be Collected Regarding the Following Indicator
☐ Local business leaders work closely with other community and civic leaders to identify school needs and address critical school issues. ☐ Local businesses offer paid time and other incentives for their employees to be regularly involved in school activities.	☐ Local business leaders provide resources and expertise to school boards and district administrations around school improvement.

Indicators for Media Coverage

When **Media Coverage** is used to support quality public education, community organizations, schools, families, businesses, and others foster improved and increased local media coverage of education and initiate strategies to establish and maintain open communication between educators, local elected officials, the public, and media sources.

The following indicators demonstrate the conditions necessary to foster **Media Coverage**:

Indicators Presented in the National Civic Index Poll Report	Additional Data to be Collected Regarding the Following Indicator
☐ The local media reports on the education positions of candidates for school board, mayor, state legislator, and other key offices. ☐ The local media provides in-depth reporting about how elected officials vote and the extent to which they keep their promises.	No additional data is needed for this category.

National Civic Index for Quality Public Education
More Information—Text Only Version
Created by Public Education Network (PEN)

This text version of the Public Education Network's National Civic Index for Quality Public Education Toolkit Introduction More Information section has been created for those who do not have access to a high-speed Internet connection, find this format easier to read, or want an easy reference or facilitation tool. There are slight modifications in the formatting of this version since it is not a web-based product; however, it contains the same content as the online version.

More Information

If you've completed this introduction with others . . .

You've already taken the first step in using this material to support your public schools. Your next step is to take this information and share it with an even larger group and begin to plan to use the National Civic Index for Quality Public Education to improve the conditions needed to support quality public education in your community.

If you've completed this introduction as an individual . . .

You need to recruit others in your community and either share the information you have gained or create an opportunity for them to explore the introduction as a group themselves. Once this is done, your group can begin to plan how to use the National Civic Index for Quality Public Education to improve the conditions needed to support quality public education in your community.

To implement the National Civic Index for Quality Public Education, Public Education Network has created a set of tools:

A Public Opinion Poll—a complete polling kit with detailed directions to explain how to conduct the poll and analyze results. This poll will help your community explore the current status of the conditions to support public education and what conditions needs to be addressed.

A Report Card—an online process that will generate a report card for sharing the results of the poll. This online tool helps you to quickly analyze the data collected through the survey and provides strategies for using the additional data collected.

Detailed Descriptions of Categories and the Conditions for Engaging in Public Education—a detailed explanation of each category that includes the most important issues to consider and what experts say about this topic. These descriptions will help you understand the implications of your poll results and next steps to take.

Tips to Improve the Conditions that Support Quality Public Schools—a detailed list of strategies and help documents for each of the categories. These tips and the lists of resources that accompany them will provide a wealth of tools to strengthen the conditions necessary for quality schools in your community.

Explore Other Resources—a list of annotated resources for each category. Many of them are available at no cost on the Internet. These annotations provide resources for relevant research and theory. While not everyone involved needs this type of information, some will.

Local Education Funds (LEF)—a group of community-based groups who support public education. The Public Education Network has worked with community-based organizations across the U.S. as they support public education. Our Web site will provide contact information for LEFs in your state. Many of these LEFs have experience and knowledge that will help you create the conditions necessary to support quality public schools.

National Civic Index for Quality Public Education

Next Steps—Text Only Version

Created by Public Education Network (PEN)

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Steps to Measure Your Community's Civic Involvement in Support of Quality of Public Schools

We hope you have enough information to take the first steps in measuring the conditions in your community that are necessary to support quality public schools. If not, you will find the resources listed on the previous page to be very helpful.

If you are ready, here are your next steps:

1. Review the National Civic Index (NCI) Toolkit and share it with your organization's board of directors, program committee or members who would help you plan to administer the index in your community.

2. Develop a plan to administer the NCI. Include budget information, along with ideas as to how the index will integrate with current work, timelines, and the capacity of your organization to assume this project. Sources of funding could come from your own budget, involve *pro bono* help from a college or a community foundation, or may be granted to your group by your partner organizations.

3. Select a planning committee. Your committee should include at least one representative from each NCI category, including parents, business leaders, community members, elected officials, higher education faculty, media, students, and an assessment expert.

4. Identify the geographic range of the "community" that you wish to poll. This could be a school district, a county, a region of the state, a consortium of school districts, or an entire state. The number of people you poll will depend on the size of the "community" that you define.

5. Develop a news release and other communications to make the community aware that you will be measuring the level of their civic activity that leads to quality public schools for all children.

6. Select a polling firm to conduct the ready-made poll contained in the NCI toolkit. You may wish to select a sample size that allows you to disaggregate by gender, geography and region, race, ethnicity, income or other factors. Also, you may wish to add poll questions pertinent to issues in your own community that are not reflected in the NCI poll questions.

7. Conduct other research to obtain data that cannot easily be gathered by polling. These additional research areas are cited in the NCI.

8. Analyze the data collected from the poll and the research, share it with the planning committee, and decide on a composite score for each of the index categories. Your committee can either include the poll results AND the additional research (which will require your planning committee to make some judgments about the score for each category), or you can report the additional research as separate information.

9. Determine a score for each category. Determine the community's strengths and weaknesses. Your planning committee can determine next steps and how to engage the community in improving its score.

10. Develop a communications and news media plan to broadly disseminate the NCI results along with the recommendations for improvement. Use the NCI toolkit section on the media for guidance.

11. Have the planning committee develop and approve a plan that will engage the public in improving its score. The plan should identify roles for various community stakeholders, and include timetables and benchmarks for progress. Remember, you want the community to take responsibility for improving its score.

12. Monitor implementation of the communities' plan for improvement; and plan to re-evaluate and re-poll the community in several years to determine progress.

This text version of the Public Education Network's National Civic Index for Quality Public Education Toolkit Introduction Glossary Text has been created for those who do not have access to a high-speed Internet connection, find this format easier to read, or want an easy reference or facilitation tool. There are slight modifications in the formatting of this version since it is not a web-based product; however, it contains the same content as the online version.

Active Parents typically come to mind when we look at efforts to support education from the wider community. There are four roles parents and family members commonly take on to support quality public schools, starting with their own child as the focus, and branching out to school, district, and beyond: 1) They support their own child's learning by communicating with their child's classroom teacher, overseeing their child's homework and class projects, and volunteering in their child's classroom. 2) They volunteer to work on school-wide activities such as fundraising events or sporting and cultural events. 3) They are involved on school-based improvement teams, advisory committees, or other initiatives that help to frame school- or district-wide decisions that support quality public schools. 4) They advocate for improvement efforts with the school board or other local government agencies to ensure that every child and youth attends a quality public school. Each role can have a positive impact on local schools and build the conditions necessary for quality public schools. However, parents and families have an even stronger impact on these conditions when they assume several or all of these roles. In fact, in the public polling conducted by the Public Education Network, active engagement of parents and family members to support public education ranks as the most significant condition of high performing schools. For as parents and family members take on roles that directly affect student learning through 1) setting shared goals, 2) raising awareness of important educational concerns, 3) learning more about the structures and performance of local schools, or 4) fostering public discussion of key issues, their efforts have a greater impact on the education of children and youth in the community.

Active Business Community is another resource that is often underutilized in public education. Typically, our first image of business involvement in education is fundraising. In reality, the business community can support public education in other ways that have a significant impact on student lives. When businesses have a culture that recognizes the importance of supporting public education, they do the following: 1) allow employees time off to participate in school activities; 2) offer knowledge, skills, and services as a resource to districts, schools, and students; 3) provide materials, volunteers, work experience opportunities, and "real world" experiences to schools and students; and 4) align their support for public education to the educational goals of the community. However, schools are also a resource for business. Businesses may locate or relocate based on a community's educational resources: Will the quality of the schools help them recruit the best employees? Do the public schools and higher education facilities create a pool of employees who can meet their needs? The businesses and schools in the community have unique relationships that foster the conditions necessary for quality public schools.

Categories reflect the conditions that support public support for education.

Commitment to the Values of Tolerance and Inclusiveness is a keystone in ensuring that every child and youth in the community has a quality education. We hear leaders use the phrase "closing of the achievement gap" when they talk about this commitment. But, what does this mean to you and me, to the children and youth in our community? This means we make sure that culture, language, physical disability, or any other difference does not create a barrier to learning. Parents and families and the community can support this effort by creating structures and processes that encourage the following: providing time for different groups to interact and exchange dreams, beliefs, and plans; honoring the hopes and dreams of all who join the effort; exploring the differences in culture, classes, race, economics, and education; eliminating blocks to participation immediately; establishing multiple levels of action for each effort; acknowledging differences and similarities openly; demonstrating caring and support for one another; and communicating in one-on-one situations as much as possible. When communities make these actions a priority and commonplace practice, they can create a community-wide voice that provokes the conditions to support a quality public education for each and every child and youth in the community.

Educational Leadership of Locally Elected Officials at every level of government is critical to ensure that every child and youth attends quality public schools. While public education is still the responsibility of local communities, the influence of state and federal laws also has a direct impact on the schools. Therefore, the leadership actions of our elected officials need to reflect the community's educational priorities. The community can help to focus these efforts by creating opportunities for the public to share their viewpoints on educational issues with the locally elected officials and insisting that officials report to the public on their efforts to foster quality public education. When the community actively engages with elected officials to promote quality schools, they create a stronger foundation for public education.

Knowledge of and Voting for School Boards is another pathway for the public, community organizations, businesses, and other groups to influence what happens in public education. School boards directly and indirectly affect the quality of student learning through negotiating teacher contracts, approving budgets, addressing facilities issues, establishing or changing curriculums, setting academic standards, choosing textbooks, deciding on funding sources, and hiring superintendents. These actions are the backbone of any educational system. On election, each board member commits to representing the community's views about quality public schools. However, the community also plays an important role in the school board process—holding the board accountable for decisions and actions that reflect the views and needs of the community. The community does this by increasing their awareness of the actions and decisions made by board members, reaching out to board members and sharing their perspectives on important issues, and expressing their views openly and ardently. When communities reach out to boards and increase board members' awareness of community priorities, they foster the conditions that are necessary to support public education.

Local Education Funds (LEF) are community-based groups who support public education. The Public Education Network has worked with community-based organizations across the U.S. as they support public education. Our Web site will provide contact information for LEFs in your state. Many of these LEFs have experience and knowledge that will help you create the conditions necessary to support quality public schools.

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National Civic Index Category Indicators are the criteria that demonstrate the status of the conditions within a community to support quality public schools.

National Civic Index Detailed Descriptions of Categories and the Conditions for Engaging in Public Education are detailed explanations of each category that includes the most important issues to consider and what experts say about this topic. These descriptions will help you understand the implications of your poll results and next steps to take.

National Civic Index for Quality Public Education (Index) is a tool to help identify the areas in which communities excel and the areas where communities need assistance in supporting public education. To create the National Civic Index for Quality Public Education, Public Education Network conducted nation-wide public opinion polls over 6 years and worked with over 30 national experts from university and research organizations. Based on these polls, the public identified 10 community-based conditions necessary to support quality public schools. Without the presence of these conditions, it is virtually impossible to ensure that every child and youth has a quality public education.

National Civic Index Public Opinion Poll is a complete polling kit with detailed directions to explain how to conduct the poll and analyze results. This poll will help your community explore the current status of the conditions to support public education and what conditions needs to be addressed.

National Civic Index Report Card is an online process that will generate a report card for sharing the results of the poll. This online tool helps you to quickly analyze the data collected through the survey and provides strategies for using the additional data collected.

National Civic Index Tips to Improve the Conditions that Support Quality Public Schools is a detailed list of strategies and help documents for each of the categories. These tips and the lists of resources that accompany them will provide a wealth of tools to strengthen the conditions necessary for quality schools in your community.

Partnerships with Higher Education provide communities with a wide range of resources to support public education that often go unnoticed. Higher education-public school partnerships commonly provide joint credit classes and promote advanced coursework for all students. However, community organizations also join with higher education to provide new resources for public education. For example, colleges and universities partner with community organizations to offer college credit classes in high-need

locations; provide job shadowing experiences; open their campuses for events to promote the value of post high school education; provide facility space for programs and events that serve the needs of the greater community; provide expertise in a wide range of topic areas; and offer other services to the community. Through these partnerships, higher education institutions are able to share a wealth of human and facility resources in support of public education.

Strong Civic Organizations have a critical role to play in supporting and reforming public education. With their variety of resources, networks, and expertise, they are able to create pathways for information exchange, relationship-building, and leadership development in and out of schools. For example, groups such as Local Education Funds (LEFs) are able to support public education by serving as intermediaries in community-wide planning, directing attention to key issues, and establishing connections across different groups. Using strategies like these, community organizations can build school-community partnerships that involve parents, family members, other community groups, and educators in supporting quality public education. Moreover, the conditions identified in the Civic Index naturally align to the qualities we would find in Strong Civic Organizations. Civic organizations will find that using the tools provided to measure the conditions necessary for supporting public education through the National Civic Index Poll may also help them shape the work of their organizations.

Utilization of School Performance Data to Improve School Quality is a vital tool in supporting public education. We assume school staff are the only ones who need to review school performance data, but they are not. Collecting, analyzing, and using student performance data should always drive community-wide decisions and actions related to education. Parents, family members, community members, local officials, media groups, and others interested in supporting schools need a clear picture of what is and is not happening in schools before they can effectively support quality public education. However, if we expect the community to engage in using data, we need to ensure that data reports are accessible and easy to understand by the community at large, translated into other languages as dictated by community needs, and visually meaningful to the community.

Youth Involvement is an emerging area of concern and need for our nation. We often hear that our youth aren't involved. In truth, they are less knowledgeable about political news and the actions of civic government. In comparing by age group participation, youth voters have a significantly lower turnout rate. However, these facts do not provide the total picture of our youth. Looking at youth involvement from their perspective—when educational issues are raised, we seldom ask our youth to participate in exploring these issues or for their viewpoints. Is it any surprise that they are not engaged? There are communities that actively reach out to youth: Their efforts address the social, physical, health, and mental needs of youth and provide assistance to them in planning for the future. When communities make these efforts a priority, we see more youth involved in service learning and as volunteers than at any time in recent history. These activities demonstrate how youth involvement can support the conditions that impact public education. It is the community that creates the structures that promote the following efforts that foster youth involvement: reach out to youth and engage them in activities to demonstrate the function and value of our political and governmental systems; include youth in decision-making teams and efforts that directly impact their lives—educationally, socially, physically, and mentally; provide real-life experiences for youth that prepare them for their future roles as citizens and advocates for public education; provide access to information and assistance to youth and their families in planning for education after graduation; and engage youth in a variety of volunteer activities to broaden their understanding of the community, the needs of the community, and the ways in which they can support the community. When communities engage youth in community events that foster service learning,

political activism, civic education, and youth transition to public life, they address the needs of the present generation of youth and also strengthen civic involvement for generations to come.

National Civic Index for Quality Public Education

Toolkit Introduction Worksheet—Text Only Version

Created by Public Education Network (PEN)

This text version of the Public Education Network's National Civic Index for Quality Public Education Toolkit Introduction Worksheet has been created for those who do not have access to a high-speed Internet connection, find this format easier to read, or want an easy reference or facilitation tool. There are slight modifications in the formatting of this version since it is not a web-based product; however, it contains the same content as the online version.

This worksheet provides you with an opportunity to capture your responses for a quick reference during the use of the Toolkit Introduction or to capture responses, so you can print them for yourself or to share with others. It is intended to be used as you experience the online version; however, you may also use it as part of group facilitated effort.

What is your experience with public education?

Take a moment to consider

- ✓ What actions you take to support public schools?

- ✓ What activities take place in your community to support public schools?

What is your experience with public education?

Check all that apply and then award the number of points allotted to each descriptor. The numbers reflect what the National Civic Index Poll has learned about what types of support have the most impact on supporting quality public education.

To support public schools, I have

Voted for an official who strongly supports public schools	☐	12 points
Joined an organization that supports public schools	☐	8 points
Experienced or known someone else who has experienced a positive interaction with a teacher or school administrator	☐	14 points
Talked to others about academic performance information published each year about local schools	☐	10 points
Followed the actions and decisions of my local school board as well as voted in school board elections	☐	10 points
Total Points for Individual Support		

In my community, I know about

Programs or strategies my school district uses to meet the needs of every student, no matter the background or ability level of the student	☐	14 points
School-sponsored programs that involve students in community activities	☐	8 points
Opportunities for high school students to engage in college-sponsored activities	☐	8 points
Workplaces who contribute to schools	☐	8 points
An educational issue that the media covered well	☐	8 points
Total Points for Community Support		

Are your efforts and the efforts of your community having an impact? Do you see any gaps?

The National Poll has revealed the importance of taking both a strong personal stance for education and a strong community stance for education by voting and participating in activities that support education. Every individual in the community needs to take responsibility for keeping informed about public education and sharing information with others. Efforts may be sponsored by schools, colleges, organizations, businesses, or the media. They may target young children or adolescents. However, efforts,

that have the greatest impact, share one commonality—they seek to ensure that all children and youth attend quality public schools.

The Index recommends that individuals, community members, and organizations provide opportunities that encourage citizens to engage and support efforts to promote educational issues by

- reaching out and supporting local officials, businesses, and organizations to support education,
- learning how to read and use data about student and school performance,
- fostering youth development,
- getting involved with schools in a wider variety of ways, and
- encouraging and following media coverage of education.

Consider your experiences and how you can continue to support public education. Then, in the text box below, record two goals you feel are vital in creating quality public schools.

1.

2.

Indicators for National Civic Index Categories

Please check the box preceding any of the indicators listed below for which you need more information.

Indicators for Educational Leadership of Locally Elected Officials

When **Elected Officials** support public education by 1) making it a community priority, 2) increasing the flow of information about educational issues to and from local elected officials, and 3) supporting partnerships between local elected officials and school leaders, they are adopting **Educational Leadership Roles.**

The following indicators demonstrate the conditions necessary to foster **Educational Leadership of Locally Elected Officials:**

Indicators Presented in the National Civic Index Poll Report	Additional Data to be Collected Regarding the Following Indicator
☐ Elected officials demonstrate a sustained commitment to education and make public education a top priority. ☐ Elected officials advocate for adequate funding. ☐ Elected officials effectively communicate with constituents on education issues. ☐ Elected officials promote a clear agenda that advances student achievement.	No additional data is needed for this category.

Indicators for Commitment to the Values of Tolerance and Inclusiveness

When a community **Commits to the Values of Tolerance and Inclusiveness,** the public engages in activities to address issues that come from differences in culture, race, class, and language among school staff, student population, and community population, make sure that all students have a quality education, and encourage representation of all stakeholder groups in decision-making opportunities.

The following indicators demonstrate the conditions necessary to foster **Commitment to the Values of Tolerance and Inclusiveness:**

Indicators Presented in the National Civic Index Poll Report	Additional Data to be Collected Regarding the Following Indicator
☐ Schools provide the same educational opportunities to students of all backgrounds. ☐ Schools provide quality services for special needs students (English language learners, special education students, etc.).	☐ School board members reflect the diversity of the families in the school district. ☐ Low income and racial/ethnic minority organizations have a say in school and school district decision-making. ☐ The student population in local public schools reflects the diversity of the community.

Indicators for Active Parents

When **Parents Actively** engage in public education, they participate in activities to share information, become involved in a variety of ways, and participate in decision making.

The following indicators demonstrate the conditions necessary to foster **Active Parents**:

Indicators Presented in the National Civic Index Poll Report	Additional Data to be Collected Regarding the Following Indicator
☐ Parents participate in school-related parent organizations. ☐ Parents stay informed about key education issues. ☐ Parents participate actively in their child's education, such as volunteering in the school, getting their child to school on time, or doing homework with their child. ☐ Schools encourage active parent participation/contributions.	☐ Parents participate in school district policy making, governance, and decision-making. ☐ Parents participate in school governance and decision-making. ☐

Indicators for Strong Civic Organizations

When **Strong Civic Organizations** engage in public education, their membership and organizational priorities promote activities to involve the public in education reform, identify and advocate for important education issues, and build and help resource networks to last.

The following indicators demonstrate the conditions necessary to foster **Strong Civic Organizations**:

Indicators Presented in the National Civic Index Poll Report	Additional Data to be Collected Regarding the Following Indicator
☐ Local organizations create opportunities to gather citizen input on education issues and to inform community members about where candidates for elected office stand on these issues. ☐ Local organizations provide help for those most in need and pay special attention to low-performing schools. ☐ Local organizations share resources with schools, including expertise, funding, volunteers, and coordination of health and social services.	☐ Community organizations define and advocate for public school accountability. ☐ The public is actively involved in community organizations that partner with the schools. ☐

Indicators for Utilization of School Performance Data to Improve School Quality

When communities **Utilize School Performance Data to Improve School Quality**, they take two approaches: Organizations, parents, family members, community members, business, and other groups engage in activities that include the presentation of data about local schools as well as prepare those involved to explore data in a meaningful way. By using data for these two purposes, communities are able to focus on the academic progress of all children and youth.

The following indicators demonstrate the conditions necessary to foster Utilization of School Performance Data to Improve School Quality:

Indicators Presented in the National Civic Index Poll Report	Additional Data to be Collected Regarding the Following Indicator
☐ Information about school performance is widely communicated and readily available in a form and language that the community can understand.	☐ Schools make parents and the community full partners in developing and supporting strategies for student academic progress. ☐ Information about school performance is explained to the community through a variety of channels, including the school district, local government, nonprofit organizations, and the media. ☐ Teachers and school staff are properly trained in how to use data to engage parents and the community to improve student achievement.

Indicators for Youth Involvement

When communities provide opportunities for **Youth Involvement**, youth are engaged in activities to increase their participation political and civic events and to address their academic and social needs.

The following indicators demonstrate the conditions necessary to foster Youth Involvement:

Indicators Presented in the National Civic Index Poll Report	Additional Data to be Collected Regarding the Following Indicator
☐ Community and schools provide students with the education and skills to effectively participate in the political and civic process. ☐ Schools encourage students to participate in school and local district governance through such activities as student council, student advisory boards, and/or student members of the school board. ☐ Youth regularly engage in community service and volunteer activities. ☐ Youth are perceived as assets and contributors to the community.	No additional data is needed for this category.

Indicators for Partnerships with Higher Education

When community groups, schools, and others **Partner with Higher Education**, these efforts result in greater support for quality public education, shared institutional resources, and coordinated efforts for students across institutions.

The following indicators demonstrate the conditions necessary to foster **Partnerships with Higher Education**:

Indicators Presented in the National Civic Index Poll Report	Additional Data to be Collected Regarding the Following Indicator
☐ Higher education institutions partner with school districts to resolve school improvement challenges, including bolstering the quality of teaching and learning, and supporting schools that need special assistance. ☐ College or university students provide support to local schools through volunteering, service-learning, and internships.	☐ Institutions of higher learning provide shared use of college facilities, college faculty, and courses. ☐

Indicators for Knowledge of and Voting for School Boards

When communities create activities to increase **Knowledge of and Voting for School Board**, they increase public participation in school board activities, establish relationships with individual board members, and strengthen networks between the school board, local leaders, and the community.

The following indicators demonstrate the conditions necessary to foster **Knowledge of and Voting for School Boards**:

Indicators Presented in the National Civic Index Poll Report	Additional Data to be Collected Regarding the Following Indicator
☐ Individuals monitor school board decisions and policies. ☐ Individuals vote regularly in school board elections.	☐ Individuals have the means to regularly address the school board or discuss school board policies. ☐

Indicators for Active Business Community

An Active Business Community participants purposefully in supporting public education and engages in activities that allow them to share their resources to support education in innovative ways.

The following indicators demonstrate the conditions necessary to foster **Active Business Community**:

Indicators Presented in the National Civic Index Poll Report	Additional Data to be Collected Regarding the Following Indicator
☐ Local business leaders work closely with other community and civic leaders to identify school needs and address critical school issues.	☐ Local business leaders provide resources and expertise to school boards and district administrations around school improvement.
☐ Local businesses offer paid time and other incentives for their employees to be regularly involved in school activities.	☐

Indicators for Media Coverage

When **Media Coverage** is used to support quality public education, community organizations, schools, families, businesses, and others foster improved and increased local media coverage of education and initiate strategies to establish and maintain open communication between educators, local elected officials, the public, and media sources.

The following indicators demonstrate the conditions necessary to foster **Media Coverage**:

Indicators Presented in the National Civic Index Poll Report	Additional Data to be Collected Regarding the Following Indicator
☐ The local media reports on the education positions of candidates for school board, mayor, state legislator, and other key offices.	No additional data is needed for this category.
☐ The local media provides in-depth reporting about how elected officials vote and the extent to which they keep their promises.	

What's Important in Your Community?

Take a moment to consider what you have learned about the National Civic Index.

What did you learn that you feel is important in helping your community support quality public education?

Record your answer in the *Text Box* below.

1.

The following publications ground the content for the Public Education Network's National Civic Index for Quality Public Education Toolkit Introduction.

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