

2007 Year-End Review

Board of Directors

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It's hard to believe that yet another year has come and gone. Still, as I write to tell you about PEN's 2007 activities and our plans for 2008 (which marks the 25th anniversary of the founding of the first LEFs), I am pleased to say that this year was yet another fruitful year for our LEF members, which now number 83, including members from five foreign countries. I am especially delighted to note the network's international growth, as matters of public education equity, access, and achievement are by no means unique to the United States.



Let me take a moment now to mention just a few member highlights:

News and Reports

- [LEF news](#)
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- [NewsBlast](#)
- [2007 Leadership Symposium](#)

- The Broad Prize, the nation's largest prize in public education, was awarded this year to the New York City Public School system. Our New York City LEF, New Visions for Public Schools, have been extremely active and effective members of the network. New Visions was noted for their significant contributions to the New York Public School system as the system received this major honor. As the winner of The Broad Prize, the New York City Department of Education will receive \$500,000 in college scholarships.
- The Foundation for Public Schools in Lincoln, Nebraska was instrumental in establishing an International Baccalaureate (IB) program at Lincoln High School for the current school year. The program is a comprehensive two-year curriculum recognized as the world's most academically rigorous high school course of study. Students who receive an IB diploma are often given advanced standing and credit by colleges and universities. Current 8th and 9th grade Lincoln Public Schools students are eligible for the program. The first class of juniors will begin working for the IB diploma in fall 2008.
- In Orlando, Florida, the Foundation for Orange County Public Schools, Inc., launched Middle School Kids, an initiative aimed at increasing the capacity of schools, communities and families to provide students with the academic, social, and emotional support they need to become productive adults.
- The city of Chattanooga hosted a two-day National Education Conference, which brought together representatives from school districts in Seattle, Milwaukee and Hamilton County, Tennessee (including PEN member, the Public Education Foundation). The group studied and discussed methods for closing achievement gaps in public schools, with a focus on the progress being made in Hamilton County. The November 7-8 "learning exchange" was sponsored by the National Education Association (NEA) Foundation. The NEA Foundation has awarded

grants to these communities as part of its Closing the Achievement Gaps initiative. In Hamilton County, the Public Education Foundation administers the NEA Foundation grant for the Hamilton County Education Association and the Hamilton County Department of Education. These funds have been used to jumpstart middle school reform, beginning with a focus on the five lowest-performing middle schools.

- The San Jose Education Foundation awarded 18 teachers housing rental assistance grants in the hopes of drawing talented educators to the city's schools. The grants were distributed through the Teach Here, Live Here program, which provides \$5,000 in rental assistance to help teachers pay their first and second month's rent and security deposit. Grant priority is given to new teachers in mathematics and science. One of the largest challenges San Jose superintendents face given the area's high cost of living is attracting and retaining quality teachers.

Throughout 2007, we at the PEN national office spent much time planning for the network's future. In 2008, PEN will celebrate the 25th anniversary of the founding of our first LEF, to be marked formally with our annual conference that will be held in San Francisco in November. But our plans extend well beyond an annual conference. I'd like to take a moment to tell you about some of these ideas.

This year, as we do every year, the staff prepared the annual operating plan for 2008. We also do three-year organizational strategic plans and as such, we will begin organizing our plan for 2009-2012 throughout the next six months. In 2008 and beyond, we want to do more than just observe a silver anniversary and plot tasks for the next three years. As we prepare to take PEN into the next 25 years, we want to chart a highly focused, member-driven course where you, our members, are front and center in developing our strategic plan, one where we can reach collective agreement on how to influence and reform public education as a network. To that end, we want to target our efforts as a network on four core content areas that are of critical importance to student achievement: teaching quality, high school completion, college access and success, and extended time (out-of-school time). All of the LEF highlights noted earlier, in one way or another, focus on at least one of these four content areas.

Our 2008 operating plan includes details on these content areas, including the five strategies (data gathering and analysis, research, policy, practice, communications, and engagement) to be used to implement each content area. It also includes an outline about the high-level commission we began formulating last year that will begin its work in 2008 to define and set standards for the rapidly expanding group of public school assistance organizations, including LEFs. As well, the 2008 operating plan discusses PEN's Leadership Institute which will be launched in 2008, thanks to initial support from the Prudential Foundation. The skills-and-content based institute will build LEF executive leadership and governance and will include 30 LEF leadership teams. The institute will provide mentoring and coaching for LEF leaders and its curriculum will incorporate LEF performance standards with the four content areas and the five implementation strategies. I am very excited about the commission and the institute, both of which I believe will provide visibility for LEFs among local, state and national stakeholders as high-performance organizations with strong leadership and demonstrated results in advancing systemic public school reform. In 2008 and beyond, PEN's membership should be an even stronger force for the public school reform we need in order to provide every child in this country with a quality public education.

The major public education reform issue for 2007 was, of course, the re-authorization of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). While Congress has postponed activity until early 2008 PEN's national office and our LEF members were deeply engaged throughout 2007 in the discussions surrounding the re-authorization. In March, I presented to the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions PEN's members' views and the public's concerns on various issues that should be addressed by bill re-authorization. In June, PEN released its official position on the act. We said any re-authorization should include provisions to do more to retain and train highly qualified teachers, employ student-focused accountability systems, and increase parental and community involvement. And in July, PEN presented results from three years of nationwide hearings on NCLB ([click here to see the report](#)). During the hearings, Americans told us they believe public schools must be held accountable for properly educating children, but they also think NCLB needs dramatic changes. PEN heard opinions from more than 2,000 people during the course of 25 hearings, focus groups and town hall meetings organized by PEN's LEF members in 10 states. More than 20,000 people submitted views via online surveys. Many organizations released NCLB positions, but PEN was the only one to ask the general public what they really think about NCLB. ([click here](#) to see the testimony, the position statement, and the report)

As you know, PEN believes that an engaged and informed public are an essential part of an effective school reform strategy. Since 2001, with major support from the Annenberg Foundation, LEFs across the nation have worked with their communities and school districts to increase public knowledge and support for a comprehensive school reform agenda that results in higher achievement for students. Over the past four years, PEN has worked to develop a National Civic Index for Public Responsibility for Public Education that identifies 10 conditions communities must have in place in order to support highly effective schools. No similar index has previously been created with a focus on education. And while there is much talk about the merit and value of public engagement and community involvement, such involvement has not previously been defined, characterized, structured, and measured. The Civic Index will do just that as it will enable communities to assess the extent to which these 10 conditions are in place in the community, and offer ways in which communities can 'improve their score' in those areas deemed to be deficient.

The index, supported by the MetLife Foundation, is research-based, derived from national public opinion polling PEN conducted over five years, and developed in consultation with the University of Maryland and a range of other social scientists and national experts drawn from more than 40 national organizations including the Education Commission of the States, National School Boards Association and the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools.

The online Civic Index toolkit was previewed by LEFs at the November 2007 Leaders' Symposium and was launched with network members in early December. PEN staff will work with our members, a number of national education partner organizations and community organizations to pilot the index in communities nationwide during the course of 2008.

([click here](#) to examine the National Civic Index website)

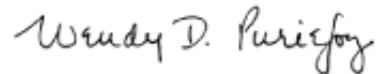
([click here](#) to take an individual assessment that gauges individual involvement in some National Civic Index categories)

Last, but by no means least, 2007 marked the first year anniversary of the *Give*

Kids Good Schools campaign. This five-year campaign aims to encourage Americans to “learn, vote and act” to provide good public schools to all children in this country. Since the campaign’s launch in August 2006, we have reached more than 100 million Americans with the message that every child in the United States has the right to a quality public school education. In addition, we had another successful *Give Kids Good Schools Week*, which was highlighted by premium placement of our public service announcement in the September 10 issue of *People*, the October 15 issue of *USA Today* and a feature story in the October 17 issue of *Family Circle*.

While I am proud of our 2007 achievements, and look forward to a very ambitious 2008, I am reminded of these words originally spoken by George Bernard Shaw and made popular by the late Senator Robert F. Kennedy, one of the authors of the seminal Elementary and Secondary Education Act: “Some men see things as they are and ask why. Others dream things that never were and ask why not.” Until every child in this great democracy of ours receives a quality public education, you can be assured that each of us will never stop asking “why not?”

With best wishes for a healthy and happy new year,



Wendy Puriefoy



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