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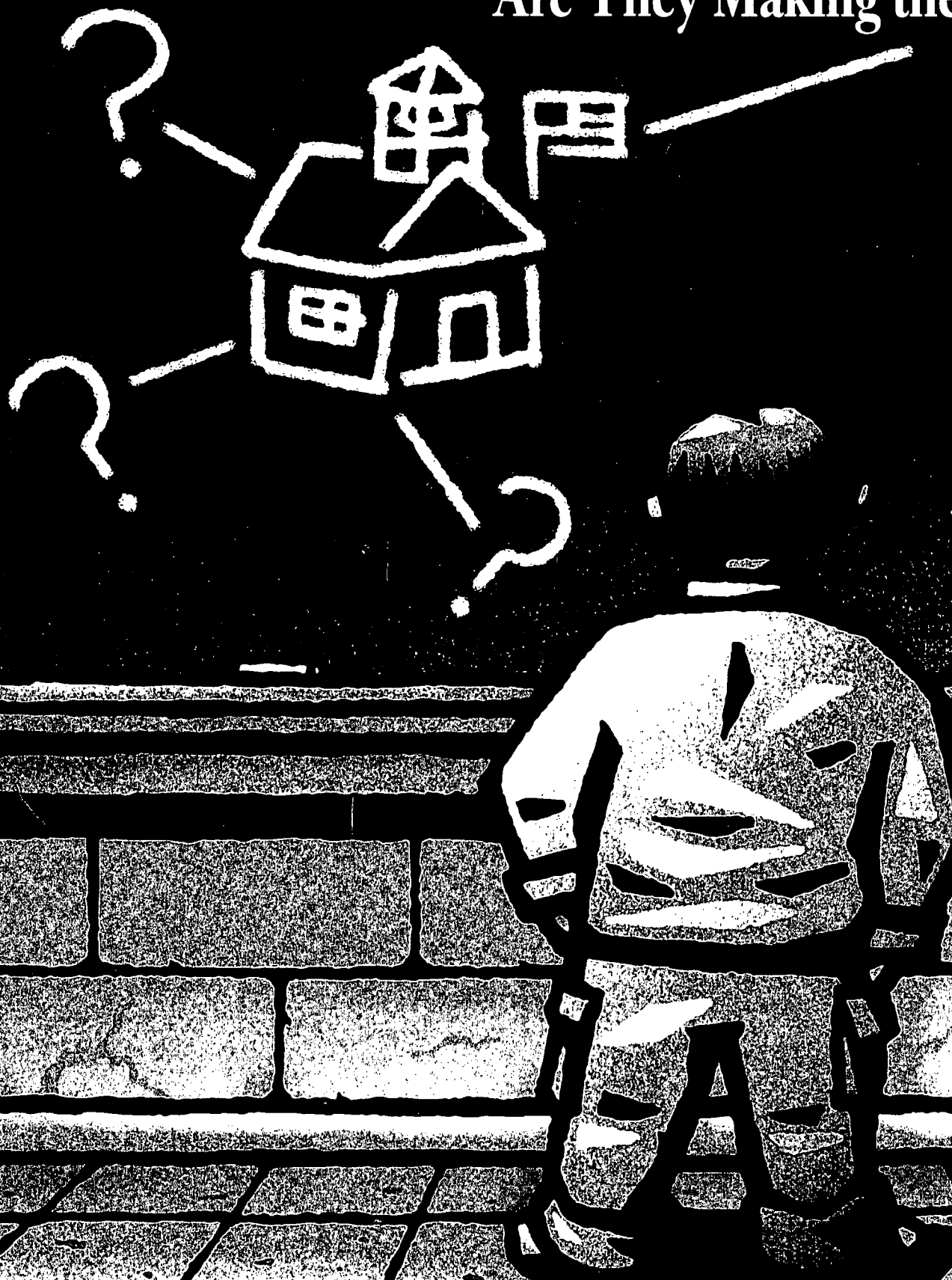


An Issue Book for National Issues Forums

NATIONAL
ISSUES
FORUMS

Public Schools

Are They Making the Grade?



Prepared by
Public Agenda

200 Commons Road
Dayton, OH 45459-2799
937-434-7300
FAX 937-439-9804

6 East 39th Street
(9th Floor)
New York, NY 10016
212-686-7016
FAX 212-889-3461

444 North Capitol Street, NW
Suite 434
Washington, D.C. 20001
202-393-4478
FAX 202-393-7644



April 10, 2000

Beverly Godwin
National Partnership for
Re-Inventing Government
750 17th St. NW Suite 200
Washington DC 20006

Dear Ms. Godwin:

This letter extends an invitation to join us in a seminar on public education on May 3, 2000 from 11:00-2:00 P.M. in the Lisagore Conference Room at the National Press Club in Washington, DC. The seminar will immediately follow the taping of the tenth *A Public Voice* from 8:00-10:00 A.M. (13th Floor Auditorium). This year's *A Public Voice* will be moderated by David Gergen, and will address the issue of public schools. (A notice describing the taping is enclosed.)

The seminar will be a moderated round-table discussion. Participants will include individuals from the National Issues Forums network who have organized and/or convened deliberative forums on public schools. The meeting will also include professionals and officeholders whose work is related to public education. Together we intend to explore interests and questions raised by the findings presented in the taping of the *Public Voice*. Specifically, we will discuss the following questions:

- Who participates in deliberative forums? How are they organized, and how does deliberation relate to an authentic "public voice?"
- What has been learned through deliberative forums about how citizens view the challenge of public education? What do citizens see as the key concerns and challenges? How do those findings relate to what professionals and officeholders are struggling with?

In addition to the taping and the seminar, we also invite you to join us for a celebration commemorating the Tenth Anniversary of *A Public Voice* on May 2, 2000 at the Metro Center Marriott, 775 12th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20005. A reception will begin at 7:00 P.M. with dinner at 8:00 P.M. Following dinner, a panel of past and current *A Public Voice* participants will share insights and memories of their involvement with this award-winning television program.

Please let us know if you will be joining us by contacting Amelia Law Johnson at 937-428-5357. Amelia can also help with any questions you have about the events on May 2-3.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Randall Nielsen".

Randall Nielsen
Program Officer

Attachment

200 Commons Road
Dayton, OH 45459-2799
937-434-7300
FAX 937-439-9804

6 East 39th Street
(9th Floor)
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212-686-7016
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A Public Voice ... 2000

Wednesday, May 3, 2000

8:00 - 10:00 am

National Press Club (13th Floor Auditorium)

14th and F Streets NW, Washington, DC

Continental breakfast will be served at 7:30 am

A Public Voice ... 2000, moderated by David Gergen, U.S. News & World Report, will this year address one of the nation's most pressing challenges ... Public Schools: Are They Making the Grade? Will more money improve schools? Should we set high academic standards for students? Should we blur the lines among our public, private, religious, and for-profit schools? What are our choices? And which way should we go?

The Public Voice series, now celebrating its tenth anniversary, features a panel of distinguished nationally known political leaders, commentators, columnists, and members of the public. Once again, they will react to prerecorded segments that contrast the voices of American citizens in serious discussion, with sound bites and headlines from news programs, newspapers, and the floor of the U.S. Congress. Like earlier Public Voice programs, this one will present the public deliberating in National Issues Forums in regions of the country. (A brochure describing the National Issues Forums, now being convened by thousands of community-based organizations across the country, is enclosed.)

A Public Voice ... 2000, produced by Milton B. Hoffman Productions, will be aired nationwide on public television this summer, and then broadly distributed to cable systems and educational networks, as well as to individuals through videotapes.

Seating at the taping is limited. And because the audience is an essential feature of the television program, you will be expected to be present for the full taping period, which will begin promptly at 8 am and will end promptly at 10 am. Please call Diane Eisenberg at (301) 652-1901 by April 26 to confirm attendance!

200 Commons Road
Dayton, OH 45459-2799
937-434-7300
FAX 937-439-9804

6 East 39th Street
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212-686-7216
FAX 212-689-3461

444 North Capitol Street, NW
Suite 434
Washington, D.C. 20001
202-393-4478
FAX 202-393-7644

*Kettering
Foundation*

DOCUMENTS BEING SENT TO:**NAME:**Beverly Godwin**COMPANY:**(City, State, Country)**FAX NUMBER:**

FROM:Randy Nielsen**DATE:**4-27-00**NO. OF PAGES:**Five (5)

**DESCRIPTION OF
DOCUMENT:**Public Voice Education Seminar
Draft Agenda and Participant list**FAX NUMBERS:****Kettering Foundation, Dayton****(937) 439-9804****Kettering Foundation, Washington, DC****(202) 393-7644****Public Agenda Foundation, New York****(212) 889-3461**

Public Voice Education Seminar
The National Press Club
Zanger Conference Room
May 3, 2000

Agenda

11:00 a.m. Welcome/Introductions Estus Smith

11:30 a.m. Discussion Betty Knighton/Taylor Willingham

- Questions about the *Public Voice* Taping: Who participates in deliberative forums? How are they organized? How does deliberation relate to the development of an authentic "public voice?"
- What have we learned through deliberative forums about how citizens view the challenge of public education? What do citizens see as the key concerns and challenges? How do those findings relate to what professionals and officeholders are struggling with?

1:30 p.m. Closing Remarks David Mathews

Public Voice Education Seminar

11 a.m. - 2 p.m. May 2-3, 2000

Participant List

4/27/00

Ed Arnone
Program Officer
Kettering Foundation
200 Commons Road
Dayton OH 45459
937-439-9836 (O)
937-439-9837 (F)
arnone@kettering.org

Mary Virginia DeRoo
President
WV Center for Civic Life
2006 Northwood Rd.
Charleston WV 25314
304-346-2470 (O)

Patty Dineen
3905 Dickey Road
P.O. Box 496
Gibsonia PA 15044
724-443-1858 (O)
724-443-5942 (F)
dineenp@msn.com

Sadi Flucas
College of DuPage
Naperville Center
1223 Rickert Drive
Naperville IL 60540
630-942-4748
Fax 94204749
flucas@cdnet.cod.edu

Beverly Godwin
Deputy Director
National Partnership for
Re-Inventing Government
750 17th St. NW Suite 200
Washington DC 20006
202-694-0064 (O)
202-632-0390 (F)
beverly.godwin@npr.gov

John-Mark Hack
Office of the Governor
Agriculture Policy Office
700 Capitol Ave.
Frankfort KY 40601
606-873-5610 (H)
502-564-2611 (O)
502-564-2849 (F)
800-747-9405
jhack@mail.state.ky.us

Starla Jewell-Kelly
Executive Director
Natl. Community Education Assoc.
3929 Old Lee Hwy. Suite 91-A
Fairfax VA 22030-2401
703-359-8973 (O)
703-359-0972 (F)

Candice Katz
Director, Education Division
Natl. Endowment for the Humanities
1100 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington DC 20506
202-606-8200 (O)
202-606-8204 (F)

Karen Kleinz
Associate Director
Chapter Requests Public Engagement
Activities
Natl. Schools Public Relations Assoc.
15948 Derwood Road
Rockville MD 20855
301-519-1227 (O)
301-519-0496 (O)
301-519-0494 (F)

Betty Knighton
West Virginia Center for Civic Life
1441 Brookstone Rd.
Charleston WV 25314
304-344-1504 (H)
304-344-3690 (F)
304-344-3430 (O)
800-296-5038
KnightonB@aol.com

Janet Lieberman

Director of Communication
and Government Relations
National Council for Social Studies
3501 Newark St. SE
Washington DC 20020
202-966-7840 (O)
202-966-2061 (F)

Dane Linn

Director
Education Policy Studies
National Governors' Assoc.
444 N. Capitol St. NW, Suite 267
Washington DC 20001
202-624-3629 (O)
202-624-5313 (F)

David Mathews

President
Kettering Foundation
200 Commons Road
Dayton OH 45459
937-439-9840 (O)
937-439-9804 (F)
jenkyn@kettering.org

Randy Nielsen

Program Officer
Kettering Foundation
200 Commons Road
Dayton OH 45459
937-439-9827 (O)
937-439-9804 (F)
nielsen@kettering.org

Terry Peterson

Counselor to the Secretary
U.S. Dept. of Education
400 Maryland Ave., Room 7W205
Washington DC 20202
202-401-1406 (O)

Arnold Fege

Vice President of
Public Engagement and Advocacy
Public Education Network
601 13th St., NW, Suite 900N
Washington DC 20005
202-628-7460 (O)
202-628-1893 (F)

Vicki Rafel

Vice President for Legislative Policy
National Parent Teacher Assoc.
1090 Vermont Ave. NW, Suite 1200
Washington DC 20005
202-289-6790 (O)
202-289-6791 (F)

Yvonne Sims

Director
Kent Education Center
2223 Gordon N.W.
Grand Rapids MI 49504
616-771-2717
Fax 771-2720
784-3578 (H)

Estus Smith

Vice President & Chief Operating Officer
Kettering Foundation
200 Commons Road
Dayton OH 45459
937-439-9818 (O)
937-439-9804 (F)
esmith@kettering.org

Margaret Suzor Dunning

The Widmeyer Baker Group
1825 Connecticut Ave. NW
Washington Dc 20009
202-667-0901 (O)
202-667-0902 (F)

Jane Urschel

Asst. Exec. Director
Colorado Assn. of School Boards
1200 Grant Street
Denver CO 80203
303-832-1000 ext. 46
303-832-1086 (F)

Joe Villani

Associate Executive Director
Federation Member Services
and Outreach Section
National School Board Assoc.
1680 Duke Street
Alexandria VA 22314-3493
703-838-6769 (O)
703-548-5516 (F)

Taylor Willingham
SCC Library Reading Program
40 North Milpitas Blvd.
Milpitas CA 95035
408-262-1349
twillingham@readingprogram.org

Julie Zimet
CEO
Daniel's Moving & Storage
9700 Railroad Dr.
El Paso TX 79924
915-751-6481 (O)
915-751-5412 (F)

200 Commons Road
Dayton, OH 45459-2799
937-434-7300
FAX 937-439-9804

6 East 39th Street
(9th Floor)
New York, NY 10016
212-686-7016
FAX 212-889-3461

444 North Capitol Street, NW
Suite 434
Washington, D.C. 20001
202-393-4478
FAX 202-393-7644

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DOCUMENTS BEING SENT TO:**NAME:**Deborah Salomon**COMPANY:**(City, State, Country)**FAX NUMBER:****FROM:**Randy Nielsen / Amelia**DATE:**4-11-00**NO. OF PAGES:**Three (3)**DESCRIPTION OF
DOCUMENT:**Information regarding EducationSeminar we discussed by phone.Hard copy to follow**FAX NUMBERS:****Kettering Foundation, Dayton****(937) 439-9804****Kettering Foundation, Washington, DC****(202) 393-7644****Public Agenda Foundation, New York****(212) 889-3461**

200 Commons Road
Dayton, OH 45459-2799
937-434-7300
FAX 937-439-9804

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(9th Floor)
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April 10, 2000

Beverly Godwin
National Partnership for
Re-Inventing Government
750 17th St. NW Suite 200
Washington DC 20006

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Please let us know if you will be joining us by contacting Amelia Law Johnson at 937/439-9357. Amelia can also help with any questions you have about the events on May 2-3.

Sincerely,

Randall Nielsen
Program Officer

Attachment

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Dayton, OH 45459-2799
937-434-7300
FAX 937-439-9804

6 East 39th Street
(9th Floor)
New York, NY 10016
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A Public Voice ... 2000

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Additional material for the Public Voice Education Seminar on May 3, 2000.



MODERATOR GUIDE

Public Schools Are They Making the Grade?

The way most Americans see it, far too many students in public schools are not learning enough. As they move up from grade to grade, studies suggest that the majority fall farther behind their peers abroad in academics. They also lag behind their peers at local private schools on many measures, including enthusiasm for learning and the discipline to work hard. More than one in five drop out of high school, taking the classic route to low-wage, low-skill jobs.

Concern about public schools is growing, as Americans realize that their children's jobs and financial future depend heavily on the quality of their schooling. At the same time, today's strong economy has made it easier for the nation to consider overhauling an educational system that costs \$300 billion a year. Many now believe, with fresh optimism, that there are practical ways to improve student achievement.

To promote discussion about directions for improving America's public school system, four approaches, or choices, provide a framework for public deliberation. Each choice puts forth a different way of addressing the problem; each represents a distinct set of priorities and views.

CHOICE 1: Give Parents a Choice of Schools

Parents are captive consumers of a failing education monopoly, one lacking competitive pressure to improve or hold costs down. No single system of education can meet the needs of 53 million schoolchildren — many systems are needed. We can improve public education by giving parents the widest possible choice among public schools, publicly chartered schools, private schools, religious schools, and for-profit schools.

CHOICE 2: Raise Standards, Stress the Basics

The public school system isn't a monopoly run amok; it's a preeminent democratic institution that is no longer in sync with the needs of our economy and society. Public schools must be maintained and repaired because they teach democratic values, assimilate immigrants, and help children learn to live in a diverse society. We must set and enforce high standards for core academics and behavior — clear, uniform standards provide a blueprint for remodeling public education, from training teachers to holding schools accountable for student achievement.

CHOICE 3: Make Education a Community Effort

Public schools aren't national melting pots. Instead, successful schools serve each community's needs, reflecting local educational priorities. Education is a community activity, and efforts to improve education must start in the community and draw on the community's strengths and resources. Inadequate citizen involvement in the schools helps explain why such a variety of ideas for improving schools has produced unsatisfactory results around the nation for many years. In order for schools to succeed, they must become responsive to the community's goals and plans for itself.

CHOICE 4: Provide Adequate Funding to All Schools

The major problem with public education today is the unequal and inadequate funding of the schools. Many schools are in disrepair, many classrooms are overcrowded, and good teachers are in short supply because of poor pay, training, and working conditions. As a nation, we are not investing enough in education, and more important, we are not sharing school revenues in a democratic way that ensures every child an adequate education. Schools must be modernized, and a larger investment is needed.

Choices, Choice Work, and National Issues Forums

If you're preparing to moderate a National Issues Forum, then you've become familiar with the structure of deliberative dialogue that NIF supports. Discussion guides, starter tapes, and the forums they support focus on choices.

And you know that each choice represents a distinctly different way of approaching an issue, with accompanying benefits, costs, and consequences.

This choice structure undergirds the basic premise of public deliberation — that citizens in a democracy have a responsibility, and need opportunities, to make choices about how they want to live together, how they want to act

together, how they want their government to function.

Sometimes, forum participants find these uses of the word "choice" confusing. Some assume that they are being asked to choose one of the choices. And, of course, they are not.

Many moderators find it helpful to clarify, at the beginning of the forum, that the work of the forum is to weigh each choice, to "work through" conflicts and trade-offs, and to form a shared sense of what's at stake in the issue. They make it clear that it is in developing shared directions for public action that forum participants are laying the foundation for making public choices together.

If this is your first moderating experience:

You don't have to be an expert on the issue.

Reading the issue book thoroughly, considering questions that get to the heart of the issue, and thinking through the essence of each choice is the critical part of preparation.

Stay focused on what the forum is about — deliberation.

Your natural curiosity and your interest in understanding diverse views will be your greatest assets; they're probably what got you here in the first place. So use them to ask questions that probe the underlying motivations of each choice, the trade-offs it might require, and the willingness of the participants to recognize them.

Keep the discussion moving.

No matter the level of experience, most moderators find timekeeping to be a challenge. National Issues Forums examine complicated issues, worthy of deep discussion. Sometimes it's hard to move on to another approach with so much more that could be said. But in order to deliberate — to really make progress on the issue — participants need the opportunity to weigh all the major approaches.

Reserve ample time for reflections on the forum.

Between allowing time for participants to lay out their personal concerns about the issue at the beginning of the forum and the demanding work of deliberating in depth on each of the choices, it's easy to find yourself with little time left at the end of the forum to reflect on what's been said. But, in many ways, this is the most important work the group will do — if they have time to do it. Explain clearly at the outset that it is important to reserve this time, and then enlist the participants' support in working with you to preserve it.

Yoi Role as a Moderator:

- to provide an overview of the process of deliberation — the rationale for the kind of work the participants are getting ready to do.
- to ask questions that probe deeply into what's at stake in the issue and in each choice.
- to encourage participants to direct their responses and questions toward one another.
- to remain neutral throughout the discussion, while encouraging participants to explore all facets of their own and others' opinions.
- to keep track of the time, so participants can move through a discussion of each of the major approaches and into an ending period of reflections.

The Role of the Recorder

Purposes of recording:

- To remind forum participants of their key concerns, the areas of greatest disagreement, and the benefits and trade-offs their discussion highlighted.
- To serve as a written record of the group's work that might feed into future meetings of the group or additional forums.
- To help inform other members of the community about the outcomes of the deliberation.

Qualities of effective recording:

- Brief phrases to capture main ideas.
- Well organized. (Some use separate sheets for benefits and drawbacks of each approach or divide sheets into columns.)
- Clear and legible. (Most use dark markers and print large enough to be seen from the back of the room.)
- Captures the tensions, trade-offs, and common ground for action.

Forums or Study Circles — or Both?

Many NIF convenors choose to organize single forums around issues of concern in their communities. Most single forums last two- to two-and-one-half hours.

Many others, however, arrange multiple sessions (study circles) to allow participants greater opportunities to examine issues in depth. Some groups set aside time for two meetings; others might devote a separate session for each choice. And some plan ahead of time for a session after the forum to come back together to consider next steps.

Some communities begin their examination of an issue in a large group forum and then break off into smaller groups for subsequent sessions. The reverse also can be helpful — starting in small groups and culminating in a larger community forum.

National Issues Forums is about encouraging public deliberation. The needs of your community will drive the schedule in which deliberation can best occur.

Guidelines for National Issues Forums and Study Circles

At the beginning of deliberative discussion, most moderators review these guidelines with participants. (A free poster with these guidelines is available to use in your forum. You may request a copy by calling 800-600-4060.)

The moderator will guide the discussion yet remain neutral. The moderator will make sure that—

- Everyone is encouraged to participate.
- No one or two individuals dominate.
- The discussion will focus on the choices.
- All the major choices or positions on the issue are considered.
- An atmosphere for discussion and analysis of the alternatives is maintained.
- We listen to each other.

The importance of the questionnaires

Pre- and Post-Forum Questionnaires play an important role in your local forum — and in the national NIF network.

The Pre-Forum Questionnaire helps participants direct their thinking to the complexities of the issue, to take an assessment of the views they will bring to the discussion. Its structure focuses on what is at stake in the issue and what trade-offs might be involved.

The Post-Forum Questionnaire also serves multiple purposes. It gives participants an opportunity to reconsider their views in light of the experience they have just had. It gives them an opportunity to add to what they said or heard in the forum.

The questionnaires also serve a vital role outside of the forum. As a means of capturing what happened in the forum, they provide information that can be used to communicate participants' views to others — to officeholders, to the media, to other citizens.

Nationally, a report on the outcomes of the forums on a given issue is produced each year, based on extensive interviews with moderators and the questionnaires that forums generate. Some communities use questionnaires as part of reports on the outcomes of local forums.

So it is very important that you, as the forum moderator, take a few minutes to gather and return the questionnaires to the National Issues Forums Institute. Please include the moderator response sheet on page 12 with your contact information so that follow-up for the national report is possible.

Return the completed Pre- and Post-Forum Questionnaires to:

**National Issues Forums Research
100 Commons Road
Dayton, Ohio 45459-2777**

Public Schools: Are They Making the Grade?

Questions to Promote Deliberation of the Issue

As you examine this issue together with forum participants, you (and they) will undoubtedly think of questions that are at the heart of what makes the issue compelling. Many of these questions will arise during the forum, based on responses of the participants to you and to one another.

Most moderators find it helpful, though, to consider ahead of time the basic, broad questions about each choice that need to be addressed. Here are some possibilities:

Choice 1: Give Parents a Choice of Schools

Should we blur the lines among public, private, religious, and for-profit schools?
What is most valuable about having a common school experience for all children?
How would competition for students impact the quality of public education?

Choice 2: Raise Standards, Stress the Basics

Should we set high academic standards for all children? How should such standards be determined?
Is it best to have one set of standards or many?
Should schools and individual teachers be held accountable for meeting academic standards?

Choice 3: Make Education a Community Effort

Do citizens want to play more substantive roles in setting school policies and budgets? What do you think your personal responsibility is?
To what degree should parents and members of the community engage in decision making in their local schools?
How can or should citizens determine directions for their schools? What would this kind of engagement look like?

Choice 4: Provide Adequate Funds to All Schools

Should we increase school funding and/or redistribute revenues to equalize educational resources?
Will more money improve schools?
Can enrichment programs compensate for disadvantages associated with growing up in poverty?

Public Schools: Are They Making the Grade?

Comparing

Choice 1

Give Parents a Choice of Schools

In trying to meet all needs, public schools meet none well. It's time to end their monopoly on affordable education by giving parents greater choice among schools.

What Can Be Done?

- Give parents vouchers for tuition at any private, religious, or for-profit school.
- Spur education improvements by making schools compete for students.
- Open more independent charter schools within public systems, and offer students greater choice among public schools.

In Support

- This choice provides students, especially those from poor families, with an education ladder to a better life.
- Without competition from private schools, public schools don't have enough incentive to improve.
- With voucher programs and charter schools, students find the programs best suited to their interest and needs.

In Opposition

- Voucher programs and charter schools encourage citizens to give up on public schools instead of working to improve them.
- This is not a plan for improving schools; it's just a risky promise that schools will improve thanks to the magic of competition.
- Some research suggests that reducing class size does more for student achievement than sending students to private schools.

A Likely Trade-off?

- In reducing the role of public schools, this choice would not pursue the goal of providing a common school experience for children of all backgrounds.

Choice 2

Raise Standards, Stress the Basics

Schools should insist that every student master core academic subjects. Hold students accountable by enforcing high standards for achievement and behavior.

What Can Be Done?

- Set high standards for all students in core academic courses and enforce high standards for behavior.
- Use tests and other assessments to hold students, teachers, and schools accountable for meeting standards.
- Coordinate teacher training and professional advancement with the academic standards.

In Support

- Raising expectations for teachers and students will improve their performance.
- Setting clear standards for what every child should know is the best way to hold students and schools accountable.
- Without strong academic skills, students do not have a foundation to learn anything else.

In Opposition

- Standardizing education is exactly the wrong approach in a monopolistic system that already stifles innovation.
- Raising academic standards is one thing, achieving them is another — especially when public education is so poorly funded.
- School standards will achieve nothing without the active support of community members.

A Likely Trade-off?

- In calling for the standardization of education, this choice would limit flexibility in teaching, slow innovation in curricula, and place more importance on tests.

the Choices

Choice 3

Make Education a Community Effort

Schools have lost public support — and can't improve without first regaining it. To reconnect with citizens, schools should become more responsive to community goals and plans.

What Can Be Done?

- Ask community members to identify concerns about schools; organize efforts to address the concerns.
- Have community members help set school policies, programs, and budgets.
- Create a community strategy; not just a school strategy, for educating every child; ask citizens and institutions to share talents and resources.

In Support

- When citizens help make school decisions, they become vested in supporting the school.
- Without community participation and support, no education improvement plan can succeed.
- America could greatly expand its capacity to educate children by better use of the educational resources in the community.

In Opposition

- This choice offers no specific ideas for improving what happens in the classroom.
- Citizens are not asking to manage schools, they are seeking answers and accountability from professionals paid to do this job.
- The best way to involve citizens in education is to give them a greater choice of schools for their children.

A Likely Trade-off?

- In making education more of a community effort, citizens would have to share much more of their time and resources to supplement efforts in the classroom.

Choice 4

Provide Adequate Funds to All Schools

Schools are badly neglected, and low pay and poor training do not attract the best candidates to teaching.

What Can Be Done?

- Increase state and federal funding of education to ensure every student an adequate education.
- Reduce gross inequities in school resources among school districts.
- Promote programs widely believed to improve student achievement, such as hiring more teachers to reduce class size.

In Support

- The nation can't afford to neglect schools, which are the backbone of our society and economy.
- Public schools are supposed to help equalize opportunity; our schools systematically perpetuate inequality.
- Schools are only as good as their teachers and — for lack of adequate pay and training — our schools are not as good as they could be.

In Opposition

- Why spend more money on public schools when private schools can do a better job for less money?
- Kids spend most of their lives outside of school. Schools can't fill all the educational gaps, especially those linked to poverty.
- Money isn't everything. Equity in school funding does not guarantee equity in student achievement.

A Likely Trade-off?

- In seeking to give every child a useful education, this choice would shift more school spending to poorer districts; it would also raise taxes substantially or reduce other programs, or both.

Suggested Format for an NIF Forum or Study Circle

Welcome

Let participants know who is sponsoring the forum/study circle. Stress the cosponsorship if several organizations are involved.

Questionnaire (Pre-Forum)

Remind people that the Pre-Forum Questionnaire is a way to get everyone focused on the issue and a way for each participant to take inventory of initial feelings on the issue. Tell them there'll be another questionnaire for them after these deliberations end.

(Pre- and Post-Forum Questionnaires are found at the end of the issue book. You may want to provide copies to participants separately if they do not want to tear these pages out of their issue books. If you distribute separate copies, it is wise to make the Pre- and Post-Forum Questionnaires on different colored paper so that they easily may be kept separate.)

Ground Rules

MAKE CLEAR THAT THE FORUM IS NOT A DEBATE. Stress that there is work to do, and that the work is to move toward making a choice on a public policy issue. The work will be done through deliberation. Review the paragraph "How Do We Do It?" (see page 11). The responsibility for doing the work of deliberation belongs to the group. Deliberation is necessary because there are competing approaches to solving the problem.

Starter Video

Explain that the video reviews the problems underlying the issue, then briefly examines three or four public policy alternatives. In so doing, it sets the stage for deliberation. (Starter videos for each issue book are available from Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company at 1-800-228-0810.)

Personal Stake

Connect the issues to people's lives and concerns — in the first few minutes — by getting participants to talk about their personal experiences with the issue, and to tell their stories. This makes the issue genuine, human rather than abstract. Some questions you might ask include: "Has anyone had a personal experience that illustrates the problems associated with this issue?" "Within your family, or circle of friends, is this an important issue?" "What aspects of the issue are most important to you?" "How does the issue affect people?"

The Forum/Study Circle Deliberation

Consistent with what deliberation is, moderators ask basic types of questions in a forum:

What Is Valuable to Us?

This question gets at why making public choices is so difficult: the approaches turn on things that people care about very deeply, such as being secure or being treated fairly. This question can take many forms:

- How has this issue affected you personally? (Usually asked at the beginning.)
 - What things are most valuable to people who support this option?
 - What is appealing about this approach?
 - What makes this choice a good idea — or a bad one?
-

What Are the Costs or Consequences Associated with the Various Choices?

This question can take as long as it prompts people to think about the likely effects of various approaches on what is valuable to them. Examples include:

- What would result from doing what this approach proposes?
 - What could be the consequences of doing what you are suggesting?
 - Can you give an example of what you think would happen?
 - Does anyone have a different estimate of costs or consequences?
-

What Are the Tensions or Conflicts in This Issue That We Have to “Work Through”?

As a forum progresses, moderators will ask questions that draw out conflicts or tensions that people have to “work through.” They might ask:

- What do you see as the tension between the approaches?
- Where are the conflicts that grow out of what we’ve said about this issue?
- Why is this issue so difficult to decide?
- What are the “gray areas”?
- What remains unsolved for this group?

Ending A Forum/Study Circle

Before ending a forum take a few minutes to reflect both individually and as a group on what has been accomplished. Questions like the following have been useful:

I. Individual Reflections

- How has your thinking about the issue changed?
- How has your thinking about other people's views changed?
- How has your perspective changed as a result of what you heard in this forum?

II. Group Reflections

- What didn't we work through?
- Can we identify any shared sense of purpose or direction?
- What trade-offs are we, or are we not, willing to make to move in a shared direction?

III. Next-Step Reflections

- What do we still need to talk about?
- How can we use what we learned about ourselves in this forum?
- Do we want to meet again?

Questionnaire (Post-Forum)

The Post-Forum Questionnaire is a way to face the conflict within ourselves. Often we discover aspects of each choice we hold most valuable. Yet, the things we care deeply about are often in conflict. Please return the questionnaires and the moderator response sheet on page 12 after the forum.

Suggested Time Line

Stages of a Forum/Study Circle

15% for Opening

- Welcome** — The convenor or moderator introduces NIF program.
- Questionnaire** — Participants complete Pre-Forum Questionnaire.
- Ground Rules** — Participants review desired outcomes of forum.
- Starter Video** — The starter video sets the tone for the discussion.
- Personal Stake** — Connect the issue to people's lives and concerns.
- The Deliberation** — Participants examine all the choices.

65% for
Deliberation

20% for
Ending the
Forum/Study
Circle

Ending the Forum — Reflect on what has been accomplished.

Questionnaire — Participants complete Post-Forum Questionnaire.

NIF Forums and Study Circles

Why Are We Here? What Are We Going to Do?

We are here to move toward a public decision or CHOICE on a difficult issue through CHOICE WORK.

How Do We Do It?

Through a deliberative dialogue in which we:

- Understand the PROS and CONS of each approach, its TRADE-OFFS, COSTS, AND CONSEQUENCES.
- Know the STRATEGIC FACTS and how they affect the way the group thinks about each option.
- Get beyond the initial positions people hold to their deeper motivations — the things people consider to be most valuable in everyday life.
- Weigh carefully the views of others; appreciate the impact various options would have on what others consider valuable.
- WORK THROUGH the conflicting emotions that arise when various options pull and tug on what people consider valuable.

How Can We Know If We Are Making Progress?

By constantly testing your group:

- Can your group make the best case for the approach least favored?
- Can it identify the negative effects of the approach most favored?

What Will Be the Effects of Deliberation?

Movement from first reactions and mass opinions toward a more shared and stable PUBLIC JUDGMENT.

The emergence of a PUBLIC VOICE, one different from the voice of personal preference or special interest pleadings.

Increased COMMON GROUND FOR ACTION found in a greater ability to:

- Identify how people came out on the conflicts, contradictions, and trade-offs, and what they were willing, and not willing to do to solve the problem.
- Identify any shared sense of purpose or policy direction and a range of actions that were consistent with one another.
- Understand the implications of how citizens sensed their interdependence on the issue and its implications for community action.

**NATIONAL ISSUES FORUMS
RESEARCH
100 COMMONS ROAD
DAYTON, OHIO 45459-2777
1-800-433-7834**

Public Schools: Are They Making the Grade?

Moderator Response

After the forum, please complete this brief response sheet and return it with the questionnaires from the forum.

Moderator's Name _____

Phone _____ Date and location of forum _____

Briefly describe the audience of your forum diversity (age of participants, background).

What elements of this issue seemed most difficult to the participants?

What common concerns were most apparent?

Where there trade-offs most participants would or would not accept?

Did the group identify shared directions for action?

Return with questionnaires to:

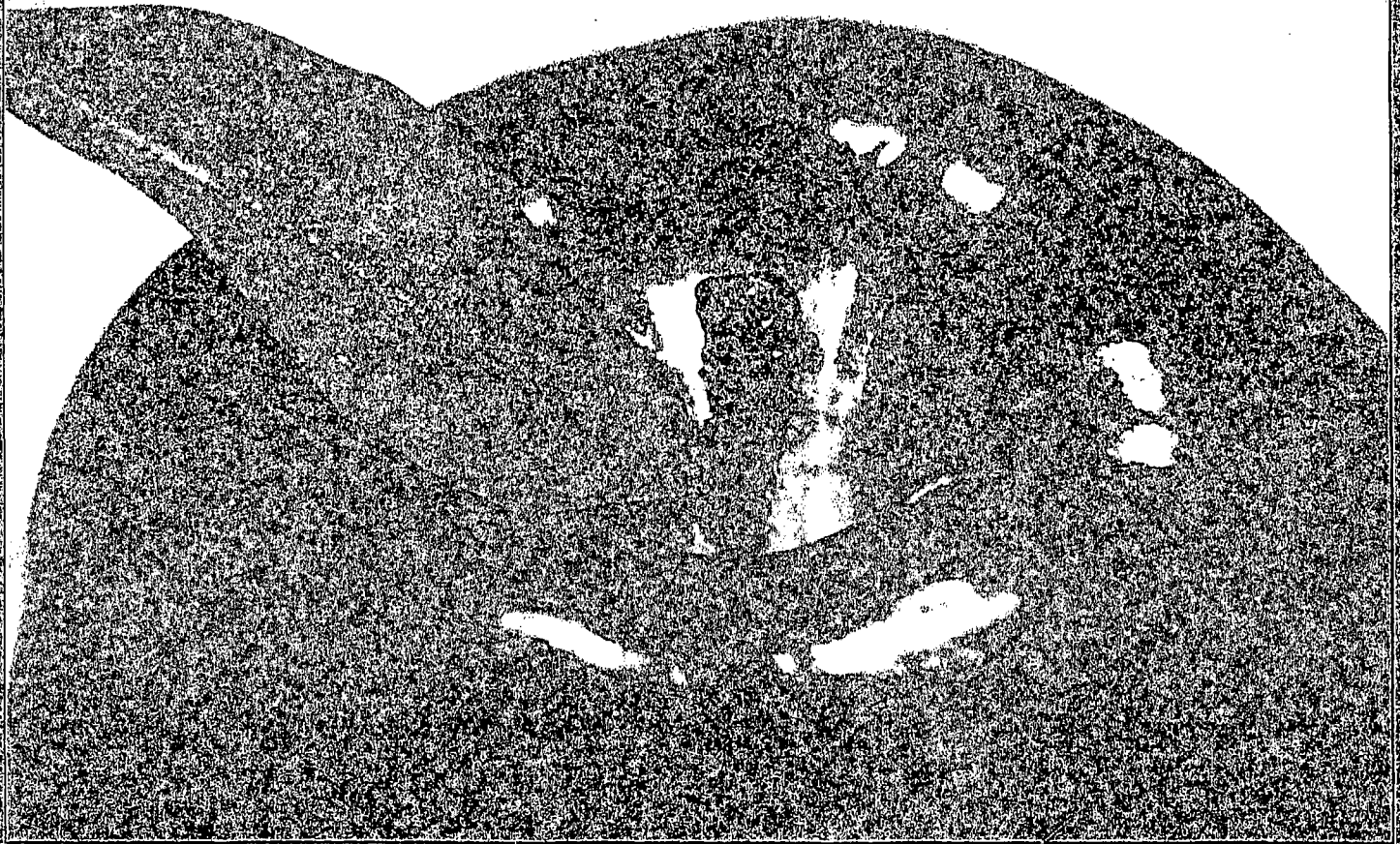
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What is the Public's Role in Public Education?

Sponsored by West Virginia Center for Civic Life

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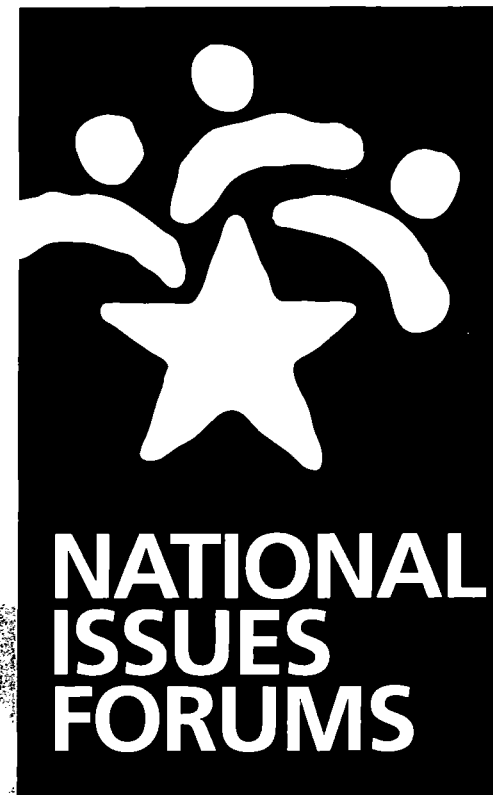
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Booklet, "National Issues Forums An Overview," 4 pages

So What?

Citizens cannot act together until they decide together. Through public deliberation, citizens define what they consider to be in the public interest and find common ground for action.

By offering citizens a framework for deliberative forums, the **NIF** network helps the public take an active role in acting on public issues. And the health of this nation's democratic enterprise depends on the active participation of responsible citizens who take the initiative to deliberate about public policy choices and about the actions to be taken by citizens inside and outside of government.



AN OVERVIEW

For more information, contact:
National Issues Forums Research
100 Commons Road
Dayton, Ohio 45459-2777
1-800-433-7834
<http://www.nifi.org>



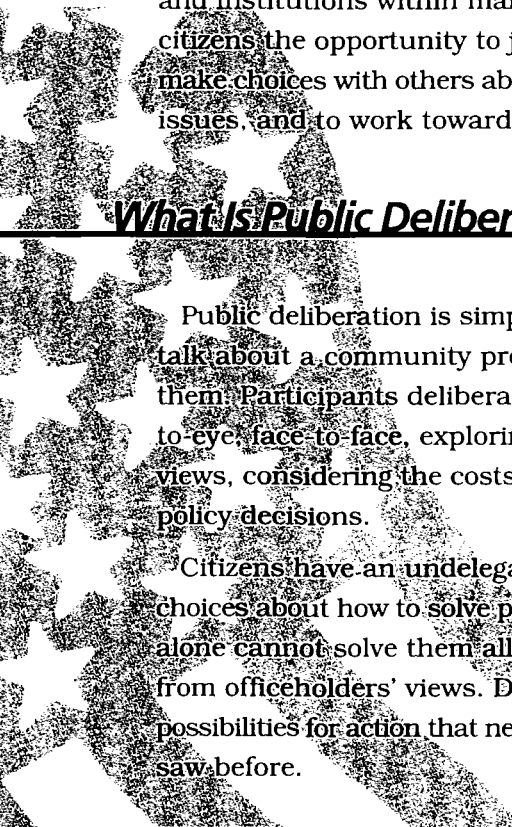
What Is NIF?

National Issues Forums (**NIF**) is a nonpartisan, nationwide network of locally sponsored forums for the consideration of public policy issues. They are rooted in the simple notion that people need to come together to reason and talk — to deliberate about common problems. Indeed, democracy requires an ongoing deliberative dialogue.

How Does It Work?

Each year, major issues of concern are identified by the NIF network. Issue books, which provide an overview of the subject and present several approaches, are prepared to frame the *choice work*.

Forums are sponsored by thousands of organizations and institutions within many communities. They offer citizens the opportunity to join together to deliberate, to make choices with others about ways to approach difficult issues, and to work toward creating public judgment.



What Is Public Deliberation?

Public deliberation is simply people coming together to talk about a community problem that is important to them. Participants deliberate with one another — eye-to-eye, face-to-face, exploring options, weighing others' views, considering the costs and consequences of public policy decisions.

Citizens have an undelgale responsibility to make choices about how to solve problems because government alone cannot solve them all. Citizens' views often differ from officeholders' views. Deliberation may reveal new possibilities for action that neither citizens nor officeholders saw before.

Forums enrich participants' thinking on public issues. The process helps people — who use choice work in their discovery — to see issues from different points of view. At their best, forums help participants move toward shared, stable, well-informed public judgments, based on what is valuable to them about important issues. Through deliberation, participants move from making individual choices to making choices as a public.

Who Participates?

Forums are organized by civic, service, and religious organizations as well as by libraries, colleges, universities, high schools, literacy and leadership programs, prisons, businesses, labor unions, and senior groups. The network of forum convenors is both large and diverse. **NIF** participants vary considerably in age, race, gender, economic status, and geographic location. Studies of **NIF** deliberation tell us that every type of citizen seeks out and participates in these public forums.

How Can I Learn More?

Each year, Public Policy Institutes (**PPIs**) are held at institutions all across the country to train **NIF** moderators and convenors. They provide both NIF newcomers and veterans with background on the program. **PPI** participants receive training and practice in moderating forums, become acquainted with **NIF** materials, discuss how to organize **NIF** programs in their communities, and learn to appreciate the importance of deliberation in identifying the public perspective on public policy issues.

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