



## Improving the Lives of Children

A SUPPLEMENT TO THE 2011 LEADERS IN LEARNING THREE-YEAR REPORT

### Introduction

How are graduates of Leaders in Learning (LIL) improving the lives of children? This supplement to the January 2011 three-year report offers an additional perspective on the question of LIL's impact on our region.

This supplement draws from two sources:

1. Telephone interviews with LIL graduates

Calls were made in fall 2009, fall 2010, and spring 2011. We reached a total of thirty-three (61.1 percent) of fifty-four graduates from our first three cohorts—eleven of eighteen from LIL 2007 (61.1 percent), twelve of sixteen from LIL 2008 (75.0 percent), and ten of nineteen from LIL 2009 (52.6 percent). We reached ten of sixteen participants (62.5 percent) from LIL 2010.

2. Targeted, intensive interviews with graduates

Additionally, in order to gain more specific insights into some of the positive, day-to-day impacts occurring in the lives of children, we spoke with LIL alumni who (1) appeared to have had the desire to distinguish themselves within education, and/or (2) cited LIL as a particularly catalytic event in their personal/professional lives. We contacted eight such individuals, and were able to speak with five (62.5 percent).

### Highlights

#### CLASS OF 2007

Seven (63.6 percent) reported work contributing directly to public education, and four (57.1 percent) are employed by Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS). An additional two (18.2 percent) reported work contributing indirectly to public education.

#### CLASS OF 2008

Seven (91.7 percent) reported work contributing directly to public education, and two of those individuals (18.2 percent) are employed by PPS.

#### CLASS OF 2009

Seven (70.0 percent) reported work contributing directly to public education, and two of those (28.6 percent) are employed by PPS.

#### CLASS OF 2010

Eight (80.0 percent) reported work contributing directly to public education, and three of these (37.5 percent) reported working within PPS. The remaining two (20.0 percent) reported work contributing indirectly to public education.

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## Case Studies

Interviews revealed seven ways in which LIL graduates impact the lives of children: mentoring; teaching; engaging families; leading schools; empowering teachers; working in youth programs; and advocating for youth/volunteering. The appendix provides names of graduates working in each of these areas and the organizations, programs, or institutions where they have had an impact. The following three case studies illustrate three areas of graduate impact that are currently most visible to us: engaging families, mentoring, and leading schools.

### CASE 1: ENGAGING FAMILIES

Leaders in Learning participants identify family engagement as a critical point of influence within education, as it is among the most important factors outside the classroom shaping the academic achievement of children. The class of 2007 conducted a group project to create a parent-engagement resource entitled the “Northview Heights Advanced Learning Academy Family Empowerment Manual.” This manual has since been adapted and adopted by Pittsburgh South Brook 6–8, the school of history teacher and LIL graduate Jeremiah Dugan ('07).

The cause of family engagement was again taken up in 2009, when that year’s group undertook to gather & collect surveys of both PPS parents and teachers and issue the report “Family Engagement in the Pittsburgh Public Schools.” In addition to compiling the survey results, participants provided analysis & recommendations and met in person with key stakeholders to share their findings. These individuals included members of the Pittsburgh Board of Public Education, one of whom offered to share the report with then-Superintendent Mark Roosevelt.

Most recently, and in addition to these other efforts, family engagement has found a personal advocate in Maria Searcy ('10). Maria’s post-program commitment was to “set up a Parent Information Resource Center (PIRC) at Pittsburgh Miller PreK–5 with the help of the surrounding Hill District education community. The PIRC’s targeted outcome will be to increase the school’s parent engagement, which will ultimately improve student achievement at Miller.”

As of our March 2011 check-in with Maria, she had already secured a room at Miller (in which to locate the PIRC), and estimated having spoken to about 130 parents. She is planning three more engagements, one for each month through the end of the school year (June 2011), and is in the process of soliciting in-kind donations to enable her events to become more widely attended.

### CASE 2: MENTORING

Mentoring is another area in which LIL graduates are having an impact on the academic achievement of children. Pittsburgh Public Schools, the United Way of Allegheny County, and other community organizations remind us that “Kids with mentors get better

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grades; are less likely to get involved with drugs; and are 86% more likely to go to college.”<sup>1</sup>

It is the latter half of the above statistic that James Forgarty ('09) alludes to in describing his past work as an advocate and recruiter for Be A 6th-Grade Mentor. He attributes his success in recruiting roughly half of that organization's roster of mentors<sup>2</sup> to his ability to articulate how mentoring has a direct impact on students' becoming “[Pittsburgh] Promise ready.”

How did James decide to become involved in this work? He says that while he was already “moving in this direction” professionally, LIL was “inseparable” from his transition to it. Through networking, “conversations with all of the players,” and a process of clarifying the issues of most concern to him as an advocate, James said that “LIL helped [me] gain a larger, more systemic understanding of educational issues,” which, he maintains, is critical to becoming a persuasive advocate. James is now a community organizer for Communities for Teaching Excellence.

Mentoring also plays a prominent role in the professional life of Katrina Struloeff ('08), who likewise cites LIL as having “allowed me to become more aware of the inner workings of the system,” and which she credits with having “fed the fire” of her motivation to get involved. In her full-time work, Katrina provides community-relations and technical assistance for the mentoring of children of incarcerated adults<sup>3</sup>—one of six strategic initiatives of the Mid-Atlantic Network of Youth & Family Services (MANY), to which roughly 600 people/organizations have turned for training seminars in these areas.

Outside of work, Katrina has distinguished herself as a current and founding board member of Future Worth, an organization—in her words—“developing innovative approaches to educating at-risk youth in order to break the cycle of poverty, oppression, and violence.” Future Worth ([www.futureworth.org](http://www.futureworth.org)) is “striving to create a program where youth will receive academic support, counseling, leadership development, mentoring, team-building, and life skills that are not adequately provided through the current educational structure.”

### CASE 3: LEADING SCHOOLS

As a result of LIL, graduates frequently report shifts in their perspectives on the world, insights about themselves, and abilities to see new connections. Statements such as “I plan to explore new partnerships at my current place of employment thanks to LIL,” or “I was surprised to learn how comfortable & competent I am in project planning and organizational leadership” arise often, and across all program years.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information: [www.bea6thgradementor.org/#about](http://www.bea6thgradementor.org/#about)

<sup>2</sup> Of approximately three hundred

<sup>3</sup> Amachi Pittsburgh, another nonprofit seeking to mentor children of the incarcerated, has gained the services of LIL alumna Allyce Pinchback ('10), who is also a mentor with Northside Urban Pathways Charter School's WISE (Women In Sync Everywhere) program.

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We see graduates acting on these insights about themselves and taking steps to advance to professional positions that enable them to influence policies and practices that directly affect student achievement. Several graduates have intended to become school principals. We know that four (across classes 2007, 2008, and 2009)—all of whom had also previously been teachers—expressed the intent to and/or applied to the PELA<sup>4</sup> program following LIL. Of these, three have successfully completed residencies and are principals. According to PPS, this is significant because:

in 2008–2009, the first year of implementation for PELA, schools led by principals who graduated from the PELA program saw increases in reading proficiency that exceeded District increases in six of the seven grades tested. Additionally, increases in mathematics proficiency at schools led by PELA principals exceeded the District increases in five of the seven grades tested.<sup>5</sup>

LouAnn Zwierzynski ('07)—principal of Faison PreK–5—was also actively involved in the class of LIL '09, and has since become involved with Coro's primary youth program, Students Engaged in Leadership (SEL)<sup>6</sup>. LouAnn told us that LIL “was very helpful to me because it gave me a different lens, the community lens, of how others perceive education in the Pittsburgh Public Schools. It also showed me the number of community agencies that [are] interested in public education and allowed me to network.”

Similarly, Deonne Arrington ('08), principal of Pittsburgh Lincoln K–8, noted that, having gone through LIL, she was “more prepared for where PELA was going to take her” in terms of emphasizing the importance of community relationships and seeking to understand one's community. True to these sentiments, Deonne is currently fostering relationships between Lincoln K–8 and Google™ (located at Baker's Square); Lincoln's parent/community council; and Lincoln's parent-teacher organization, to name a few.

Deonne also told us that, prior to LIL, she was reluctant to become a principal because she saw the role as primarily “managerial.” However, she said that LIL enabled her to view being a principal as a matter of visionary leadership, and helped her imagine aspiring to that role. Asked where she sees her most vivid and positive day-to-day impacts on the lives of children, she said “In the classrooms,” where she's able to observe teachers and give them instructional feedback, and where she's able to build relationships with students. In the longer term, Deonne hopes that her students will be able to remember their relationships with her and her staff and use those “planted seeds of wisdom” to make the best decisions they can for their futures.

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<sup>4</sup> One of the leadership-development components of PPS's Pittsburgh Urban Leadership System of Excellence (PULSE), PELA's curriculum was developed in late 2007 and early 2008 in partnership with Coro Pittsburgh.

<sup>5</sup> To read the entire post: <http://php.pghboe.net/news/index.php/2010/04/23/pittsburgh-emerging-leadership-academy-prepares-new-principals-to-take-lead-at-district-schools>

<sup>6</sup> A joint program of Coro Pittsburgh, A+ Schools, and the MGR Foundation, SEL is focused on articulating & enacting a student-led reform agenda within PPS.



Lastly, like LouAnn, Deonne has been a steadfast ally of Leaders in Learning. She actively recruits for LIL (she sent three of her colleagues to us in 2010), and wants to send the remaining four members of her leadership team to us in the coming year(s). She cites LIL as having contributed to the positive impacts of her work by emphasizing “the need to seek students’ input, as well as that of community members and partners; and the need for informed decision-making,” whether through interviews or meetings—as above—or through reading about best-practices and research within her field.

## **Pathways to Leadership: A Summary**

The analysis conducted for this report leads us to identify five general mechanisms by which the Leaders in Learning program improves the lives of children in our region:

1. Selecting and recruiting individuals who have an interest in improving education and the lives of children.
2. Helping participants to connect with their deeper passions (e.g., to advocate for children), which motivates them to push further in their efforts to work on behalf of children.
3. Enabling participants to gain insights about their own skills (e.g., as an administration leader), which motivates them to push further in their efforts to improve the lives of children.
4. Fostering a deeper understanding of critical issues facing children (e.g., a lack of family involvement), which motivates participants to work—or continue working—to address those issues.
5. Connecting participants with resources & people who can help them become more effective in their efforts on behalf of children.

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## Appendix

### SEVEN WAYS GRADUATES ARE IMPROVING THE LIVES OF CHILDREN

#### 1. MENTORING

Lisa Hoitsma Favorini ('08)  
James Fogarty ('09)  
Sarah Joseph ('08)  
Allyce Pinchback ('10)  
Katrina Struloeff ('08)

#### Programs/Organizations Impacted

Amachi Pittsburgh  
Be A 6th-Grade Mentor  
Big Brothers Big Sisters of Greater Pittsburgh  
MANY  
Northside Urban Pathways Charter School  
WISE

#### 2. TEACHING

Edwin Breaux, II ('08)  
Jeremiah Dugan ('07)  
Tonya Edmonds [formerly Groover] ('07)  
Deborah Hollis ('07)  
Akirah Wyatt ('09)

#### Schools Impacted

La Escuelita Arcoiris  
Pennsylvania Cyber Charter School  
Pittsburgh Northview PreK–8  
Pittsburgh Pioneer  
Pittsburgh Science and Technology Academy 6–12  
Pittsburgh South Brook 6–8  
Pressley Ridge

#### 3. ENGAGING FAMILIES

LIL 2007 participants (group project)  
LIL 2009 participants (group project)  
Maria Searcy ('10)

#### Schools/Institutions Impacted

Pittsburgh Miller PreK–5

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Pittsburgh Board of Public Education  
PPS  
Pittsburgh South Brook 6–8

#### 4. LEADING SCHOOLS

Deonne Arrington ('08)  
Jessica Colbert ('09)  
Michael Dreger ('10)  
Ola Flowers ('10)  
Peggy Shields ('09)  
LouAnn Zwieryznski ('07)

#### Programs/Institutions Impacted

PELA  
Pittsburgh Faison Pre-K–5  
Pittsburgh Langley High School  
Pittsburgh Lincoln K–8  
PPS  
PULSE

#### 5. EMPOWERING TEACHERS

Matt Anderson ('10)  
Michael Dreger ('10)  
Kira Henderson ('10)  
Dan Holland ('09)  
Marge McMackin ('09)  
Debbie Spencer ('10)

#### Organizations/Institutions Impacted

ASSET Inc.  
Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers  
PPS  
University of Pittsburgh  
West Virginia University

#### 6. WORKING IN YOUTH PROGRAMS

Desiree Davis ('08)  
Anna Greenstone ('10)  
Dan Holland ('09)  
Richard Meyers ('08)  
Nicole Molinaro ('07)  
Allyce Pinchback ('10)  
Kate Porigow ('09)  
Jim Reid ('08)

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Katrina Struloeff ('08)  
Abe Taleb ('10)

Programs/Organizations Impacted

AJAPO (Acculturation for Justice, Access, and Peace Outreach)  
Bidwell Training Center  
City Charter High School  
Communities in Schools of Pittsburgh–Allegheny County  
CRAE (Culturally Responsive Arts Education, a program of PPS)  
Future Worth  
New Hazlett Theater  
Pittsburgh Peabody High School  
PPS  
Pittsburgh Summer Youth Employment Program (through the Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation)  
Propel Andrew Street High School (in Munhall)  
Reading is FUNdamental–Pittsburgh  
SAGE (Students for the Advancement of Global Entrepreneurship, a program of City Charter High School)  
SEL  
World Affairs Council of Pittsburgh  
Young Preservationists Association

**7. ADVOCATING FOR YOUTH/VOLUNTEERING**

Paulette Blakey ('07)  
Elizabeth Buchanan ('07)  
Angelica Cooper ('10)  
James Fogarty ('09)  
Sean Fogarty ('07)  
Lory Johnson-McClary ('08)  
Marge McMackin ('09)  
Richard Meyers ('08)  
Nicole Molinaro ('07)  
Jim Reid ('08)  
Twila Simmons-Walker ('08)

Educational Programs/Organizations Impacted

A+ Schools  
Communities for Teaching Excellence  
Education Policy and Leadership Center (EPLC)  
Govern for Kids  
Hill District Education Council  
School Funding Campaign (a program of the EPLC)  
SEL  
Westinghouse High School

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