

Case Study No.4

PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE EDUCATION GRANTMAKING

Learning by Doing:

The Noyce Foundation's Every Child a Reader and Writer Initiative

by CAROLINE KING

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PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE EDUCATION GRANTMAKING

Discipline & Focus	Knowledge	Resources Linked to Results	Effective Grantees	Engaged Partners	Leverage, Influence & Collaboration	Persistence	Innovation & Constant Learning
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grantmakers^{for}education

Grantmakers for Education's mission is to strengthen philanthropy's capacity to improve educational outcomes for all students. We achieve this mission by:

1. Sharing successful strategies, effective practices and lessons that exemplify responsive and responsible grantmaking in education.
2. Creating venues for funders to build and share knowledge, debate strategies, develop leadership, collaborate and advocate for change.
3. Gathering and interpreting data to illustrate trends, highlight innovative or proven educational approaches and support informed grantmaking.

Grantmakers for Education developed this case study as a reflection and discussion tool. Cases are not intended to serve as endorsements, sources of primary data, or illustrations of successful or unsuccessful grantmaking. In addition, to help make the case a more effective learning tool, it is deliberately written from one foundation's point of view, even though other foundations may have been involved in similar activities or supported the same grantees.

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Case Study Jury

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James Canales, president—*The Irvine Foundation*

Susan Hanson, president—*Glikbarg Foundation* (liaison to the jury from GFE Communications Committee)

Ted Lobman, former president—*Stuart Foundation*

Hayes Mizell, former program director—*Edna McConnell Clark Foundation*

Gabriella Morris, president—*Prudential Foundation*

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Authors and Contributors

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FOREWORD:

A Roadmap for More Effective Education Philanthropy

The mission of Grantmakers for Education, a diverse national network of over 200 grantmaking organizations, is to strengthen philanthropy's capacity to improve educational outcomes for all students.

In June 2005, we announced eight education grantmaking practices—drawn from the experience and wisdom of our members—that we think lead to results in education. These Principles for Effective Education Grantmaking seek to promote the wisdom, craft and knowledge education funders need to achieve maximum results.

As a complement to the principles, Grantmakers for Education is developing this series of case studies designed to encourage foundation trustees, leaders and program staff to reflect more deeply on what these principles mean for their own grantmaking and how they might be integrated into their efforts.

With the help of a distinguished set of advisors from our field, we have chosen case studies that we believe represent rich, thought-provoking examples of how funders might aspire to use these principles in their education grantmaking. Hindsight is always 20/20, and while we think these cases showcase exemplary efforts in education philanthropy, we also chose them because each sheds light on the careful work a funder must invest to make a grant effective, the challenges that crop up along the way, and the messiness inherent in grantmaking despite the best-laid plans.

In the end, we hope these principles—and the cases that help illuminate them—affirm a set of positive attitudes about the future: philanthropy, done wisely, can contribute solutions to the problems that prevent too many students from learning and achieving.

LEARNING BY DOING:

The Noyce Foundation's Every Child a Reader and Writer Initiative

Caroline King

Introduction

In 2000, the Noyce Foundation and five school districts in the San Francisco Bay Area embarked on an ambitious partnership to improve teaching and learning in literacy. By January 2006, the initiative, Every Child a Reader and Writer, was at a crossroads.

At the core of the initiative was Writer's Workshop, a unique, research-based approach to improving students' writing skills. As part of Every Child a Reader and Writer, each district agreed that every one of its elementary schools would gradually adopt Writer's Workshop and commit to the 60 minutes a day of classroom time it required. In addition, district and school staff promised to participate in and ultimately lead teacher professional-development opportunities focused on writing instruction, regularly assess students' learning, share best practices, and assume increasing responsibility for the entire initiative. In exchange, the Noyce Foundation provided funding and significant hands-on support.

Equally important was the foundation's strategic decision to engage the school districts as full design partners. By problem solving with grantees and making adjustments over time, the foundation believed that Every Child a Reader and Writer would improve as it evolved, that districts' capacity to lead the initiative would grow, and that a viable model for improving student achievement in public school systems would develop.

Fundamentally, the foundation hoped that the initiative would not only raise students' literacy skills but also catalyze school districts to enact systemwide changes that would yield high-quality teaching and learning in every classroom.

Progress had been achieved by 2006. Thirty-four schools—representing 40 percent of the combined five districts—had adopted Writer's Workshop. In at least two of the foundation's five partner districts, the writing performance of students participating in the daily writing workshop exceeded the performance of other students, as measured by California's state writing exam. Two districts and several schools had also adopted the workshop model for teaching reading skills. Anecdotally, teachers, principals and district leaders reported that teachers' knowledge and skill had also improved and that students were more engaged in the classroom.

Yet only one of the five districts had implemented Writer’s Workshop in every elementary school. Districts’ and schools’ capacity to take on more ownership for the initiative varied, and all five districts faced challenges due to budget constraints and state policy mandates. And, perhaps most troubling for the foundation trustees and staff, while the percentage of students meeting the program’s grade-level standards in writing had steadily increased for the first five years of the program, student performance had plateaued in 2005.

The results caused Noyce Foundation trustees and staff to embark on a strategic review of Every Child a Reader and Writer in January 2006. The foundation grappled with several key questions: Was districtwide adoption of Writer’s Workshop still realistic, or even desired? Was it finally time to accelerate a “gradual release of responsibility” for the initiative to the districts? How could the foundation help districts sustain and deepen the work? What had the organization learned about trying to significantly improve teaching and learning in public school systems?

Effective education grantmaking: Constant learning

Even after acting on the best available information to make a grantmaking decision, a grantmaker should seek to learn from grantees, remain adaptable to new ideas and open to unexpected learning, and willing to admit when grants do not turn out as expected. To this end, Grantmakers for Education’s Principles for Effective Education Grantmaking identifies *innovation and constant learning* as a core principle for achieving results in education philanthropy. This case study indicates the practices and challenges inherent in using new information and knowledge to improve grantmaking. It also touches on another Principle for Effective Education Grantmaking, *effective grantees*.

The case features the Noyce Foundation and its flagship initiative, Every Child a Reader and Writer, which aims both to improve literacy achievement for students in grades K-5 and to create a replicable model for improving teaching and learning in school systems. As part of its significant commitment to the initiative, the foundation worked alongside its grantees. It carefully watched the initiative’s progress, assessed what was needed to solve unexpected problems, and provided extra resources and expert assistance when needed.

The Noyce Foundation

Created in 1990 to honor Dr. Robert N. Noyce, inventor of the integrated circuit and co-founder of the semiconductor company Intel, the Noyce Foundation is dedicated to stimulating ideas and supporting initiatives designed to produce significant improvement in teaching and learning in mathematics, science and literacy in grades K-12.

The Noyce Foundation is both an operating foundation, meaning that its staff directly manages programs, and a traditional grantmaker. The foundation’s work is geographically focused where Noyce family members live—primarily the Silicon Valley and Massachusetts. In 2005, the foundation’s charitable grants and program expenses totaled \$6.5 million; net worth was estimated at \$158.5 million.

Because of Dr. Noyce’s interest and background in science, the foundation worked in its early years to increase the number of students in K-12 public schools with the knowledge, skills and interests

needed to pursue careers in science or technology. In later years, the foundation’s portfolio expanded to include literacy and education-policy reform efforts. In 2006, Every Child a Reader and Writer was one of its two flagship operating programs; from 2000 to 2006, the foundation invested \$8.3 million in the program.

Better writing skills for better reading skills

The Noyce Foundation’s efforts to improve elementary literacy began in 1994. Initial grants supported teacher training in reading in 26 Bay Area school systems. Despite modest gains in student performance, by 1999 the foundation’s trustees were frustrated that more had not been accomplished. Concurrently, the California Board of Education began to mandate the use of highly prescriptive approaches and materials for teaching reading. The trustees began to rethink their strategy. Founding trustee Ann Bowers recalled:

After five years, we were unable to show that our grants had dramatically improved students’ reading skills; we knew we needed to shift gears. The question was how? The “reading wars” raging across the country—phonics, whole language, balanced literacy, etc.—made it very confusing to identify effective approaches. And the shifting state-policy context had severely limited the ability of external actors to engage with districts around reading. As a small foundation, we realized that it did not make sense to put our resources toward fighting that battle. We needed help finding a new point of entry.

Bowers began conversations with New Standards, a joint initiative of the National Center for Education and the Economy and the University of Pittsburgh that had developed grade-level standards for over 20 states.¹ The New Standards team brought research to the foundation’s attention demonstrating that developing students’ writing skills also strengthened their ability to read. Soon after, Bowers proposed to her fellow trustees that the foundation’s literacy programs focus on writing instead of reading. She explained her rationale:

Not only did we have credible evidence that writing improved reading and literacy skills, but politically, we were able to avoid the reading wars and state policy conflicts, and practically, we filled a vital gap for districts. The state had announced that the fourth and seventh grade English Language Arts tests would include a writing component beginning in 2001 and most districts were starved for writing curriculum and professional development.

Foundation goals

Noyce Foundation trustees and staff articulated three goals for their new initiative:

- improve the literacy skills of students in kindergarten through grade five;

¹ Standards outline what students should be able to know and do by subject area, such as English/language arts, mathematics and science, at each grade level. Most states adopted standards for their public school systems in the 1990s, along with tests designed to measure students’ progress toward achieving the standards and accountability systems that rewarded or sanctioned schools based on students’ performance on the state tests. Aligned standards, assessments and accountability were the hallmarks of what became known as “standards-based education reform.”

- promote the replication of effective literacy practices in the San Francisco Bay Area by establishing a core group of districts and schools that would serve as models for the region; and
- through the process of using and supporting Writer’s Workshop, help districts and schools enact deeper, lasting changes that would dramatically improve teaching and learning in all subjects.

Writer’s Workshop

New Standards consultant Sally Hampton introduced the Noyce Foundation to Writer’s Workshop as a promising teaching format for improving students’ literacy skills. Several national literacy experts had created Writer’s Workshop and a companion Reader’s Workshop. The workshop format was designed to help teachers “differentiate” instruction based on individual students’ strengths and weaknesses while ensuring that all students mastered grade-level standards. The format of the 60-minute Writer’s Workshop includes three distinct parts:

- 10-minute “mini-lesson” for all students
- 40 minutes of “differentiated instruction,” where the teacher directs each student to engage in an activity specifically designed to help that student practice and develop skills based on his/her particular needs (Examples of activities include free writing, providing and receiving feedback from peers, revising an earlier draft, or conferring with a teacher.)
- 10-minute “closing” by a teacher for all students

The foundation hired Hampton as a consultant to help local districts begin to use Writer’s Workshop in their elementary schools.

However, based on its prior grantmaking, the foundation also wanted to design an initiative that would allow Writer’s Workshop to foster larger changes at the school and district levels. Bowers explained, “We realized that working solely with teachers was not sufficient for improving student achievement. We came to believe that if we wanted Writer’s Workshop to make a lasting impact on teaching and learning in a district, we needed to involve actors throughout the school system.”

The trustees sought someone with district reform experience to help design the new initiative’s overall strategy. In January 2000, they hired Amy Gerstein, the director of the Coalition of Essential Schools, as the foundation’s new executive director to play a lead role in designing what became Every Child a Reader and Writer.² Gerstein commented, “Our vision from the beginning was bigger than just getting schools to implement Writer’s Workshop. . . . We were looking for an opportunity to improve students’ literacy skills and, in the process, transform teaching and learning in school systems. We chose the initiative’s name—Every Child a Reader and Writer—to reflect our broader aims.”

² The Coalition of Essential Schools formed in 1984 under the leadership of Dr. TheodoreSizer. The coalition aimed to support a loosely affiliated network of schools, known as “essential schools,” that were implementing school-based reforms to promote student engagement and performance based on Sizer’s research. See www.essentialschools.org for more information.

Selecting initiative partners

In the summer of 2000, the foundation invited the 26 local school districts that had received its prior literacy grants to apply to participate in Every Child a Reader and Writer. Through a competitive application process, the foundation selected five partner districts, called “core districts.” In selecting its final slate of core districts, the foundation considered

- the depth of prior work and commitment to improving literacy achievement;
- a pledge by district leaders to work toward the eventual implementation of the daily Writer’s Workshop in all elementary schools, at every grade level;
- a financial commitment to help pay for one “literacy” teaching coach, teacher training and materials;
- a track record of providing high-quality professional development to its teachers; and
- the district’s commitment to assume increasing responsibility for the program.

Another key consideration for the foundation was which school a district proposed as the one to first implement Writer’s Workshop. The selection of this school was important, as the foundation intended the school to serve as the district’s flagship “staff development school,” modeling exemplary instruction and supporting schools added in future years.

The five core districts—Madison Elementary School District, Las Casas Elementary School District, Pacific Cove Elementary School District, Playa Azul Unified School District and San Cristobal Unified School District—were located in the San Francisco Bay Area, served between 3,000 and 13,000 students, and encompassed between four and 16 elementary schools (*see Exhibit 1 for core district demographic data*).³ Across the five districts, approximately 35 percent of the students were non-native English speakers and 25 percent came from low-income families.

The foundation also hoped that surrounding school systems would adopt the daily workshop approach as an effective way to increase students’ literacy skills. To that end, the other 21 districts were invited to attend some of the teaching training sessions.

Program design and rollout

Every Child a Reader and Writer was conceived not only as a grantmaking program but also as an operating program. Noyce Foundation staff initially managed the initiative and played a hands-on role in the implementation (*see Exhibit 2 for a time line of key events*).

³ By policy, the Noyce Foundation does not publicize grantees’ names. Out of respect for this policy, the core districts have been given fictitious names in this case study. In California, “unified” school districts include K-12 schools; “elementary” school districts include only elementary schools. Madison Elementary School District was replaced by View Ridge Elementary School District in 2003 (described on pages 8-9).

Year 1 (2000-01): Staff development schools open

The effort began in the fall of 2000 with one school per district implementing Writer’s Workshop. These initial schools were designated the “staff development schools” and each one had been nominated by its respective district. To gain the foundation’s approval, the prospective staff development school had to demonstrate strong principal leadership and support for adopting Writer’s Workshop from 100 percent of the teaching staff.

Each staff development school committed to serve as a model of effective implementation and host visits from schools that were considering or had already adopted Writer’s Workshop. Each staff development school appointed a full-time literacy “coach” who worked to accelerate teachers’ ability to teach writing through the workshop model. The coach also was charged with leading training efforts in the district as new schools joined each year.

Years 2-6 (2001-06): Rollout to additional schools

In each subsequent year of the initiative, new schools were expected to adopt Writer’s Workshop. The foundation and the core districts jointly identified “schools most ready to implement successfully.” Each new cohort of schools made a series of commitments—the foundation referred to these as “non-negotiables”—that included

- a daily 2.5-hour literacy block for students with 60 minutes spent in Writer’s Workshop;
- instructional leadership (which included structures for promoting faculty collaboration and learning, work toward shared goals by all school staff, and principal and teacher leadership for improving instruction);
- facultywide support; and
- the creation of a team tasked with improving literacy instruction.

The foundation did not require literacy coaches at these new schools. Bowers explained, “Coaches are an expensive human resource and we did not think it was financially sustainable to require more than one coach per district.” However, some districts and schools voluntarily trained part-time literacy coaches to provide further help. As a result, the presence of coaches varied widely from district to district.

While districts had agreed to add schools to the program each year, a specific number was not specified and a concrete time line for completing the districtwide rollouts was not established. Gerstein explained, “We acknowledged it would roll out differently in each district and did not want to be constrained to a ‘one-size-fits-all model.’”

In addition, with each year of program participation, districts were expected to assume more responsibility for managing and coordinating the program components. However, the time frame for what the Noyce Foundation termed “a gradual release of responsibility to the districts” was intentionally left open-ended. Bowers shared the foundation’s thinking at the time: “We knew that we would be engaged beyond the typical three-year foundation horizon, but we had no idea how long it would take to build the districts’ capacity to lead and sustain the work on their own. But we

were always clear that our continued support hinged on additional schools adopting Every Child a Reader and Writer each year and increased student performance.”

Robust staff development

Four role groups at the district and school level were expected to participate in regular professional development opportunities focused on literacy instruction. These opportunities included

- a one-week summer induction program on Writer’s Workshop and exemplary literacy instruction for teachers new to the school, as well as four days of additional professional development during the school year at the district’s staff development school;
- biweekly meetings for coaches to receive intensive professional development on writing content, workshop teaching strategies and teacher “coaching” skills;⁴
- regular mandatory professional development meetings with foundation staff for coaches, principals and district administrators to strengthen their leadership skills and understanding of literacy development, as well as to discuss ways of improving the initiative; and
- additional, voluntary professional development opportunities for any participant, which the foundation began offering in 2002.

Budget and financial commitments

Each year, the Noyce Foundation provided the core districts and implementing schools with the same flat funding: \$25,000 per core district and \$5,000 per implementing school. In addition, it covered many program-related expenses, including 50 percent of each staff development school coach’s salary.

By 2006, it had invested approximately \$8.3 million in the initiative. Nearly 80 percent of its funding, or \$6.4 million, went toward district and school grants or program-related expenses. The remaining \$1.9 million was spent on “operating expenses,” which primarily included salaries for foundation staff, consultant contracts and support for professional development (*see the Every Child a Reader and Writer Program Budget in Exhibit 3*).

Financially, each district was asked to pay the remaining 50 percent of its staff development school coach’s salary, and each school had to contribute resources toward teacher training and materials. Gerstein recalled, “We were very explicit about the partnership nature of this initiative from the outset. We told the core districts, ‘This is like getting married, and we’re in this together, for better or worse.’”

Deliberate efforts to assess progress

A particularly important element of Every Child a Reader and Writer’s design and implementation was the foundation’s explicit commitment to continual learning and adaptability. Bowers explained:

⁴ The foundation defined “coaching” as working one-on-one with a teacher over a sustained period of time to improve that teacher’s instructional practice on a mutually identified objective.

We realized that while we were starting out with a fairly tight program design, it was theoretical and would need to be adjusted along the way to accommodate reality. In addition, since our goal was for the districts to own and eventually sustain the work without us, we believed that it was vital that our core districts become our design partners as the initiative evolved.

The Noyce Foundation utilized four main vehicles to facilitate learning with the core districts:

- **Formative assessments** provided real-time feedback about how the Every Child a Reader and Writer model was working in schools and classrooms.⁵ Between 2000 and 2003, Ray Bacchetti—a former program officer at the Hewlett Foundation—and Stanford University graduate student Deborah Faigenbaum conducted three annual formative assessments analyzing program implementation in the core districts. Bacchetti and Faigenbaum visited classrooms using Writer’s Workshop and met with district and school participants in groups or individually.

Faigenbaum recalled, “Because the foundation brought us in as neutral observers, district and school participants felt able to share the good, the bad and the ugly about what was working and what wasn’t.” Bacchetti remarked, “It approached this program from the beginning as a co-learner in partnership with the districts. Its goal was to create upstream learning so that subsequent cohorts could learn from the early adopters. Whenever a problem developed, the foundation did not perceive it as a setback, but asked, ‘What can we learn in the process of solving it?’”

- **Regular meetings and focus groups with participants** provided time to discuss common problems with the work, share lessons learned and brainstorm potential solutions. All meetings promised confidentiality to attendees. The foundation relied heavily on the input from these unique meetings as it considered year-to-year revisions of the initiative. Commenting on this approach, the director of instruction in one core district observed, “The partnership with the Noyce Foundation is truly unique for our district. We know we can be completely honest with the program staff about our challenges. We do not have to worry about covering up the bumps in the road because it has always created ways for us to problem solve together.”
- **External evaluations** commissioned by the foundation analyzed Every Child a Reader and Writer’s impact on student achievement. Educational Data Systems Inc. was engaged to produce annual reports analyzing the percentage of students meeting the program’s specified grade-level standards for writing. The reports also compared the performance of fourth-graders in participating schools with those in other schools according to the California Standards Test of writing. In addition, researcher Suzanne Wilson from Michigan State University prepared a longitudinal study of the effects of the program’s professional development activities on teachers’ practices and beliefs and student achievement.

⁵ *Formative* assessment is done while a project is underway in order to provide feedback for ongoing activities and to inform any needed midcourse corrections. In contrast, *summative* assessment is done to measure a completed project’s impact.

- **School visits and case studies** offered opportunities to uncover both challenges and best practices as they emerged. Noyce Foundation staff and consultants often conducted classroom observations, and numerous participants mentioned their frequent presence in schools and classrooms and their ability to “take the pulse” of the initiative at any given time. The foundation also developed internal case studies to document and share best practices.

From all these learning activities, the Noyce Foundation made concerted efforts to reflect on progress, revisit the program’s design and translate lessons learned into ongoing program improvements.

Responding to lessons learned

As described above, the Noyce Foundation put in place a series of tools to help it learn about the rollout and effectiveness of Every Child a Reader and Writer at every step of the initiative, and it deliberately used what it was learning to make changes that would improve impact and effectiveness. Gerstein observed, “The program has looked different each year. Our ability to respond to what we learned about changing district and school needs has been one of the keys to success.”

In response to challenges that cropped up during implementation, the foundation made major changes to bolster the capacity of the core districts to successfully implement Every Child a Reader and Writer between the program’s start and 2006. Five examples follow.

Boosting foundation capacity and resources

During the first year of Every Child a Reader and Writer, consultant Sally Hampton of New Standards managed the program with significant support from Gerstein. “We were a great complement during the design phase given my systemic reform experience and Sally’s expertise about the content and teaching of writing,” Gerstein said. “But, as executive director, I could not sustain my level of involvement in the program’s day-to-day implementation. It also became clear that we needed someone with management experience and intimate knowledge of how school systems operate to lead the work.” Gerstein recruited Audrey Poppers, who was retiring as associate superintendent for one of the core districts, as a new program director in the summer of 2001.

The Noyce Foundation also hired several external consultants to strengthen its own internal capacity and knowledge. Several former members of Columbia University’s Teachers College and other literacy experts delivered training and advised the foundation on literacy curriculum, professional development and tools throughout the lifetime of the project. Other consultants were brought in to conduct research, document best practices, and problem solve with foundation staff and core district leaders and teachers.

Still, the addition of new schools each year stretched the foundation’s capacity to manage Every Child a Reader and Writer. Despite efforts to develop internal district capacity and support so that districts could assume greater responsibility for implementing the initiative, the need for support only increased. Contributing factors included teacher turnover in schools, school district budget constraints and lack of consistent leadership in the partner districts and schools.

Creating new teaching tools

Listening closely to feedback from its partners, the Noyce Foundation worked throughout the implementation of the initiative to create tools that would help teachers and district leaders improve writing instruction. Moreover, the foundation wanted these tools to prove valuable to other practitioners, researchers and funders engaged in literacy improvement efforts.

For example, during the program's first year, participants pointed out the need for an objective way to assess teachers' strengths and weaknesses in using the Writer's Workshop teaching model. Teachers wanted a better understanding of *what* to do, while principals and coaches wanted a tool to help them give constructive feedback to teachers and identify teachers' professional development needs. In response, Hampton designed an implementation "checklist." As the foundation continued to evaluate and refine the checklist with its school and district partners, the tool evolved into a more thorough "implementation scale." The scale helpfully detailed instructional practices at three different levels of teaching competence: getting started, effective and highly effective.

Replacing a core district

After year three (2002-03), the foundation removed one of the original five districts, Madison Elementary School District, from core district status and withdrew its funding. Seeing continued lackluster implementation by the district, the foundation concluded that its investment in Madison was not yielding sufficient impact. Poppers explained:

Pulling out of Madison was a difficult decision, but one that we had to make after providing extensive support. Despite the best attempts by the staff development school, the district and the foundation, we were unable to bring the quality of teaching in the staff development school up to an exemplary level. This was a "deal-breaker," since we didn't see how the school could foster strong levels of implementation in other schools in the district. The school had faced multiple challenges since the beginning—budget cuts, a merger with another school and trouble getting the right person in the coach position. While the district ceased to be a core district, district and school staff continued to attend our trainings—which we welcomed—and six schools have implemented Writer's Workshop in multiple grade levels.

In the 2002-03 school year, the Noyce Foundation allowed View Ridge Elementary School District, one of the 21 districts that had been participating in the initiative on a more limited basis, to take the open spot. By 2006, seven of the nine schools in the View Ridge district had adopted Writer's Workshop and several schools were also using the workshop model in reading and math.

Revising the staff development school model

Initially, the staff development school model—where one school in each district served as a model to others for best practices—proved quite useful. During the first three years of Every Child a Reader and Writer (2000-03), the staff development school teachers were the most adept at teaching Writer's Workshop in their districts. Thus, to expose teachers to examples of high-quality writing instruction, teacher training opportunities were held at the staff development school. The principal of one staff development school noted another benefit: "When many teachers saw the program's grade-level

standards for writing, they said, ‘My students cannot achieve at that level.’ Our school, which served the same kids with the same resources and had kids meeting those standards, took that excuse off the table.”

However, the staff development school model produced “diminishing returns,” according to Poppers. By the end of the initiative’s third year, the foundation saw that one of two problems developed as subsequent schools joined the initiative:

- many of the schools relied too heavily on the staff development school for guidance instead of developing their own capacity; or
- over time, some teachers at other schools had equaled or surpassed the level of practice in the staff development school.

One major change made in response to these findings was to drop the expectation that all of the teacher trainings would occur exclusively at the staff development school. At the foundation’s encouragement, coaches began to hold training sessions in other classrooms that were strong models.

Strengthening principal leadership

The foundation’s understanding of the role of the principal—and the importance of strong principal leadership and support—evolved over time. Poppers explained, “We had always thought that the principal’s leadership was important for the program’s success; we now realize that it is pivotal. When principals are strong instructional leaders, have deep content knowledge, and are able to build a supportive learning community, we see the deepest implementation of Writer’s Workshop, the transformation of instructional practice and the highest results for students.” On the other hand, the Noyce Foundation watched as the initiative floundered in schools with less engaged or skilled principals.

Further, the capacity needs of principals rose as the program rolled out. Poppers elaborated:

Schools in the first three years of the initiative were the “highflyers” in their districts—they had strong principals, enthusiastic teachers and a steadfast commitment to Every Child a Reader and Writer. As the program expanded, we sometimes encountered weaker site leadership and commitment, which came hand-in-hand with less motivated or organized staff capable of doing this work at the level required to transform practice. Although I had some reservations about some of these schools up front, mainly based on the principals’ readiness to lead, I felt I couldn’t block schools, given our joint commitments with the districts to roll out across all of the schools.

In response, the foundation made concerted efforts to strengthen principal leadership, including a new effort in the 2004-05 school year to get principals into classrooms to see Writer’s Workshop in action. Known as “structured school visits,” these quarterly visits included debriefing sessions for the principals to share observations and discuss implications for their schools’ work. In 2005-06, the foundation also hired two former principals who had led Every Child a Reader and Writer in their schools to work with Poppers part-time to help organize the structured school visits and provide additional on-site coaching to current principals.

Impact

The Noyce Foundation and its core district partners cited three areas of results where the impact of Every Child a Reader and Writer could be seen on teaching and learning:

- school and district adoption of the Every Child a Reader and Writer model;
- improvements in the quality of teaching; and
- gains in student achievement.

School and district adoption of the model

By the 2005-06 school year, 34 of the 61 elementary schools across the five districts used Writer's Workshop. Twenty-nine literacy coaches (part- or full-time) and roughly 600 teachers across the five districts had been trained as part of the initiative. However, only the smallest district, the Playa Azul district with four elementary schools, had adopted Writer's Workshop in every elementary school. Each of the other four districts added up to three new schools per year, although some districts did not add any new schools in some years (*see Exhibit 4 for implementation time line*). An additional 28 schools in 10 non-core districts used Writer's Workshop in at least one grade level.

However, the core districts had assumed only a limited role in the initiative's management. Coaches had not taken over responsibility for designing and offering induction training opportunities until the summer of 2005. District administrators had assumed few responsibilities for the initiative's ongoing coordination and oversight.

Reflecting on the initiative's rollout over nearly six years, foundation staff saw significant factors that had hindered systemwide implementation and broader district ownership, including:

- **Accountability pressures:** Increased pressure from federal and state accountability mandates affected implementation. At the federal level, the No Child Left Behind Act enacted by Congress in late 2001 placed ambitious expectations for annual improvements in student performance on schools. Meanwhile, California was working on changes to its statewide testing and school accountability system. Since both accountability systems relied primarily on math and reading test scores to reward or sanction districts and schools, interest in and resources for writing waned as educators began focusing on actions to improve results in these two subject areas.
- **State mandates and budget cuts:** Two state events occurring in 2003 had a marked impact on the initiative: 1) the California Board of Education mandated new, more prescriptive textbooks in reading; and 2) the state underwent a severe budget crisis. Poppers explained, "The textbooks adopted by the state had a very prescriptive approach that sparked a discontinuity with Every Child a Reader and Writer for districts at the same time they had fewer available resources to devote to the initiative. Many districts were unable, or unwilling, to make the case for expanding the program and were forced to cut coaches and professional development support."
- **Turnover:** Personnel turnover also hindered the foundation's scale-up/dissemination strategy for Every Child a Reader and Writer. Major district leadership transitions had occurred in all

of the core districts. Even with the foundation's insistence that districts keep principals in implementing schools for at least two years upon adopting Writer's Workshop, principal mobility represented a significant challenge. Indeed, by 2005-06, 50 percent of schools in the program were under new site leadership. The initiative also suffered the loss of key "informal leaders," such as teacher leaders, through retirements, transfers to different schools or downsizing, according to Poppers.

- **School district capacity:** The foundation encountered more challenges than it had anticipated in building schools' and districts' capacity to assume increasing responsibility for the initiative. For example, in year three (2002-03), the staff development school coaches were originally expected to take over from the foundation the design and delivery of training for teachers new to the program. This goal proved unrealistic, according to Poppers, because "many of the coaches had not developed the content knowledge, capacity and skills needed to lead the in-district training."

Instead, coaches apprenticed with the consultants and finally assumed responsibility for teacher training in the summer of 2005. Remarking on the transfer, Poppers said, "We still have a lot of variability among the coaches, due to previous experience and the length of time they have been involved in Every Child a Reader and Writer. However, we knew that coaches would have to take on the training at some point if we really wanted it to be sustainable over the long run."

- **Sustaining momentum:** Finally, the foundation underestimated the ability of school systems to successfully implement how teachers teach a subject area. One district administrator noted the challenge of "sustaining leadership focus over an extended period of time." She explained, "There are so many day-to-day distractions—budget constraints, state policy mandates—but there's also an organizational culture of shifting gears every two to three years. Longer time horizons are not an operational norm in public school systems."

Teaching quality

Every Child a Reader and Writer was universally regarded as having a positive impact on teaching quality. The director of instruction of one core district observed, "We've seen teachers taking on leadership roles, collaborating with colleagues and being receptive to one-on-one coaching—all things that were not previously part of our district's culture." The instruction director of another district added, "Writer's Workshop embodies what good teaching looks like—the practice of diagnosing student needs, differentiating instruction and assessing progress. It has raised the level of instruction in our district." A former staff development school principal noted, "It changed teachers' expectations of what kids can achieve. As the students moved up in the grades with more sophisticated skills, they pushed the teachers to continue deepening their practice."

Preliminary findings from Michigan State University's study of teacher practices in Every Child a Reader and Writer classrooms also were promising. Researcher Suzanne Wilson's analysis showed "clear evidence that teachers were using what they had learned during professional development opportunities in their classroom instruction. These changes in classroom practice seem to be leading to increased student achievement."

Perhaps one of the most promising indicators of how teachers viewed the utility of the Every Child a Reader and Writer model was that some schools had voluntarily adopted the intensive workshop model for reading and other content areas. Two districts—Playa Azul and San Cristobal—implemented Reader’s Workshop districtwide. During the summer of 2005, the Playa Azul district hired consultants from Columbia University to train its principals and teachers on strategies to improve students’ reading comprehension skills, and the school district invited a handful of participants from the other four core districts to attend.

Still, the Noyce Foundation remained concerned about the relatively weak teaching skills and content knowledge of the teaching force at large in all of its partner school districts. Teacher turnover made sustaining improvements and building on existing knowledge a constant challenge. The disconnect between the state’s prescriptive reading programs and the workshop model exacerbated the issue. Poppers remarked:

The design of Writer’s Workshop—which demands a lot of flexibility and specialized instruction from teachers—conflicts with the more prescriptive materials that are state-mandated for reading, which many teachers are inherently more comfortable using.

Some districts have seen all along that mechanically implementing Writer’s Workshop is not the goal of Every Child a Reader and Writer—it is really a model for focusing on individual student needs, improving instruction through collaboration and coaching, frequently assessing students’ progress toward meeting standards, and making adjustments as necessary. To the degree that we are unable to help every district and school to see the bigger picture behind Writer’s Workshop, the program will be limited to producing incremental changes or pockets of excellence instead of transforming practice on a broader scale.

Further, Bowers questioned the efficacy of continuing to scale up a project predicated on an internal coaching model. Citing the foundation’s lessons learned about the conditions required to enable effective coaching, Bowers explained:

We underestimated the amount of time and intensity of effort it would take to develop strong coaches. Coaching flies in the face of teacher culture, which resists colleagues assuming differentiated positions and critiquing one another. Even with strong principal leadership, many coaches are reluctant to point out a teacher’s deficiencies for fear of devastating a colleague. It is clear to me that internal coaching models will never get very far without a persistent external agent, such as a foundation—which, unfortunately, is unsustainable.

Student achievement

The core districts praised Every Child a Reader and Writer for ensuring that every student spent 60 minutes per day on writing; most California public school students spent one hour per week. Students enjoyed writing and were more fully engaged, while parents were pleased to see concrete student work and clear evidence of progress, according to several principals across the five districts. One district leader reported that her district had seen a positive impact on students’ reading performance in participating schools. “Students take less time to become independent readers; they read on their own in second grade instead of third grade,” she said.

The Noyce Foundation asked Educational Data Systems (EDS) to compare the performance of participating and nonparticipating students on the writing component of the fourth-grade California Standards Test for English Language Arts. Poppers explained, “The state test is a weaker assessment tool than our portfolios because it primarily measures students’ ability to use writing conventions (e.g., spelling, punctuation, etc.) versus testing their actual writing strategies and skills. But we have to recognize that the public, school boards and parents largely rely on the state tests as indicators of quality and performance.” Indeed, some district and school leaders suggested that earning greater support from the school board and district resources for Every Child a Reader and Writer would be easier if it could be demonstrated that the initiative resulted in more students performing well on the state test.

EDS found that, on average, there was no difference in student performance on the state’s fourth-grade writing assessment. Both groups of students—those who had participated in Every Child a Reader and Writer and those who hadn’t—earned a mean score of 4.26 (a score ranged from a low of 0 to a high of 8).

These averages, however, masked wide variation across the five core districts (*see Table 1 below*). On average, participating students outperformed other students in two districts (Playa Azul and Pacific Cove), while participating students underperformed other students in the three remaining districts (View Ridge, Las Casas and San Cristobal).

Table 1 California State Writing Assessment 2005 Results Mean student scores by core district						
	Average - All districts	Playa Azul	View Ridge	Pacific Cove	Las Casas	San Cristobal
Every Child a Reader and Writer participants	4.26	4.27	4.26	4.22	4.33	4.26
Non-Every Child a Reader and Writer participants	4.26	4.13	4.35	3.92	4.54	4.29

For this comparison, the sample has been adjusted to reflect the overall population of students participating in Every Child a Reader and Writer. Therefore, the statistical significance of scoring differences between the two groups could not be tested. See Exhibit 5 for the number of English-language learners in each district’s sample.

Source: Educational Data Systems Inc., *Technical Report 2005*.

The foundation concluded that these results suggested that Every Child a Reader and Writer had a cumulative, positive effect on students’ writing skills: with each additional year in the program, a student was likely to achieve a higher score on the state writing test (*see Table 2 next page*).

Table 2
California State Writing Assessment 2005 Results
 Mean student scores by number of years in Every Child a Reader and Writer

Number of Years in the Program	Number of Students	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	547	4.20	0.89
2	458	4.28	0.87
3	222	4.24	0.93
4	173	4.27	0.76
5	162	4.51	0.84
Total	1562	4.27	0.87

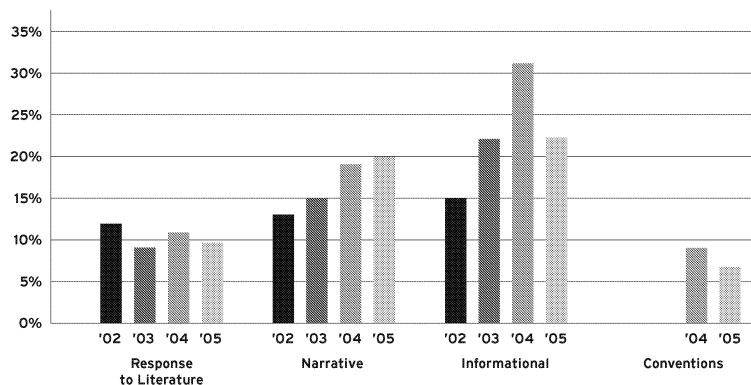
The difference between the mean score of students in their fifth year of Every Child a Reader and Writer and the mean score of students in their first, second or third years was “statistically significant” at the .05 level.

Source: Educational Data Systems Inc., *Technical Report 2005*, page 42.

EDS also analyzed student achievement results by the teachers’ levels of implementation: In a random sample of fourth-grade students, the data suggested that students in classrooms in which teachers had more effectively implemented Writer’s Workshop earned higher scores on the state’s writing assessment (*see Exhibit 6*).

The foundation’s staff was most concerned with student performance on Every Child a Reader and Writer’s specialized-designed assessments. According to Bowers and Poppers, the program’s unique grade-level standards were higher than the state’s writing standards and its assessments were more rigorous than the state’s writing test. Based on a random sample of student writing portfolios scored each year, the percentage of students meeting Every Child a Reader and Writer grade-level standards in writing had steadily increased from 2000 through 2004. However, at the end of the fifth year (2004-05), student performance plateaued (*see Table 3 below*).

Table 3
Students Attaining Every Child a Reader and Writer’s Grade-level Standards
 2002-2005



Source: The Noyce Foundation.

The 2005 testing results prompted a turning point for the foundation. Poppers explained, “As long as students were making slow and steady progress, the trustees seemed okay with our open-ended involvement. The dip in the 2005 results, however, renewed a sense of urgency around resolving the transfer of responsibility to the districts.”

Strategic review: Looking ahead

Indeed, the 2005 results prompted staff and trustees to undertake an internal strategic review of the initiative. True to the foundation’s way, Poppers convened a small focus group in January 2006 to revisit the foundation’s strategies and distill lessons learned to date. The group created a document to share at the foundation’s quarterly meetings for district staff and to solicit feedback.

It identified the following key issues as necessary to resolve:

- Was districtwide adoption of Every Child a Reader and Writer still realistic, or even desired?
- What would be a realistic time frame for transferring more (or complete) responsibility for the initiative to the districts?
- How could the foundation help districts sustain and deepen the work?
- How could the foundation most effectively share what it had learned about improving students’ literacy skills with other educators and what it had learned about systemic reform with other grantmakers?
- What should the foundation’s future grantmaking strategy for literacy be?

While the road ahead remained unclear, Poppers remained optimistic. She commented, “We’ve always worked hard to be good partners, and to be transparent and honest about what we were doing and why, and we were always willing to look at reality from the districts’ and schools’ point of view. I know we will continue our efforts to help the schools and districts to implement a sustainable model.”

EXHIBIT 1

CORE DISTRICT DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

	Playa Azul	View Ridge^a	Pacific Cove	San Cristobal	Las Casas
Students	3,534	9,075	11,714	13,962	10,013
African-American	1%	2%	6%	5%	3%
Asian	2%	6%	18%	19%	19%
Hispanic	38%	37%	40%	30%	30%
White	53%	46%	27%	32%	38%
Low-income	30%	28%	41%	45%	31%
English learner	27%	18%	29%	25%	24%
Schools	7	14	20	23	20
Elementary	4	9	16	16	16
Middle	1	2	3	3	4
High	1	2	0	2	0
Other	1	1	1	2	0
Staff					
Teachers	162	409	559	699	535
Administrators	14	37	35	54	37
Finances					
Per pupil expenditure	\$6,347	\$6,201	\$6,779	\$7,539	\$6,621
Performance & Accountability					
Percent Proficient English/Language Arts	51.2%	51.8%	49.0%	49.7%	54.9%
Percent Proficient Math	54.4%	52.8%	52.7%	50.0%	55.8%
CA API Score ^b	749	755	770	741	787
Met AYP ^c	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

^a Madison Elementary School District was originally one of the five core districts but was replaced by View Ridge in 2003.

^b The Academic Performance Index (API) is the cornerstone of California's Public Schools Accountability Act of 1999 (PSAA). The purpose of the API is to measure the annual academic performance and growth of districts and schools based on results of the standards-based California Standards Test and the norm-referenced California Achievement Tests. It is a numeric index (or scale) that ranges from a low of 200 to a high of 1000. The statewide API performance target for all districts and schools is 800. See www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/ap/apidescription.asp.

^c The federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 requires that California determine whether or not each public school and district is making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) toward the goal of having all students score proficient or above on standardized tests by 2014.

Sources: California Department of Education (www.cde.ca.gov) and Ed-Data Partnership (www.ed-data.k12.ca.us).

EXHIBIT 2

TIME LINE OF KEY EVENTS

DATE	EVENT
1999	<p>Noyce Foundation ends five-year reading program with 26 local school districts.</p> <p>Foundation trustees resolve that future work with public school systems will involve actors at all levels, not just teachers.</p> <p>New Standards introduces foundation leaders to research demonstrating that developing students' writing skills also strengthens their ability to read. Consultant Sally Hampton suggests Writer's Workshop as a promising model to improve teaching and learning in writing.</p> <p>Ann Bowers recommends that foundation's literacy work focus on writing instead of reading.</p>
January 2000	Amy Gerstein hired as executive director and asked to design broad strategy for new writing initiative, now called Every Child a Reader and Writer.
Summer 2000	<p>Noyce Foundation invites 26 districts of prior literacy program to apply to participate in its new literacy initiative.</p> <p>Foundation selects five core school districts: Las Casas, Madison, Pacific Cove, Playa Azul and San Cristobal. Remaining 21 districts invited to limited trainings.</p>
2000-01 School Year [Year 1]	<p>Every Child a Reader and Writer begins with one staff development school in each core district using Writer's Workshop.</p> <p>Writer's Workshop implementation checklist developed and used in schools.</p> <p><i>Schools participating in the initiative = 5</i></p>
2001-02 School Year [Year 2]	<p>Audrey Poppers hired to manage the initiative full-time in place of consultants.</p> <p>Writer's Workshop implementation scale designed to replace checklist and help gauge three levels of competency at teaching literacy (getting started, effective and highly effective).</p> <p>Federal No Child Left Behind Act adopted.</p> <p><i>Schools participating in the initiative = 13</i></p>
2002-03 School Year [Year 3]	<p>Madison dropped as a core district; View Ridge added.</p> <p>Teachers offered voluntary Saturday lecture series and an advanced summer institute for additional professional development.</p> <p><i>Schools participating in the initiative = 18</i></p>
2003-04 School Year [Year 4]	<p>California state mandates reading textbooks, while state fiscal crisis prompts budget cuts for education.</p> <p><i>Schools participating in the initiative = 25</i></p>
2004-2005 School Year [Year 5]	<p>Principals and coaches begin "structured school visits."</p> <p>Percentage of students meeting Every Child a Reader and Writer standards falls for the first time.</p> <p>Playa Azul school district hosts reading institute in summer 2005.</p> <p><i>Schools participating in the initiative = 28</i></p>
2005-2006 School Year [Year 6]	<p>School coaches lead new teacher training programs for the first time.</p> <p>Foundation hires two former principals to help strengthen support for Every Child a Reader and Writer among participating principals.</p> <p>Foundation's internal strategic review of the initiative begins in January 2006.</p> <p><i>Schools participating in the initiative = 34</i></p>

EXHIBIT 3
EVERY CHILD A READER AND WRITER
 Budget Overview (2000-2006)

Budget category	2000-01 actuals	2001-02 actuals	2002-03 actuals	2003-04 actuals	2004-05 actuals	2005-06 budget
Training for coaches and staff developers	25,784	53,341	186,262	154,674	104,523	96,342
Teacher training	68,637	246,213	497,334	122,763	138,502	136,502
Principal training	1,880	3,692	9,507	2,118	27,226	25,949
District administrator training	2,451	3,929	3,894	2,118	3,734	7,609
Grants to school sites	18,750	75,000	105,000	125,000	135,000	170,000
Grants to districts	200,000	321,623	445,010	385,000	365,000	395,000
Partner district teacher training	34,369	64,579	73,367	54,805	97,711	99,230
Partner district principal training	21,792	43,808	21,563	605	178	1,300
Portfolio assessment (1)	0	65,706	25,024	118,864	154,760	310,006
Documentation	18,400	59,088	44,520	800	0	0
Tools (2)	51,600	163,734	39,107	259	39,344	26,908
Operating expenses	138,955	484,949	344,919	295,819	266,184	388,751
Total:	\$582,620	\$1,585,660	\$1,795,507	\$1,262,824	\$1,332,162	\$1,657,597

(1) The first portfolio scoring was in June 2002, so it fell in the 2001-02 program year. The following summer's portfolio scoring took place in July 2003, so it fell in the 2003-04 program year. For that reason, portfolio expenses in the 2002-03 program year appear low.

(2) Tool development costs were paid from a separate Foundation category (not ECRW) beginning in 2004-05.

Source: The Noyce Foundation.

EXHIBIT 4**IMPLEMENTATION TIME LINE BY CORE SCHOOL DISTRICT**

School District	Total Number of Elementary Schools	Cohort I 2000-01	Cohort II 2001-02	Cohort III 2002-03	Cohort IV 2003-04	Cohort V 2004-05	Cohort VI 2005-06	Every Child a Reader and Writer Total Schools
Playa Azul	4	1	2	1	-	-	-	4
View Ridge	9	-	-	2	2	2	1	7
Pacific Cove	16	1	2	-	3	-	2	8
San Cristobal	16	1	3	1	1	-	-	6
Las Casas	16	1	2	1	1	1	3	9
TOTAL	61	4	9	5	7	3	6	34

Source: The Noyce Foundation.

EXHIBIT 5

STUDENT PERFORMANCE DATA

Fourth Grade California State Writing Assessment 2005 Results Mean student scores by participating school district

	Average	Parent Education Index	Percent English Learners
ALL DISTRICTS			
Every Child a Reader and Writer Schools	4.26	3.00	21.80
Other Schools	4.26	3.07	27.64
Playa Azul			
Every Child a Reader and Writer Schools	4.27	3.17	29.35
Other Schools	4.13	2.53	42.31
View Ridge			
Every Child a Reader and Writer Schools	4.26	3.16	17.70
Other Schools	4.35	3.09	26.10
Pacific Cove			
Every Child a Reader and Writer Schools	4.22	3.04	19.82
Other Schools	3.92	2.69	30.57
Las Casas			
Every Child a Reader and Writer Schools	4.33	2.98	25.57
Other Schools	4.54	3.29	25.03
San Cristobal			
Every Child a Reader and Writer Schools	4.26	3.04	21.23
Other Schools	4.29	2.98	27.02

Parent Education Index is a measure of parent education (range: low 1 – high 5). Percent English Language Learners shows the percentage of English language learners. Writing assessment score range: low 0 – high 8.

For this analysis, the sample was adjusted to reflect the overall population of students in Every Child a Reader and Writer schools. Therefore, statistical significance could not be tested.

Source: Educational Data Systems Inc., *Technical Report 2005*.

EXHIBIT 6
EVERY CHILD A READER AND WRITER
Teacher Implementation Levels

Fourth Grade California State Writing Assessment 2005 Results
Mean scores for students by teacher implementation score

Teacher Implementation Score	Number	Mean
1	67	4.17
2	137	4.23
3	94	4.26
4	35	4.49

“Number” represents the sample size. Means are adjusted to match student population demographics in Every Child a Reader and Writer schools. Therefore, statistical significance could not be tested.

Writing assessment score range: low 0 – high 8. Teacher Implementation score range: low 1 – high 4.

Source: Educational Data Systems Inc., *Technical Report 2005*, page 10.

LESSONS FOR EDUCATION PHILANTHROPY

This case study suggests four important lessons for grantmakers seeking to increase their impact:

- **Create deliberate ways to learn from your grantmaking.**

The Noyce Foundation relied on rigorous and constant evaluations—formative, summative, internal and external—and structured focus groups with school district partners to improve its strategy over time. “The program has looked different each year,” observed the foundation’s executive director. “Our ability to respond to what we learned about changing district and school needs has been one of the keys to success.”

- **Tailor grants to support grantees—and consider how grantees will sustain efforts after the grant period.**

“Since our goal was for the districts to own and eventually sustain the work without us, we believed that it was vital that our core districts become our design partners as the initiative evolved,” said trustee Ann Bowers. Between 2000 and 2006, the foundation made major changes to bolster the capacity of its school district partners to successfully implement Every Child a Reader and Writer.

- **Learning and improvement require curiosity, humility and a commitment to act on lessons learned.**

According to one grantee, “The partnership with the Noyce Foundation is truly unique. We know we can be completely honest with the program staff about our challenges. We do not have to worry about covering up the bumps in the road because it has always created ways for us to problem solve together.” As one of its tools for tracking progress, the foundation hosted regular meetings and focus groups with participants to discuss common problems with the work, share lessons learned and brainstorm potential solutions.

- **Find the right balance between learning and accountability.**

Doing so is difficult, and the Noyce Foundation’s trustees and staff frequently revisited this issue. Recalled Bowers, “We knew that we would be engaged beyond the typical three-year foundation horizon, but we had no idea how long it would take to build the districts’ capacity to lead and sustain the work on their own. But we were always clear that our continued support hinged on additional schools adopting Every Child a Reader and Writer each year and increased student performance.”

SELF-STUDY QUESTIONS

Questions to consider while reading this case about effective education grantmaking:

1. What was the Noyce Foundation’s theory of change—the assumptions, activities and expected outcomes—for its Every Child a Reader and Writer Initiative? Was it a plausible theory? Why or why not?
2. Was it realistic for the core school districts in the initiative to “assume increasing responsibility for the initiative’s coordination”? Should the foundation have been less ambiguous about the ending date for its involvement?
3. What evidence did you see in the case that *innovation and constant learning*, one of GFE’s Principles for Effective Education Grantmaking, were part of the Noyce Foundation grantmaking strategy and ongoing work with the Every Child a Reader and Writer Initiative? Were they effective in this regard? Why or why not?
4. What would you recommend that the Noyce Foundation do next regarding the Every Child a Reader and Writer Initiative?
5. Is your organization clear about what it needs to learn from its grantmaking in order to evaluate its effectiveness and improve its work over time? What structures are in place to facilitate learning and innovation with grantees—and are these sufficient?
6. What specific lessons and insights did you gain from this case and how might they apply to your grantmaking work in education?

EPILOGUE

During the Noyce Foundation’s January 2006 strategic review of Every Child a Reader and Writer, people close to the initiative shared their reflections and expressed viewpoints about the road ahead:

Every Child a Reader and Writer has had a powerful impact in our schools. Our students love writing now. Principals and teachers tell me about students who want to skip recess to revise their latest piece of writing. Parents love reading their children’s stories and feel that they are gaining important skills. Teachers are collaborating together in new and important ways, such as lesson planning, diagnosing student needs and assessing student work. And teachers now believe that every student can achieve high standards, as long as we educators take the time to meet all children where they are and help them attain new levels.

— **Director of instruction**
Playa Azul Unified School District

Every Child a Reader and Writer is unique among systemic reforms because it involves working on the system and in the classroom—the curriculum piece—at the same time. I truly believe this is the only reason why we’ve made as much progress as we have.

As a foundation, we weren’t afraid to get our hands dirty with an operating program. We’ve been transparent and authentic in our commitment to be co-learners with the school systems. This has been long and hard work, and quite resource intensive on our part. This model is not for every grantmaker, but we believe that as a result of this effort, the Noyce Foundation has dramatically improved instructional practice around literacy in the Bay Area. The challenge now is to help the schools and districts sustain and deepen the work.

— **Amy Gerstein, former executive director**
Noyce Foundation

I have mixed feelings about next steps. On one hand, I wish the foundation could stay engaged in Every Child a Reader and Writer for another five years. Then we would have 10 years of solid longitudinal data that we could share with policymakers to convince them of the value of this type of initiative in helping students meet high standards and in improving instructional practice in a specific content area. On the other hand, I recognize that it would take a tremendous amount of foundation resources to do that. Another option would be for us to gradually step back from our operating role over the next two years, let the districts lead the work, and identify high-leverage ways to support them, such as bringing in outside experts or convening meetings to share best practices.

— **Audrey Poppers, program director**
Every Child a Reader and Writer

As the program has expanded, I see a “watering of intent.” Schools are joining Every Child a Reader and Writer more by mandate than from a real commitment to change instructional practice and enable all students to achieve high standards. And our newer schools appear to have weaker site leadership, which leads to thin implementation in the classroom, thin coaching and, ultimately, thinner and thinner results for students. Unless we are able to help principals develop and distribute leadership in a way that improves practice, student performance will not improve and people will say, “See, this did not work” and stop.

— **Former principal at a participating school and consultant to the Noyce Foundation**

Every Child a Reader and Writer is an example of how foundations can help build “education capital” in the field. By “education capital” I mean creation of the knowledge, materials and results required to outlive the life of the grant. So many times, these “assets” disappear as soon as the funder’s money disappears. The Noyce Foundation has struck the right balance of offering a compelling vision, sustained focus, constant pressure and helpful support. I am convinced that the program has all the ingredients to insure a relatively long half-life.

That said, I do wonder how long that half-life will be in different settings. Is the districtwide change the foundation seeks too ambitious? It thoughtfully designed the initiative based on existing research, responded to district and school needs as expressed, and has stayed the course. But will the program really transform the fabric of the core districts—as originally intended—or just a handful of teachers who have been *personally* transformed and won’t teach writing any other way?

— **Ray Bacchetti, scholar-in-residence, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching**

In June 2006, Anne Bowers shared the outcomes of the Noyce Foundation's strategic review of Every Child a Reader and Writer and her final reflections:

The foundation had long looked on Every Child a Reader and Writer as a lab for showing how writing and reading could be significantly improved through focused and sustained teacher professional development. Our goal was to disseminate the results and the tools developed.

While we always had conversations with superintendents about our intention to pull back and let them take on increasing responsibility, in retrospect, the conversations should have been more explicit starting at about year three. But at that point, we and the district leaders were so wrapped up in the day-to-day challenges of disseminating Every Child a Reader and Writer within the districts, that the subject of transferring more responsibility to the districts either got lost in the shuffle or seemed too theoretical. Now it appears as if full dissemination in the five core districts is unrealistic, largely due to insufficient or weak leadership capacity in the schools and districts.

So, the foundation was presented with an interesting dilemma. I like to use the gym analogy. Many people today will not go to the gym without a personal trainer. The Noyce Foundation has been the personal trainer for these core districts for the past five and a half years. However, it is just not sustainable for us to keep doing things for them. The question is, "How can we get districts to develop enough muscle on their own so they can create a self-managing and sustaining network?"

Since it was not our intention to simply be the managers and funders of a professional development initiative that appeared to have reached a level of maturity, the foundation's trustees determined that this was the time to turn the program over to the districts. The trustees authorized a two-year transition period in order to finish up some tool development and to give districts time to organize. The core districts in particular are now engaged in a planning process with our staff to determine how to best continue the work. This will be an intensive effort in school year 2006-07. In year 2007-08, the foundation will have pulled to the sidelines, serving as a coach when needed, and the following year the districts will be managing the program on their own.

Although creating sustainable improvement in teaching and therefore student learning is difficult, we have shown that it can be done with significant, persistent support and leadership from an outside agent. The internal conditions that enable progress are that the leadership of both the district and the schools are committed to supporting continuous improvement of teachers' practice and content knowledge and that the state educational funding enables schools to make decisions about what approaches to use.

We are encouraged that in one district with a new superintendent who wanted to move to a prescriptive reading and writing program, the teachers and principals supported Every Child a Reader and Writer so effectively that they convinced him to stay the course. It is also worth noting that a number of the non-core districts who received no direct support and much less professional development have continued to expand their use of the program with very satisfying results.

Moving the initiative to the customers to manage should teach us all another set of valuable lessons.

NOTES

PRINCIPLES FOR

Effective Education Grantmaking

- principle
no. 1

Discipline and Focus

In education, where public dollars dwarf private investments, a funder has greater impact when grantmaking is carefully planned and targeted.
- principle
no. 2

Knowledge

Information, ideas and advice from diverse sources, as well as openness to criticism and feedback, can help a funder make wise choices.
- principle
no. 3

Resources Linked to Results

A logic-driven “theory of change” helps a grantmaker think clearly about how specific actions will lead to desired outcomes, thus linking resources with results.
- principle
no. 4

Effective Grantees

A grantmaker is effective only when its grantees are effective. Especially in education, schools and systems lack capacity and grantees (both inside and outside the system) may require deeper support.
- principle
no. 5

Engaged Partners

A funder succeeds by actively engaging its partners— the individuals, institutions and communities connected with an issue—to ensure “ownership” of education problems and their solutions.
- principle
no. 6

Leverage, Influence and Collaboration

The depth and range of problems in education make it difficult to achieve meaningful change in isolation or by funding programs without changing public policies or opinions. A grantmaker is more effective when working with others to mobilize and deploy as many resources as possible in order to advance solutions.
- principle
no. 7

Persistence

The most important problems in education are often the most complex and intractable, and will take time to solve.
- principle
no. 8

Innovation and Constant Learning

Even while acting on the best available information—as in Principle #2—a grantmaker can create new knowledge about ways to promote educational success. Tracking outcomes, understanding costs and identifying what works—and what doesn’t—are essential to helping grantmakers and their partners achieve results.

Grantmakers for Education improves the knowledge, networks and effectiveness of education philanthropy. By connecting effective education strategies with effective grantmaking strategies, we help foundations and donors leverage their investments to improve achievement and opportunities for all students. Founded in 1995, we are a national association of over 200 philanthropies that connects grantmakers with knowledgeable leaders, promising programs, experienced colleagues and actionable research.

