

# *What Can Business Do to Help the Schools Improve?*

*A panel discussion among education leaders and business experts*

Business wants better performance from the schools—and business wants to help. How can it do so most effectively? The Public Policy Institute sponsored a panel discussion on this topic during The Business Council's 2001 Annual Meeting. The moderator was R. Carlos Carballada of M&T Bank, former Chancellor of the Board of Regents and now chairman of The Business Council's Education Committee. Here is an edited transcript of the panel's discussion.

## **Chancellor Emeritus Carballada:**

*We assembled this panel discussion to help businesses that wish to get involved in education find a way to do so. Business is very concerned about the education system, and very much willing to help. But it's critical that if businesses do get involved, they do it in the right way, do the right things, and actually help the children achieve these educational goals.*

*Cliff Janey, as superintendent of schools in Rochester you've been involved with businesses for a number of years through an organization called the Rochester Business Education Alliance. Tell us a bit about that group's genesis, and whether they've been helpful to you in their nine or 10 years of existence; tell us whether that whole effort has been a help or a hindrance.*

## **Dr. Janey:**

The Rochester Business Education Alliance has been around for 10 or 11 years. I think their origin had to do with a view that education can best be seen as an economic development issue, not a social issue, for the city and the county and the region. They also recognized that education could no longer just be

## THE PANELISTS

- ◆ **Bill J. Clark**, vice president at State Farm Insurance's North Atlantic regional office in Ballston Spa.
- ◆ **Todd Feigenbaum**, managing partner of Exemplar LLC in Glens Falls, and a school board member.
- ◆ **Dr. Clifford Janey**, superintendent of schools for Rochester.
- ◆ **Steve Kussman**, executive director of the Utility Business Education Coalition.
- ◆ **Stanley S. Litow**, vice president of corporate community relations for IBM, and president of the IBM International Foundation.
- ◆ **Dr. Renee Young**, principal of C.S. 21 in Brooklyn, which won a 2001 Pathfinder Award from The Business Council for rapid improvement in educational performance.

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somebody else’s business. They felt a great need to form that partnership, and it has helped tremendously.

Let me cite three roles, among others, that business organizations can play in terms of moving an educational agenda.

One is an advocacy role. In 1995, when I came to Rochester, it was a school district known for innovation and experimentation. But I thought it was idea-rich and focus-poor. An idea could come up from any direction, and people would say, “let’s try it.” We didn’t have a lot of institutional focus, organizational focus, or program focus. Part of the problem was the governance structure of the city school district. Rochester had a lot of board members at that time who’d served well over a decade; one had served close to 10 years. That has its ups and downs.

The mayor, the City Council, the members of the business community, and other leaders thought we needed to get the governance structure right in Rochester. Business strongly supported legislation proposed by Assemblyman Gantt and Senator Alesi. Governor Pataki came to Rochester to sign the bill in 1997 and spoke to the public about the need for the superintendent and district leaders to do their job unencumbered by micromanagers.

This bill gave the superintendent of schools in Rochester the opportunity to choose his or her own senior staff, without the approval of the Board of Education. This brought the situation a little closer to the superintendent being not only an educational leader, but also responsible for a large organization and behaving more like an executive officer. It also raised the expectation in terms of accountability, knowing that I could appoint staff unencumbered by “who-you-know” considerations.

So the role of business organizations at large in Rochester in an advocacy setting has really made a difference. There are couple of other needs I’d like to highlight.

For one, I want the business community to maintain a relentless focus on the benefits of early childhood education. When we pre-screen our kindergarten students in five areas—vision, hearing, cognition, language, and motor skills—and they go on to first grade, we know that if we don’t have a curriculum that’s fairly broad and, especially, deep in those five areas, a third of those kids will find their way to be classified for special education. This is especially true if we don’t offer the arts (for fine motor skills) and phys ed in a very thorough way in elementary schools. We find that students don’t have the capacity to write, and they’re referred to special education.

It’s an important role for the business community to remain advocates for public education in particular areas that have long-term effects. The better we do

for kids coming into the schools, the better the lasting benefits for everybody.

The third area of advocacy is to continue to advocate for quality choices to help parents stay within the public schools. We have just begun an effort to convert a third of the schools in Rochester to become charter schools. The idea of creating choices within public school districts will create the kind of market dynamic, the competition in our schools, that will be healthy. More important than the competition is that parents can make choices that are quality choices, not just choice for the sake of choice.

Besides advocacy, the other two areas where I think business can make a contribution are organizational development, and systems planning. The business community can help us tremendously in terms of having principals understand, and be comfortable with their understanding of, data and data application—understanding how data can inform instruction, how you can make changes in instructional practice based on your knowledge of student performance data, and how student performance data should be used for accountability.

In terms of program planning and implementation, the Rochester Business Education Alliance, with the city school district, created a certificate of employability. It addresses five areas in which students will have to demonstrate their competency, and we give this certificate at graduation in addition to a diploma. It gives students special standing when they go out to apply for a job in high school, after it, or while in high school. About one-fourth of our new high school graduates are now earning a certificate of employability; I expect that to double over the next few years.

So I'd categorize how business can help in these key roles: program planning and implementation; organizational development and systems planning, especially with respect to the use of data; and maintaining advocacy for public education.

**Mr. Carballada:** *Dr. Young, we were chatting this morning about your school's accomplishments. Your school made the largest positive increase this year on New York City-wide tests. I'm curious: Was there any business involvement in that effort? How important was it? What was done? Where do you think the principal can benefit from business involvement, and what advice do you have for a business owner or manager that might wish to do something for the schools?*

**Dr. Young:**

I don't know where to begin! I have alliances, partnerships with businesses in New York City, they've been most helpful. I want to talk about human resources. Many times, my teachers will say, are we going to get donations from business? And yes, they're important. We take used computers, furniture, paper—whatever businesses want to give, we'll take it. But there's a larger picture here, and I feel

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First of all, our children need human connections. One of the most beneficial relationships that we have is with a company that provides mentoring to our students. Such companies allow our students to visit the businesses, and tour the institutions. This is extremely important for our children. I don't believe in career “day.” I believe in career *year*, where people from various professions come in from various businesses, and talk to the children, develop links with them, establish relationships, spark an interest in the area—so if students are thinking about becoming an entrepreneur, here they have the link with someone who has accomplished that goal. So the human element is so extremely important.

This doesn't have to be direct contact. Businesses have also supported senior citizens who come into the building to mentor our students. The businesses organize and sponsor the senior citizens. So the business that can't send its employees in, can help develop the organization so other outside help comes in. All of these human connections are terribly important.

Of course we always need business in an advisory capacity. Businesses are light years ahead of the Board of Education, and I have to say that. They are. We don't know anything about forecasting, consumer satisfaction—those are alien thoughts to us in the school system. We don't know anything about marketing. Businesses can train us in those strategies—looking at trends, predicting, forecasting. So the expertise of business, we really, really need, and those relationships should be developed. And we've had that in the past.

Long-range planning is another area in which businesses can help. They definitely can teach us how to plan using data, and we need the help.

In addition, a very important area is the recruitment and selection of staff. We need businesses to show us how to truly assess candidates. When I look at a resume, interview the person, I'm looking for their experience in teaching. But in talking to various business organizations, I have learned that there are definite skills that you look for that would help us define what a truly successful teacher would look like.

We also need businesses to tell us what you want your employees to look like in terms of their proficiencies—so we can start to infuse those career skills in our curricula. We need that connection, we need to be told. For example, teamwork, I know, is an expected outcome for students who graduate and come into the business world. We need help identifying other areas that are especially marketable when our students graduate.

Technical skills—we definitely need help in technology. My organization in my school has attempted to set up communication centers to link home and parents; we need help establishing those centers. We're also working on a project

at a large housing complex that feeds into our school. Most of our kids come from that project, so we're looking for businesses that could work with the housing authority to set up a reading center in the housing project, along with a communication center for the parents.

I also have businesses that support students who go on college tours that we schedule in June—something many kids can't afford on their own.

The investment of businesses in the schools is extremely important. I can't think of any area that would not benefit. But I also feel, after 35 years of working in one school, looking at the decline and growth of the community, I really believe that the business and the school community must join with every institution in the community—the churches, the hospitals, the police, the local businesses—to really have an impact on community development. You spoke of economic development, Dr. Janey, and I feel that individual schools need to improve, but for improvement to be widespread, we need to look at community development. If the youth will truly be affected, we need to take one block at a time, with all those agencies in the community working together—that will have the greatest impact on student development.

**Mr. Carballada:** *Stan Litow served in the New York City chancellor's office and as leader of the Education Priorities Panel, a New York City education reform group. He now handles education issues for IBM, whose CEO, Lou Gerstner, has been an educational reformer for years, hosting education summits and drawing the attention of the business and education communities to the need for higher standards and accountability. Stan is also in charge of IBM's long-term Reinventing Education reform strategy.*

*Stan, you've been an educator and a businessman. IBM has hundreds of educational efforts going on all over the world. But suppose I happen to be a small businessman, I don't have the resources, the experience, the talent that IBM has; and I really wish to do something, because I think educational achievement is very critical for our country in the long term. I can only do simple things, but I want to do something that is going to have a long-term effect. What kinds of advice would you give to the thousands of small businesses that we have in this state and this country?*

**Mr. Litow:**

That's a very tough question. Because most of what you hear about relationships between businesses and schools overwhelmingly involves larger businesses, multinationals and the like. But there's a big role for small businesses to play, in areas that have been carved out by other panelists.

I want to talk about where we are now, and where it can go. A key thing to remember, is that nationally, we spend \$370 billion a year on K-12 education—and last year, all of the private giving from businesses and foundations to public K-12 added up to less than 1 percent of all the public monies that were spent.

So if you think that business is going to make its overwhelming impact displacing public money, you're sadly mistaken. That's not going to happen.

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A second key thing for all businesses and others to understand: Education is a very complex business. Many of us are in different kinds of businesses—we know the complexities of information technology, banking and insurance, telecommunications industry, and so on. Education is also a complicated business. People would like to have a simple answer. They’d like you to get it into one sentence; that would be great. That’s why it’s tempting to grab at a simple answer, a magic bullet—vouchers, competition, or something. That’s a serious mistake. Because complicated problems require complex solutions.

As to your question on what businesses can do:

Publicly, businesses can support the schools. That means when local school districts stand up foursquare in support of high standards, effective measurement, and accountability, that businesses stand behind them. That’s important because there are people that are opposed to standards and tests. All polls say that’s only about 5-10 percent of public, but they’re vocal.

Businesses can get up in their community, can get up at school board meetings and through their business associations, and support high standards.

Second, they can support it on a community level. When you hire someone out of high school, in addition to seeing a diploma, ask to see a transcript. And have a discussion with that student about what kind of academic courses and preparation they’ve taken. Companies like State Farm and IBM and others, after the national education summit in 1996, signed pledges to review transcripts before hiring—to send a message that it’s not just a diploma that matters, it’s what kinds of preparation kids take.

Ask for the report card on summer or after-school hires. Have a conversation with that kid about academic performance. Sure, we get the benefits of young people who come into work in businesses, but have an academic conversation with that kid—that’s a responsibility that businesses have.

Mentoring, which has already been talked about, is also critical. IBM has 5,000 employees who serve as electronic mentors. They not only provide service in the schools, but in an ongoing way they support standards and improved academics. They provide ongoing support. Other businesses can do that, and larger businesses can help them do that. IBM helps other businesses that want to get involved in mentoring.

Lastly, visit your local school. That isn’t all that hard to do. Businesses can also join local parent associations—that’s not impossible. Send in your dues to a local PTA without actually being a parent, and think about what you can do individually and with your employees to support education.

Many businesses have matching grants programs, where they support

contributions into the community. Not many of them include contributions into K-12 as eligible matching grants programs. IBM's program for K-12 matching grants is a \$10 million program. Most business's matching grant programs are just for higher education, for employees' alma mater. There are a lot of concrete things small businesses can do.

Larger businesses, and business coalitions in states, can be critically important in supporting school reform activities. If you look at the research about which states have made the largest amount of headway over the longest period of time, by the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the answer is North Carolina and Texas. Read Rand's analysis of these results. They credit the long-term involvement and leadership of the business community in bringing about those changes.

Cliff chaired the Council of Great Cities Schools, which did a survey of its members and asked, among a wide range of constituents, which were the most and least helpful. Business was #1. So business is viewed positively by schools. And there's lots businesses can do. They're already doing a lot, but the recent events and the challenges ahead require us to do a lot more.

**Mr. Carballada:** *Todd Feigenbaum is a businessman in Glens Falls, a parent of kids in those schools, a long-time school reform researcher, and an advocate of world-class standards for all. Todd, The Business Council has a wonderful reputation in this state. We have been supporting higher standards very actively, trying to get our members to support that effort. But I can't tell you I'm totally satisfied with our efforts. What do we need to do as a Business Council to get the businesses to take that first step of involvement? Many of them, as you know, are in the business of survival. They're very focused on their company, its efforts, its resolve to succeed; sometimes these things like education seem to be on the side and don't get any attention. How do we state the case to get a groundswell for real active involvement in our schools by businesses?*

**Mr. Feigenbaum:**

Building a groundswell is a key. One thing businesses can do is encourage employees to get more involved with their schools. There are countless studies that show, the more parent involvement we have in schools, the higher our student achievement.

Another element is for business people and all parents and taxpayers to become better consumers of education—to have higher expectations for their schools, to support their schools but, at the same time, hold their feet to the fire so that they rise to those standards that have been set, they become committed to it.

A very practical way to achieve a lot of the benefits that Renee was discussing is to get more business people to serve on school boards.

Business people have many of the skills and backgrounds that school boards desperately need, because schools are among the most change-resistant

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institutions in American society. And they don’t have the expertise that’s required to go through the systemic change that they need to undertake. Business people can provide that kind of expertise and guidance to help schools become high-performance organizations, where accountability measures can be built in. The whole notion of accountability is a foreign concept in most school districts. They don’t know how to use the data. Or they begin to use the data, and they get very worried about how it’s going to be used outside. The business community can help them find positive, constructive ways to look at their strengths and weaknesses, to do strategic planning, to set high-level goals.

Too often, boards of education that I’m familiar with put themselves in reactive situations. They react to problems as they arise, they put out fires, but they rarely do long-term planning, rarely set any long-range goals for their district, and most school districts have no culture to support the long-term planning and organizational change that are required to make these things happen.

Make no mistake, serving on a school board can be the least-appreciated job you’ll ever have. It’s lots of work. Many business people are afraid to serve, thinking, what do I know about education? But the superintendent and administrators are there for that. It’s the organizational/management expertise that business people can bring to that.

**Mr. Carballada:** *Let’s turn now to Bill Clark of State Farm Insurance. Ed Rust, the CEO of State Farm, is a national leader in education reform and chairs the Business Roundtable’s education reform initiative. Bill was charged by Ed Rust with driving education reform issues for State Farm in its North Atlantic region. Bill was an elementary school principal for eight years, and has a personal passion and commitment to education. Bill, tell us a bit about what State Farm is doing, how you’re trying to move this education reform process forward.*

**Bill Clark:**

When I sit here, I think: One thing I think we need to do is get into science research ourselves. I have the pleasure of sitting on the education task force with you and Todd; he has a lot of knowledge. We should be trying to develop a pill to take Todd’s knowledge, and put it into our heads. And I’m not sure people understand what we have here with Renee Young. In her area, she works where it’s all under-privileged, with low-performing schools—and she has an extremely high-performing school right in the middle of that. What she does is very magical. So we should do some research to clone her.

I’m a former educator. I was in education for 13 years, eight or nine as an elementary school principal, but that was 16 years ago. About 16 months ago, our



chairman, Bill Rust, said, “Bill, engage. Get out there and do something about it.”

I thought that it would be a snap. I’ll get a few people together, we’ll get running. But this is the squishiest, squirmiest thing I’ve every tried to put my arms around, and I, like you, have a passion for education, and I know we have to do something about it.

We’re going to work with Margarita Mayo at The Business Council, and Carlos and the whole task force, in putting together a program called “Engage.” This is to help small businesses and large businesses cut some time off the learning curve, and really learn how to engage in educational excellence and education reform issues. I’ve learned a lot in six months; if I could start over, I’d cut some time off it. It will probably take us two or three months to get this put together. Then, what we’d like to do is have some meetings around the state with interested business partners, and have some small group discussions on what you can do to engage. In the case of big companies like State Farm or IBM, it’s a lot easier to do. But big companies like IBM and State Farm, and any other large organizations, need to reach out to small businesses and help small businesses form coalitions and partnerships to engage. My people will be excited.

Let me tell you a bit about what we do, to give you some idea of what organizations can do.

State Farm is lucky to have 2,500 employees and agents throughout the state. Our program, Partners in Education, lets our employees get involved with the schools. That’s quite successful. We also sponsor, and even small businesses can do this, 60 teachers in a program to get their national board certification—because those teachers tend to be better teachers, and their children learn better.

One of the things we’ve learned in our travels is that there are two issues in education reform:

First there is a support issue: throw a little money at it. If the principal says the school needs computers, you give them money for computers or some used computers. But the second level—and what we really need to do—is get involved in systemic changes for the schools.

You can send money, or you can send people. Probably the most important to do is send the people. To get that job done, business leaders don’t need Todd’s knowledge, but you have to have a commitment to it. You have to inspire people who work within your organization that have passion for education to get involved. Maybe some money will follow that, but it’s really a personal commitment. It’s not easy, but it’s fun, fascinating, and rewarding.

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We educate our workforce, and get them very involved. Next week, we’ve got seminars at our office that teach parents how to get the most out of parent-teacher conferences. We sponsor and run diversity-training programs for local schools, for students and teachers, to help them get more comfortable with issues surrounding diversity.

**Mr. Carballada:** *Bill, thanks. And thanks to The Business Council for your support this year in the effort to raise academic standards in New York State.*

*Steve Kussman’s organization, the Utility Business Education Coalition (UBEC), was formed, and is supported, by utilities nationwide. UBEC works in partnership with the National Association of Manufacturers and with The Business Council to help establish business involvement with High Schools That Work in New York State. Steve, you’ve been involved in New York State for some time now; I think you have 12 of these experiments going on across the state to see what effect you can have with your program in improving the performance of children in high school. What role do you see for business?*

**Mr. Kussman:**

UBEC is a business organization created to work with schools to bring about the accelerated, standards-based change that The Business Council has worked so hard for during the last decade. This state now has benchmark standards in place for graduation, and at other grade levels. These form a fabric of expectation that tie back to economic goals of New York and our country.

When New York adopted its standards, you set targets for achievement for schools in this state that were pretty aggressive. That was really based on a methodology over time that worked with the business community, other constituencies, higher education—to set some benchmarks for student achievement, with standards to match. You’re converting what had been a two-tier diploma system to a single tier, at a higher standard.

And The Business Council has very much put itself on the line by saying, “this is where New York needs to be.” It’s really tremendous leadership on your part. It affects you on the state and local level, because you’ve got about 700 school districts in the state, all of which are struggling with this dilemma.

The state Education Department has reached out nationwide to identify, highlight and bring into play those effective practices that are known to raise student achievement. And this is being done without any additional resources, so that was even more daring.

Research shows that the High Schools That Work program, which has been in operation since 1987 and is now in 26 states and at 1,200 locations around the country, is the most productive whole-school reform methodology for secondary school students. It is the one that provides the most cost-effective teacher professional development.

My organization, UBEC, has been working as partners with High Schools That Work since the mid-1990s. This partnership ties back to the gap we're talking about today, and that's how you consistently bring community and business involvement in to move performance up at a quicker pace.

Failure rates at High Schools That Work sites revolve around the systems-change problems, political leadership problems, others that other panelists talked about earlier.

The business community is the key sector in both articulating its needs from schooling, and then in helping the schools think through and master the change processes, the data management process, the leadership training processes, and the other pieces that are critical to rapid acceleration. That can be done consistently through local partnerships with businesses and schools and higher education that are effectively targeted.

So when High Schools That Work came to the state, we teamed up with The Business Council to work with New York to ensure that as many of the sites that volunteer to take on this as possible can accelerate student achievement to protect the graduation requirements that this organization put itself on the line to defend.



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*A Special Report:*

## **What can business do to help the schools?**

Business wants and needs better performance from the schools—which are producing the workforce of the future. And businesses want to help the schools improve. But what efforts on the part of the business community, and of individual businesses, will in fact do the most good?

To probe this issue, The Public Policy Institute sponsored a panel discussion at The Business Council's 2001 Annual Meeting, bringing together top educators with business executives who have had hands-on experiences in education reform. They highlighted these ideas, among others:

- Advocate for high standards, early childhood education, and other public policies that can help.
- Assist schools using the skills that businesses possess—such as organizational development, systems planning, staff development, measurement, accountability and even marketing. Help schools identify the skills that workers of the future will need.
- And help students. Donate equipment—and time. Offer mentoring, career advice and other direct help to students. Ask to see grades and transcripts when you hire.
- Serve on your local school board—a toughjob , but a rewarding one.