



Prepare the Future embraces widely shared American values – fairness, trust, and responsibility – that create the opportunity for children, families, and communities to thrive. We need a powerful voice to insist that such values shape discourse and action in the public square. Prepare The Future’s first priority will be quality public education that will prepare all our children for life. We will build an infrastructure that citizens in communities across the country can use to effectively address other important issues that affect the health and well being of our children and youth.

The Problem

America needs a powerful, grassroots non-partisan organization for three compelling reasons. First, the condition of children in America, especially for those who are poor, African-American, Hispanic and/or are disabled, is unacceptable. We are especially concerned with the quality of public education. Second, values such as fairness, trust, responsibility and strong caring communities are losing traction. Concern for the common good is declining and the public square is often deserted. Third citizen participation through voting and citizen confidence in government, the institution created explicitly to promote the common good, are in trouble. There is deep distrust. The only institution with a lower approval rating than the current Republican president is the current Democratic congress.

The Solution

The solution is a large, values driven, grassroots, professionally staffed, well-funded, technologically sophisticated, disciplined organization that holds local, state and national policy makers accountable for the well-being of all our children and families, with special advocacy for those we historically have left out.

The Education Agenda

- Comprehensive, systemic change in the public school system that is built on the conviction that all children can and must learn to high standards, graduating on time, equipped for post secondary education and the knowledge and skills for effective citizenship.
- The use of instructional, organizational and governance strategies for which there is evidence of effectiveness if faithfully implemented, including but not limited to universal developmentally appropriate early childhood programs for three and four year olds; quality teachers and school leaders, extra time during the day week and year for struggling students, safe schools, parent engagement

and small schools and classes.

- Reasonable and fair accountability systems for educators and students based on student performance on high standards and for citizens based on providing the resources educators and students need to perform to high standards.
- Adequate resources required to support successful achievement of all students with the resources raised and distributed in a fair and equitable manner.

Key Organizing Strategies

- *Action Trees* – Action Trees, each started by a partner organization, are on-line communities of advocates. Each organization identifies a base of 40 members, staff, volunteers and friends who make four commitments: a) to a quality education for all children; b) to take at least one action every quarter in support of the agenda; c) to contribute financial support of \$20 per year; and d) to find five friends, family members or neighbors who will make the same four commitments.
- *Small Groups* – Small Groups will be our core on-the-ground organizational base in each of our target states. Each Small Group will consist of about twelve people. They will meet monthly to learn about and discuss important education issues and engage in regular advocacy activities. Each Small Group will build a Mini-Action Tree to create a base to support its local work.
- *Student Chapters* – Youth organizing is on the rise, and one of the major issues these groups deal with is education. In addition to partnering with existing youth groups, we will establish chapters at colleges, universities and high schools to organize youth around public education issues.

Early Prepare The Future experience

There have been early and very positive experiences reinforcing our view that people are eager to act and that what we have designed will work.

- **Good Schools Pennsylvania's substantial success:** 350 Small Groups, 23 College and 50 High School chapters, monthly vigils of at least 300 people, rallies of 1,000 or more, making public education the #1 issue in the 2002 gubernatorial campaign, a minimum of 100 people in the capitol each legislative day of the 2003 legislative session. This created the climate during the 2003 legislative session for substantial increases in state funds to low-income districts, first time state funding for early childhood education and a number of other advances. Most recently, Good Schools successfully led the policy fight that resulted in legislative and gubernatorial endorsement of a cost of education study that has determined that the Pennsylvania system is underfunded by several billion dollars. The study led to the successful 2008 gubernatorial proposal to invest \$3 billion in public education over the next six years and, equally important, to a new formula that raises and distributes funds more equitably. It was this experience that has resulted in the design work to take such organizing to scale.
- **Action Tree Pledges.** We have secured 141 Action Tree pledges to make a good faith effort to build an Action Tree once we raise the resources to staff the effort: 19 pledges in California, 12 in Colorado, 18 in Ohio, and 72 others

from national organizations. Fully developed these would yield 1,584,840 advocates. The breadth of these commitments makes it clear that there are many, many Americans ready to become advocates for the values of fairness, trust, responsibility and strong, caring communities and for quality public education if there is a values driven, grassroots, professionally staffed, well-funded, technologically sophisticated organization that they believe can serve as an effective vehicle through which they can make their views known.

- **Movement to action now.** While waiting for funding, Ohio and Colorado there are serious efforts to move to action now. In those state, the pledgers note new pro-education governors and other state developments that may provide an early opportunity to make education gains. Each has moved forward to develop a detailed Education Agenda to inform their respective state's policy dialogue. In addition, the advocates in Ohio are already moving to build an initial joint Action Tree of a few thousand people to make their educational contributions to the dialogue more muscular in the next legislative session.