

## Closing the Achievement Gaps Overview

Over the last 12 years, the NEA Foundation has invested \$13.7 million to improve learning conditions for more than 200,000 students by supporting union-district-community teams in seven school districts via its Closing the Achievement Gaps initiative. The goal: improve teaching and learning through collaboration. Community-based partners identified local solutions that served the students and schools with the greatest needs, ranging from home visits and other community-building activities to targeted professional learning and teacher-led leadership teams within schools. As the final two grants come to a close, the NEA Foundation is proud that sites have seen sustained success in:

- **Student learning.** Achievement gaps narrowed significantly in the schools most directly impacted by the work, including in Lee County, Florida, where a teacher-led emphasis on student goal-setting improved outcomes and grew from one school to 30 over the life of the grant.
- **School environments.** Teachers reported higher satisfaction with their opportunities for professional development, collaboration, and decision-making. In Omaha, for example, a new instructional leadership team model piloted in the grant schools has been enshrined in the teacher contract districtwide.
- **Family and community engagement.** Home visits and other communication from schools involved parents directly in their children's education. For example, a broad range of community organizations helped provide services to students in Springfield, Mass., and helped rally grassroots support for home visits and other services.

How did they do it? Leaders in each site found that a focus on four dimensions of their work promoted success:

- **Vision.** By keeping their eyes on what mattered most – students – the different organizations at each site built strong, sustainable relationships with a shared goal.
- **Partnerships.** These efforts require support from everyone involved: from the district superintendent and local association president to individual schools. By communicating effectively and regularly, the sites developed trust and engagement from all participants.
- **Community.** Buy-in from businesses, nonprofits, foundations, civic authorities, and parents builds support for new initiatives and makes changes more sustainable.
- **Sustainability.** Working together builds trust and relationships that continue even when leaders change.

By encouraging collaboration between districts, unions, and communities, the *Closing the Achievement Gaps* initiative gave each site the means to focus on the real reason for public schools: helping the students at the heart of their communities succeed.

### NEA FOUNDATION CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAPS SITES

Hamilton County, TN (2005)  
Seattle, WA (2006)  
Milwaukee, WI (2006)  
Springfield, MA (2010)  
Columbus, OH (2010)  
Omaha, NE (2011)  
Lee County, FL (2011)