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Grants from the Hewlett and Ford Foundations Help Launch a New Study of School Finance and Governance in Three California School Districts

Palo Alto, Calif. – The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the Ford Foundation have awarded \$900,000 in grants to support a groundbreaking joint initiative by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) and Pivot Learning Partners (PLP) aimed at improving school finance and governance in large, urban school districts. To carry out the work underlying this initiative, AIR and PLP have formed a partnership with three prominent California school districts – Los Angeles, Pasadena, and Twin Rivers.

The goal of the project, which is entitled *Strategic School Funding for Results (SSFR)*, is to develop and implement more equitable and transparent strategies for allocating resources to schools within each district and to link those strategies to systems designed to encourage innovation and efficiency, and strengthen accountability for student outcomes.

The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation provided a \$600,000 grant and the Ford Foundation provided \$300,000 in support for the AIR and PLP partnership with Los Angeles Unified School District, Pasadena Unified School District and Twin Rivers Unified School District.

Working in collaboration with these districts provides multiple opportunities to explore ways in which new models of school finance and governance can impact student learning.

Ramon Cortines is superintendent of Los Angeles Unified School District, which is the second largest district in the country serving more than 700,000 students, 68 percent of whom are eligible for free or reduced price lunches and roughly 35 percent of whom are English language learners. When asked about the SSFR project, he said:

“This partnership with AIR and PLP allows us to accelerate our work to become a district that creates a personalized learning experience for students and adults. We believe those closest to our students are best equipped to decide on how to allocate and leverage resources. I am very excited to implement a budgeting process that is transparent, equitable and allows schools to target resources to the needs of their students.”

Edwin Diaz is the superintendent of Pasadena Unified School District, which has almost 20,000 students, including 55 percent who are eligible for free or reduced price lunches and 24 percent are English language learners. Mr. Diaz said, of the project:

“In this environment of diminishing state funding, it is critical that we align our resources with student needs and practices that achieve the greatest results for children. SSFR will provide the framework and tools for Pasadena Unified School District to adapt to this new fiscal landscape for public education.”

Frank S. Porter, superintendent of the new Twin Rivers Unified School District located near Sacramento, has approximately 30,000 students, of whom more than 60 percent are eligible for free or reduced price lunches and one of every four is an English language learner. Mr. Porter said:



"As California's newest unified school district, Twin Rivers is engaged in re-inventing our schools on a system-wide basis. The SSFR project provides our teaching and leadership staff with a very timely opportunity to effectively link and align resources and accountability with professional and school autonomy. I'm excited and looking forward to working on this transformative project."

Kristi Kimball, Program Officer at the Hewlett Foundation, said "We are pleased to support the development of bold reform plans in three school districts that are thinking differently about how to increase equity and education outcomes for all of their students."

Fred Frelow, program officer with the Ford Foundation's education and scholarship unit, said, "The Ford Foundation has long supported efforts to reform school financing systems around the country. We need to build a greater understanding of the impact that these systems have on the quality of our schools and the education they offer our students. This research will help in the development of more fair and equitable funding models."

The Hewlett and Ford Foundation grants will provide the necessary funding to complete critical elements of the first phase of this work. Under this first phase of work, the AIR/PLP team, in collaboration with leadership in each of the partner districts, will carry out needs assessments in each district as well as data and policy analyses to support implementation of the new school finance and governance structures. This project will establish the foundation for the creation of a new approach, including a new formula for allocating resources to schools and supporting policies, procedures, tools, and training.

Dr. Jay G. Chambers of AIR, the co-principal investigator and project director and an economist with more than 35 years experience conducting research on school finance, said, "I am truly excited about this opportunity to work on a collaborative effort like this one which connects research to policy and practice in a real world environment where the children are served."

James R. Brown of PLP, a former superintendent in California public schools and co-Principle Investigator for the project, said: "We know how important it is for schools to be able to allocate their resources toward achievement of their goals. Our upcoming work with our three district partners will provide a much needed opportunity to develop funding strategies that will strengthen individual schools while still providing the necessary links to the district's core improvement strategies."

This innovative project draws on the extensive research and resource allocation expertise of AIR and the knowledge of practice brought to the work by Pivot Learning. AIR, a leader in applied behavioral and social science research, is nationally-recognized for its work in evaluation and school finance, including a recent study on student-based funding in Oakland and San Francisco. Pivot Learning views district-level school finance reform as a key component of whole-system change that is required for California school districts to raise student achievement and close the achievement gap. Pivot Learning has been working on just this kind of system change at the district level since 2001, providing services to nearly fifty districts across California.

This project is designed to help federal, state, and local policymakers establish policies and make decisions that will impact equity, transparency, accountability, and innovation in the operation of K-12 education.



About William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation has been making grants since 1967 to solve social and environmental problems at home and around the world. Hewlett Foundation is one of the nation's largest, with assets of more than \$6 billion. The Hewlett Foundation makes grants to solve social and environmental problems at home and around the world. Our grantees are working to reduce poverty in the developing world, curb carbon emissions that lead to climate change, and improve education for students in California and elsewhere, among many other valuable goals.

About Ford Foundation

The Ford Foundation is an independent, nonprofit grant-making organization. For more than half a century it has worked with courageous people on the frontlines of social change worldwide, guided by its mission to strengthen democratic values, reduce poverty and injustice, promote international cooperation, and advance human achievement. With headquarters in New York, the foundation has offices in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia.

About AIR

Established in 1946, with headquarters in Washington, D.C., the American Institutes for Research (AIR) is a nonpartisan, not-for-profit organization that conducts behavioral and social science research and delivers technical assistance both domestically and internationally in the areas of health, education, and workforce productivity. For more information, visit www.air.org.

About Pivot Learning Partners

Pivot Learning Partners (formerly Springboard Schools) is a non-profit public school change catalyst working with school districts throughout California to raise the achievement of students overall and close the achievement gap. We help create a future in which all students learn to high levels and where race, class, language, gender, and culture are no longer good predictors of educational outcomes. Our work consists of three parts: we study what works in the most effective schools in the state and nation; we teach educators what we have learned; and we follow them back to school and coach them to make new ideas work in real schools and classrooms with real kids and the challenges they bring to school every day. In the 2008-09 school year, we partnered with fifty districts serving 750,000 students. Our partner districts served a higher percentage of low-income (55%), minority (60%), and non-native English speakers (28%) than the state of California as a whole, yet despite these demographic challenges, they consistently outperformed state averages. For more information about Pivot Learning Partners, visit www.pivotlearningpartners.org.