



The Forum For Western  
Pennsylvania School  
Superintendents

A History of the Forum  
For Western  
Pennsylvania School  
Superintendents,  
1994-2011

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by

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The Forum for Western Pennsylvania School Superintendents is a regional progeny of the Danforth Foundation's National Forum for the American School Superintendent. Running from 1993 to 2002, members of the National Forum focused on many pressing issues in public education, including the application of neuropsychology to early childhood education, the demand for rigorous standards, improved assessment, increased accountability, the complexity of working with school boards and teachers' unions to govern school systems, and "the challenges of race and class in the United States, the great fault lines in our national life" (Cambron-McCabe, Cunningham, Harvey, & Koff, 2005, p. 3).

Drawing from a variety of domains and institutions, including the University of Pittsburgh's Learning Research and Development Center, the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School of Communications, and Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, members experienced intellectually rigorous professional development and developed strong professional relationships. Given the U.S. education's reverence for reform, the Danforth Forum not only provided respite from the day-to-day travails of running school systems, but also offered opportunities to discuss schooling within broader social context.

In 1996, Dr. Richard Wallace, co-director of the Danforth Forum and faculty member of the University of Pittsburgh, founded The Forum for Western Pennsylvania School Superintendents. The Forum for Western Pennsylvania School Superintendents provides professionally relevant strategies to negotiate the complex issues facing education and fosters collegial connections to alleviate the sense of isolation often experienced by superintendents. Through semi-annual meetings and substantial informal contact, members explore broad social and educational issues, engage in reflective practice, and examine the challenges of being a school superintendent.

The Collaborative for Evaluation and Assessment Capacity (CEAC), in various forms, has served as the Forum's evaluator since its inception. As part of the 2010-2011 Forum evaluation, CEAC conducted an historical study of the Forum for Western Pennsylvania using interviews with former and current Forum Directors as the primary data collection method. Dr. Wallace provided insight into the Danforth Foundation and the National Forum and their function as the funding source and model for the Forum For Western Pennsylvania.

With contributions from original members and future leaders, Dr. Sue Goodwin and Dr. Jerry Longo, Wallace details the intentions, actions and mission of the early Forum for Western Pennsylvania. Drs. Goodwin and Longo then describe their experience with The Forum and its mission, changes and growth, during their tenures. Finally, all three leaders speak to the ethos of the Forum for Western Pennsylvania and discuss possibilities for the Forum's future. The study itself is organized chronologically. While some narrative guides readers through each era, the bulk of this history is told through the quotes of each leader.

### **The Danforth Foundation's Forum for the American School Superintendent**

In the late 1980's, the Danforth Foundation brought together thirty prominent educators from around the country, including former Superintendent of Pittsburgh Public Schools and University of Pittsburgh, School of Education faculty member Richard Wallace. The foundation asked the group for recommendations regarding an organization it hoped to support that according to Wallace:

*“Would bring superintendents from around the country together to talk about issues, to provide them with opportunities to hear some people on the cutting edge of educational issues around the country, and to then do something on the basis of what they had experienced.”*

The group had two primary recommendations regarding the membership of the organization. First, the membership should represent a broad spectrum of school districts with regard to size, urban-rural classification, poverty level, geographic location, and gender. Second, individual members should be nominated on the basis of their professional accomplishments by recognized state and national education/leadership organizations.

Following these recommendations, the Danforth Foundation created the Forum for the American School Superintendent in 1993. Gathering 50 members from across the country, it selected a theme on which to focus challenging, substantive professional development for members. Members discovered the Danforth Foundation had taken lengths to provide an atmosphere of safety and trust, where the superintendents could be free to speak without fear. As a result of this atmosphere, the members bonded through rich dialogue and shared experience, developing lasting professional and personal relationships. In summary, the Danforth Foundation provided members an experience of the highest quality, even down to the practical details of food and accommodations.

Following each Danforth Forum meeting, the foundation made funding available for initiatives that came out of member interest and engagement with the theme. The initiatives were intended to put into action the ideas discussed and studied during the meeting. Small groups of Danforth Forum members applied for initiative funding and convened five times a year to implement the initiative. Initiatives included programs to “reinvent school leadership” and early childhood programs. Dr. Wallace described several characteristics of the Danforth Forum that were ideals for and transferred to the Forum of Southwestern Pennsylvania:

#### Intellectual Rigor

*Each year there was a different theme, and cutting edge speakers from around the country were brought in. We were always given a briefing book and/or books to read prior to the Forum so that everybody coming to it would have a base of knowledge from which to: 1) integrate information that they were hearing, and 2) have a sense of the valued position of the speaker and what we would likely hear by reading their books or articles... Each of these meetings was intense. I mean, they had us going from literally 8:00 in the morning until almost 10:00 at night. We used to call [name] the slave driver. But it was intense, and it was incredibly fruitful.*

#### Safety/Openness/Trust

*Danforth had the idea that the Forum should be a “safe haven” for superintendents. One of the really important goals was to give superintendents an opportunity to come and talk with their peers and let their hair down and complain about boards, complain about unions without anybody being around who would rat on them, so to speak. In other words, it was to try to create an open environment where people felt free to say anything that they wanted to*

*without fear of, you know, retribution, so to speak, or fear of that word getting back to a board member.*

## Relationships

*[The Forum] demanded a level of trust. There was a real bonding of individuals. People found others that they could commiserate with; people who were facing similar issues that they were facing. And a good portion of the value of the conference or the Forum was not only the richness of the dialogue that was being presented both in print and orally, but also the richness of discussion among members of the Forum themselves. It was to the point where I think the vast majority of us had a great sense of fulfillment every time we left a Forum meeting.*

## High-Level Treatment

*It was an extraordinarily powerful and worthwhile experience, and further, the Danforth Foundation treated us like royalty. I mean, they put us up in the best hotels, and they spared no expense. And we just – we met some incredibly competent people.*

## Comparing the Danforth Forum to Other Professional Organizations

*It got to the point where I found the meetings of other organizations so shallow and almost meaningless. I won't give you the name of the organization, but a national organization that represented the field that I was in had annual conferences, which were attended broadly by superintendents across the country. I would have to search for days to find a session that was worthwhile for me to attend – something substantive enough that it was worth my while going there. And because of the membership of both the Council of Great City School and the Forum, I dropped out of all other organizations because they were not fulfilling. And the Forum, along with the Council of Great City Schools, provided that opportunity for intense professional enrichment.*

## **The Forum For Western Pennsylvania School Superintendents: The Early Years**

In 1993, the Danforth Foundation began funding statewide professional organizations for school superintendents. Dr. Wallace, who was a faculty member at the University of Pittsburgh at the time, was contacted to spearhead the development of a forum for superintendents in the Pittsburgh region. The Danforth Foundation provided seed money and helped Dr. Wallace procure additional funding from the Heinz Endowment, as well as the Grable and Mellon Foundations. Although the Forum for Western Pennsylvania was modeled after the Danforth Forum, there were many practical differences:

*“The major difference between the two Forums was the national foundation had millions of dollars at their disposal because the Danforth Foundation supported them,” Dr. Wallace said. “Unlike here – we had to kind of apply for funding. So the notion from the get-go was we probably wouldn't be able to do everything*

*that the national Forum did because we wouldn't have the resources, for example, to do the follow-up initiatives that were really so powerful. But with the funding that we could get, we could replicate the kind of experience that superintendents had had at the national level in terms of the program, the flow of the program, and so forth."*

Dr. Wallace put together a steering committee to determine the possibilities for a Forum for Western Pennsylvania Superintendents. Working with Dr. Edgar Holtz, then Executive Director of the Allegheny Intermediate Unit, Dr. Wallace enlisted a variety of leaders from throughout the region, including representation from foundations, the business community, higher education, and K-12 education. Bob Millward, Director of the Superintendent Development Program at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, was among the original members of the steering committee, as were local superintendents Dr. Jerry Longo, Dr. Bill Pope, and Dr. Betty Sue Shaughnessy.

*"When Dick began the local Forum, he knew me and a number of us [local superintendents]," Dr. Longo said. "This is important because typically the city superintendent has little to do with the suburban superintendents in the region. They tend to look in and not out. Dick was the exception. He had a sense of the region. Innovative activities going on in Pittsburgh Public were open to regional districts. And so he had a good sense of who was who; who the most accomplished superintendents in the region were. He also had a great relationship with Edgar Holtz, who was as well respected as Dick. They got together and decided to put together a coordinating group to help get this started."*

The steering committee discussed membership, especially the need to stratify membership in the same way the Danforth Forum had. Geographic representation and urban-rural diversity were of particular importance. The committee made sure that the Western Pennsylvania Forum had members from each of the region's Intermediate Units. Representation across socioeconomic strata was also important, drawing membership from very wealthy to very poor districts. At the time, the region had few if any minority superintendents; therefore, race was less a factor in member selection. However, the region did have a number of female superintendents and their representation was an important consideration in the member selection process. Dr. Wallace and the committee then sought nominations for members from IU directors, state organizations such as the State Boards of Association and Superintendents' Association, foundations' personnel, and business leaders. Dr. Longo, an original steering committee member and current Director of the Forum of Western Pennsylvania, and former Danforth Forum Director, Dr. Sue Goodwin, explained how diversity in the membership enriched members' experiences and understanding.

*"One of the advantages of Edgar, as IU3 director, was that he had connections with other IU directors and could go beyond the immediate region to reach out to other superintendents in areas such as Bedford and Forest County," Dr. Longo said. "Eventually, that diversity became what was most exciting about the Forum; you didn't used to get to know colleagues from across the region. That diversity of experience and richness was one of the central strengths of the region. There's a little bit of arrogance in any metropolitan area that the*

*answers are all there. We learned from our colleagues in other areas who were facing challenges like geography and finances; they were great problem solvers and extremely innovative. We were able to learn a lot from each other due to the diversity of experience.”*

*Dr. Goodwin added: “We did an exercise kind of like the Kiva at the end, where we were sitting in concentric circles. The people that had been superintendents the longest were sitting on the outside. And those who were superintendents the least amount of time were in the innermost circle. And two or three women were sitting in the innermost circle except for this one woman, a superintendent from the Erie region. She had been a superintendent for a while. I just remember as we talked, I remember thanking her for making it happen for those of us inside the circles. And it was a real kind of emotional experience, and yet, I never felt different in the Forum because of gender.”*

Members who joined were not necessarily aware of what the organization and experiences would be like. The strength of the reputations of the University of Pittsburgh, Dr. Wallace and Dr. Holtz seemed to have been a major factor in attracting quality members who were willing to sacrifice their time to attend. As Dr. Longo discussed:

*As it turned out, by and large, it was a very strong membership. I don’t know if we were just lucky or people had such respect for Ed Holtz and Dick Wallace that they made sure they gave them good nominations. Then people joined but they didn’t know what they were joining. Here, again, I think it was the Forum’s association with Dick Wallace and Pitt. Because otherwise, there was no history, no reason to join this, especially given that superintendents guard their time. They don’t take the idea of getting away for two and a half days easily. But I think it was Dick’s reputation and the University of Pittsburgh that encouraged people to give it a chance.*

At the first meeting of the Forum For Western Pennsylvania Superintendents, members listened to a speaker and learned about the Forum, including its purposes, how it would function, and when it would meet. Also on the agenda for members was identifying the first theme for the first year. Little did they know that by the next year’s Forum, the membership would insist that this first theme, Advocacy for Children and Youth, would become the driving mission of the organization. Dr. Wallace and Dr. Longo explained how the theme and mission came about.

*“The notion was that we would mirror the Danforth Forum, and change the theme every year,” Dr. Wallace said. “And the group decided that they wanted to focus on what we came to label as advocacy for children. And so we organized the next forum meeting around that topic. Later we added youth at my insistence because we wanted to deal not only with children but with adolescents as well. And so this forum adopted advocacy for children and youth as its primary goal and mission, if you will, and everything from then on related to that in one way or another.”*

*"I remember quite vividly sitting in a room at the William Penn Hotel, doing our planning, discussing what our theme would be," Dr. Longo recalled. "Collective memory is that Bill Pope put out the theme of advocates for children and youth. While others had different ideas, I think we were all captivated by the idea and so we compromised that it would be a theme for a year. But that theme has endured over the years and is a central underpinning of our relationship."*

From its founding, the Forum of Western Pennsylvania was housed in the University of Pittsburgh's School of Education. Funding supported rather basic operations for the organization; however, as Dr. Goodwin noted, "We started out as a fairly loose organization of Superintendent's and University people and wanted to get together and do good things for our schools and our kids."

Funding primarily supported office space and a support person—Dr. Charlene Trovato—who assisted Wallace in running the Forum. In addition to attending to the logistics of Forum gatherings, Dr. Trovato was responsible for gathering the membership, as well as the early efforts to foster relationships among members. As Dr. Wallace and Dr. Longo described:

*"She really took responsibility for the nuts and bolts of the forum, and she was one who was very conscious about membership in terms of geographic distribution, socioeconomic strata, gender, and so forth," Dr. Wallace said. "And she kept people's feet to the fire, you know, in the early years with respect to that. "*

*"Once we came together, the planners (Dick and Charlene) did a good job putting together a group of people and building relationships. A lot of activities had small group discussions and were strategic in the sense that you were almost forced to talk to people you didn't know." Dr. Longo continued: "So you got to know folks from the country even though you were from the inner city. We weren't allowed to connect with people just from our own little area. That strategy paid off in our really developing a cohesive bond, a brotherhood of superintendents."*

An advisory committee, including Dr. Trovato, Dr. Longo, and Dr. Joe Werlinich, the Co-Director of the University of Pittsburgh's Principal's Academy, also strengthened the Forum's early activities.

*"The advisory committee we had was also very strong. That group has to, you know, kind of add fuel to the fire and constantly bring up issues, and they're some awfully good people," Dr. Wallace said.*

In these early years, the Forum relied on the Danforth model for direction in a number of areas. While the Forum did not have significant money for initiatives, it did offer \$4000 mini-grants for members to implement innovative ideas. The Forum also modeled its professional development on the rigorous intellectual scholarship model of the national Danforth Forum model. Finally, safety, openness and camaraderie were high priorities at every Forum to nurture supportive relationships among members.

## Initiatives

*"I can remember one of the superintendents took \$4,000 – he was really, intensely interested in early childhood education. He used that min-grant as leverage to multiply funds from a variety of sources," Dr. Wallace said. "With the funding, he opened up a community-based early childhood center in his school district, which was phenomenal."*

## Professional Development

*"I can tell you that the early years – probably the first seven or eight years at least when I was intensely involved – people would not want to miss a forum meeting because it was so personally and professionally powerful," Dr. Wallace added.*

*"The Forum had an approach to professional development for superintendents that was fairly intellectual in its content. We were forced to do some reading. They brought in high quality speakers, authors of books. It forced us a little bit to get more into the theoretical stuff. Our bent as superintendents is to be more on the practitioner side of things. Not that we avoided that, but there was this intellectual content to it at the beginning that many of us liked," Dr. Longo said.*

## Relationships

*"It's just something unique about the forum. I think the fact that it's restricted in terms of the number of members and the fact that it's sort of stratified helps," Dr. Wallace said. "People oftentimes in rural districts are pretty lonesome, and they don't have anyone to talk to who understands their problems and issues because they're quite different from, you know, a suburban or urban community. The fact that they can come and find someone to talk to who understands their problems and issues and while at the same time listen to and hear from others – it really becomes something that they own personally."*

*"So we had the opportunity to be with people who kind of understood the issues we were facing who could advise us, or help us, or just listen and understand. You are in this role and there's almost no one you can talk to about these things. Can't talk to your spouse, you'll scare them," Dr. Longo said. "Can't talk to people in the system cause anything you say can and will be used against you. People felt free... You could talk in the Forum and be pretty assured that anything you said there would stay there."*



## The Forum For Western Pennsylvania School Superintendents: The Middle Years

Members describe the middle years as those when Dr. Goodwin co-directed the Forum with Dr. Wallace, who began to travel away from Pittsburgh more extensively. Dr. Goodwin was the former superintendent of South Side Beaver School District until 1999, when she moved to the University of Pittsburgh as a full-time faculty member. In terms of the organization, Dr. Trovato remained in her official capacity of support for only a few years, but the advisory committee continued. During these years, the Forum followed a similar course as the early years, continuing the mini-grants and annual themes, connecting superintendents with academic research, promoting professional discourse and mutually supportive relationships among members. What emerged in these years was a spirit of collaboration between the Forum and Institutions of Higher Learning (IHE) and among individual members as well as among members' school districts.

### *Organization*

*“Charlene [Trovato] working with me was informal. It was an informal collaborative; her role was more formal with Wallace. She was defined as support. She was very much a support for me, too, but at that point things were being redefined.”*

Dr. Goodwin continued: *“Normally what would happen when I was involved, the advisory committee would identify a theme and then I would organize the program.”*

### *Mini-grants*

*“At one point, this is 2005, we broke the advocacy down into these five subgroups and we really started saying how do we become better advocates for children? Then, there were committees for each subgroup. Every superintendent was in one of these groups, and then the groups applied for mini-grants,”* Dr. Goodwin said.

### *Annual Themes*

*“I think our high school theme may have been two years. Now to me that was one of my favorite Forum’s when we had students from urban, suburban and rural school districts come in and talk about their high schools, what was good, what was bad,”* Dr. Goodwin said.

*“Leadership was an ongoing theme, and it kind of was pervasive since the very beginning.*

*“Another theme, when we were really in the lowest point – the Allegheny Conference and the business community, probably in, I don’t know maybe in 2004, 2003 were down on education regionally and there was a lot of negative publicity in the newspapers. Forum members were upset and wondered, “How*

*can we counter some of this?” One of the best Forums I believe that we ever had was when we had Biden’s sister, Valerie Biden Owens, come in. She spent the day and a half, or a day, talking about actually campaigning and how you rally people. And what we could do and needed to do to get good information out there. So it was a lot of PR kind of things. I don’t know if that was an identified theme, but we did spend at least two Forums on PR. How do we communicate the good things going on in schools?” she added.*

#### *Scholarship and Discourse*

*“I think of scholarly as really being much more academic and research based. And when we had Lauren Resnick and we were working with the Institute for Learning, I think that’s scholarly,” Dr. Goodwin said. “I was connected with the institute in another capacity, so when instruction would be the theme it was kind of natural for me to go to the institute or to Lauren. We did something on science and math at one point, and we had some people from the Department of Instruction and Learning too. And I would call that scholarly.”*

*She continued: “I think scholarship is a major part of the Forum, and it always has been. But I want to make the distinction because not everything is scholarly just because it is at a high-level and high quality. We did a lot of reading and activities that were more procedural and ways of motivating people. That is different than being academic.*

*“I think the level of discourse was always high. The best thing about it is – this didn’t happen very often – you get a speaker who’s not a real good speaker. Forum members are of such a level that they don’t let things bomb. They don’t let that happen because they themselves elevate it. Forum members pick it up. And they, every time, made sure it was good.”*

#### *A Collaborative*

*On working in a collaborative, Dr. Goodwin said: “One of the most interesting things to me that I saw really happening during the time I was there, was the transformation from individual superintendents to a collaborative and groups of superintendents. I think they started thinking of themselves more as members of a community than as individual superintendents. And that’s something that took time. I view that as a major accomplishment and a major turning point in the Forum. It was no longer a collection of individual superintendents. It really became a network and a collaborative. There was a period of time where you could see it, where it was very obvious.”*

#### *Collaboration: Mini-grant Initiatives*

*“What I saw happening was they moved from individual districts applying for that money to groups of districts applying for that money. And one of the things we wanted to do was to create this feeling that we weren’t just responsible for our own districts and our own kids, we were responsible for all children, that*

*advocacy for all. That started to evolve and I commented on it in 2005, that we had districts, three districts going together, with one initiative that had seventeen districts collaborating,” she continued.*

### *Collaboration in the Region*

*“I think the other thing, and it goes right along with that, is they see themselves as members of a greater community. Like, their responsibility isn’t just for their district; it’s for the region. You know, I’m superintendent of my school district; my job is to make sure my kids do well on their tests and my schools are good schools. Now it’s the region. What about this Western Pennsylvania region? What role do I play in making – and that’s big. That’s a big shift.*

*“It was probably 2003, 2004 that you really started to see that most people were thinking in terms of others and how can we make this bigger and how can we pull in more districts. There was some IHE collaboration at that point.*

*“In the past there may have even been some competitiveness, like, with school boards. I know my board always used to say, ‘We want to be the best in the County.’ And we, in Forum began to share things. “Well, why are you sharing things with other districts?” You know, all kids are our responsibility, not just these kids right here. So I think that’s huge, and I think that would be what I would say is the biggest shift that I saw in attitudes and culture,” Dr. Goodwin said about the collaboration in the region.*

### **The Forum For Western Pennsylvania School Superintendents: The Current Era**

The Western Pennsylvania Superintendents’ Forum underwent a transition period beginning in 2005. At this time, Wallace and Goodwin stepped away from the leadership to make room for three practicing superintendents: Jim Manley, Linda Hippert and Jerry Longo. By 2006, Longo came to serve on the University of Pittsburgh’s faculty full-time, where he assumed the leadership of the Western Pennsylvania Forum. The establishment of organizational structures to support the Forum’s sustainability, including strategic planning and creating by-laws for the Forum and systems for the executive committee, was a primary focus of this time in the Forum. The Western Pennsylvania Forum also organized itself so that its modes of operation facilitate its mission, especially regarding relationships among members and opportunities for professional reflection. As a group, members refined the mission as they addressed issues of membership. Professional development, at this time, focuses on both instruction and the social context of public education. Finally, the Forum sought to broaden itself and its impact. One way to do this was through efforts to support the growth of superintendents early in their careers.

### *Transition*

*“Let’s keep it at the university, but let’s get more intense and involved with people from the field, and so we turned it over to three superintendents at the time, Jerry, Linda, and Jim. In effect, we said okay, you know, one generation to another – the Forum is now yours,” Dr. Wallace recalled.*

## Structure

*“The Forum is interesting because it’s been around now longer than many organizations like that have been. We started out as a fairly loose organization of superintendents and university people who wanted to get together and do good things for our schools and our kids. And it’s evolved. It started out pretty loose and then gradually has gotten more structure, a little more formal organization to it. And I think Jerry has done a good job of getting committees together and using committees, and I think he has a strategic plan,”* Dr. Goodwin said.

## *Strategic Plan and By-laws*

*“We felt that, number one, we needed to become an organization. We did some strategic planning. We had George Stamansky from Duquesne University help us. He was a Forum member and had some expertise in strategic planning with school districts. He donated his time, and helped us put together a strategic plan, which worked into a set of by-laws,”* recounted Dr. Longo.

Dr. Longo continued: *“The entire group helped adopt the by-laws by considering what things were important to the membership. What came out was that the membership saw this as an elite group. Not something for every superintendent. You ought to have demonstrated in your professional life some contributions you could make. You couldn’t just come in and take something; you had to come in with something to offer. So that started to work itself into the language of those by-laws.”*

## Executive Committee

*“We developed an executive committee. We’d always had advisory committee, but no one knew how you got on it. Dick just sort of put people there. But we set up a process for bringing people in.*

*“Also we decided that once members left their work as superintendents didn’t mean they would be done with the Forum. We opened the door to the retired members, and if they wanted to continue with the Forum, they did this at their own expense.*

*“We included retired members on the executive committee as well as current folks and people from other organizations such as the PA Association of School Administration, other universities and colleges. So we really began to broaden our base,”* Dr. Longo said.

## Membership

*“As the transition began to take place we had to make a decision about membership. We decided to freeze it until we got through strategic planning and by-law development because part of the discussion was what membership*

*should look like. Across Western Pennsylvania there's been so much movement in the position, a lot of senior people who'd been there a long time were retiring and newcomers were coming in. What was our role in all of this? Bring in young superintendents and develop them? Or remain this elite group who had achieved much? If we did the latter, we would have a challenge because there were fewer of the experienced superintendents left in the region," Dr. Longo said.*

*"One point during the time I was there I was down to 36 members and, originally, the forum was to be the 50 best and brightest superintendents," Dr. Goodwin recalled. "And so we debated over and over again: Do you just bring on the best and brightest or do we bring on people that are new, young and need the support?"*

*"We went through a whole series of membership drives. Freezing it, to 50 to sink down to 32-33. We became a different kind of organization when we were 32-33. We started to recruit. We thought we could trust the membership to recruit and bring quality people that were wanted. But there were a lot of questions of who these people were by the members. Members had this concept: We were this elite group, who is this character, where have they come from, what have they done to be part of this elite group? So this was a whole discussion: When do you bring people in and how much experience do they need? What is our role in developing new talent for the position and helping these people become successful? So that's been a big part of this transition," said Dr. Longo.*

*Dr. Longo added: "And eventually over the last couple years we got the number back up to 50, so if we have 3-4 retirements we'd recruit 3-4. But for a while there, we'd take 10-11-12, big numbers of people, and some of the people we took didn't belong in the group; they didn't have the commitment. But others, who we wondered about, have developed, as we've seen others do."*

#### *Membership –The Forum's role in developing master professionals*

*"I always say to people, when we first brought people in at the beginning, we weren't the people you see in this elite group. Some of us were pretty young in our experience as superintendents. We weren't the people who had 15-20 years of experience that the region respected. But there were a bunch of us who became Pennsylvania superintendents of the year. There have only been about 15 awardees, and half of them were members of the [Western Pennsylvania] Forum. But they didn't start out there. The Forum, I believe, contributed to our ascendancy in our profession because of the relationships we developed and the growth we've had it was a part of us becoming this elite group. We didn't start out necessarily there," said Dr. Longo*

#### *Membership – Younger Members*

*"At the beginning some of us were in job 5-10 years. But now we say members have to have at least 2 successful years as superintendents. So the shift has*

*been that we are bringing in younger and less experienced people. But we know them. We now have enough range in our experience to know who will benefit. We look to get the up and comers, who are doing good things in districts, active professionally, maybe have written something/presentations, done something innovative. We are getting them much earlier in their careers,”* Dr. Longo said.

#### *Broadening the Membership*

*Dr. Longo went on to say: “Even with superintendents, we continue to broaden our base. Carol Wooten is a charter school superintendent; we also have the superintendent of the Pittsburgh Catholic Diocese in our membership. We began to be not just group of public school superintendents but you now start to see leadership from other education organizations that do similar work as [Western Pennsylvania] Forum members.”*

#### *Focus on the Current Educational and Social Climate*

*“During the transition, we were trying to find out how we would deliver this professional development. Linda, Jim, and I were clones of each other...we all thought about the world in similar ways due to our experience as practitioners. We tried to bring some of that into the Forum. I think we had lost a little bit of steam...it had become less intellectually challenging and less connected to some of the changes happening around us...we wanted to dig into that a little more.*

*“I think that the world had changed around us. We were beginning to see some of the things playing out now, and we wanted to get ahead of things. There was an emphasis on technical things about instructional leadership. We had a different notion about what that should look like from a practitioner’s point of view. And so that was just where we were; it was just a different vision because of the experience we were having. We were all still out there... I think the three of us being in it had a different perspective than someone who’d been out for a while. We were down in the muck,”* Dr. Longo added.

*Regarding the social context of public education, Dr. Longo said: We began to address that as a group with the White Paper on No Child Left Behind. Once you break down details, you have different perspectives on it based upon your experience as superintendent. We said we got to have consensus. That was first time we worked to develop consensus on issue. I think the group found it powerful cause they still talk about it. But that was a change in how we did business. The white paper became an op-ed piece authored by the Forum.”*

#### *Cultivating an Organization for Relationship*

*“There are some of us who have never missed a meeting. There are many more that have missed few if any,”* Dr. Longo said. *“Over time, we’ve really bonded and we value the experience. People go way out of their way to come to experience and be a part of it. But the group shrunk to 30. When we had to bring in another 20 people, obviously that changed that relationship for a bit.*

*But it didn't take long to recover it. Some of that had to do with the [2010] [Western Pennsylvania] Forum in April (the SIMSOC experience). It caused people to work together in ways the typically didn't have to. Strategic planning and by-laws helped people thinking about what we wanted the organization to be and how to bring people in to make them comfortable. We had to begin processes for that as well, so we initiated new member luncheons before the Forum. We could sit and talk to new members about what was expected of them, what to expect, and senior members could talk about Forum values. Then we began to have people who nominated [the new members] introduce them and say what they saw in them before their colleagues. We said 'if we want a fraternity whose members have responsibility for one another, care about each other, interact professionally—even personally—then we have to do things to make that happen.'*

Dr. Longo continued: *"We used to have a speaker at first night's dinner. It was never well received, so we talked to the membership. They told us: we don't get to see each other; can't we just have dinner and talk to each other? That was the shift in our thinking. We once felt that if we're taking time out of busy superintendents' schedules, we have to be so focused. But the relationship part of this is also valuable. We've become more relaxed to focus on relationships too."*

He went on to say: *"We've tried to recapture the intellectual content part of our missions through the workshops. We did one workshop on ethics recently that went over well. It was fairly intellectually challenging. Most have little background in that area."*

### *Organization for Reflection*

*"The retreat wasn't a word in the original [Western Pennsylvania] Forum. We came up with this word cause we wanted it to be that, so people can go off, be reflective, concentrate, and put the day-to-day aside," Dr. Longo recalled. "Even the geography has changed. We used to meet in Pittsburgh. Now we go to Nemaocolin in Bedford Springs. You see, if we are in Pittsburgh, and you are the superintendent in Northgate, say, then you can go home if you get called. But when we are in Bedford, you don't do that; you stay. Being a retreat and being together for the duration became important."*

### *Broadening the Forum's Impact*

*"Three years ago, I had a conversation with the Grable Foundation about the transition of superintendents in Western PA and my concern about new superintendents going into districts that don't have resources. The Foundation asked 'Well, what helped you?' I had great professional development opportunities to be with people from across the world or country. We got \$50,000 from Grable to go down to Peabody College, Vanderbilt last summer for a professional institute as part of a yearlong experience that would conclude with the Spring [2011] Forum. When you are in that kind of group and you are*

*hearing what people are going through and doing across the country, you begin to understand things that you didn't understand before and find out that there are solutions out there for a lot of problems that you face. You begin to build this bond with people who are in your profession doing similar kinds of work to you. That was something new for us, but the intention is to develop these promising, less experienced superintendents to really be leaders and contributors and advocates for children and youth. We want to give them the background and skills that they might not have sitting in Titusville, Pennsylvania all by themselves, day after day with little intellectual challenge,"* Dr. Longo said.

### **Western Pennsylvania Superintendents' Forum: The Ethos and Future**

All three of the leaders of the Western Pennsylvania Superintendents' Forum speak of important themes, which describe the ethos of the Forum as an organization. Above all, the Forum, as a body of members, is an intimate and deeply rooted support network. The Forum fosters those characteristics, such as safety, openness and trust, which help to enable such relationships. The Forum also stands for high quality professional development. Finally, the Forum, as a collective, serves the greater educational community first as an advocate for all children and youth and secondly as members of a greater regional network invested in quality public education. These themes emerge as the leaders discuss possibilities for the Forum's future in terms of advocacy and supporting the growth of other superintendents, especially those with little experience and resources.

#### *Ethos*

*Dr. Wallace said, "I think the forum really can help superintendents by one, providing a safe haven, and two, providing a forum for exchange of ideas and issues and problems. And for fostering a sense of the professionalism, because that's really what it's all about."*

*"It is a fraternity. People have experiences and only a few persons will understand them. So what we all learned, in addition to the quality professional development, is the opportunity to be with people who kind of understood the issues we were facing who could advise us, or help us, or just listen and understand,"* Dr. Longo said. *"You are in this role and there's almost no one you can talk to about these things. You can't talk to your spouse; you'll scare them. You can't talk to people in the system because anything you say can and will be used against you. People felt free; you could talk in the [Western Pennsylvania] Forum and be pretty assured that anything you said there would stay there."*

*Dr. Goodwin added: "Anytime you have people who understand what you're experiencing, I think that's the most important thing. The Superintendent, we always say, is a lonely position. Teachers can go to teachers and principals go to other principals and even to teachers because they have that common experience, but when you're a superintendent there's no one else in the organization that's been there. So you have to go outside your organization to talk to somebody. And that's the basis for the whole Forum: That network, closeness and that support. I mean they have tremendous support for each*



*other in the Forum. Everybody just picks up a telephone when you're having some bad experience or a problem. And there are people right there. It's a brotherhood; it's a sisterhood. You can call anybody in that Forum and they'll be there for you."*

*Finally, Dr. Wallace said of the ethos: "We reconvened the group and said okay, last year we identified advocacy as the main theme. Let's identify a theme for this year. And they didn't want to let go of that issue. And so this Forum adopted advocacy for children and youth as its primary goal and mission, if you will, and everything from then on related to that in one way or another."*

## *Future*

*"I see in the Forum's future being a collective advocate for children and youth. It's always been an idea and has played out in individual local districts to some degree, but as an organization we haven't done enough to really be that advocate. So what I see in the future is really for us to begin to step out of our silos and be engaged in the broader community. That transition to that more active kind of organization began with the SIMSOC where people began to feel and experience some of the things that people in our school systems and communities experience; the powerlessness of some groups and the good intentions of others. We look at the next [Western Pennsylvania] Forum as a bridge to go from SIMSOC and delve in more deeply. One of our presenters will be John Wallace, from Pitt's School of Social Work, who is involved in the Homewood Children's Village (a copy of the Harlem Children's Village). My hope is that we're going to see there's an obligation for us to do more to be advocates for children. I'd like to see us become involved in the Homewood project to some degree. I'm not sure how that will come to be. Are there other ways we can bring to bear or bring resources that could help? I think we need to be seen as living up to this motto, this idea. It's hard. People have consuming jobs and are paid to focus on their silo, but I do think that the notion of being advocates for children and youth goes beyond those in your purview. (The White Paper on NCLB was an effort in that direction that says we're concerned about every one and we better have some consensus around where we stand. But that's intellectual and a less hands on approach.) Everybody can help in a different way. This creates an opportunity for us to take an experiment and see how we can help. You can't say you are for kids and ignore the plight of the urban poor," Dr. Longo said.*

*Dr. Goodwin said of the future: "I think one of the things Diane Kirk has spearheaded was getting younger students from the letter of eligibility program to attend [Western Pennsylvania] Forum meetings. I think the Forum has a role to play with development of new superintendents and the mentoring of new superintendents. That's been something that's been discussed and I think it's time now to continue the evolution of the Forum."*

*"I would like to see us continue to bring opportunities to others, like the Vanderbilt experience," Dr. Longo added.*

*“The other thing that might happen,” Dr. Goodwin continued, “and I’m not sure, maybe that the Forum develops another cohort and there are two Forums, you know, maybe in different locations. And as funding becomes tight, I’ve always thought the forum could partner with intermediate units and do some things in intermediate unit contexts. When you bring that up with Forum members, they’re always very cautious about it because they want to protect that smallness that we’ve had. That’s something you have to be really careful about because they have a real bond and there’s a fear there that if you branch out and become bigger and take on maybe another one, that you could lose that.”*

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