

Christians Investing in Education

A Guide for Discussion
and Action



To find out more about the work of the Center for Public Justice as we equip Christians to engage in public life please go to our website at:

www.cpjustice.org

For more information about the Christians Investing in Education initiative and for additional resources, updates and an electronic copy of this guide please visit:

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Preface to the First Edition

Dear Friend,

This guide represents the efforts of hundreds of Christian citizens to develop a faithful response to the massive challenges we face with education in our country.

For over a year, the Center for Public Justice has gathered parents, school administrators, teachers, business leaders, nonprofit professionals, and college students in hotel ballrooms, on college campuses, in restaurants, and in school cafeterias. Our goal? To develop an understanding of what it means for Christians to invest in education, so that citizens are equipped to respond in faith.

We began our discussions by affirming that education in a political community is a conversation that belongs to every citizen, not only to parents. We also affirm that many different institutions must be invested in education in some way—and that such a comprehensive view of education in all its forms requires an equally comprehensive response.

To discern what this response should be, we spent hundreds of hours asking questions and listening to what a political community—Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in this case—had to say about education. As a direct result of these conversations, the Center for Public Justice produced a draft set of resources to equip Christian citizens for investing in education. And then we returned to get feedback. We spent more time gathered around kitchen tables, in living rooms, coffee shops, churches, and business offices where Christian citizens were candid about the initial draft. These conversations significantly shaped these revised resources, and we are thankful for the spirit of true partnership that animated these discussions.

As a result, this guide begins to identify the unique responsibilities given to the multitude of institutions that make up our society, the different ways each institution can and should engage with education, and finally, the responsibilities Christians bear in the process. These responsibilities are both political ones (those belonging to all citizens) and nonpolitical ones (those belonging to Christians as members of many other institutions such as families, nonprofits, businesses and congregations).

We want to acknowledge the financial support and thought-partnership of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation that has supported this initiative. It started as a conversation

in which we offered both commendation and constructive questions about the Foundation's major education reform efforts.

Yet, over the course of a year the conversation has grown into a shared commitment to see that every family has the opportunity for their child to receive an education that equips them to flourish.

There is, of course, much more yet to be done. This guide is offered as the first word in an ongoing conversation that we hope and pray contributes to educational justice for all.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephanie". The script is cursive and fluid, with the 'S' being particularly large and prominent.

Stephanie Summers

CEO, Center for Public Justice

October 2013

Preface to the Second Edition

Dear Friend,

It has now been over a year since we first published this Guide for Discussion and Action. During that time dozens of people have used the Guide in small groups and individually to gain a deeper vision for our common calling to faithful citizenship and what that means in education.

In addition, over this past year we have been in conversation with numerous people about how we could improve this guide.

In response to the feedback, this second edition of the Guide contains the same content for the group discussions but now also includes additional tools and resources. After receiving feedback from many of the group participants who wanted to gain a deeper understanding of the theology and philosophy behind our work, we decided to include the Additional Resources section as well.

In order to continue to incorporate user feedback, we have also included a link to a very brief online survey so that we can hear from you.

We continue to hope that the Guide will encourage and inspire conversation and action that we pray contributes to educational justice for all.

With gratitude,



Stephanie Summers

CEO, Center for Public Justice

November 2014

Facilitator Guidelines

A Note to the Facilitator

Two topics people usually avoid in polite company are religion and politics – and you are now leading a discussion that addresses both! With this in mind, we've put together some materials to help you along.

The Role of the Facilitator

Each session needs a facilitator. Whether it is the same person from session to session or you share leadership, your experience with the group and the information will be even more enriching if the session facilitator takes the time to read through the suggested facilitation tips below.

As the facilitator you do not have to be an expert, your role is simply to help the group move through the session together. It is also your role to consider the dynamics of the group and remind the group of its shared responsibility to treat each other justly.

In preparation for each session, you will want to read through the entire session in advance in order to be well prepared. We also suggest that you spend some of your preparation time praying for the session, the group, and wisdom and discernment in your leadership.

Prayer

It can be tempting to skip over the prayer times, but try to stick to them in order to remind the group of the common reason you have come together. The first prayer time is designed for the facilitator, or a volunteer, to pray over the issues that have come up in the investigative activity and then to pray corporately to prepare hearts for the new topic. Be sure to leave some time for the closing prayer to allow for prayerful contemplation over the issue discussed, especially when conversations became heated or questions were not clearly addressed.

Keep the Group Moving

The discussions are meant to build on each other from question to question and session to session. In order for participants to gain the greatest value you will need to complete all of the material in each of the seven sessions.

Facilitator Guidelines

Each session has estimated times for different parts. You will need to keep your eyes on the time and keep the group focused on the questions being asked.

Session Scribe

Each session will need a scribe who is able to take notes for the group. In the list of “what you will need for this session,” are instructions for the scribe of the questions that require notes for future activities and sessions. However, your group may benefit from having notes taken on the entire progression of questions. Tracking the notes on specific questions and the notes on weekly lessons learned will be important for the final session.

The scribe will need to be someone who writes legibly enough to be able to read the notes the next week. As the facilitator, you will want to pay attention and sometimes may need to prompt the scribe to make sure notes are taken.

If you are meeting in a space that requires you to pack up each week then we recommend that you use an easel pad to take notes. Someone needs to be responsible to bring the easel pad back from session to session. (Or perhaps, if someone has a smart phone they can use the Genius Scan app, a free app that allows you to email documents to participants after taking a picture of the notes.)

Investigative Activities

The investigative activities are designed for participants to start putting action to the inquiry. As the group begins to develop a deeper understanding of institutional responsibilities these activities will help participants learn about the different ways that they can engage and learn about resources available to help them engage.

We recognize that not everyone will have access to the Internet so we have tried to account for that by suggesting the option of contacting the government office by phone or visiting the public library and working with a librarian, who typically enjoys helping with research.

Sensitivity to Group Dynamics

Issues around education and government can be a very sensitive topic due to the breadth of perspectives held by Christians that we begin to explore throughout the material. Consequently, it is very important that everyone in the group feels comfortable enough to share their thoughts and experiences. If you have time, skill,

Facilitator Guidelines

and the ability to design a get-to-know-you session developed to help build trust among the group that would be ideal.

Though we have not provided introductory group-building material, we do believe that the first session provides an opportunity for participants to begin developing that trust, and that the answers to the questions in Session One provide a glimpse of the diversity within the group as participants are sharing their stories about educational backgrounds.

In order to help participants feel comfortable we have suggested a few basic principles to keep in mind as the facilitator:

- Try to make sure everyone feels comfortable sharing.
- Try to make sure, whenever possible, that everyone's ideas are heard. It is important that the group not get bogged down or dominated by an individual or a small number of participants. Asking someone to remain quiet so others who have not yet shared can do so is a reasonable request to make.
- Be sensitive to participants who might represent one of the institutions being discussed each week.

Invitation for Your Feedback

Our tools and resources will benefit substantially from your feedback. Please participate in our [very brief online survey](#) so that we can continue to improve the Christians Investing in Education resources.

We'll work to follow up with you, but we know we won't know how to get in touch with everyone who ends up with a copy of this material. If you have questions about the material during your study or have specific feedback about it, please contact the Pittsburgh Initiative Director, Charity Haubrich at charity.haubrich@cpjustice.org or toll-free at 866.275.8784.

Session One

Parents: How Do Parents Decide On Schooling?



What You'll Need for this Session

- An easel pad and markers (An easel pad allows you to review notes from week to week.)
- A scribe to take notes for the group, specifically the lessons learned in this session.
- Each person should have a copy of the discussion guide and something to write with.



Prayer

As you transition into this week's topic take a moment to call upon the Lord by saying the following prayer out loud together:

Lord help us to listen to one another, to have ears to hear your wisdom, eyes to see injustice and hearts that seek to love and serve one another.



Take 7-10 minutes to read the following narrative aloud in the group.

Samantha put on her shoes, opened the front door, and looked up the stairs. “James,” she said. “Come on! You need to step on it or we’ll both miss our buses!”

James raced down the steps and squeezed his feet into his still-tied shoes. He took his see-through backpack from his mother’s hand and opened the front door. Samantha put her hand on his shoulder.

“Oh no, you don’t!” she said. He turned around, gave her a peck on the cheek, grinned, and said, “Bye Mom” as he bolted down the sidewalk towards his bus stop. Thank goodness it’s Friday so he can sleep in tomorrow, she thought. Samantha grabbed her purse, locked the door behind her, and headed out.

Two minutes later, Samantha was on her bus to work when she realized she’d forgotten her lunch. She let out a groan. It was the second time this week she’d rushed out the door, and it meant she’d have to run out later and pick something up since she didn’t have time left to stop on the way.

She wondered if she’d be able to get past Troy without him seeing her leave and wanting to come along. She didn’t want to talk to him today, not after their conversation earlier that week.

Samantha and Troy went to the same church, and when the public school in Samantha’s neighborhood had closed, James was sent to the same K-5 school as Troy’s son, Michael. The boys had ended up in the same fifth grade class, and while James had done okay, Michael struggled academically.

Earlier this week, Troy had been heading out the door when Samantha was leaving to grab lunch. While they walked along, he’d been telling her why he and his wife had decided to send Michael to the local Christian school this year.

“We know our son. Last year he wasn’t learning. His teacher tried really hard, but she had her hands full with all those kids. And every kid is different. The one size fits all approach always means some kids get left out. We knew it

would be worse this year, with all the transitions and bigger classes in sixth grade.”

He'd also talked about how he and his wife had to “pay twice” to educate their son. She'd asked him what he'd meant by that, and he'd told her that they would still have to pay taxes like everyone else to support the public school. But now he and his wife also had to make big financial sacrifices to afford the Christian school.

Samantha hadn't said what she'd been thinking, and Troy thankfully hadn't asked. She had always been proud to send James to the public school in her neighborhood, which was where she had attended when she was growing up. It had gotten a little rougher since she'd been there, but it was still a good school. James had even been able to walk to his grandmother's apartment and stay there after school until Samantha was done with work.

But when the neighborhood school closed, James had ended up in a not so good elementary school out of the neighborhood. She had tried to get James into a different school in the district, but she hadn't been able to get him into anywhere with a better reputation.

James wasn't struggling right now, but if she was really honest, he wasn't thriving either. His sixth-grade class combined students from a lot of neighborhoods, and there were a couple of kids in his homeroom who had picked on James last year. Samantha wondered what she would do if they started giving him a hard time again, or if James started to experience problems like Michael.

The bus pulled up to the curb at her stop. Samantha got out and walked into work, passing Troy as she entered. “Good morning,” Troy said. “Good morning,” she said. Samantha kept on walking.

She knew she should be glad for Troy and his wife and son, but instead his story had just made her feel even worse than she already did. They had figured out a way to get a school they were happy with, even if they had to pay for it.

She couldn't afford to do that. So she was stuck, and because she was stuck, so was James.

At five minutes to noon, Samantha thought she was in the clear, because when she checked, Troy wasn't out front. She grabbed her purse and headed for the door. "Samantha," Troy said. "Wait up."

She squared her shoulders and turned around. "Troy, you can come with me, but you can't talk about school. I can't really take it today."

Troy looked at her with confusion on his face. "What do you mean? Is everything okay?"

Just then, Jennifer, the staff accountant, walked over. "I'm going to grab lunch, anyone want to join me?" Troy and Samantha both nodded yes and followed her out the door.

While they waited in line for their lunches, Jennifer, who was in a women's Bible study with Samantha, asked how things were going at school for James.

Samantha said, "Well, okay so far. Those kids that were giving him trouble last year seem to have backed off, probably because he grew like a weed this summer! He likes his homeroom teacher, so that's good. She's new to the school, but not brand-new. She came from somewhere else. But I worry a little about what it will be like if those boys start in on him again."

Jennifer nodded sympathetically. "You know I don't have any kids of my own, but James is one of my favorite young men. I know that whole situation was a burden for you last year."

Troy said, "I thought you were trying to get James in somewhere else, too."

"I did try," she said. "But I couldn't get him in anywhere else. It's okay. It could be a lot worse than it is."

Troy asked, "What about the Christian school?"

Samantha turned to face him and said, “Unlike you, I can’t afford to ‘pay twice’ to educate my child.”

Jennifer laughed uneasily. “Um, sorry to interrupt, but I think our food is ready.”

Troy looked at Samantha. “I deserve that,” he said. “I’m sorry. I didn’t know.”

“It’s okay,” said Samantha. “Let’s get our food.”

After picking up their sandwiches, Troy and Samantha walked back down the first block in silence. Jennifer followed slightly behind, seeming to be lost in her own thoughts. While they waited at the light to cross, Troy said, “I should have asked you about that earlier. I feel terrible. I was only thinking about my own family. Back there you said it’s okay. But it’s not really okay for either of us.”

He continued, “We should both be happy about decisions we can make for our kids about school. But neither of us actually is. You can’t get James into the school you want, and my family is making sacrifices to afford to.”

At that moment, Samantha realized that neither one of them was really able to do what they wanted for their child’s education. In different ways, both of their families were stuck. She also realized that it wasn’t just Troy who had been thinking only about his own kid.

“Troy,” Samantha said, “Every parent should be able to be happy with the decisions they make for their kids about school.” She paused in thought and then continued, “What would it look like if both of our families, if all parents, were able to make the decision they wanted to?”

“I honestly don’t know,” Troy replied. “But I want to find out.”

Group Discussion

Take 5-10 minutes for each person to individually answer questions 1-6.

1. In your experience, do you know who decided what type of schooling to pursue for you (public, independent, homeschool, etc.)? If so what factors influenced that decision?
2. For parents in the group: How did you decide what type of schooling (public, independent, homeschool, etc.) to pursue for your child(ren)? What factors influenced your decision.
3. Are you satisfied with the type of schooling that was chosen for you or that you've chosen for your children? Why or why not?



Lessons Learned

Take a few moments to individually write down in the space below two or three new things you have learned through today's discussion about the process parents go through in order to make decisions regarding their child's education.



Ask each person to share their top "lesson learned" out loud with the group. The scribe should write the lessons learned that each person shares, on the easel.

Investigative Activity

Investigative Activity

Over the next week ask a friend these same 5 questions: Be ready to share what you learned with the group next week.

1. In your experience, do you know who decided what type of schooling to pursue for you (public, independent, homeschool, etc.)? If so what factors influenced that decision?
2. For parents in the group: How did you decide what type of schooling (public, independent, homeschool, etc.) to pursue for your child(ren)? What factors influenced your decision.
3. Are you satisfied with the type of schooling that was chosen for you or that you've chosen for your children? Why or why not?
4. If you or your parents could make a different decision about the type of schooling, would your or their choice of schooling change? Why or why not?
5. If you or your parents could make a different decision about the type of schooling, what could have made this change possible? What might keep this type of change from happening?



Closing Prayer

Take a few moments to thank the Lord for the stories shared, acknowledging his work and presence within them, and to pray about any frustration and confusion that may have been revealed, and for a deeper understanding of how to pursue justice.

Session Two

Citizens: What Do Schools Have To Do With Me?

What You'll Need for this Session

- Your Investigative Activity work from the last session.
- An easel pad and markers.
- A scribe to take notes for the group, specifically for Question 3 and the lessons learned in this session.
- Each person should have a copy of the discussion guide and something to write with.
- The facilitator needs to bring a copy of the dictionary definition of citizenship.

Investigative Review

Take 10-15 minutes to have participants share with the group what they have learned from conversations with friends and neighbors over the last week.

Who was the person you talked to?

How did your friend decide what type of schooling (public, independent, homeschool, etc.) to pursue for their child(ren)? What factors influenced their decision?

Was the person you talked to satisfied with the type of schooling that was chosen for him/her or that they've chosen for their child(ren)? Why or why not?

If your friend could make a different decision about the type of schooling, would their choice of schooling change? Why or why not?

If your friend could make a different decisions about the type of schooling, what could have made this change possible? What might keep this type of change from happening?



Prayer

As you transition into this week's topic take a moment to call upon the Lord by saying the following prayer out loud together:

Lord help us to listen to one another, to have ears to hear your wisdom, eyes to see injustice and hearts that seek to love and serve one another.



Take 7-10 minutes to read the following narrative aloud in the group.

When Samantha and Troy left the sandwich shop, Jennifer held back a few steps to give them space. They obviously had some things they needed to sort out.

Jennifer felt confident that both her friends were right, but that they were both missing something important. Parents should be able to make decisions for their own children, and that included decisions about school. But they weren't quite getting that parents aren't the only ones who should care about children and schools.

Jennifer didn't know how to talk about it yet. But she wanted to say to them both, "When we're talking about fixing the problems with schools, we need to talk about politics!"

She knew that there are all kinds of ways that people help schools that are not political. But politics really did matter when it came to schools. Jennifer thought about the time when she first realized this was the case. One night about a year ago, Samantha had shared with the women's Bible study that James' school was being closed. She'd asked the women in the group to pray about where James would end up. Jennifer remembered committing to pray for her friend.

Up until that night, Jennifer had been mostly oblivious to the start of school each year. Jennifer would never have even noticed school was starting if it hadn't been for Joyce at the church who headed up Back-to-School Sunday every year, coaxing members to bring in school supplies that got donated to James' school. Jennifer remembered driving home after the Bible study and wondering what school they'd donate the supplies to next year.

But the next morning when she was making coffee, she turned on the local news. There were several items about school closings and the school board. When she got in her car, she listened to news radio during her commute across town. That morning there were two stories about schools and one about the new teacher evaluation system. Jennifer listened, realizing that she didn't know the first thing about how someone like her could help, or if she even should.

The church was hosting a meet-the-candidates forum for the school board. But she wasn't a parent. Should someone like her even try to help?

For the next two months, Jennifer prayed for her friend. Knowing every child is created in God's image meant she believed that every child should get the opportunity to grow into who they have been created to be. She was clear on the fact that not every school was a great school and that not every kid was given the same opportunities. Every once in awhile Jennifer would wonder why that was the case and what she could do since she wasn't a parent.

That had all changed on that cold November morning 10 months ago. Jennifer remembered working through the ballot and getting to the list of candidates for school board. Even though she'd voted in every election held since she was 18, she realized she had never voted the ballot all the way through. She had never voted for the school board.

Jennifer had always told herself it was because she didn't have a kid in the schools. But at that moment, she realized she wasn't supposed to be voting as a parent. She was voting because she was a citizen. Jennifer remembered hearing that being a citizen comes with responsibilities to God and to her neighbors.

She had a horrible feeling while looking at the names on the ballot. She didn't know how the school board worked. She didn't know what it was supposed to do. And she didn't recognize a single name. Surely one of those school board members represented her. And maybe another one represented Samantha and James? She didn't know what to do.

That night at home, Jennifer prayed that God would show her what she needed to do. A few weeks later there was a story on the morning news about the school board holding a public meeting on the draft of next year's budget, which contained proposals for some major cuts and more school closures. Jennifer knew she'd been given the talent of understanding finances and budgets and enjoyed making sense of them in a way that clearly not everyone did. Maybe there was a way she could use these talents to help?

For the last eight months Jennifer had been going to school board meetings regularly. In that time, she'd learned that the answers were not as simple as she'd first thought. Before she'd been to a meeting, she'd thought that the schools were suffering because they didn't have enough money. What she quickly learned was that the budget for the schools was the second-highest in the state. She learned there were many, many challenges, but the size of the "money pie" wasn't the big one. HONK!

The car horn jolted Jennifer out of her thoughts, just in time for her to stop and avoid running into Samantha and Troy who were waiting for the light and still talking.

She heard Troy say, "But what difference can the school board make?"

Jennifer didn't know what they'd been talking about, and before she could stop herself, she said, "A lot. I go to school board meetings."

Troy looked deeply confused. "No offense, but why on earth would you do that? You're not a parent."

"You're right, I'm not a parent," said Jennifer. "But I'm not going as a parent. I'm going as a citizen. You two aren't just parents. You're citizens too."

Samantha spoke next. "I've always meant to go, but it's always on a school night. After work, and with James to get ready for school the next day, it's just always seemed impossible."

"Most parents I know are in exactly the same situation," said Jennifer. "Between work and family and everything else, taking the time to be involved as a citizen in this way can be a real challenge."

"You're making excuses for me," said Samantha.

"No, just the opposite," said Jennifer. "You're not only parents, and we're not only church members. We're all citizens as well. Citizens are supposed to work towards a more just political community for everyone."

“It’s like what we were saying earlier, Samantha,” Troy said. “Except that every citizen should care about students. Not just the parents.”



Group Discussion

Take around 40 minutes to answer the following three questions as a group.

How would you define the word “citizen”? **(Please do not look up a dictionary definition. You will have a chance to do that later.)**

Break into small groups of 3-4 and together determine the definition of citizenship.

Have each group write their definition of citizenship on the easel and work together to create one definition for the room.

Write the dictionary definition of citizenship beside the group definition.

Are there any notable similarities or differences between the two definitions? If so, what are they?

In the story Jennifer described Christian citizens as having the responsibility to work towards a more just political community for every person. This means seeking the well-being of others, not just individual interests. What about this definition do you find exciting? What about it do you find challenging?

When it comes to education, what would it mean to practice Christian citizenship the way Jennifer described it, working towards a more just political community for every person? (Be sure to have the scribe take notes for the answers to this question.)



Lessons Learned

Take a few minutes to individually write in the space below two or three new things you have learned through today's discussion about citizenship.



Ask each person to share their top "lesson learned" out loud with the group. The scribe should write the lesson learned that each person shares, on the easel.

Investigative Activity

Each member of the group should commit to reading a local newspaper or listening to local news station this week to find an example of a current practice in education that appears to be unjust. Prepare to share a short summary for your group that addresses the following questions.

What is the injustice that has been identified?

In what ways are citizens working together to address this injustice?

Who seems to be responsible for the injustice?

What aspects of the story may not have been covered?

What might citizens do to address this injustice?



Closing Prayer

Take a few moments as a group to thank the Lord that we are citizens of His Kingdom that will one day be made new, acknowledging His work and presence within our world today, and to pray about how we can work toward a more just educational system for everyone.

Session Three

Non-profits & Faith Based Organizations: How Can They Support Schools and Families?

What You'll Need for this Session

- Your Investigative Activity homework from the last session.
- An easel pad and markers.
- A scribe to take notes for the group, specifically for Question 3(b) and the lessons learned in this session.
- Each person should have a copy of the discussion guide and something to write with.

Investigative Review

Take 15 minutes and break into groups of 3-4 to share your summary of the article or news story you listened to this past week and answers to the summary questions.


What is the injustice that has been identified?

In what ways are citizens working together to address this injustice?

Who seems to be responsible for the injustice?

What aspects of the story may not have been covered?

What might citizens do to address this injustice?

 *Each small group should choose the story that best shows citizens working to address an injustice and share it with the whole group.*

 **Prayer**

As you transition into this week's topic take a moment to call upon the Lord by someone praying over the injustices that you've just shared, and end the prayer by praying the following out loud together:

Lord help us to listen to one another, to have ears to hear your wisdom, eyes to see injustice and hearts that seek to love and serve one another.

 *Take 5-7 minutes to read the following narrative aloud in the group.*

Troy held the door open for his co-workers as they returned to work.

As Jennifer walked by, he asked, “How do you mean I need to be involved as a Christian citizen? In caring about all the schools? That doesn’t quite make sense, especially now that Michael is at the Christian school.”

Troy noticed the owner, Keith Johnson, walking towards them with a stack of papers.

“Let’s talk later,” he said. Jennifer nodded yes.

All afternoon as he worked, Troy reflected on their conversation. Jennifer seemed to think there was more to being a Christian citizen than voting or going to the school board. But what else it actually involved wasn’t clear to him at all. For the first time in his life, he found himself wishing that it wasn’t a Friday so he could stick around at work to talk.

As he headed out for the weekend, Troy called his wife from the parking lot to tell her he was on his way. Robin sounded tired when she answered the phone. She said that as she was leaving work, she’d gotten a call from Michael’s teacher. Unlike last year, Michael had been doing fine in his classes so far. But the teacher had called to say that Michael was having trouble staying seated in class. This week, he’d started behaving in aggressive ways towards the other boys.

Troy felt his pulse pick up. What was this about? He told her he’d pick up a pizza for dinner and they’d talk more once they were both at home.

As he started the car, Troy thought about Michael. He’d always needed more help than they could manage to give him on their own. They’d moved him to the Christian school for sixth grade because of the smaller class sizes and to give him more focused attention. It seemed to be helping him make progress academically. But Michael was still struggling.

Troy thought about what else was different this fall. Last year Michael had stayed for homework help, snacks, and after-school sports held in the school gym. The program was a partnership with a Christian nonprofit whose mission was to provide character and skills building activities for kids with working parents. The homework help seemed to be a good thing for most of the kids, even though it hadn't been enough for Michael. But he had gotten very good at basketball. He'd looked forward to joining the team at the middle school. Troy realized that Michael did a lot more sitting around now. Was this part of the problem?

Troy thought about how he and Robin had worked hard to figure out what was best. They'd done all their homework, or so he'd thought. Robin ended up having to do the most to accommodate the differences. Last year Michael took the school bus home. But now Robin was responsible for a daily carpool for Michael and another boy from his class. She drove them to school on her way to work every morning. The other boy's mom did the pickup after school each day, dropping Michael off at the dentist's office where Robin was a receptionist. This meant Michael sometimes spent more than two hours after school sitting in the waiting room.

Troy was frustrated with himself. He knew Robin was able to make sure that Michael worked on his homework every day, which seemed to have helped him improve. But changing schools seemed to have come with a downside they hadn't anticipated. Maybe Michael needed to be more physically active than he was now? Going from four days of after-school sports to zero was clearly having an impact. Why hadn't they thought of this before?


He remembered his conversation with Samantha and Jennifer earlier in the day. This wasn't just about his kid. Any parent could find themselves in the same situation, with a child who has a need that is more than what any school can fill. What kid doesn't?

As he eased his car into the driveway, Troy considered the thousands of kids in the dozen or so schools he passed on his route to-and-from work each day. Each of those kids had all kinds of different needs at every one of those

	Needs (a)	Barriers (b)	Changes (c)
Parents			
Students			
Families			

2. Think of a nonprofit and/or faith-based organization that provides support for students and families. What are the values that shape that organization? Discuss how these values shape how families think about themselves. Discuss how these values help shape how students think about themselves.

Some nonprofit and faith-based organizations engage in advocacy, which is activity done by the organization to educate citizens about the changes to

 *Have the facilitator ask each person to share their top “lesson learned” out loud with the group. The scribe should write the lessons learned that each person shares on the easel.*

Investigative Activity

Each member of the group should commit to reading a local newspaper or listening to a local news station this week to find an example of each type of nonprofit listed below. Come back next week with the names of the organizations, what type of work each one does, and how someone would be able to obtain their services.

Nonprofit and/or faith-based organizations (1) primarily supporting parents, (2) primarily supporting students, and (3) primarily supporting families as a whole.

Identify whether any of the three types of organizations listed above also engage in advocacy in support of needed changes to laws and policies impacting education in your area.

Closing Prayer

Take a few moments to thank the Lord for all of the people and organizations that exist to help serve families, acknowledging His work and presence within them, for a continued understanding for how they can to pursue justice for families.

Session Four

Principals, Teachers and Students: How Do They Work In Harmony?

What You'll Need for this Session

- The scribe notes from question 3b in the previous session.
- Your Investigative Activity work from the previous session.
- An easel pad and markers.
- A scribe to take notes for the group, specifically for questions 3 & 4 and the lessons learned in this session.
- Each person should have a copy of the discussion guide and something to write with.

Investigative Review

Take 10-15 minutes, break into small groups of 3-4; and have each group share their findings from last week's Investigative Activity.

What is the name of each nonprofit?


What type of work does each nonprofit do?


How would someone obtain the services of each nonprofit?

Do any of these organizations also engage in advocacy in support of needed changes to laws and policies impacting education in your area?

Looking at the criteria you created in Question 3(b) in the last session, “criteria your group would use to determine whether or not a group was


working towards justice for all,” each small group should list what criteria are met by the organizations that engage in advocacy.

 *Each small group should report back to the whole group with one example of a nonprofit or faith-based group that is equipping citizens to engage in advocacy in support of needed changes to laws and policies impacting education and which criteria that organization meets as they work towards justice for all.*

 **Prayer**

As you transition into this week’s topic take a moment to call upon the Lord by having someone pray for the work of the nonprofit organizations that you’ve learned about and close the prayer by praying the following out loud together.

Lord help us to listen to one another, to have ears to hear your wisdom, eyes to see injustice and hearts that seek to love and serve one another.

 *Take 7-10 minutes to read the following narrative aloud in the group.*

Ms. Thomas was not going to let them see how angry she was with them, or how frustrated she was with herself. No matter how hard she had to make herself hold back, she was committed to remaining in control of her emotions.

“Boys,” she said, “I need you to take your seats. Right. Now.”

No one moved. Every child was in a seat except the three boys gathered around James’ desk near the back of the room. They were pretending they hadn’t heard her at all.

It was Monday, she told herself. It was only homeroom period. And already she felt exhausted.

She’d always thought she was a good teacher. Or at least she had been a good teacher before she got here.

James’ voice interrupted her thoughts. “Ms. Thomas!”

Her eyes focused again on the group of boys near the back of the room. The three boys had their backs to her and were standing so she could not see James. She had no idea what was happening this time.

Then the bell rang. Every student stood up and began grabbing books and binders, talking, and tossing on backpacks. She saw James run out of the door with three boys in close pursuit. She’d been saved by the bell. She hoped James had been as lucky.

She remembered last year when she was still teaching back home. It had been her third year as a sixth-grade teacher. She’d had the same kids for the entire day, for every class except phys-ed. Sixth-grade was at the elementary school there.

She'd prided herself on knowing the name of every student without ever having to look at a seating chart. She could take attendance from memory after the first day. Now she struggled to keep up with the names of the kids that rotated through her classes. She'd gone from being someone who was able to really help kids love to learn, to someone who taught the same subject over and over again to such a large number of students who completed so many assignments she could barely keep up with them all. The transitions between classes, which felt like bursts of pure chaos, were the worst minutes of each day.

She had been worse on Friday, she reminded herself. She'd had to send one of the boys to the principal's office during homeroom for trying to start a fight with James over breakfast. One of the three boys had been trying to take James' breakfast. James had remained expressionless. Even after one of the boys successfully stole his juice and chugged it down right in front of him, James' face hadn't changed a bit. Even when she ordered the culprit to the office, James sat there like a stone.

At least this morning she'd remembered that Mondays were always the most difficult. These kids were hungry. Many of her students hadn't eaten a single meal since their lunch period on Friday afternoon. Until they'd eaten breakfast this morning, she knew everything was harder for them, and for her, than it needed to be.

She took a deep breath as the students for her first-period class took their seats. She told herself she'd be able to do better tomorrow. She wasn't quite sure how. So many of the students had needs that seemed to be her responsibility now. So many students showed up every day with needs she had never known before this school. She turned to face her class.

After finishing three back-to-back classes, she sat down at her desk for her planning period. Ms. Jones paused at the door. "Ms. Thomas," she said. "Do you have a minute?"

Ms. Thomas nodded. If she was honest with herself, she was still scared of Ms. Jones, who had been the building principal for seven years. Ms. Jones had the reputation for being fair but having high standards. She'd helped oversee the implementation of a new teacher evaluation system the year before. Many of the other teachers in the building had only positive things to say about it. But she wasn't sure. She'd never been evaluated before, and she felt sure she was not doing anywhere near as well as she'd done in her last school.

"I wanted to follow up with you about the young man who was in my office on Friday morning," said Ms. Jones, pulling up a student desk and sitting down. "We had a so-so talk. He's got a tough go of it at home. Were things any better today?"

Ms. Thomas thought about what she should say. "Only slightly," she said. She could see the compassion in Ms. Jones eyes, which made her feel worse.

Ms. Jones continued to look at her steadily, and then smiled. "It's been a normal Monday, then?" she asked.

Before she could stop herself, Ms. Thomas rolled her eyes and said, "Has it ever!" She quickly realized how unprofessional her comment had been. "I'm sorry, Ms. Jones, I didn't mean it like that."

Ms. Jones leaned forward and with a kind but firm voice said, "Yes, you did." She stood up and walked towards the far side of the classroom, looking out the windows. "I came to talk with you and see if you had any questions about the upcoming teacher evaluations since it will be your first time.

But first, let me tell you a story."

Ms. Thomas listened as Ms. Jones told her the story of her own career as a teacher before she became a principal. Ms. Thomas was surprised to learn that Ms. Jones had been ready to quit. She'd ended up in a school where the

challenges in her classroom were so bad she had asked members of her church to help out in what she referred to as “an act of complete desperation.”

“Thankfully, they responded,” she said. “Their very practical help with my students was a lifesaver. I learned from that experience that other teachers struggled just as much as I did to try and solve every problem our students had. But I also learned that many issues need other people and organizations to help address them.”

“Ms. Thomas,” said Ms. Jones. “If this isn’t already clear, you should know that I’m tough, but I’m fair. I believe that every one of the students here can be successful, and that they all have room to grow. Sometimes that means doing something a bit different for different types of students in order to help them really learn.”

She turned to face Ms. Thomas. “I look at the teacher evaluation system the same way,” she said. “We get to learn together about what you really need to reach your potential. You’re your own person. What you need may be different than what another teacher may need.”

Ms. Thomas felt a sense of relief. Ms. Jones already knew she was struggling. But in the same way Ms. Thomas saw the potential in her students, Ms. Jones saw the potential in her. And she knew she didn’t have to do it all alone.



Group Discussion

Take 40-50 minutes to discuss the following questions in your group.

List the responsibilities of the principal, teachers and students in a school.

Principal

Teachers

Students

What responsibilities do teachers and principals in schools have to students' families?

Teachers to Students' Families

Principals to Students' Families

In every school, there will be students whose families need more support than the schools are designed to provide. Based on the responsibilities discussed by the group in Question 2, list specific challenges that teachers and principals have in schools when working to fulfill their responsibilities.

Challenges Teachers Might Have

Challenges Principals Might Have

Using the list of specific challenges teachers and administrators face that the group created in Question 3, what challenges are best addressed by the efforts of other institutions. Identify which of these institutions might best address the specific challenges teachers and principals face.

Other families

Nonprofit and faith-based organizations

Congregations

Business



Lessons Learned

Take a few moments to individually write down two or three new things you have learned through today's discussion about the role teachers and principals play in education.



Ask each person to share their top "lesson learned" out loud with the group. The scribe should write the lesson learned that each person shares, on the easel.

Investigative Activity

Over the next week, contact the office of, or visit the website of, your local school board or district (<http://www.pps.k12.pa.us>) or the Department of Education in your state (<http://www.education.state.pa.us>).

What proposed changes to laws or policies are currently under consideration?

Which of the proposed changes to laws and policies will help teachers and principals to best fulfill their responsibilities students to and their families?

(Make sure each school district in the room has at least one person looking up info for its district and, if possible, have at least two people in the group looking up the state department of education.)



Closing Prayer

Take a few moments to pray together as a group by thanking the Lord for our teachers and principals and their desire to serve our communities and children, acknowledge His work and presence within them, and pray that the Lord would provide continued wisdom and discernment as they teach our children and navigate many challenges. Pray for specific concerns and praises you have for the teachers and principals you know.

Session Five

Business: How Might Businesses Support Schools?

 What You'll Need for this Session

- Your Investigative Activity work from the last session.
- An easel pad and markers.
- A scribe to take notes for the group, specifically the lessons learned in this session.
- Each person should have a copy of the discussion guide and something to write with.

 **Investigative Review**


Take 10-15 minutes, break into small groups of 3-4, and spend a few minutes reviewing the answers you found at the local and state level to last week's Investigative Activity, and ask the following questions.

Which did you choose to research, the school board or the Department of Education?

How did you find the information? Was it easy or difficult to find?

What are proposed changes to laws or policies that are currently under consideration?

Which changes will help teachers and principals to best fulfill their responsibilities to students and their families?

 *Each small group should share one finding with the whole group. Encourage a diversity of reporting between school board and the Department of Education, especially if there are several school districts represented.*

 **Prayer**

As you transition into this week's topic take a moment to call upon the Lord by having someone pray for the work of local and state government that you've learned about and close the prayer by praying the following out loud together.

Lord help us to listen to one another, to have ears to hear your wisdom, eyes to see injustice and hearts that seek to love and serve one another.

 *Take 5-7 minutes to read the following narrative aloud in the group.*

Keith looked around the principal's office. He chuckled a bit to himself. What a funny thing, a company president getting sent to the principal's office at age 52! The door swung open. "Mr. Johnson? I'm Ms. Jones. I'm sorry to keep you waiting. Don't get up." Ms. Jones pulled up a chair to face him. "What do you need?"

Keith had heard this principal was no-nonsense and efficient and ran her school the same way. "I won't take up too much of your time," he said. "I know you have your hands full. But I'm hoping I can help you while you're helping me."

Ms. Jones shifted and sat up a little straighter in her chair, looking a bit puzzled. "Yes?"

Keith shared that for the last 20 years, his wife Joyce had been heading up a Back-to-School Sunday effort at one of the smaller churches in the area. He shared how she'd spend a month or two reminding members to bring school supplies that were being donated to an elementary school in their neighborhood. He told Ms. Jones that last year the school had been one of those that had been closed. He also shared that Joyce had been in the hospital during the usual back-to-school time.

"So what I'm saying is," said Keith, "That while the good folks at the church remembered to visit my wife in the hospital, and to bring us some home-cooked meals, which I appreciated very much, they didn't remember Back-to-School Sunday."

Ms. Jones interrupted. "Thank you for thinking of us," she said. "Unfortunately, we can't come pick anything up. But if you can get your items here, we have students who need them. Is there anything else I can do for you today?"

"There is," said Keith. "I said I want us to help each other. I learned a lesson while my wife was in that hospital bed. Don't hear this the wrong way. I thank God for the friends who came to see her. But no one asked her what she

wanted. And what she wanted, more than anything, was to know Back-to-School Sunday was still on.”

Keith continued, “I was praying about it one night because I was cross about it. I’m ashamed to admit it, but I was. I was praying, and then a thought came to me. I’d been the same way. See, several years ago, I approached this school with an offer of help to provide my accounting staff to tutor students in math. I knew exactly what kind of help those kids needed. Or at least I thought I knew.”

Ms. Jones appeared to visibly relax.

“I’ve been mad at the school for years for not taking me up on my offer. But what I’m asking now,” said Keith, “is can you tell me what kind of help your school really needs from the businesses in this community?”

“Schools and businesses exist for different purposes,” said Ms. Jones. “But you’re not the only one who needs to be asking what kind of help you need. We need to be asking what you need from us.”

As he drove back to his office, Keith said a prayer of gratitude for his new friend, Ms. Jones. He’d learned a lot by asking the question he’d asked. Ms. Jones had even called in a young teacher who talked a bit about some of the challenges she’d seen her sixth-graders facing. They’d discussed several ideas that would work in that context. But one stuck out to them all as something that businesses could do easily, which was to help students connect what they were learning in the classroom today to their future careers. Keith was so excited about it that he brought it up in a conversation with Cynthia, his vice-president, later that day.

Cynthia was visibly irritated. “Look,” she said. “We do this kind of philanthropic stuff already. We give people time off to do charity work. We have a donation match program, a quarter on every dollar our employees give. We write checks to support the local scholarship fund and the sports team. But we don’t have time to let our people go talk about what they do and how they got

there. You know it's a tough market right now. We can't waste resources on something like this."

Keith was surprised by her response. "I think talking with these young people will actually make our business better. The teachers at the schools will recommend their best students for our internships. We'll be able to talk to the teachers and the students about what kind of qualifications successful applicants need to have. They can't know what kind of employees we need unless we tell them."

Keith paused before he continued. "I know those things are all long-term benefits."

"But there's also an immediate benefit for our people," Keith said. "Describing their work to others and why they do it in the first place always makes them more excited about doing it."

"I think I'm starting to see what you're saying," said Cynthia. "Yes, it is going to cost us resources, but it could be a good investment."

"And the best part," said Keith "Is that these young students will have a better sense of why their learning matters. Think about what could happen if we helped other businesses provide their people as examples of what life after school can look like? These folks are more than just good employees. They are people who are invested in the well-being of the community as a whole."



Group Discussion

Take the next 40-50 minutes to discuss the following questions as a group.

Keith Johnson recognized that he had not stopped to ask what kind of help the school actually needed. Did this experience resonate with you in any way? Share your experience with the group.

As a group, discuss what could happen if students knew that what they were learning in the classroom today was preparing them for life after graduation.

For most students, being a teacher is the only job they've ever seen up close. What types of businesses are in your community? What future possibilities might businesses help students see for themselves?


Ms. Jones says that schools and businesses exist for different purposes. Discuss how you think the purposes of schools and businesses are similar or different. Are there things that schools and businesses can learn from one another, as Ms. Jones suggests? Discuss what these things are.

A guiding principle for many businesses is the idea of thrift, meaning the wise use of money and non-financial resources (like employees and equipment). Where in a school could the principle of thrift could be beneficial



Lessons Learned

Take a few moments to individually write down two or three new things you have learned through today's discussion about the role businesses play in education.

 *Have the facilitator ask each person to share their top “lesson learned” out loud with the group. The scribe should write the lesson learned that each person shares, on the easel.*

Investigative Activity

As a group, commit to reading a local newspaper or watching a local news station this week to find examples of businesses investing in education. Be sure to obtain the following information:

What was the name of the business?

What are they doing to invest in education?

Did the coverage explain why the business was making the investment?

Did the coverage explain any laws or policies that either are or should be in place in order to support these types of investments? If not, how would you recommend to someone how they would find out about the existing or needed laws or policies? Consider acting on your own recommendation to learn this information.

Closing Prayer

Take a few moments to pray together as a group by thanking the Lord for all of the businesses that are connecting with our schools, acknowledging His work and presence within them, for a continued vision for the leadership of schools and businesses for how they can work with one another, and pray for any obstacles that could prevent that from happening.

Session Six

Government: How Can Government Ensure Both Opportunity & Diversity?



What You'll Need for this Session

- The facilitator should bring a list of responsibilities of your local school board member. (*An example from the PPS School District can be found in the Appendix. You may need to look this information up for your school district on their website under board policies, or contact the district office.*)
- Your Investigative Activity work from the last session.
- An easel pad and markers.
- A scribe to take notes for the group, specifically the lessons learned in this session.
- Each person should have a copy of the discussion guide and something to write with.



Investigative Review

Break up into small groups of 3-4. Have each person choose one example they have brought and report the answers to last week's Investigative Activity.

What was the name of the business?

What are they doing to invest in education?

Did the coverage say why the business was making the investment?

Did the coverage explain any laws or policies that might need to be in place in order to support these types of investments? If not can you think of any laws or policies that are/should be in place to support these types of investments?



Have the whole group discuss together how you would find more information about related laws and policies.



Prayer

As you transition into this week's topic take a moment to call upon the Lord by having someone pray for the work of businesses that you've learned about and close the prayer by praying the following out loud together.

Lord help us to listen to one another, to have ears to hear your wisdom, eyes to see injustice and hearts that seek to love and serve one another.



Take 8-10 minutes to read the following narrative aloud in the group.

James looked at the clock on the wall. Two minutes. One hundred twenty seconds left. He could do it.

He took a deep breath. *One nineteen. One eighteen. One seventeen.*

He saw the fingers first before he saw the face and knew it was Derek. He was taller than Derek this year. And he was faster. James swatted and Derek's fingers disappeared from where they had reached out to take his orange juice. It was Monday morning and it was still frozen from the delivery truck freezer. He couldn't drink it yet. But it was the only thing worth keeping. The rest of breakfast tasted like rat dung. Derek could take all of it from him and James wouldn't care.

He'd lost count. He looked at the clock. One hundred ten. One hundred nine. One hundred eight.

If he could make it to the hall before Derek did, he'd be okay. In the hall, he was faster. In homeroom, he was stuck. If he got up or yelled at Derek to stop it, Ms. Thomas would be sad. He liked Ms. Thomas, even though he felt sorry for her. She never lost her temper. But she seemed sad when kids didn't listen. He wished he had Ms. Thomas for a period class without Derek instead of just homeroom. She reminded him of his favorite teacher from his old school.

His old school. James felt confused just thinking about it. He'd learned all kinds of new things there and knew everyone in it. He'd walked a few blocks to it instead of rushing to catch the stupid bus every morning. He'd been ready to be king of the school just like all the fifth graders had been before him. But instead he'd spent last year at a different school. The school that Derek had ruled. Now he was at the middle school and here was Derek all over again.

They'd closed his school. Who did it? He remembered asking his grandmother, and she'd said it was the school board, the people who made the rules about the schools. He'd thought he would have been bored if all he did was talk about school rules.

This year he'd thought he might learn more about it in social studies class. He liked social studies class. He liked hearing about how America was supposed to

work. He liked Ms. Campbell, who taught first period social studies. She never looked annoyed when he asked her a question.

James liked learning about government. He had already learned that there were different levels of it. Some decisions got made in Washington, DC, where America's government for everyone in the whole country was. There were some decisions that got made at the state Capitol for the whole state. And there were some decisions that got made by the local government. Ms. Campbell had said that the people who voted for local government could watch the same TV news program and know exactly where each of the neighborhoods were, that's how close local government is.

Ms. Campbell had told his class that being a citizen was more than voting. She said it meant that people who live here are supposed to make it a better place for everyone who lived there. But he wasn't sure yet exactly what that meant. He knew that when he was 18 he could vote for all the local candidates. And he could vote for the president.

He had never been to Washington, DC, where the president lives. That field trip wasn't until eighth grade, but they were already raising money for the trip. They would be gone two overnights and they would travel on a bus, the kind that wasn't a city bus or a school bus. It would have a place below it where they would put their bags with their clothes for the trip. They would visit the White House where the president lives with his wife and daughters, and the building where Congress meets to make laws.

James thought he would ask Congress to banish Derek to the moon and then have them re-open his school. Or maybe the other way around. He was willing to compromise.

This year for sixth-grade social studies they'd take a field trip to the state Capitol. They were planning to leave on a school bus from the parking lot when school started in the morning and come back very late on Friday night. They would stop on the way at McDonald's for lunch. There would be volunteers from his church and other helpers from the community like his mentor Mr. Steve to go on the trip to help make sure no one got lost. And they would get to

meet with their local representative in her office at the State Capitol and talk with her.

James knew he couldn't wait until eighth grade to try and get things fixed. He wondered if maybe there was something he could get ready to say to the representative at the state capital to fix the rat dung food at the school. And help Ms. Thomas. And make sure kids like Derek weren't in his class again next year. He'd ask Ms. Campbell about it next period.

Someone was laughing. James looked at the clock again. It looked like 16 seconds, but he wasn't sure. Derek was standing sort of in the way, saying mean stuff now.

James watched as Derek's hand moved towards his desk, almost snatching up the container of orange juice.

The orange juice! It was the only thing James wanted. "Ms. Thomas!"

James had shrieked before he could stop himself. He looked towards the front of the room but he couldn't see her. Derek was going to win this time. And he knew it.

Derek grabbed the juice, shook it hard, opened the container, and began to drink. The boys next to him laughed and cheered as Derek chugged the juice straight through until it was gone.

James took a deep breath and stared straight ahead. He was ready. Ten. Nine. Eight. Seven. Six. Five.

James bolted from his seat and was already in the hall when the bell rang. He weaved around the kids who had skipped class in the hall. He practically ran straight into Ms. Campbell's desk when he crossed the threshold of her room.

James said, "Ms. Campbell. Why did my school get closed?"

Ms. Campbell said, "Some decisions get made by the school board, James."

"The school board?" he asked. He was breathing hard enough that he couldn't ask his whole question.

“They are a group of men and women who are elected by local voters. Their job is to make the rules and decisions about the schools in our school district,” Ms. Campbell said. “Now go ahead and take your seat, and we’ll get started. It’s a good question. I’m glad to see you’re so eager to learn.”

James knew Ms. Campbell hadn’t exactly answered his question. But it seemed okay to him for now. At least he knew who had decided to close his school. And that the school board was made up of people who lived here too. And that people who lived here had voted for them. So these people were his neighbors.

He knew there were a lot of things he didn’t understand yet about what it meant to be a citizen or what government did. He knew it was more than voting. And he was glad, because he wouldn’t be old enough to vote for a long time. But his neighbors had voted for the school board. And the school board had decided to close his school. Did they know he had to eat rat dung? Did they know about Ms. Thomas? Did they know about kids like Derek?

James sat down at his desk and got out his pencil.

It didn’t quite make sense to him yet, how he could help as a citizen. James knew that it would take a lot of work, from a lot more citizens than just him. But he was ready to do his part.



Group Discussion

Take the next 40-50 minutes to discuss the following questions as a group.

Without looking at the actual responsibilities (*listed in the Appendix*), as a whole group, brainstorm a list of the responsibilities for public school board members that responds to God's call to do justice for every family and institution in the political community.

Responsibilities of a school board member:

Compare your group's list of responsibilities with the actual responsibilities of the members of the public school board found in the Appendix. What are the similarities and what are the differences between these two lists of responsibilities?

Similarities

Differences

Discuss why there are similarities and differences between the two lists of responsibilities.



Lessons Learned

Take a few minutes to individually write down two or three new things you have learned through today's discussion about the role government plays in education.



Ask each person to share their top "lesson learned" out loud with the group. The scribe should write the lessons learned that each person shares on the easel.

Investigative Activity

Divide into three groups. Determine which group will examine local government, which will examine state government, and which will examine the federal government.

For next week, each person should research the responsibilities for education held by the level of government your group has. Be sure to include the following:

Responsibility for education

How did you obtain the information?

Was obtaining this information difficult or easy?

Is it clear how citizens can be involved to help shape the laws or policies at this level related to education? (For example, is there a way to make public comments to legislators?)



Closing Prayer

Take a few moments to pray together as a group by thanking the Lord for those who are serving on the local school board. Ask Him to provide them with wisdom and discernment and a continued conviction to serve with the view of providing a just system for all children. Pray for the wisdom and the follow through for us in helping our school board pursue justice for all of our children.

Session Seven

The Way Forward: Where Do We Go From Here?

What You'll Need for this Session

- The groups notes and record of lessons learned from all of the previous sessions. (*Before the session begins, post all of the notes on the wall of one side of the room in consecutive order, and all of the lessons learned on another wall in consecutive order.*)
- Your Investigative Activity work from the last session.
- An easel pad and markers.
- A scribe to take notes for the group, specifically the lessons learned in this session.
- Each person should have a copy of the discussion guide and something to write with.

Investigative Review

Take 15 to 20 minutes to divide into groups of three, or groups that consist of at least one person who has done the homework for each level of government and have each person in the small group share what they have learned in your investigation.

Roles and responsibilities of your level of government for education

How did you obtain the information? (Was it difficult/easy etc?)

Was it clear how citizens can be involved in shaping the laws or policies related to education at the level of government you investigated? (For example, is there a way to make public comments to legislators?)



Prayer

As you transition into this week's topic take a moment to call upon the Lord by having someone pray for the work of government that you've learned about and close the prayer by praying the following out loud together.

Lord help us to listen to one another, to have ears to hear your wisdom, eyes to see injustice and hearts that seek to love and serve one another.



Group Discussion


Place the notes from the prior sessions in several places throughout the room. Take 5-10 minutes to have everyone walk around the room, quietly reading and reflecting on the notes and lessons learned from the past six sessions. Consider the questions below during your time of independent reflection.

What observations do you make about your group's learning around the roles and responsibilities of the institutions you have discussed throughout the past weeks?

What were the most passionate conversations, and what triggered such a response?

Which conversations did you struggle with the most, and why?

How have you grown in your understanding of citizenship and its responsibilities?

 *Once everyone has had a chance to read most of them, have everyone take their seats and answer the following questions as a group:*

How have you grown in your understanding of citizenship and its responsibilities?

If more citizens are going to gain an understanding of their political responsibilities and begin working together to help shape a more just education system, what are the three next steps that must be taken from here?

Which of those steps would you and/or your group be willing to take?

How could you help support each other in taking these steps individually and corporately?

What resources are available to us in this work?

For Another Time ...

Pick a time, date, and a leader to organize the group coming together again to discuss your activities. A suggested agenda for your meeting would be to review the activities that you had committed yourselves to and to ask yourselves the same set of questions to determine what has changed in your community and any next steps that you may want to consider taking for the future.

What has changed about how we engage in education?

If more citizens are going to gain an understanding of their political responsibilities and begin working together to help shape a more just education system, what are the three next steps that must be taken from here?

Which of those steps would you and/or your group be willing to take?

How could you help support each other in taking these steps individually and corporately?

What resources are available to us in this work?



Closing Prayer

Take some time to pray together thanking the Lord for all of the lessons learned over the past weeks. Pray for wisdom, direction, and passionate pursuit of justice as you fulfill your responsibility as citizens

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Invitation for Your Feedback

Our tools and resources will benefit substantially from your feedback. Please participate in our [very brief online survey](#) so that we can continue to improve the Christians Investing in Education resources.

We'll work to follow up with you, but we know we won't know how to get in touch with everyone who ends up with a copy of this material. If you have questions about the material during your study or have specific feedback about it, please contact the Pittsburgh Initiative Director, Charity Haubrich at charity.haubrich@cpjustice.org or toll-free at 866.275.8784.

Role of the Pittsburgh Board of Public Education

(Taken from the Pittsburgh Board of Public Education Website)

The Board recognizes that the legal authority of the Board lies with the collective body, not with individual members. Therefore, the Board members will work collaboratively to make good policy decisions. The primary work of the Board involves six (6) major areas:

1. Planning – The Board shall:
 - a. Work with the Superintendent and the community to establish strategic direction for the district by adopting and annually reviewing a strategic plan that describes the vision, mission, values, priorities, strategies, educational standards and methods of assessment.
 - b. Adopt an annual budget plan that is aligned with the district’s priorities and student learning objectives as described in the strategic plan.
2. Policymaking – The Board shall:
 - a. Establish and regularly review policies that define the Board’s structure, rules of procedure, communication and decision-making processes, code of conduct, and other policies that pertain to the governance function.
 - b. Establish and regularly review policies that state expected results in regard to the educational and operational functions of the district.
 - c. Establish and regularly review policies that describe the relationship and division of responsibilities between the Board and Superintendent.
3. Monitoring – The Board shall:

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- a. In collaboration with the Superintendent, establish objective criteria for assessing the performance of the Superintendent in managing district operations and conduct regular performance reviews.
 - b. Adopt measures of assessing student achievement and request regular progress reports.
 - c. Adopt objective criteria for monitoring progress toward district priorities.
 - d. Maintain fiscal oversight by routinely reviewing reports on income and expenditures, audits, and financial planning documents.
 - e. Monitor its own performance through the establishment of performance priorities and regular self-assessment, including improvement strategies such as Board professional development.
4. Communicating – The Board shall:
- a. Establish and honor procedures for public and staff input into Board policy decisions.
 - b. Encourage public input.
 - c. Maintain open and honest communications among all members of the Board and Superintendent, and with the public.
 - d. Establish and monitor procedures for regular reporting of student achievement data and progress on district goals to parents/guardians and the general public.
 - e. Create partnerships with other community service providers, when appropriate, to support the success of all children.
5. Advocating – The Board shall:

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- a. Serve as a public advocate for the district and the children and youth who live in the district.
 - b. Maintain communications with other federal, state and local policymakers in regard to public policies that impact education and children.
6. Facilitating Leadership And Accountability – Board Covenants
- a. The Board acknowledges that in order to provide effective leadership for the district and to accomplish the district goals and priorities, the Superintendent must have a leadership and administrative team compatible and aligned with his/her vision of reform and therefore must have authority over staff.
 - b. In order to facilitate effective leadership and accountability, the Board will not be involved in personnel supervision or evaluation or other personnel matters except as requested by the Superintendent, and the Board acknowledges the Superintendent's responsibility and accountability for these matters. Similarly, the Superintendent will establish the procedures for interviewing, recommending, and hiring building principals and other management staff, and the Board will not hire or terminate employment of any building principal or other management staff except in accordance with procedures established by the Superintendent and with the Superintendent's recommendation. The procedures established by the Superintendent will conform to the School Code and other applicable law. The recommendations will be based in part on the frequent and open communication with Board members.

Additional Resources

Brief Guidelines on CPJ theologies and philosophies:

[Guideline on Family](#)

[Guideline on Political Community](#)

[Guideline on Government](#)

[Guideline on Citizenship](#)

[Guideline on Education](#)

Answers to Christians Investing in Education's Most Frequently Asked Questions:

[What should a Christian view of education look like?](#)

[Why does educational diversity matter?](#)

[How should we talk about schools?](#)

[How should we consider school closing from the lens of justice?](#)

[How are the local, state and federal governments involved in education? Is this involvement just?](#)

[How can we pursue justice in teacher effectiveness measures?](#)

[Should government be involved in setting educational standards?](#)

[What does CPJ mean when it talks about a "political community"?](#)

[How can citizens participate in the political community?](#)

[How do we help families that need additional support?](#)

[What might a just funding model for K-12 education look like?](#)

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[What are the right roles and responsibilities of a teachers' union?](#)

[What about the “separation of church and state”?](#)

Book Discussions:

Skillen, James. *The Good of Politics: A Biblical, Historical, and Contemporary look at Politics*. 2014 Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, MI Paperback.