The 50CAN Dictionary: Redefining Education Reform
In the fall of 2013, 50.1 million students entered public schools across the nation. 50CAN: The 50 State Campaign for Achievement Now advocates for each child to have access to a high-quality education, regardless of their address.

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We are relentlessly pursuing the hope of a high-quality education for every child across the United States, regardless of their address, through a network of bottom-up local advocacy campaigns.

Environmentalist Aidan Ricketts once wrote that advocates “are like the immune system of the body politic—they move to the sites of … injustice and aim to fight, repair and heal.” It’s not hard to find examples of injustice in our education system but that’s only half the story. Because when you look a little deeper you find ordinary people doing extraordinary things.

These injustices are not only being challenged but changed by accidental advocates who refused to look the other way when confronted with the reality that children in their community were not getting the education they deserved. Collectively these campaigns are transforming the way our education system works so that it works better for all kids.

These success stories, big and small, have convinced us that we are working on the most important issue of our day and approaching it with the most critical missing lever: nonpartisan, research-backed advocacy for policy change, driven forward by diverse local leadership and supported by best-in-the-nation thinking. Powered by an optimism that change is possible, we have grown from an idea born in an abandoned warehouse on the outskirts of New Haven, Connecticut, into a nationwide organization that finds, connects and supports great local leaders.

2013 was a year of tremendous growth for us. We expanded our work into North Carolina and New Jersey, we recruited new executive directors and new board leadership and we championed legislation in seven statehouses that resulted in 16 critical policy wins. This annual report recognizes our successes, our progress and our path ahead.

We are humbled by the dedication of our local leaders, community advocates, donors and staff and proud to play a role in redefining what’s possible in American education for the next generation of citizens whose possibilities stagger the imagination.
Gumption (n)

The dedication of our multi-state team of volunteers, board members, donors, staff and partners who never give up in the face of a challenge.
Commitment (n)

The participation of our community members dedicated to enacting real change in their region. See also: fearless.

- Secured: $40.3 million in Pre-k funding
- Generated: 496 media hits in the national press
- Hosted: 2 50CAN U retreats
- Interviewed: 640 kids about their dreams for a great education
- Wrote: 215 pages of innovative, nonpartisan education research
- Won: 16 major policy victories
- Collected: 23,751 signatures for policy change
- Traveled: 57,831 miles from state houses to parents’ homes, to hear what you had to say
The parents, teachers, administrators and advocates in our movement willing to fight for the future of our nation’s students.
Exceptional local leaders advocating in their communities to achieve a high-quality education for all kids, regardless of their address. See also: moxie.

50CAN is, ultimately, about people. 50CAN finds, connects and supports great local leaders to bring about real change to the education landscape through advocacy.

We identify outstanding education leaders in each state and give them an opportunity to lead as executive directors, staff, board members, philanthropists and citizen activists.

We make it easier for our leaders to get results by removing administrative work from their plates and providing best-in-class tools, from reports to databases to graphic design. We aim to match local contributions one to one with funds raised nationally. We also provide trainings on campaign planning, policy, communications and advocacy tactics through our 50CAN University program.

In 2013, 50CAN welcomed two passionate local leaders to the network as executive directors in Maryland and New Jersey. Meet Jason and Janellen!

Our work is infused with the passion of our national board of directors. In 2013, outgoing board chair Jonathan Sackler welcomed Sandra L. Vargas to the role of national chair. Sandy previously served as the founding board chair at MinnCAN, where she led philanthropic and advocacy efforts across the state. Sandy is energized to bring 50CAN out of its startup phase and usher in the ambitious plan for our next three years as an organization.
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director of university relations, Roger Williams University

Kara Milner
Rhode Island parent

Michael Obel-Omia
head of school, Paul Cuffee School

Gary Sasse
director, Bryant Institute of Public Leadership
Redefining Moxie (n)

The courage and spirit that our local leaders share with community members as we unite in our mission.
Our work is grounded in a community of local advocates who wake up every day committed to expanding education opportunities for kids. Because of this work, together we secured 16 major legislative wins in 2013 for the 7.8 million students enrolled in public school in the seven states where we work: Rhode Island, Minnesota, New York, Maryland, North Carolina, New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

We have championed research-driven legislation across key areas like teacher and principal effectiveness, high-quality pre-K, education funding, college and career readiness and high-quality school choice.

We are honored to stand shoulder to shoulder with the families, teachers, principals and citizens working to make this dream a reality in the daily lives of our children.

Read more about our state work in the spotlight stories.

Our work is focused around five key policy principles: start earlier, expand choices, aim higher, cultivate talent and reach everyone.

Partnered with the MinneMinds coalition to win an historic $40 million investment in early childhood education that will increase access to quality pre-K for MINNESOTA’s low-income 3- and 4-year-olds.

Rallied to win a $300,000 investment in RHODE ISLAND’s full-day kindergarten program to ensure access to high-quality early education for all kids.

Paved the way for Achievement First to enter RHODE ISLAND, and helped ensure the Providence charter school would open on schedule.

Helped pass a bill that calls for the MARYLAND State Department of Education to conduct a thorough study of charter schools and then recommend proposals to reform the system with a focus on ensuring high-quality options for all kids.

Boosted accountability in MINNESOTA’s charter school sector by ensuring that charter authorizers are now required to prepare annual reports to track student achievement, as well as operational and financial performance.

Ensured that MINNESOTA charter schools have more equitable funding and will benefit from per-pupil funding increases.
Increased state support for **NEW YORK**’s early college high schools to $6 million.

Successfully rallied the **MINNESOTA** Board of Teaching to grant waivers to incoming Teach for America educators.

Helped pass legislation that makes student learning and achievement the primary purpose of **MINNESOTA** charter schools.

Ensured that failure to demonstrate satisfactory academic achievement for all students is now clearly defined as a reason for contract non-renewal or termination of **MINNESOTA** charter schools.

Helped bring a refined focus to the teacher skills exam in **MINNESOTA**, and initiated a department task force to review licensure skills assessments for the long haul.

Kept the implementation of **MINNESOTA**’s new teacher evaluation on track, despite attempts from legislators to delay the much-needed change.

Helped implement performance-based teacher contracts in place of tenure in **NORTH CAROLINA**.

Successfully championed the creation of a **NORTH CAROLINA** taskforce that will explore matching teacher pay with effectiveness.

Won annual teacher evaluations in **NORTH CAROLINA** that take student performance into account.

Successfully urged lawmakers to fulfill the promise of equitable school funding in **RHODE ISLAND** with an additional $32 million in state aid for education.
Pioneer (n)

The members of our network who launch bravely into uncharted territory, eager to explore the terrain.
Rhode Island is a small state with a big desire to do more to help all of its kids succeed. Wherever executive director Christine Lopes Metcalfe traveled in the state, she heard the same desire from ordinary citizens to make their voices heard on education issues. Inspired by the New England tradition of direct democracy through small town meetings, she decided to create her own town hall meeting on education—with a little help from the electronic safe.

That’s how she found herself on the line with more than 8,000 residents of the Ocean State who dialed in to a telephone town hall for a conversation with Cumberland Mayor Daniel McKee and Superintendent Phil Thornton on September 5th. During the call, our guests engaged with voters from all over the state, answered questions and discussed what people could do to help strengthen their communities’ schools. From art programs, charter schools, Common Core State Standards and funding challenges, the town hall covered a wide range of topics affecting Rhode Island students.

The town hall succeeded first in bringing the voices of citizen activists throughout the state directly to elected officials, and also in creating a community not defined by geographic boundaries but rather defined in the steadfast dedication to establish statewide change in education. To that end, Christine looks forward to building a lasting model of successful education in Rhode Island with the momentum and vision garnered from Rhode Island’s own residents.

As caller Theresa from Valley Falls, RI put it, “This is about our children and improving their future... It’s important for people to open their minds and get behind what needs to be done.”
MinnCAN executive director Daniel Sellers and deputy director Nicholas Banovetz spent the latter half of 2013 on an ambitious 19 city listening tour through the Gopher State, visiting 48 classrooms, speaking with more than 450 students, teachers and principals and powering their travels with a total of 144 cups of coffee.

The goal of this ambitious trip was to find changing-the-odds schools across Minnesota, learn from them what works, and use those lessons to inform education policy at the capitol.

While no one school was the same, there were common themes between these schools that stood out. These teachers and principals believe deeply that a high-quality education starts with a strong vision and high expectations for all kids.

Perhaps Ken Scarbrough from Cloquet put it best when he told us how his region is tackling the issue of improving outcomes across a diverse population of students with different styles and needs; “a lot of the credit has to go to students, supportive families, caring and hardworking teachers, and above all else, collaboration in the community. Essentially, we all do everything we can to make life better for our kids.”

The MinnCAN team came away from their road trip armed with 182 pages of field notes and dozens of ideas for policymakers from many different citizens on how to ensure that every Minnesota child receives a high-quality education, regardless of their address. Most importantly, as they prepared for their 2014 campaign, they brought with them a deeper understanding of education issues not just in the Twin Cities, but across the diverse regions of Minnesota as a whole.
In 2013, NYCAN Executive Director Julie Marlette led the challenge for New York to close achievement gaps in classrooms through high-quality pre-K. As a senior analyst in the New York State Senate, Julie saw firsthand the difference that the right research can make in ensuring policies are guided by the facts. It was this belief in the power of research that encouraged Julie to focus on policies that would help New York kids start earlier.

NYCAN’s original report, ‘Start Early to Close Gaps’ demonstrates that high-quality pre-K programs narrow achievement gaps and push low-income children into the middle class, with big returns on dollars invested for both the state and school systems. The report garnered significant media attention throughout the year—contributing to over 80 NYCAN media hits in 2013.

NYCAN is proud to serve as a leading forum for people and policy to come together to make major gains for kids.
With 12 years at the helm of KIPP Baltimore, MarylandCAN executive director Jason Botel knew that the facts about public education often get lost among party politics and rhetoric. MarylandCAN is committed to providing non-partisan resources that parents, teachers, students and advocates can all use to stay informed. In 2013, Jason took the opportunity to invite feedback from citizens across the state about what would better inform them on issues in education as a whole.

After taking the pulse of the communities he advocates for, Jason incorporated their visions into re-designed State of Education reports. The new, interactive reports tell the story beneath the work of grassroots advocacy: that we must start with the facts and build a solid foundation of understanding before we can make real progress for the next generation of thought leaders and game-changers.

The dynamic report provides community members with the information they need to accurately compare their state against the country, and to contribute to the dialogue on education policy in Maryland. Explore Maryland’s cutting edge State of Education report from 2013 here.
For Jamie Passinault, returning to her hometown of Pittsburgh to teach after years in Colorado public schools was an exciting opportunity. She taught fifth- and sixth-grade science for one year before receiving notification that due to her lack of seniority, she was being laid off during budget cuts. “It was an ending moment,” Ms. Passinault said. “I wasn’t ready to leave the classroom.”

Dominique, known by her students as “Ms. D,” fared only slightly better. After transitioning to one of Philadelphia’s most challenging high schools, more than 60 percent of the teachers in her school were laid off.

PennCAN’s executive director Jonathan Cetel saw the damage this broken approach to layoffs was having on schools and decided to do something about it. It was clear that the voices of these teachers needed to be heard if the public—and our policymakers—were going to fix the system. PennCAN worked through 2013 to collect stories of teachers like Jamie and Dominique and bring statewide attention to the loss of high-quality, effective teachers in the classroom. These teachers shared their stories in Pennsylvania newspapers like the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette and Philadelphia Inquirer through op-ed pieces, letters to elected officials and small gatherings around the state.

The experiences of these passionate teachers moved State Representative Tim Krieger to introduce HB 1722: The Protect Excellent Teachers Act in October 2013. HB 1722 calls for reform in the furlough decision process for Pennsylvania public school districts by ending the current policy of last-in, first-out or LIFO in school districts across the state. PennCAN was proud to have the opportunity to work closely with the sponsors of the bill in support of both a statewide press conference and to ensure that the perspective of these teachers was heard in the house education committee hearing. The hearing also included supportive testimony from a broad array of groups, including the Superintendent of Pittsburgh Public Schools, the Pennsylvania School Boards Association, the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators, the Philadelphia Education Fund, the New Teacher Project and the Philadelphia School Partnership.

This critical first phase of the work—from helping teachers tell their stories to laying the groundwork for a legislative solution—set the stage for 2014, where ending LIFO is positioned to be a top priority of the House Education Committee in their education legislation negotiations.

From 2012-2013, Pennsylvania school districts laid off 2,600 teachers. What’s worse, the layoffs were made solely on the basis of teachers’ seniority without any consideration given to their performance in the classroom. Factors like how hard a teacher worked and what they helped their kids accomplish were considered irrelevant in the eyes of the state.
SPOTLIGHT ON JERSEYCAN

The power of volunteers in New Jersey’s inaugural campaign

The work we do would not be possible without the visionary leadership and passion of our state advisory boards. In New Jersey, we knew we needed advocates who understood the unique education issues in the state, and who would be willing to grow the movement in the Garden State from the ground up.

JerseyCAN successfully launched in 2013 thanks to the dynamic guidance of an exemplary board, co-chaired by former New Jersey Governor Tom Kean and former CEO of JP Morgan Private Wealth Management Ann Borowiec. Both co-chairs played a critical role not only in the founding of JerseyCAN, but also in shaping the campaign’s inaugural research report: A Framework for Excellence. The guidance and expertise of the advisory board allowed the JerseyCAN team to focus its first year on coalition building amongst their civic and business colleagues and to reach a diverse population of citizen activists in New Jersey whose voices had not yet been heard on education issues.

Governor Tom Kean, co-chair
“I’m serving as the co-chair of JerseyCAN because I believe we need research-based policy solutions to ensure that all students in New Jersey have access to excellent schools that prepare them for higher education and long-term economic success. Using evidence and policy analysis, we need to look at what’s worked in New Jersey and other states and replicate those models.”

Ann Borowiec, co-chair
“Upon learning the facts about education in New Jersey, I recognize that we have both moral and economic obligations to improve the quality of education for New Jersey students, particularly in the neediest communities. I helped to launch JerseyCAN because we need a strong, independent research and policy voice to arm policymakers, parents and the public with information and tools needed to change the trajectory for New Jersey students.”
SPOTLIGHT ON CAROLINACAN

Proving what’s possible in North Carolina

North Carolina opened the door to public charter schools in 1996 to provide North Carolina parents with more choices when it comes to their kids’ schooling and to help raise the bar for what was possible for all public schools in the Tar Heel state. But 17 years later, despite the hard work of teachers in 127 schools on behalf of 50,000 students, those stories were often not being told.

CarolinaCAN sought to change that, believing that one of the best ways to ensure that charter schools fulfill their potential was to bring what was working in the most successful schools to the wider public. Armed with a video camera and a lot of questions, executive director Julie Kowal and filmmaker Janice Smith crisscrossed the state to meet with teachers, principals, parents and students at these amazing schools.

The result was CarolinaCAN’s Prove What’s Possible campaign. What we found was that charter school teachers across the state are setting new and ambitious standards for what is possible in public education. Leaders are using the charter school model to provide life-changing opportunities for students who might have fallen through the cracks in traditional public schools. While the majority of North Carolina schools struggle to meet the needs of low-income and minority students, these public charter schools are putting them on the path to college.

By highlighting excellence and learning from schools that prove what’s possible in public education, CarolinaCAN is working to raise the bar for what we expect from all public schools and build support for pursuing public policies that prioritize the growth of charter schools that are mission-driven to help all students achieve at high levels.

SEE THE VIDEOS
50CAN spearheaded trainings for the next generation of local leaders in education advocacy with 50CAN University, a comprehensive professional development system for current and future leaders.

In 2013, 50CAN University trained six state executive directors in the science and art of advocacy through in-person seminar retreats, online classes and year-round work. The collaboration between state and national teams every week of the year is leveraged to ensure that 50CAN U elevates a series of gatherings into a collaborative culture that informs everything we do.

With these effective leaders in the field, we provide nonpartisan, original and groundbreaking scholarly research on issues in education reform to guide their work. In 2013, we produced several key findings that shaped the dialogue at the state level, including New Jersey’s Framework for Excellence (JerseyCAN), Native American Student Achievement in Minnesota (MinnCAN) and The Year of the Teacher (CarolinaCAN).

Our local leaders strived to set the bar high for inclusive and innovative education advocacy. In 2013, we championed for a high-quality education for all kids with an icon campaign in North Carolina, telephone town halls in Rhode Island and Minnesota and legislative briefings across all seven states. Our goal is to listen to as many voices in our states as possible and effectively represent a diverse coalition of citizens committed to change. To this end, we surveyed more than 1,500 residents of Minnesota and Pennsylvania to find out what they had to say about teacher quality, school choice and the future of American education. We also took to the open road in Minnesota and New Jersey, meeting with education advocates across the states to collaborate on how to shape our policies for the future.
The knowledge that sometimes the most unlikely tools yield the best results for real change.
The individuals, corporations, foundations and organizations that support our mission with philanthropic gifts. We are humbled and deeply grateful for your outstanding support. See also: game-changers.

### $100,000 +
- Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
- The Joyce Foundation
- Medtronic Foundation
- Newark Charter School Fund
- Philadelphia School Partnership
- Robins, Kaplan, Miller & Ciresi Foundation for Children
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### $50,000-$99,999
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* in-kind contribution
Those who march to the beat of their own drum, unwilling to settle for the status-quo in education.
2013 balance sheet

Total assets: $3,511,124
Total liabilities: -$196,690
Total net assets: $3,314,434
50CAN is proud to recognize our advocates, leaders, supporters and friends through this annual report. Your continued support of our work defines the future of education policy. We look forward to our work together in the future. For all that you have done in 2013 and beyond, thank you.

Share the #CANnualReport