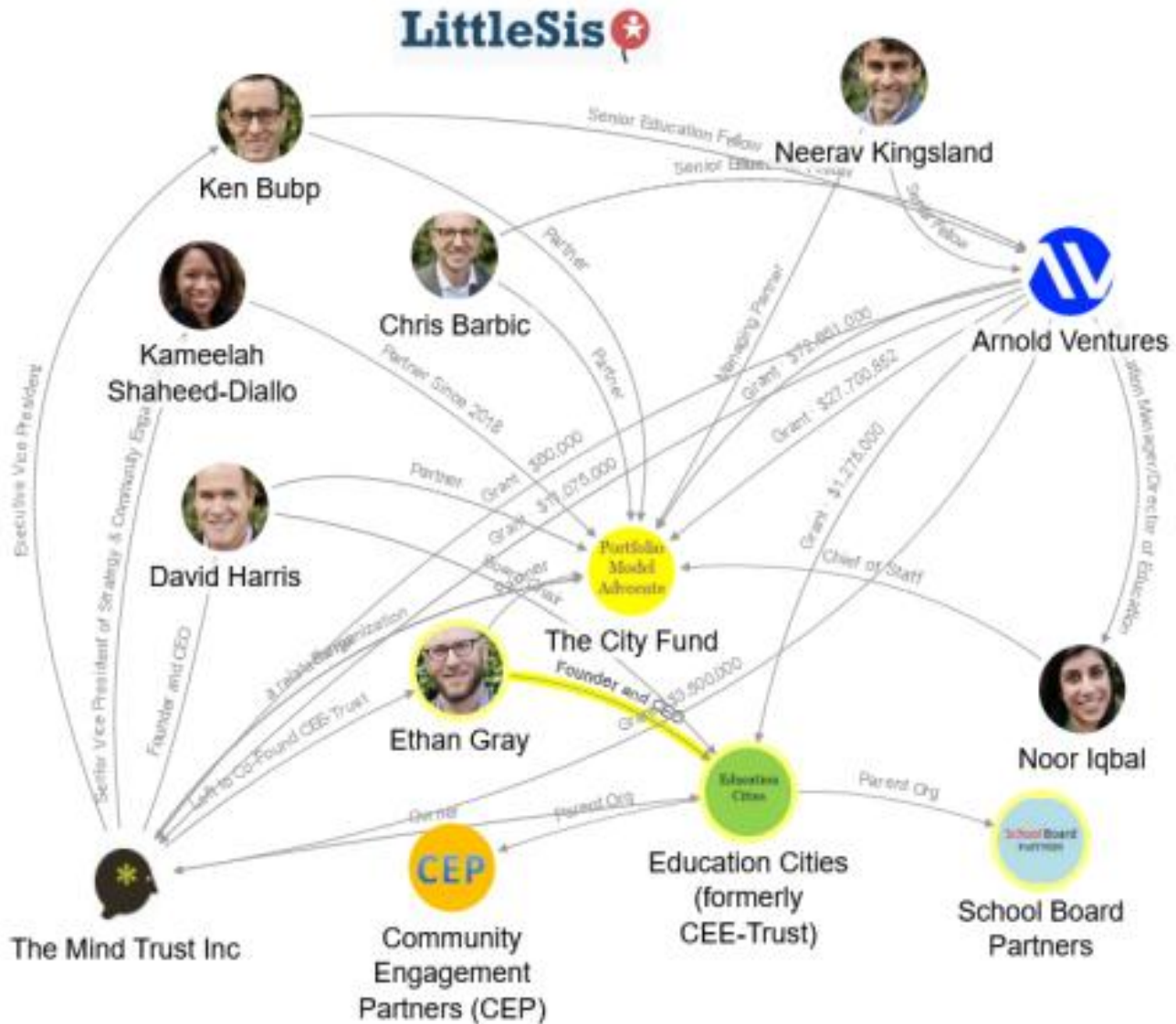


# CITY FUND

Over the past several years, a new education reform movement has made its way across the country. Its goal is privatized education. The privatization framework allows its supporters to steer public tax dollars away from the public schools that desperately need them and toward their chosen consultants, partner groups, curriculum choices, and other products and services without oversight from elected officials and taxpayers. The movement manifests in the expansion of charter schools and increasing their enrollment, division of public school districts into factions, incubation of community advocacy groups, promotion of anti-public school / pro-privatization legislation, and influencing state and local campaigns for elected office.

To say that the proponents of this model engage in deceptive tactics would be a gross understatement. In addition to disguising their approach with buzzwords like innovation, transformation, and social justice, they funnel money through PACs, and then through individuals, groups, and organizations, to make their funding difficult to trace. This shroud of financial and ideological secrecy also makes the money, which is desperately needed in public education, easier for schools and organizations to accept.



One major national funder of this education reform philosophy is [The City Fund](#). The City Fund distributes money from corporate school reform philanthropists, such as John Arnold and Reed

Hastings, to local city organizations to accomplish the goals listed above. Its political organization, Public School Allies, makes campaign contributions to local school board candidates who are likely to adopt the same philosophy. The model being promoted by The City Fund and its affiliated organizations has been seen nearly to fruition in New Orleans and Indianapolis, and the stories being played out in other cities where The City Fund operates are eerily similar.

We are education experts and advocates who represent the cities and schools across the country that are being impacted by this movement and we refuse to be complicit. Our stories from Newark, Denver, Camden, San Antonio, Nashville, Baton Rouge, Oakland, and St. Louis account for only a fraction of the cities where these movements are underway, but we hope that sharing our experiences will help others recognize the tactics whenever and wherever they appear.

Recent articles about The City Fund and its influence in [St. Louis](#) and [in local school board races](#) inspired us to contact each other. What we discovered is unsettling. The organizations funded by The City Fund present themselves as local grassroots organizations when nothing could be further from the truth. While propping up these local organizations with millions of dollars, The City Fund also places its own supporters on the organizations' boards to influence their ideology and decision-making. These groups and their partner community advocacy groups have equivalents in at least 15 cities. A few examples of umbrella groups sponsored by The City Fund include [The Mind Trust](#) in Indianapolis, the [Camden Education Fund](#) in Camden, [redefinED](#) in Atlanta, [RootED](#) in Denver, [The Opportunity Trust](#) in St. Louis, [San Joaquin A+](#) in Stockton, and [New Schools](#) in Baton Rouge.

Simply naming the equivalent organizations here would be unhelpful, but knowing what actions they engage in is critical to identifying their influence. In addition to the strategies listed earlier regarding elections, ballot measures, and charter schools, organizations closely affiliated with The City Fund have engaged in a variety of similar behaviors in our cities. In most locations they have created a school finder tool and promoted a common application for both traditional district and charter schools. These groups host community events or support the publishing of reports where skewed data imply the deterioration of public education, and often push the idea that "innovative" charters are the only solution. They make similar demands of school boards and of individual board members to conform with their ideals, and react with similar misinformation when confronted by the public or the media. The similarities across cities is so striking that on several of our joint calls there was audible relief when one of us realized we weren't the sole target of this deception.

These organizations are not home-grown local groups established to solve local problems, but they are experts at pretending to be. While they employ well-meaning advocates who are understandably energized by words like equity or opportunity, and while they promote themselves as organizations who seek to understand what the community wants for its children, at their core these groups are the local arms of a national organization, The City Fund, whose model seeks to and has experienced frightening success in advancing the privatization of public education. With privatization comes the loss of local control and democratic ideals.

The City Fund does not make it clear when it is investing in a city; fortunately, we have the opportunity to learn from each other and to mobilize now to stop the corruption before it becomes so deeply embedded in our systems that it can't be reversed. The individuals peddling their agenda under the guise of education equity will continue to steer public dollars toward their private programs and gain political capital until we decide public education is too important to jeopardize for a scheme. We are all complicit in the perpetuation of inequity if we choose to let this continue once we know the reality.

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