Eli Broad: ...graduates that served in a Teach for America teaching program. And there are currently 11,000 TFA members in America’s classrooms, reaching more than three million students in our neediest communities. TFA is the largest provider of new teachers for low-income schools. Our foundation has been pleased to invest $42 million dollars over the years in Teach for America. We think that investment is paying big dividends. Now, having said that, Wendy has become a global crusader to eliminate education inequality. Last year, she became the CEO and co-Founder of Teach for All, which takes the TFA model well beyond the borders of the United States. After the success of Teach for America, leaders in other countries, whether they be India, Chile, or Lebanon, reached out to Wendy for help in developing her pools of high-quality teachers. Teach for All now has programs in 34 countries and six different continents. Wendy has been recognized as one of TIME magazine’s most influential people. Fortune Magazine named her one of the world’s 50 greatest leaders, and one of the world’s most powerful women. She’s the author of two books, A Chance to Make History and One Day, All Children...both about her work at Teach for America. Wendy, as you might imagine is a rather passionate overachiever. She’s a mother of four; she believes to the core that every child, regardless of family background and income, deserves a great education. Wendy did more than start two organizations. She created a movement for education equity. Let’s give a warm welcome to Wendy Kopp.

Wendy Kopp: Well, as you all can imagine that introduction meant a lot to me. That was absolutely beautiful! I feel like I should sit down while I’m still ahead...coming from you Eli, in particular. I’m so excited to be here with you all today and to have with us some
of our really staunchest and oldest supporters. Not only Eli, who as you heard has been
an extraordinary champion, without whom we certainly could not have pulled off the
growth that we have seen in Teach for America over the last 15 years. Also, John
Hotchkis, sitting here next to me, was one of the very first people I met. I must have
been no more than six months out of college and someone connected me to him. He
came in and visited me, and he tells this story all the time, when we were sitting on
cardboard boxes in donated office space at Morgan Stanley. He helped bring Teach for
America into Los Angeles in our first year. The Haagas, who we have the privilege of
honoring tonight for their incredible championship and support of Teach for America
over the years in this city and many others, board members, supporters and friends.

In many ways, we could argue that it’s the birthplace of Teach for America. We trained
our first 500 Corps members here, exactly 24 years ago. It feels like a good moment to
reflect on where we are in this. I will say, 25 years ago as I was still a senior in college, I
had just turned in that senior thesis, proposing this big idea, I could never have
imagined...I wasn’t thinking beyond a couple of years, as most of our college seniors
don’t. I can’t imagine I would have thought that I would be here today, 25 years later,
more passionate than ever about this idea, nor that this idea would take me everywhere
from India and Nepal to Nigeria and South Africa to Chile and Peru. I thought I would
just share with you all a bit about why it is that I am personally more passionate than
ever and also why I believe that the social entrepreneurs I met a few years ago, have
taken this to the far-flung places of the world are actually going to accelerate the
progress of all of us and ultimately improve our collective welfare.

My passion for this derives from what I’ve seen mostly here in the United States over
the last 25 years. Some people hear Teach for America and they think it’s about two
years of teaching. It’s really not. This is about channeling the energy of our country’s
most promising future leaders against the issue that I believe is the most fundamental
issue we face: the fact that still in our country, despite our aspirations to be a place of
equal opportunity, where kids are born still predicts their educational outcomes on
average, and their life outcomes. That’s a big, systemic problem. We live in a world of
quick fixes. Let’s fix the teachers, let’s change the curriculum, and let’s do something to
fix this. But this is a big systemic problem. What that means is that we’ve got to come at
it with an enormous amount of talent, and energy, and leadership at every level of the
system for policy and politics, from every sector. We’re saying: let’s go out and recruit
our most highly-sought after folks, just as aggressively as the banks and the consulting
firms do. And let’s get their first two years to be teaching in our highest-need
communities. Let’s invest a lot in those folks in the pursuit of really important,
immediate impacts for their kids. But also, knowing that that group of people will never
see the world in the same way. Those two years will change their priorities, their career
trajectories; it will change every single year thereafter.
That’s a nice idea. But, of course, the real question really is: does it really work? I have to say, I think the best way to understand whether or not its working is to actually look at what is happening in communities where we’ve been placing a steady stream of folks for 15, 20, or in the case of Los Angeles, 24 years. Being in the city, I thought I would reflect a bit on my perspective about where we are in Los Angeles as it relates to this issue vs. where we were when I got started, now almost 25 years ago. Then, and I remember this because I was a senior in college, the hit movie 25 years ago was *Stand and Deliver*. I think it’s such a fascinating marker, because if you remember back to that movie, which I’m sure you know being here in Los Angeles, made a hero out of a teacher in East Los Angeles. He coached a class of kids to pass the AP Calculus exam. I remember my own reaction to that movie, which was that this man was extraordinary and was an absolute outlier. It didn’t occur to me, it should have, I should have said: Wait. What did he do differently? Let’s figure it out and make sure that all of our teachers do what he did. But we assumed that it was his charisma, it was something magic, something elusive. And of course, Hollywood made the movie in the first place, because it was such a dramatic story, and he was such an outlier in terms of our perceptions. I just think it’s fascinating, because today, we have not only one teacher, but growing numbers of schools in this city that are taking whole buildings full of kids and putting them on a trajectory to attain an excellent education by any standards to get to and through college, just as Jamie Escalante was doing in one classroom earlier. There are many of those schools in this city, some of them are part of charter school networks, others are part of the regular system, but there aren’t enough. No where near enough. But there are growing numbers of them. There are nine KIPP schools. I asked my husband, who runs the KIPP network, how he would characterize the impact of the KIPP schools. He told me something just this morning that I find stunning. He said: Our second graders are performing at the same level as the fifth graders who come into our middle schools from the neighborhood schools. That’s true transformational change for kids. And there are many other schools that are beyond KIPP.

Now, the question isn’t: can this be done in more than one classroom or at the school level, but its: how can we spread this to the whole system? And there is so much energy and advocacy and demand for system-level change. Now on that score, we are nowhere near where we need to be. And of course, if you’re in this, like the Eli’s and others are, it’s tough. We are pushing a boulder up a hill. And if you’re in it every day, it seems like we are not getting where we need to be. But, if you have a bit more perspective, and of course become I come in and out of LA every once and awhile, I have slightly more perspective maybe. In preparation for this, I looked back at where were things in the year 2000 vs. today?
I came to some interesting facts. Take the schools in Watts. In the year 2000, the gap between the schools in Watts and the schools in Beverly Hills, in terms of the API scores, the measurement that the state of California uses, there was a 400 point gap in terms of the average achievement. The schools of Watts had an API score of somewhere in the mid-400s, they came in incredibly low. That gap has been cut in half. So the schools in Watts are not where we all want them to be, but its very significant progress in the face of a challenge that has persisted for decades in this community and in our country and in this city. I know this from my colleagues at Teach for America in Los Angeles; we are struggling with high schools. And yet, if you look at the top 10 high schools in this city, in the year 2000, 38% of the kids in those high schools were low-income. Today, 49% of them are. And on average, those high schools have an API score that is almost 200 points higher than in was in the year 2000.

There are many other things that we could talk about: the fact that there are 263 charter schools in the LAUSD region, whereas there was not a charter school when I got started in this city. And 30% of those charters are in the top 10% of performance in the state of California. This is because of many things far beyond Teach for America. This is because of many things from incredible philanthropists to reform-minded mayors and advocates and social entrepreneurs far beyond Teach for America. But its also true, that if you took all the Teach for America people out of this city, not only the teachers in their two years but all those Teach for America alums, you would take away a meaningful amount of the energy, the leadership, the entrepreneurship that’s driven the change. We have, at the moment, 340 teachers in their first two years. But we also have 520 teachers, some of whom have been teaching literally for 24 years in this city among our alumni. There are 58 school principals who are Teach for America alums. If you get inside of John Daisy’s team, you realize that the head of Human Resources, the area superintendent who oversees the chronically underperforming schools and the innovative schools, are Teach for America alums. If you look at the networks like KIPP or Camino Nuevo, you see 8 out of 11 principals of the KIPP schools, as well as the Chief Academic Officer, and half of the teachers are Teach for America alums. At Camino Nuevo, five out of seven school principals are TFA. It’s all to say: we can move the needle. We have seen there’s nothing magic and nothing elusive about this. This is about the same thing that success in any other sector is about: this is about talent and leadership. We’ve seen that Teach for America is one source, along many others, of the kind of commitment and leadership that we’re going to need if we’re going to actually, in the end, realize our aspiration that all kids in this city truly do have access to the American Dream.

The last 25 years has led me to realize that that little concept that I had as a graduating senior was not only good in theory, but it actually works. It’s making a meaningful difference in now 49 communities, urban and rural regions, all across this country. But
something happened a few years ago that has actually increased my optimism that we’re going to move the needle against this problem in a big way before I retire at least. What that thing was, and I was so unsuspecting, but maybe 8 years ago, there was something in the water. I had never thought about anything beyond our borders because the fact is, the problems in this country as it relates to this issue we’re talking about are so extreme. And there’s lot to be done, and there’s a lot more to be done. Within one year, very inspiring, compelling, and convicted folks from India, from Chile, from Lebanon, and from many other places, 13 countries within the span of a year, found their way to my office and said: We have got to do this in our country. We need to recruit India’s most promising future leaders, get them to commit two years to teach India’s highest need kids, and then cultivate their leadership as a force for change. We’re going to do it. Will you help us?

It seemed like the responsible thing to do to try and be helpful. But it also seemed like this was going to become very overwhelming very quickly. That led to this idea that we better do this as a separate thing because we can’t distract Teach for America from its efforts to continue getting bigger and better. So we launched something called the Teach for All network, whose mission was to support the development of this model around the world and accelerate the impact of the model. But what I learned along the way is that we would do a lot more than support these very committed, dedicated social entrepreneurs. In fact, what they would do in their countries would end up not only addressing the very pressing needs in their countries, but informing the work in other countries and ultimately fueling an ever-accelerating movement to expand educational opportunity.

Let me say just a couple things about what leads me to that sweeping statement. First of all, this model that has resonated so much in this country, it’s just been a talent magnet. Every year there are between 50-60,000 folks competing to enter this program. 15-20% of the senior classes from some of the most highly-regarded universities in this country are competing to commit to teach in urban and rural communities. Many people at the front end of Teach for All said: there’s an ethos, there’s a spirit, there’s an ethic of service in the U.S. that doesn’t exist around the world. This will never work. Do you know in Teach for Pakistan’s first year, 1,000 people competed for 40 spots? In Colombia, 2,600 people competed for 60 spots, this year in India, 13,000 people from just a few of the elite universities, competed for their incoming 500 spots. All over the world, irrespective of the culture and the context, we’re seeing that this model attracts the same hearts and minds and souls. If you met these folks, if you’re one of those folks who know a bunch of Teach for America people, you know what kind of people we get. They’re just incredible people: hearts, minds, and souls, deeply convicted. You’d find yourself in classrooms in Pakistan thinking: It’s not possible. The same people all around the world, drawn to this effort. We’ve see that not only do those teachers have a real
impact in the lives of their kids, and the independent studies that have come out looking at Teach for India’s impact and Enseña Chile’s impact have a very significant positive effect in the lives of the kids these teachers reach. But at the same time, we’ve seen the same alumni effects, with 50-70% of the teachers who teach in these programs all around the world, deciding: You know what? I thought this was for two years, but I’m going to commit my life to education. And we’re seeing even in those early cohorts, the same kind of leadership and entrepreneurship that we saw in the early Teach for America cohorts that created the founders of KIPP as an example, and many others, the superintendents of various states and districts across the country. We’re seeing all around the world truly pioneering leadership. People starting social enterprises to retrain the government teachers all across the city of Mumbai. Others starting new technology programs to individualize instruction for math out of New Zealand. This is all to say that all around the world, can you imagine what a better society we would have if our most highly sought after folks were channeling their energy not only into businesses around the world, banks and other consulting firms, but into schools and into improving the quality of education in their countries.

At some level, when I started in this, I expected I would find a lot of diversity. In fact, I assumed I should check my assumptions at the door. What works in education in the U.S. isn’t necessarily going to work in education elsewhere. There were a lot of people within the Teach for All network saying: Well that’s true, its going to be different from place to place, but there’s going to be universal, which is that people are going to be everything everywhere. Of course, we should channel our top talent to education. It took one year for us to realize how overwhelming the similarities are from place to place. All you have to do is go spend time in classrooms where the most marginalized kids of the world are attempting to get an education. You realize that their circumstances are far more similar to each other’s circumstances than they are to the circumstances to the more privileged kids in their countries. You start talking with the school principals and the policy leaders and you very quickly realize that the mindsets, the policies, the practices that are fueling this issue, where all around the world socioeconomic background predicts educational outcomes, the patterns are unreal. That can be depressing; we’re clearly fighting the forces of gravity here. There’s a reason for optimism in that. It means that the solutions are shareable. That’s why I’m optimistic right now. I’m realizing that all around the world, and soon in no doubt nearly every country in the world, we will have programs channeling the top talent against education inequity in diverse cultures that inspire different and brilliant ways of thinking against a problem that is very similar in its nature as part of a global network where people are sharing solutions. That’s what makes me optimistic.

It’s interesting, because in other issue areas like the environment or public health, there are real global constituencies. People assume that the solutions are shareable and our
fates are interconnected, so we’d better take a global approach. The thing is, in education, we don’t assume that. We assume that this issue is so local. What I’ve learned is that we’ll get a lot further, a lot faster, if we recognize the degree to which the solutions are shareable, and the degree to which our fates are interconnected. We must know that. I’m sure this group of people knows this. Everything in this world is interconnected, our economic prosperity, our environmental sustainability, our public safety, public health, everything. A world of rising educational levels and decreasing educational disparities is simply a much better world for all of us: a more prosperous world, a more sustainable world, and a more peaceful world.

That’s what fuels me every day, it’s what makes me excited that I’ve still got another 25 years in front of me to help support the further development of what will hopefully be a global movement to ensure that all children have the chance to attain an excellent education.

Thank you.

Terry McCarthy: Thank you so much Wendy. Let’s take some questions from the floor.

Audience: I’m a retired educator myself, a product of Stanford School of Education. I have a question about the mechanics: who pays these young teachers, how much do they get, does a TFA teacher in Los Angeles make the same as a TFA teacher in Poughkeepsie, does the school district hire them? They don’t have teaching credentials.

Wendy Kopp: That’s why this model is as scalable as it is. It’s that they’re filling vacant teaching spots. The school districts are hiring them as regular beginning teachers. They’re actually making different things everywhere, as you say, the teachers in Poughkeepsie are making different amounts than the folks in LAUSD. We’re leveraging the salaries from the school districts. Initially we were just placing people in vacancies where there are teacher shortages. But over the last 20 years, now 40% of the new teachers in urban areas are coming in through alternate routes to certification, and that’s how our people come in. They’re getting an incredible amount of pre-service and ongoing professional development during their two years. This is not just taking smart people and putting them in classrooms. This is very carefully selecting folks with real leadership ability, really investing in their development, and actually investing more in the in-service development, which all the research would say is how teachers best develop. Now states recognize that as a viable route to regular certification.

Audience: Since Common Core has come in as the biggest reform since Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education, can you tell me what impact that particular program will have on teachers, Teach for America, and regular programs?
Wendy Kopp: I personally believe this is going to be revolutionary, assuming we can get it through despite all the politics that go on. First of all, if you haven’t read Amanda Ripley’s latest book, I’m actually blanking on the title, it’s an incredible book and it makes the case better than I ever could. She follows three U.S. exchange students to Poland, Korea, and Finland. She follows their journey and they come back and their reflections are illuminating, even for me, because she’s not following low-income kids, she’s following middle-income to upper-income kids. And they’re coming back saying that kids are the same all over the world, but we’re boring the kids to death in this country. I see it in my own school visits. I was in rural China last year, remote, rural China, where 3% of the kids, 200 million of China’s 240 million kids are in rural China, and 3% of them will get a college degree. But I was in a fifth grade classroom, where the kids were doing math at the level of my sixth grader who is in a school where the curriculum is advanced by a year. Our standards are so low and my theory is, if you look at the aggregate, despite what I was saying about LA and how much energy, resources, and progress we’re seeing, the fact is, if you look at the aggregate data in this country, we have made precious little progress. It doesn’t compute. How is that possible? You know how it’s possible? We have been teaching to the wrong standards. So all this progress isn’t showing up on these internationally benchmarked assessments and the best proof of that is that two of the very first adapters of the Common Core were Washington DC and the state of Tennessee. And when you look at the latest national assessment of educational progress, the assessment that folks accept as truly rigorous and highly regarded, those two places made more progress than most districts and states have made in the last 10 years in the last 2 years. Their kids on average grew half a year in the last 2 years, meaning that fourth graders today are a full half a year ahead of where they were 2 years ago in the state of Tennessee. That’s a big place. I think that’s because they finally married all the new energy, all the best practices, all the stuff that has come of age in the last decade with finally teaching to more rigorous standards. The difference of the Common Core and the previous standards is, they actually require kids to think. That’s the biggest difference. Fewer standards, more critical thinking. You have to wonder, so what’s going on out there? How is it possible that we’ve got all these protests coming from the right and the left and everywhere else against raising the standards for our kids? This should not be a political issue. There’s just no ideology about it. We need to get everyone into classrooms for a day. We would very quickly say, “Oh, my gosh, increase the rigor.”

Audience: Thank you for your very inspiring talk today. You mentioned that there is global similarities in how marginalized students are taught all across the world and you guys have been learning about this in the past year. And you also mentioned sharable solutions, I have to ask, are you guys working with institutions, other organizations, or
development agencies, to produce any research about this? Come up with practical solutions?

Wendy Kopp: We are very new, first of all, I have to say. Teach for All is in its seventh year and we spent the first five of those years thinking we have no idea if this is going to work. The demand from the social entrepreneurs was much greater than our own capacity, so we just put our head down and went to work. Over the last year, we came up for air and started trying to think about how we can work with others, with various aid organizations out there from the World Bank to UNICEF to think about how we can work together to grow more quickly and to spread what we’re learning. We have implemented the systems for understanding. As just one example, what is it that differentiates the most successful teachers in high need communities? I can say, Teach for America has done that for many, many years. And doing that not only now in U.S classrooms, but now having a global platform for innovation, experimentation, and learning, has pushed Teach for America’s thinking light years within a couple, or three years’ time. This is what fuels my thought that we can move so much more quickly. The powerful thing about Teach for America itself is that we’ve got a national learning platform. When someone innovates in LA, it takes a year before folks in New York realize, “Oh, we should be doing that, right?” And that’s not only what’s going on in classrooms, but what we see happening in the reform movement. In the last seven years, we’ve basically made the national platform a global platform and I think it will just ultimately accelerate progress.

Audience: How are the teacher’s unions reacting to this Teach for America?

Wendy Kopp: At the very beginning of this venture, people predicted it would never get off the ground because the unions would oppose it. And actually, one of the first people I naively wrote to, was Al Shanker. And he got right back to me and said that this is exactly what we need. We need to figure out how to get our smartest people into the profession of teaching and that’s what this is going to do. He’s a very enlightened union leader and what I realized early on is that this isn’t a union issue because new teachers become union members so this isn’t the thing that unions have stake a claim out against. I think over time, it has become very clear that the Teach for America alumni are out there in the center of the effort to change things. They’re changing the way as policy makers, advocates, school superintendents, and others. They’re changing the way teachers are hired, selected, promoted, evaluated, and compensated. I think that the reform movement has gained a lot of progress and traction and become much more contentious and I think it’s because the TFA alums are out there pushing on the change. Our union relationships can be a little bit trickier. But here’s the thing, I’ve come to believe that we can bring this entire problem, meaning educational inequity, within our control if we have enough of the leadership we need. Union politics play out incredibly
differently from place to place. It depends so much on who that union leader is. Think back to the Al Shanker story as one piece of evidence. But we have the potential to see a whole new generation of union leaders in this country over the next decade. And how much progress we make will in part, be a reflection of who those union leaders are and what their values are.

**Audience:** What role, if any, do you see technology playing in addressing the educational inequity both domestically and abroad?

**Wendy Kopp:** To make the understatement of the year, we are not leveraging technology in education. It’s almost impossible to believe the extent to which that’s true. Like, if you live in our world and you work in any organization or any sector and you realize how differently things work today than they did even five years ago, let alone ten years ago, just because of all the technological advances and you started working in schools and school systems, you would just be shocked. We just are not leveraging technology. There’s just so much we can do on every level from around student engagement, around leveraging technology, to providing curriculum and freeing up teachers so they can be the motivational forces and coaches that we really need them to be, to the way schools are managed, to the way teachers operate, to the way teacher professional development happens. There’s so much possibility and the good news is, there’s a tremendous amount of energy around that right now. I just came from the Bay area where I actually had no idea, I had no idea, first of all, just in our own little Teach for America community, how many people are starting, literally dozens, of ventures to leverage technology to improve education. It’s very inspiring. There’s so much good stuff going on. The one thing I will say though is that I have been to so many conferences lately and so many meetings where people are claiming that it’s clear that we’re not making enough progress in education. So we have the solution, and it’s a tablet. Let’s give kids tablets and they will learn to read. Ha. I cannot tell you how vividly I have seen that theory backfire. And I could just go on and on but if we actually delude ourselves into believing that technology is the solution rather than something than should be leveraged more effectively as a tool for effective educators, we will go down a path that will take us years to work our way back from. So I hope we don’t go down that kind of deep end.

**Audience:** Thank you Wendy. I have a question for you advice about scaling and organization. I sat on a board of an education nonprofit here in Los Angeles. We work with schools such as Camino Nuevo that you mentioned as well as LAUSD and we’re very interested in growing our program. We serve about a couple hundred students. It’s all about helping them stay in school and graduate. As you look back, obviously you’ve scaled Teach for America and Teach for All incredibly well, what advice would you give a
smaller organization in terms of how do you have actually make a meaningful impact and how do you grow. For example, in a large urban city like here in Los Angeles.

**Wendy Kopp:** It matters so much what you’re trying to scale. So I don’t know that I’ll have the answer for scaling the particular thing you’re trying to scale. I think in our case, first of all, it took ten years before we even started to scale, which is sort of interesting. I mean for ten years we brought in five hundred people a year. We maybe started a little big and took us that long to work our way back to stability. But once we had stability, the way we scaled Teach for America was to basically develop lots of three year growth plans where we said, “You know what? Three years from now, here’s where we’re going to be.” And our goals were not only around scale but around impact. We’re going to grow our impact. We’re going to grow in scale. We’re going to grow our teacher’s impact. During the two years we’re going to grow our alumni impact. And we would develop these financial plans and organizational plans saying, if we’re going to pull this off, this is what we’re going to need from our staff, this is the money we’re going to need, and then we would go out to people like Eli and say, look at this, you can invest in us now and you can help us get to here. And we would do that and we would say now you can help us get to here and now you can help us get to here. So the discipline of planning and really thinking through given all the factors, how many people we can really recruit and place and how much money we can raise and our other quality objectives, I think developing those plans, it sounds so simple, but that’s probably the biggest key. It was just the discipline of doing that and having the environment where there were people like the Broads and others who would make the investments necessary to actually do that well. Thank you all.

**Terry McCarthy:** Wendy, thank you so much for that. I think it’s no secret to anyone in this room the educational challenges that we face still in the city of Los Angeles, let alone the United States. We thank you for all your efforts here in LA and for around the country. Let me just say, before I let you go, that we have a couple programs coming up next week. The US former Ambassador to Syria will talk to us about how to end that war in Syria or what we should do there and we have one of Pakistan’s most senior diplomats Husain Haqqani talking on Tuesday about the relationship we have with their military. And next month we have General Stanley McChrystal talking about his lessons from the Special Forces. But a big thank you to Wendy for talking to us and to Eli for introducing her. Thank you all for coming, have a good day.