



**Interview with LPFI's new Executive Director Robert Schwartz  
April 2010**

Robert Schwartz joins the Level Playing Field Institute as Executive Director, beginning in spring 2010. A seasoned educator and leader who brings with him passion and experience creating solutions to mitigate education inequity, Robert will lead the organization to increase the breadth and depth of LPFI's impact. Below is a transcript of a short interview regarding his thoughts on becoming LPFI's new leader.

**Q: What attracted you to LPFI?**

RS: As a middle and high school science teacher for 13 years, I was initially attracted to LPFI through the SMASH program. As I read more and more about the organization, I realized how in line the mission of LPFI is with the work I have been doing for the last twenty years. When I really started to dig in, I found an incredibly intelligent, passionate, and committed staff - the type of staff I would want to work with. The continued interaction with students is a big, big bonus.

**Q: How does LPFI's mission align with your personal priorities?**

RS: As I was looking for new opportunities, I only considered organizations that leveraged the work I have been doing - LPFI was a natural fit.

**Q: To what do you attribute your passion for working with students/for fairness?**

RS: I have spent the last 16 years working in urban schools. I have seen firsthand the lowered expectations adults in those environments maintain for our students and their tragic consequences. I have also personally seen the results when the adults all have high expectations for the students. There are no ability differences between students of different races, genders, economic levels, etc. There are only differences in the opportunities afforded students.

**Q: What challenges are you most eager to address?**

RS: A lack of equity, and the issues it engenders, is the greatest societal challenge we face. LPFI is squarely focused on eradicating that inequity. Our challenge as an organization will be to determine where we will have the greatest impact at the deepest level - meaning, we cannot be an organization that does a lot of things marginally well. We will be an organization that executes on a small number of interconnected initiatives with a laser-like focus on our mission and does those things at the highest level with the largest return.

**Q: What are you most excited to learn?**

RS: Being that I have so much experience in STEM education and college access for traditionally under-represented students, I am most excited to learn about the workforce initiatives - there is such a direct tie-in for our SMASH students and IDEAL scholars that will impact their future.

**Q: How do you see LPFI increasing its impact - and why is that important?**

RS: While LPFI already has an incredible track record, we have only begun to scratch the surface in terms of our potential impact. By increasing our impact we can begin to bring about the societal change necessary to alter the face of higher education and the workplace. Our programs have brought about amazing change in the lives of individuals, and we now have the potential to bring about those same impacts for entire communities and society as a whole.

**Q: What inspires you?**

RS: I am inspired by "aha" moments. It is the instance when someone understands a really difficult concept or idea, comes to see another person's point of view, or realizes that greatness is within them. There is nothing better than seeing someone you inspired to an "aha" moment do the same for someone else. I want to be that kind of leader for LPFI's staff, students, and workplace partners.

**Q: What are your priorities for your first year at LPFI?**

RS: For my first year, I will work with the board, staff, funders, and other key stakeholders to make strategic decisions on how to grow our impact as a non-profit and determine what resources we will need to meet larger objectives. I am looking forward to the coming months to fully immerse myself in the organization and to work with our key partners to chart a path towards the greatest fulfillment of our mission and vision.

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