An Action Guide for Education Organizing

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Why Organize for Better Public Schools?

Introduction

Is improving the quality of education in public schools a top priority for members of your organization or community? If so, then you are not alone. Increasingly, grassroots organizations around the country are organizing around public school issues and winning substantive change.

- In Sacramento, organized parents proposed and won a program to train and compensate teachers to visit the homes of each of their students, developing relationships with parents and respecting their input. The program was so successful in increasing parent involvement and student performance in the schools that the state legislature funded its expansion statewide.
- In Albuquerque, New York, Philadelphia and elsewhere, community organizing has stopped or cut back on efforts to turn low-income schools over to unaccountable for-profit corporations;
- In Chicago, the Bronx and other cities, parents, working with teachers have won new programs to recruit, retain and support high quality teachers in struggling schools.

Even though your organization has successfully won other campaigns, does the prospect of tackling public school issues seem daunting? This action guide is geared toward organizations that already have experience organizing on other issues, and now want to take a look at public education—but need an education primer to get them started. This guide assumes the reader already knows the nuts and bolts of organizing, and wants to learn the public school landscape in order to apply those organizing skills on a new terrain.

Why organize around school issues?

There are a number of reasons why a grassroots community organization may want to organize around public education issues:

1. Public schools have historically been community assets –

often one of the most important community institutions in low-income neighborhoods. As public schools have been allowed to deteriorate, neighborhoods have followed. Organizing around the continued attack on public education can preserve this vital community resource.

2. Schools are a major factor in where families choose to live. Poor schools bring middle class flight to the suburbs, which drains city neighborhoods of resources and power. A fight for good schools is a fight for well integrated, functional communities.
3. Organizing on education issues is an opportunity to reach out to new constituencies and stakeholders, including parents, students, and teachers. Education organizing has proven to be powerful base-building work, particularly in new-immigrant communities.
4. Public education is crucial: the education a child gets from kindergarten through high school will lay the foundation for lifelong learning and a career path. The quality of that education plays a big role in determining how prepared a child is to succeed as an adult.
5. In many cities, children of color and immigrant children are the majority of students attending public schools, yet often their needs are not adequately addressed by the school system. Funding inequities contribute to disparities in schools.
6. Despite the existence of parent-teacher organizations, many parents feel shut out of their children's schools and have limited ability to affect the quality of their children's education.
7. The new federal law —the No Child Left Behind Act— mandates major changes in public schools, driving decisions on a wide range of issues and placing new burdens on local schools and districts.
8. Many community organizations have a track record of organizing to improve public schools, proving that collective power can create change, even in a system that often is viewed as too complex and dysfunctional to be fixed.

Goals of the Guide

The purpose of this education organizing action guide is to:

- Provide you with historical context to understand the under-

lying belief systems of our public education system.
- Give you information about how public school systems typically operate, including the key players and funding streams.
- Help you understand the changes that are taking place because of new federal legislation.
- Share inspiring and instructive stories of successful education organizing efforts from around the country.
- Provide tools and resources for you to get started on schools organizing.

Using the Guide

This web-based guide provide brief descriptions of the different pieces of the education puzzle, with links to more detailed information and additional resources that readers can go to if they want to explore a topic further.

Based on feedback from our volunteer readers, we have not structured the Guide in a linear fashion, with a beginning, middle and end. Rather, we expect that different organizers and leaders will want to approach the Guide differently, reading some sections first and others later, or utilizing some sections and not others. Various pieces of the Guide are therefore presented as individual sections, which may be accessed in the order most useful for you. The sections are:

A Thumbnail History of Public Education highlights key milestones and trends from the founding of this country to the present day. This section explores the ideals as well as the racial and class dimensions of the beliefs that have shaped public education in our nation. The last part of this section looks at some demographic trends in education.

Power Analysis. This section helps outline what you need to know to do a power analysis of the public school system in your community. It describes the key players who have a decision-making role in the system, starting at the individual school level and going up to the district, state and federal levels.

School Funding is the subject of another section of the Guide. This section explains what the various sources for public school funding are, and how those funds are allocated throughout the

Case Studies of Education Organizing

This chapter includes three case studies that highlight the effective use of a variety of issues, strategies, and organizing models to build power and create systemic change in public education.

The choice of organizations reflects three different organizing approaches. Power U in Miami is an individual member, neighborhood–based organization; Sacramento ACT is a congregation-based organization that is part of a larger organizing network, and Youth United for Change in Philadelphia is a chapter-based organization of high school students. Despite using different models, all three groups are engaging the most important stakeholders—parents, students, teachers and administrators—in their quest for school reform.

All three organizations are taking on issues that focus both inside the school and outside. Sacramento ACT focused on issues inside the schools that affect student performance, but for their solutions they looked at improving parent-teacher relations by going out of the classroom and into the home environment. Power U is looking at environmental issues both outside and inside the schools that affect students' capacity to learn. Youth United is tackling issues within individual schools, as well as system-wide structure and funding concerns.

While the first two case studies focus on specific campaigns and issue demands, the third case study on Youth United for Change explores in depth the unique challenges and strengths of organizing high school students. The process of organizing youth, which raises many new issues, is described in detail.

Throughout the case studies, key strategic decisions and lessons are highlighted in the text. Many other profiles of education organizing campaigns can be found in the articles of *Ed Organizing*, at http://www.communitychange.org/issues/education/publications.

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The Center for Community Change

Founded in 1968, the Center for Community Change is a national nonprofit organization committed to helping low-income people, especially people of color, change their communities for the better. The heart of the Center's work is helping grassroots leaders build strong community-based organizations, which we believe are the building blocks of change in low-income communities.

Every year, the Center provides an array of hands-on assistance to more than 200 organizations in low-income neighborhoods and rural communities nationwide, helping them get started, develop effective boards, raise money, organize their communities, set priorities and devise practical strategies. CCC helps them develop and win policy reforms and launch programs to improve housing, increase access to good jobs and revitalize their communities.

The Education Team provides sustained technical assistance to community organizations working on public school reform. The Team publishes a quarterly newsletter, *Education Organizing*, that reports on grassroots campaigns and strategies on education

issues. Leigh Dingerson, on the CCC staff, is the Team Leader for the Education Team, editor of *Education Organizing*, and served as coordinator of the Action Guide development.

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An Organizer's Thumbnail Sketch: Milestones in the History of Public Education

A sense of the past is useful for organizing in the present because it provides a context for our work. The historical context for education organizing in the U.S. includes class, race and ideological struggles born of two – frequently competing – goals for public school systems.

One of society's goals has been to help students develop the skills needed to function successfully in a democracy. It is characterized by a belief in democratic ideals including equal opportunity, self-improvement, class mobility, generational progress and achievement through hard work. Another view embraces the role that public K-12 education has played historically in preparing children to become cooperative and effective workers and passive consumers as adults—thereby favoring capitalist goals over democratic ideals.

Inevitably, these two goals come into conflict with one another. But they have shared, over time, a limited notion of democracy articulated by Thomas Jefferson and others of his day and perpetuated in our economic system. Both made distinctions between "laborers and the learned," between men and women, between black, brown, yellow and white skin. Whether intentional or not, the legacy our society has brought forward through history is evident in the tensions emanating from class and race distinctions in our schools.

Tension between a school's responsibility to an individual (providing *some* children with boundless resources), versus responsibility to society as a whole (insuring that *all* children have access to the highest level of instruction) also serves to separate rather than unite. Despite court rulings overturning the concept of 'separate but equal', today's public schools often manifest a sharp contrast in their racial segregation and their uneven distribution of resources.

Is reform being driven by well-documented research about how children learn, or by the political desire to seem tough and push for quick fixes?

All of these competing constructs of public education are evident in the curriculum, the structure of schools and learning, and of course the politics of public school reform. The constant tension between the democratic ideals and the pressure to maintain class and racial divides explains much about how schools are governed and funded and about the rhetoric and reality of reform efforts.

With this in mind, activists and organizers must constantly ask questions that help expose these contradictory interests. For instance:

- How does education policy in our districts play out along race and class lines? What are the ways that resources – broadly defined – are skewed to widen these divides?
- Does a school's curriculum encourage creative and independent thinking or does it focus on test scores, rote memorization, and ability grouping?
- Are standards and assessments being used to evaluate what's working and what's not and assure better outcomes for students and teachers, or to bar access, sort and label kids, or to punish students, teachers, schools or districts?
- Do politicians and corporate executives dictate policy and practice or do parents, students and teachers take the lead, modeling democratic ideals – or at least have a seat at the table?
- Is reform being driven by well-documented research about how children learn, or by the political desire to seem tough and push for quick fixes?

Much has been written about the goals, beginnings, and development of public schools in the United States. A list of helpful resources is included in the Where to Find It section of this action guide. This is not intended to be the definitive history of public education, but rather a thumbnail history, designed to help activists and organizers identify and exploit contradictions in ways that will help them frame their work and move schools issues in their communities.

Education in the Colonies – the 1600s

The first schools in the European colonies of Massachusetts, Connecticut and New Hampshire were created by the Puritans in

the mid-1600s. Promoting the twin tenets of work and faith, Puritan schools taught basic literacy – relying heavily on the Bible as a textbook – along with skills needed for work and survival. Very few children had access to these schools, which were often centered in private homes. And even those who did attend found their academic schedule heavily shaped by the colonists' need for young people to work in the fields and trades.

The colonists recognized the role that schooling plays in conveying not just skills but also moral values to children. As Protestants who belonged to sects other than Puritanism arrived in the colonies, they began to object to the theological grounding of the Puritan schools. Without common agreement on a single set of values, these arrivals established schools to share their own values with their children. By the middle of the eighteenth century, private schools, guided by the ideologies of disparate religious groups, were the norm.

Defining Social and Class Roles – the 1700s

Thomas Jefferson was an early advocate of *public* schools, available to all children. But "public" didn't mean equal. Jefferson was a proponent of both conflicting tenets described in the introduction to this chapter. He wanted education to serve to "maintain democracy," but also envisioned two sets of schools segregating "the laboring from the learned" and educating them accordingly. Jefferson's crumb to the poor was a promise of upward mobility: he conceded that his system might "[rake] a few geniuses from the rubbish." [1]

Jefferson's concept of public schooling didn't catch on right away, but in the aftermath of the Revolutionary War, Jefferson revived his campaign. He argued that public schooling was necessary to teach the values of the new democracy and prepare citizens for civic involvement.

Jefferson's concept of who was to partake of this training in democracy was hardly democratic. Public education was not envisioned to include women, Native people, enslaved Africans, indentured servants or laborers. Yet even such a stratified system wasn't enough for some. In the southern states, for example, wealthy plantation owners shunned the idea of public schools

altogether. They were content to arrange for the private education of their *own* children and declined to worry about the larger societal implications of failing to education all children.

Industrial Schools – the 1800s

Public education received a major boost in the early 1800s with the contributions of Horace Mann, who was appointed as the First Secretary of the State Board of Education in Massachusetts in 1837. Mann campaigned throughout the state on behalf of public schools, and his work resulted in significantly improved financial commitments to schools, and the increased institutionalization of public education in the state. Mann also established the first teacher training school in the United States, and advocated for a system of free libraries. His series of twelve Annual Reports carried his message outside of Massachusetts. In the reports, he called for a free education for all children, rich and poor alike, which he believed would equalize growing class schisms in society. He supported taxation as a means to support a system of public schools, a non-sectarian approach to public schools, and argued that the nation's economic wealth would increase as citizens were educated.

Between 1846 and 1856, over three million immigrants arrived in the United States, a number then equal to one eighth of the entire U.S. population

Largely through the influence of Mann, in the first half of the 1800s new state constitutions were being drafted, and most included provisions for public education. Though most schooling continued to be private and highly segregated, public schools began to emerge. They were immediately politicized, with the curriculum designed to reflect the values of the dominant political party or social groupings in their jurisdictions.

During the 1800s, a dramatically increasing population and urban concentration in some states, due to both internal and external migration, was met with a corresponding explosion of public schools. Between 1846 and 1856, over three million immigrants arrived in the United States, a number then equal to one eighth of the entire U.S. population[2]. These immigrants, and the influx of people from rural areas and the south, joined the growing workforce that fueled new manufacturing industries in the north. Factory owners wanted public schools to provide basic skills and a workforce that accepted its place -- a mission that came in direct conflict with the vision of schools that prepared all citizens to participate fully in civic society.

Reconstruction – 1865 - 1950

At the conclusion of the Civil War there was a rush to bring public education to the South, particularly to some four million recently emancipated slaves. Congress created a federal Department of Education in 1867 to spearhead and regulate this massive expansion of public schools.

Southern states-rights congressmen, however, opposed federal involvement in education. They wanted to control who was educated and what they were taught. As a result of their efforts, the Department of Education enjoyed cabinet-level status for only one year before being demoted to a "bureau." Education did not return to Cabinet level again until 1979—more than a hundred years later.

Despite this struggle over the federal government's role in education, public schooling *did* find its way into the lives of millions of citizens. White literacy was almost universal by the beginning of Reconstruction, and grew rapidly in the rural South where school access had been more limited.[3] But the rise in Black literacy rates was especially dramatic. While estimates of the growth in Black literacy vary, one more conservative estimate is that Black literacy increased from 10 percent in 1880 to 50 percent in 1910. The Census Bureau reported that by 1930 the Black literacy rate had jumped to 80 percent.[4] At the same time, the literacy for white adults was 90 percent. Robert Higgs writes:

> …even if the true literacy figure a half century after emancipation reached only 50 percent, the magnitude of the accomplishment is still striking, especially when one recalls the overwhelming obstacles blocking black educational efforts. For a large population to transform itself from virtually unlettered to more than half literate in 50 years ranks as an accomplishment seldom witnessed in human history. — Higgs, Robert, *Competition and Coercion, Blacks in the American Economy, 1865-1914*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977.

After Reconstruction, signaled by the withdrawal of federal troops in 1877, whites regained political control of the South and laid the groundwork for legal segregation through the Jim Crow laws. African Americans were relegated to separate schools. In 1896

"In recognition of the special educational needs of low-income families and the impact that concentrations of low-income families have on the ability of local educational agencies to support adequate educational programs, the Congress hereby declares it to be the policy of the United States to provide financial assistance…to local educational agencies serving areas with concentrations of children from low-income families to expand and improve their educational programs by various means (including preschool programs) which contribute to meeting the special educational needs of educationally deprived children." **(Section 201, Elementary and Secondary School Act, 1965)**

the U.S. Supreme Court in *Plessy v. Ferguson* declared the concept of "separate but equal" constitutional and permitted segregation in virtually all aspects of public life, including schools.

Migration, Immigration and Industrialization

American society, cities and culture continued to change dramatically at the turn of the twentieth century. From 1870 to 1920, 40 million immigrants from Europe came into the United States. Hundreds of thousands were children whose parents looked to public schools to help them forge a better life. Public schools played a major role in the assimilation of immigrant families, as they do today. The forced removal of Native American children from their homes on reservations to attend boarding schools is a grim reminder of the negative aspects of assimilation goals. In many ways the schools were a cultural battleground, with debates over bilingual education similar to the debates going on in schools today. Beginning in the mid-1850s and up through the turn of the century many states enacted bilingual education laws. However, after the massive immigration noted above and the U.S. involvement in the first World War, xenophobia caused a number of states to pass English-only instruction laws. These bilingual education debates reflected biases about which immigrants' cultures should be valued. For example, European languages such as German and French were frequently taught in the classroom, but Mexican students were punished for speaking Spanish in school.

At the same time, African Americans left the south, changing the face of northern cities and increasing pressure on schools to meet the needs of the developing industries in which they worked. Junior highs and high schools were restructured, with large numbers of students moving from one classroom to another like widgets moving along an assembly line. Teachers specialized and students were placed in groupings that were said to be based on ability, but deliberately or not often reproduced the socio-economic or racial caste of students' families. Much of this structure remains today: "ability grouping" may begin as early as kindergarten when children are assigned to reading-readiness groups. Once labeled "low-track," children often have difficulty moving to tracks that will prepare them for more sophisticated secondary school classes or college.

In 1926 the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), a standardized college entrance exam, was used for the first time. The SAT was developed by Carl Brigham, a eugenicist who did research that allegedly proved immigrants were "feeble-minded". In the next few decades intelligence and achievement tests became widespread in their use. To this day many argue that the SAT and other standardized tests are culturally biased, favoring white students over students of color.

Battles for Equality and Control – 1950s

After decades of behind-the-scenes groundwork, as the civil rights movement was building in the South, the Supreme Court struck down *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1954. In *Brown v. Board of Education* the justices declared segregated schools inherently unequal and ordered them dismantled "with all deliberate speed." The ruling ignited a firestorm of protest, from northern as well as southern states, and led to decades of sometimes-violent struggles for integration and equality.

Opposition to the Brown decision was couched in terms of "states rights," – the notion that state governments should maintain the ability to do as they please. State's rights continues to be used symbolically today to avoid talking about difficult issues of race, class and values.

The courts could order busing, but they couldn't force parents to participate.

The *Brown* decision was hailed as forcing states and districts to integrate their schools and equalize resources. But in fact, the Supreme Court failed to throw its full weight behind the decision. As the Mississippi organizing group Southern Echo notes[5], "Instead, the court left it up to the combatants at the local school district level where the local districts had the advantage, often supported by corrupt, racist federal judges who had no reluctance to flaunt and attack the Supreme Court and the United States Constitution." Echo argues that the Court's use of the phrase, "all deliberate speed," while meant to acknowledge the complexity of the task it was demanding, instead signaled to local segregationists that change could wait. While some cities turned to forced busing and gerrymandering school attendance boundaries to reach for a more diverse student body, equity and integration proved more elusive. The courts could order busing, but they couldn't force parents to participate.

In response to integration, millions of white families moved away from urban centers, spurring a massive expansion of suburbs, where the new, all-white school districts were unaffected by the Supreme Court's ruling. Housing segregation fostered school segregation. African-Americans were denied access to suburban homes through 'redlining'— banks and realtors simply shut them out of all-white neighborhoods. Through the 1980s, and despite attempts by some urban districts to keep and attract white students with programs such as magnet schools, the exodus from city schools continued. By 1992, the Court was forced to declare itself unwilling to order more drastic solutions to reverse the rapid resegregation of public schools: "Where resegregation is a product not of state action but of private choices, it does not have constitutional implications. […] It is beyond the authority and beyond the practical ability of the federal courts to try to counteract these kinds of continuous and massive demographic shifts," wrote Justice Anthony Kennedy in the *Freeman v. Pitts* decision.

The Federal Government Steps In – The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)

In the 1950s and early 1960s, states and local school boards shared authority over public education, its funding, organization, and content. By then most states had departments of education, established funding mechanisms and regulations guiding attendance, curriculum and other components of the public education system. Within broad guidelines, localities made specific policies and decisions.

Predictably, there were vast differences among districts in the same state and among the states themselves. There was little consistency in the way that students and their families were involved, supported, and challenged in the schools.

In an effort to manage these disparities, the federal government, in 1965, stepped into the fray. The 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) directed federal funds and programs to disadvantaged students in recognition that children from low-income homes required more educational services than children from affluent homes. Title I of ESEA became the largest federal K-

12 education program, receiving $8 billion its first year.

In pressing for the ESEA, President Johnson acted less out of altruism than in response to demands from the civil rights movement, widespread civil unrest and the Civil Rights Act passed the previous year. Without directly attacking local or state control of schools, Congress said that the states had failed to meet the educational needs of their most impoverished children and would, therefore, have to live with more federal involvement. ESEA was also a cornerstone of the President's "War on Poverty. In addition to providing new federal resources for schools, the law encompassed the new Head Start program for disadvantaged preschoolers and in 1968 incorporated bilingual education provisions (Title VII), offering federal aid to school districts to assist them in addressing the needs of children with limited English-speaking ability.

Communities Step In – Local Control

While battles over desegregation raged through the 1960s and '70s, the issue of who controlled the public schools continued to be a subtext. One important struggle was the 1968 confrontation in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, a predominantly Black and Puerto Rican community in Brooklyn, New York, which exposed and ignited simmering tensions between communities of color and mostly white teachers over the control of schools.

That conflict emerged when the New York City schools, under pressure from parents, created three experimental school districts and gave local communities control over school budgets, curricula and staffing. One of those districts, Oceanhill-Brownsville, was also assigned the City's first black superintendent. When the new parent council in Oceanhill-Brownsville decided to signal their power to the union by voting to transfer 18 teachers out of the district, the fight erupted into the public arena. To the press, the school council claimed that the teachers were undermining the goals of the community control experiment. But a larger context of the dispute was the emergence of Black and Puerto Rican nationalism across the country, with its call for self-reliance and racial empowerment. The predominantly white teachers of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) were perceived as indifferent and unsympathetic to the needs of the community and its children.

To no one's surprise, the United Federation of Teachers objected. Union president Albert Shankar called a citywide teachers strike. The strike lasted two months, ending when NYC Mayor John Lindsay, who had originally supported the plan for community control, capitulated to the union and brought an end to the experiment.[6]

The Ocean Hill-Brownsville conflict catapulted to the front pages of newspapers around the country. It fueled a debate that rang with the rhetoric of the ongoing civil and workers' rights struggles and pitted parents against teachers with a viciousness that has not been seen since – but has shaped a public perception of conflicting interests between parents and teachers that continues to the present. Even today, many who were involved in the struggle have difficulty talking about Ocean Hill-Brownsville.

Yet, despite the difficulty of the struggle, the demand for more community control has persisted. Two decades later, in 1988, The Chicago School Reform Act signaled a new era in local control. The Act established Local School Councils (LSCs) that gave parents and community activists new power. Among the responsibilities turned over to the Councils was the right to select and evaluate principals, help develop and approve school improvement plans, and control discretionary budgets averaging $500,000 per school. The Chicago Teachers Union, while initially skeptical and not supportive of the move, now embraces the site-based management structure. In fact, during 2004, the Union has joined with a broad coalition of community organizations to oppose the Mayor's "Renaissance 2010" plan which would, in part, abolish Local School Councils at some schools. *(For more about the Chicago School Reform Act, see the section on Power Analysis).*

'A Nation at Risk'

The optimism of the 1960s and early 70s, the momentum created by the civil rights movement, and federal mandates that the poor and children of color receive an equal education began to wane in the late 1970s. Students of color were increasingly segregated in inner city and racially isolated rural schools as attempts to integrate schools failed. The growth of the suburbs had drained property wealth from cities and funding from schools serving their residents.

In the face of these defeats, new approaches to education were gaining ground. The civil rights and women's movements influenced many parents and teachers to seek more diverse curriculum content that would give prominence to the roles of women and people of color, and to seek better understanding of how race and gender oppression are manifested in a learning environment. A growing number of educators and community activists rejected adjectives like "needy" and "disadvantaged" to describe children and families. They urged schools and teachers to recognize the strength, talents and resources that exist in every individual, family and community. Furthermore, they argued, teaching styles and expectations heavily influence students' success or failure.

President Ronald Reagan was elected in 1980 on a platform that rejected these kinds of ideas. He, his staff and his supporters were committed to going back to some imagined time when everyone could and should pull themselves up by their bootstraps, and there was no talk – or recognition – of inequality. He hoped to reduce the size and scope of government and let markets reign. In 1983 Reagan created the National Commission on Excellence in Education to evaluate the nation's education system and propose reforms to help the U.S. maintain international supremacy – economically (the "trade war") and politically (the Cold War).

The Commission's report, "A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform," gave the administration the rhetoric it wanted, warning that U.S. student achievement was slipping and that the country faced the imminent prospect of being overtaken in the global market by other nations. Among the alarmist sound bites the report produced were:

"The educational foundations of our society are being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people."

"…If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war."

The Commission's *recommendations,* on the other hand, were a mixed bag. Largely disregarded by the administration and the media was the Commission's support for smaller class size and

greater access to more sophisticated curriculum and teaching. Also widely ignored were recommendations that teachers receive more autonomy, more access to professional development and more competitive salaries. Instead, the Reagan administration emphasized the report's discussion of learning "standards," spawning a standards movement.

Standards were (and are) a potentially valuable mechanism to insure that all students receive high-level curriculum, and might even have led to the elimination of tracking. But the administration took a more conservative tack. Governors, corporate executives and the media were cultivated at regional and national summits promoting a results-driven approach to education that sought to emulate the late 1970s restructuring of American businesses to increase productivity. "Standards" became curricular requirements that could be measured with standardized tests. More recently, many states have implemented "high stakes" testing programs that tie student promotion and graduation to statewide achievement tests. While these various assessments have sometimes proved useful to evaluate school resources and identify needs, they are increasingly used to punish students, teachers and schools. As noted by the Education Commission of the States, "Standards are only one piece in a puzzle that also encompasses assessment, curriculum, accountability, teacher education and professional development, and intervention and support for struggling students and schools."

Rhetoric found in "A Nation at Risk" and the standards movement's failure to get quick results provided Reagan, subsequent administrations and conservative governors with justification for free-market experiments including vouchers, tuition tax credits and privatization.

Thus, despite its use of specious data and its unfounded conclusions, "A Nation at Risk" left a 'standards' legacy that significantly impacts learning today. Though subsequent studies disputed its findings, "A Nation at Risk" fulfilled its mission to open the debate on a fundamental restructuring of public education. Rhetoric found in "A Nation at Risk" and the standards movement's failure to get quick results provided Reagan, subsequent administrations and conservative governors with justification for free-market experiments including vouchers, tuition tax credits and privatization.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

George W. Bush's administration swept into office with a plan to seize the Democratic Party's traditional dominance over public education as a domestic issue. The vehicle for this "education

presidency" was the scheduled reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

The development of the new ESEA began on a progressive note. In fact, NCLB contains several progressive principles, including the idea that schools should be judged based on their ability to bring *all* children along educationally, and that the quality of the teaching staff is a key component of successful learning and an area where huge gaps exist between wealthy and low-income schools. But through the course of the debate, conservatives managed to move the details of the law in a much more ominous direction.

In January 2001, with broad bipartisan support, President Bush signed the new incarnation of ESEA, with the title "No Child Left Behind" (the moniker was lifted from the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) slogan 'Leave No Child Behind,' though the Children's Defense Fund has been strongly critical of the new law). NCLB makes sweeping changes in the way schools and districts must operate if they receive federal education dollars. The law requires annual assessments in grades 3-12 and imposes sanctions on low-income schools that do not meet annual goals for improvement in assessment scores. It sets goals for improving teacher quality. It consolidates funding, allowing states the leeway to use federal education dollars for a wide range of programs. And it refocuses the longstanding federal program for bilingual education towards English language acquisition. The fact that the law rests on some solid foundations makes it harder to criticize. As a political move, NCLB was a brilliant strategy. But for kids, it could be a disaster.

No Child Left Behind dramatically expands the federal role in public schools, while at the same time encouraging families to look to less regulated private and semi-private institutions to educate their children.

The immediate effect of the law has been to dramatically increase federal oversight of education, worrying advocates of smaller government and flying in the face of the legacies of Presidents Reagan and Bush senior. However, the Bush Administration's ultimate goal is undeniably the downsizing of not only the federal role in education, but likely the public role as a whole. The Administration has severely underfunded the law. And NCLB's promo-

tion of privatization of education and flirtation with vouchers belies a longer term agenda to reduce the role of government in education. In effect, the law sets unrealistic restrictions and mandates on schools and districts, while at the same time encouraging "failing" schools be turned over to private entities that are less accountable and virtually unregulated. It offers "choice" to low income parents to move their children out of poorly performing or "persistently dangerous" schools – without insuring that there will be better quality, safer schools for them to attend. It funnels federal dollars to private supplemental service providers and to advocacy organizations that promote vouchers. And at every step, the law emphasizes measurement, assessment, and curricula that feed business – and federal dollars – to the private sector.

In the first two years after NCLB was enacted, it appeared to have achieved the Republican goal of disarming the Democrats of their traditional dominance over the issue by positioning the Republicans as the party of change, fundamentally restructuring public education in the country. Astute spin from the Department of Education suggests that to argue against NCLB is to support the status quo.

Despite the Department of Education's attempts to vilify opponents of the law (the Secretary of Education during Bush's first term, Rod Paige, went so far as to call the National Education Association a "terrorist organization" in the spring of 2004), a wide assortment of teachers, administrators, parents, advocates and education experts have expressed grave concerns about the law. Clearly, the rhetorical goal of leaving no child behind is seen as much more complicated by those on the ground.

As implementation proceeds, a rising opposition to the law, and support for revisions have grown. How school districts, teachers, parents and communities respond to No Child Left Behind is certain to be the major theme of the next several years in the debate on public education in the U.S. Will the law lead to the erosion of federal support for poor children in public schools? Will public schools become even more stratified based on race and class, with the "haves" winning and the "have-nots" losing…again? Or will the focus on assessment and sanctions eliminate unproven or ineffective teaching practices and raise student assessment scores? And if it does so, what will those assessment scores

really tell us about our kids' ability to succeed in post-secondary education and beyond?

The Center for Community Change has developed a range of resource materials on No Child Left Behind, which are specifically targeted to organizers. In addition, education advocates can provide analyses and other tools for understanding the complex provisions of the law. For more information, click on this link to our website section on No Child Left Behind, or to the Center's NCLB briefing papers. Or, see the Where to Find It section of this guide.

Recent Education Trends

However NCLB plays out, education is an issue that Americans care about, and therefore one that politicians know they have to address. In a poll taken in 2002, 38 percent of those polled said the president and congress should make education their 'highest priority', and another 45 percent said education should be a 'high priority.' The only two issues ranked higher by those polled were terrorism and the economy. In the Latino community, education consistently out-polls all other issues – even immigration reform.

It's no wonder that public schools are a political battle ground. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, there are 47.4 million children enrolled in the nation's public elementary and secondary schools. And together, billions of federal, state and local dollars support the massive infrastructure of 85,000 school buildings across the country.

Moreover, public schools continue to educate the vast majority of the nation's children, as compared to private and parochial schools, or home schools:

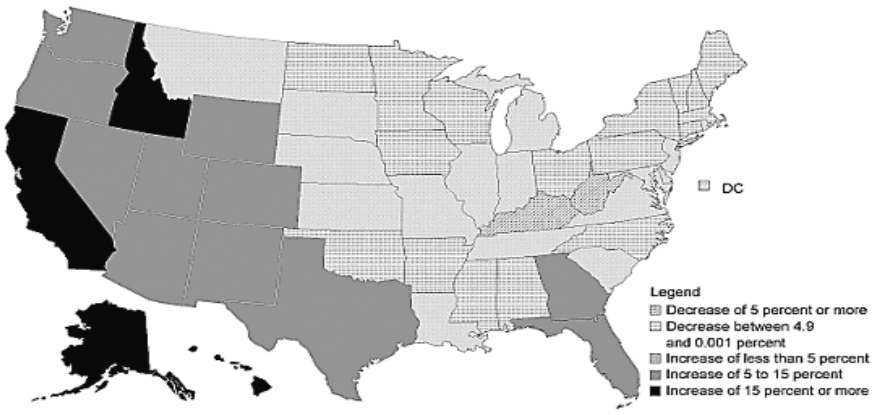
Overall Numbers

No. of public elementary/secondary schools in the US (2002):	84,735 (76% of all schools)
No. of private schools in the US (2002):	27,223 (24%)
Total public elementary/secondary school enrollment (2001):	47,400,000 (89% of US students)
Total private school enrollment (2000):	5,100,000 (9.4%)
Total home-schooled enrollment (1999):	850,000 (1.6%)

Geographic Trends in Enrollment

Enrollment in elementary and secondary schools grew rapidly during the 1950s and 1960s due to the "baby boom" generation. Enrollment reached a peak in 1971 and began to decline from there. The decline, reflecting the decline in school-age population over the period, lasted through 1984. Then, in 1985, enrollment began to climb again and began hitting record levels in the mid-1990s, in part due to a rise in immigration rates nationally. The following map visually displays the rise of student enrollment in the Southwest and West, and concurrent declines or stagnation in older urban industrial centers in the East and Midwest.

Figure 5. Percent change in grades K-12 enrollment in public schools, by state: Fall 2001 to fall 2013



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, The NCES Common Core of Data (CCD), "State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary/Secondary Education," 2001-02; and State Public Elementary and Secondary Enrollment Model.

Race and Ethnicity Matter

While the sheer number of students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools climbs, with regional variations, we are also seeing a shift in the demographics of public school students over time.

	1972	***1976***	***1980***	***1985***	***1990***	***1995***	***2000***
White	*77.8%*	*76.2%*	*72.8%*	*69.6%*	*67.6%*	*65.5%*	*61.3%*
Black	*14.8*	*15.5*	*16.2*	*16.8*	*16.5*	*16.9*	*16.6*
Hispanic	*6.0*	*6.5*	*8.6*	*10.1*	*11.7*	*14.1*	*16.6*
Other	*1.4*	*1.7*	*2.4*	*3.5*	*4.2*	*3.5*	*5.4*

Source: US Department of Education Common Core of Data, 2002

While the percentage of White students in the public schools is inching downwards, African-American students became a larger percentage of the public school population through the mid-'80s, and have basically stayed constant since then. The big shift is among Hispanic students, who have gone from making up 6 percent of the public school population in 1972 to over 16 percent in 2000. That's a *huge* demographic shift, which is having a big impact on our schools. Similarly, the growth of "Other" students [meaning mostly non-Hispanic immigrants and Native Americans] has grown from 1.4 percent to 5.4 percent, an even more dramatic jump.

These demographic shifts have important implications for education organizing. The issues that matter to parents and their children will depend in part on how schools and districts are addressing the needs of changing school populations, including students with limited English proficiency.

Woven throughout the history of public education in the U.S. are stories of class and race struggles to achieve a decent education—to realize the democratic ideal of equal opportunity. The tension between this ideal and the political, economic and social realities of a given period in time continue to the present. The history and contradictions of public education in America provide an important lens to interpret and understand the current laws, debates, and practices that will be discussed in this guide.

Endnotes:

[1.] Keleher, Terry, 1999. "History of Public Education in the United States." Oakland: Applied Research Center.

[2.] Ibid, Keleher, 1999

[3.] Carter, Susan B, et al, "Race and Ethnicity: Population, Vital Processes, and Education. Policy Studies Institute, University of California, Riverside, February 2003. http://www.economics.ucr.edu/papers/03-11.pdf

[4] Irons, Peter. "Jim Crow's Schools," American Educator, Summer 2004. American Federation of Teachers http://www.aft.org/pubs-reports/american_educator/issues/summer04/crowschools.htm

[5] "Justice Funding: Experimenting with the language of struggle to clarify policy and strategy choices." By Southern Echo, Inc., 2004.

[6] "Transforming Urban Schools Through Investments in Social Capital," Part 4. Noguera, Pedro A. In Motion Magazine. May 20, 1999. http://www.inmotionmagazine.com/pncap1.html

Power Analysis:
Who Can, Who Should, Who Will

Schools and school districts have many decision-makers, both groups and individuals. Sometimes their authority and responsibilities are clear-cut; other times they overlap or are shared. This section gives a general overview of who these people and groups are and what they control. Remember, though, that school districts differ from place to place. To understand the division of authority and responsibility in your school district, begin with some research online or at the library. Look at your city's "government services" or "elected officials" listings for a description of how the schools are run and managed. Then, you can follow up with specific questions in a phone call or meeting with local or district information officers.

At The School

Principals lead schools, academically and administratively. A good principal can set a school climate that is conducive to learning and intellectual engagement – not just for students but for the teaching staff as well. Large schools also may have **deans** or **assistant** or **vice principals** who share in these leadership responsibilities.

The amount of freedom a principal has to make decisions and shape a school's atmosphere varies from district to district. Usually they have a great deal of leeway within policy guidelines set by boards of education and superintendents. The exception to this generalization may be curriculum. The move toward state standards and federal tests has heavily circumscribed flexibility in this area.

It doesn't take long, when you enter a school, to begin getting a flavor of the school "climate" or "culture." Is it a place where students, teachers and administrators are respected and challenged? Is it a functional office that provides its "workers" what they need to do their jobs? Schools are work sites for teachers, support staff, paraprofessionals and others. As such, the climate created by building leadership affects all who work there, as well as students who attend the school, and their parents. In a well-run

In Denver, New York and other cities, organized parents have won campaigns to replace school principals, help choose new school leadership and ensure better management and higher expectations within schools. Perhaps the most radical organizing to change school culture has been done by the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) in Texas, where a network of "Alliance Schools" focuses on establishing a learning community that engages students, parents, teachers and other staff.

school, **teachers** may work together in teams by grade, or subject level in an effort to strengthen coordination between classrooms and provide an opportunity for teachers to learn from each other and critically reflect on their work. In other buildings, there may be no sense of collegiality: classroom doors are closed, teachers work largely on their own and are suspicious of efforts by parents or other teachers to sit in the classroom to monitor or provide support. These buildings typically fail to provide an intellectually stimulating environment for teachers and students, and result in high teacher turnover and low student achievement.

The degree of autonomy teachers enjoy to shape their classroom teaching depends on multiple factors, including class size, student attributes, the principal, the level of support she provides, and any standardized curriculum mandated by the school district. Increasingly, as standardized exams become more influential in decisions about promotions and graduations, teachers are under pressure to "teach to the test" and therefore have less leeway in how they convey their course material.

In most school districts, teachers and other school staff (custodians, paraprofessionals, cafeteria workers) are unionized.[1] **Unions** work to protect faculty and staff from inequitable labor practices, and negotiate wages and benefits through collective bargaining. In some school districts, the local teachers union includes teachers as well as paraprofessionals, cafeteria workers, bus drivers and other school personnel. In other districts, non-teaching positions may be represented by other unions, including the Teamsters, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) or others.

Most teachers unions have "building representatives" or "shop stewards," who serve as the union liaison and leadership within each individual school building. These elected building "reps" sit on a district-wide council that helps decide on union activities and positions. It is usually worth building relationships with these leaders. That way, when an issue seems to present a conflict between staff interests and student needs, activists may be able to find solutions that satisfy both. Also, some issues may be of concern to both parents and teachers, providing the opportunity to work together to resolve problems.

Dozens of organizing groups have begun their work on education issues by targeting small but meaningful changes at the building level – perhaps addressing safety for children walking to and from school, playground facilities, or other issues. These campaigns should be conducted strategically as a way to build parent interest in the school, develop alliances with teachers or administrators and establish a presence for the group.

For a good description of the kinds of campaigns that groups often start out with, check out "Unlocking the Schoolhouse Door," a report by the National Center for Schools and Communities (April 2002) that looks at how community groups typically begin their engagement on education concerns. [http://www.ncscatfordham.org/binarydata/files/unlockingschool.pdf]

Teachers unions engage in collective bargaining with the school district to create a contract that guides their working conditions. Contracts are typically negotiated every one to three years, but portions of the contract may be reviewed or renegotiated on an annual basis. Most union contracts determine wage and salary scales, but teachers' contracts also may influence building assignments, evaluation processes, and tenure policies and practices. Increasingly, unions are insisting on the right to bargain around additional issues such as class size, facilities conditions, the composition of school and district decision-making teams, professional development and others that directly affect student learning. Contracts are public documents that should be available from the district and/or union office. Some local unions post contracts or summaries on their web sites.

Some states (Arizona, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Texas, Virginia) do not allow collective bargaining by teachers. In these states, decisions about salaries and working conditions are decided by the district administration, with varying degrees of influence by teachers depending on the district leadership. Nevertheless, these states all have teacher union affiliates. But the unions typically are far less powerful than those in states where collective bargaining is guaranteed.

Some states have laws that proscribe what can and cannot be included in collective bargaining agreements. To find out what your state's "scope of bargaining" policies are, go to this link, which contains a state-by-state table on collective bargaining policies for teachers:
http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/37/48/3748.htm.

Parent Teacher Associations (PTA), also known as Parent Associations or Parent-Teacher-Student Organizations, are sometimes seen, particularly by administrators and teachers, as the primary vehicle for parents to participate in the school. The national PTA was founded in 1897 as the National Congress of Mothers. It was a radical concept at the time, when social activism was scorned and women did not have the vote. The PTA has been instrumental as a national lobbying force around issues such as access to kindergarten, school meals, child labor and other issues. In the last several years, many school-based parent organizations have formed independently of the national PTA, though they play similar roles at individual schools.

In Spokane, Washington, the Washington Rural Organizing Project (now known as Spokane Interfaith and Education Alliance) organized the PTA at Sheridan elementary school, and won District funds to coordinate activity around vehicular traffic outside the school, among other issues. The effort dissolved, however, when the organizing group turned their attention to a school funding levy and the District withdrew its support.

PTAs are almost always unstaffed, and work with extremely limited resources. They often thrive or falter based on the skills and personalities of a few hard-working parents. In low and moderate-income communities, school PTAs are not often seen as welcoming or representative of the school population as a whole. PTAs tend to be dominated by whites – even in majority-minority schools – and by more middle class families. They are often seen by community groups as relatively conservative bodies that focus on fundraising support for the school. School principals often heavily influence the PTA, and can control their access to school resources to some degree, which also contributes to the frustration that many community organizing groups have with the tendency of PTAs to be fairly conflict-averse.

Many organizing groups have successfully worked with or through established PTAs on a range of issues. However, where PTAs do not reflect the overall demographic makeup of the school, or are substantially controlled by a small subset of parents or the principal, community groups have found them to be unhelpful and some times even obstructionist.

Site-based decision-making, also known as shared decision-making or school-based management, exists in many districts and schools. The concept was brought over from private-sector "participatory management" innovations—to place more power, autonomy and accountability at the school level and allow for greater decision-making by teachers, and sometimes by students, parents and community members as well. These structures differ widely in their responsibilities and effectiveness. At one end of the spectrum is Chicago *(see box below)* where neighborhood residents elect local school councils that in theory can hire and fire principals and other staff and exert significant control over school budgets. Some site-based structures also have control over curriculum and programming decisions. In other places planning teams and similar committees may be advisory only, not accountable to anyone, allowed to address a limited range of issues, controlled by administrators or frustrated by uncooperative staff.

District Level: Administrators and Elected Officials

Superintendents, occasionally known as chancellors, chief executive officers or chief administrative officers, are legally obligated to carry out the policies of the board of education or in some cases mayors or county executives. Superintendents are usually a district's most visible representative and are critical in defining its culture, shaping decisions, encouraging innovation and improvement, and creating a supportive work environment for faculty and staff. The superintendent, with the ***administrative, district,*** or ***central office staff:***

- Monitors school progress and budgets and reports to the board and the public;
- Selects curriculum and materials (within the confines of state law);
- Oversees training and development of principals and teachers;
- Negotiates contracts with employees unions;
- Manages facilities;
- Ensures equitable distribution of materials, equipment and information to schools;
- Creates short- and long-term plans;
- Hires, assigns and fires principals and other staff, usually with board approval; and
- Prepares budgets for the board's approval.

In federal parlance, the district administration is know as the "Local Education Agency" or LEA.

Boards of education, known in some places as school boards or school committees, typically set budgets, policies and goals for their districts. They can usually levy taxes, and must issue regular

financial reports. Boards determine the school calendar, approve curriculum, make decisions about buildings and renovations and decide many other issues.

School boards are not usually involved in day-to-day operations, but *are* accountable for ensuring that local, state and federal laws are obeyed. These requirements range widely, covering academic standards, the licensing of teachers and other staff, health and safety, employment law, and much more. A board's key responsibilities are to:

- Raise funds, approve district budgets and oversee expenses;
- Authorize contracts with employees and their unions;
- Hire the superintendent, other top administrators and, in some smaller districts, principals;
- Communicate with the public about public education and local schools.

Ideally boards also should provide vision and a philosophy or approach to education. They should answer hard questions on the content of curriculum, the best ways to meet the needs of the district's students, and ways to engage the community and attract the best staff.

Many boards are elected, but a growing number of mayors, county executives and city councils have won the right to appoint them. Their argument has been that since they are responsible for budgets and the success or failure of schools, they should determine who governs them. Some activists have struggled against this trend believing elected boards are more accountable. Others have supported change arguing that school districts are too complex to be run by lay people or that elected school boards are open to corruption.

Local government's primary role in education is creating and refining funding mechanisms, most often property or real estate taxes. (See section on, School Funding) In addition, many cities, counties, and other local entities have regulations that apply to schools, for example fire codes and rules about health, safety and building occupancy.

Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) sometimes hold power at the district level. Often, individual school PTA presidents come

together in a district-wide body, which may be anointed by the superintendent or school board as the "official" voice for the community and parents.

Site-based decision-making. In some places, participatory decision-making extends to the district-level. In most of New York State, for instance, districts are required by law to have a district-level planning team in addition to teams for each school. These teams are supposed to include community, parents, administrators, support staff, and teachers. For more on site-based decision-making, see ***Building Level*** above.

Unions represent faculty and staff in most school districts. In many large districts there are four or more unions – one each for principals; teachers and other professional staff; paraprofessionals such as teachers' aides; and maintenance or custodial workers; as well as specialized unions for the trades, such as electricians. As mentioned above, guidelines for how districts negotiate with unions – and the parameters of collective bargaining – are usually set by states. Wages, salaries, and benefits account for about 85 percent of a typical district's budget. Conservatives charge unions with getting in the way of school change, accusing them of protecting their own members (with contract language on teacher placement, seniority rights and due process provisions) over ensuring student achievement. In recent years, though, a growing number of local unions have begun to assert the role of teachers in changing schools for the better and leading the focus on student achievement. These locals say they have a responsibility to make sure all kids learn and to help get rid of teachers who can't or won't support this goal. They also are forging alliances with parent and community groups. Some of these locals belong to the Teacher Union Reform Network (TURN), www.turnexchange.net.

In a number of cities, local community organizations have developed good working relationships with their teachers union locals, and are engaged in joint efforts to reform schools. The Center for Community Change's "Partnerships for Change" project supports and learns from these alliances *[for more information on Partnerships for Change, see a brochure on the project at www.communitychange.org/issues/education/partners/].*

Winds of change in Chicago?

The Chicago School Reform Act of 1988 was a response to demands for better schools and increased parent and community involvement. Local school councils (LSCs) established by the Act gave parents and community activists responsibilities that those in other districts could only dream of. These included the right to: select and evaluate principals, help develop and approve school improvement plans, and control discretionary budgets averaging $500,000 per school.

LSCs include six parents and two community representatives elected by parents and community residents, two teachers elected by school staff, the principal, and in high schools a student elected by his or her peers. The district requires LSC members to have 16 hours of training. Several Chicago-based non-profits provide this training, as well as additional workshops and support.

Are they working? A 1997 study by the Consortium on Chicago School Research found that 50-60% of LSCs are "high functioning" and that another 25-33% are doing well though in need of more support. Studies also suggest that elementary schools with sustained improvement in reading test scores during the 1990s had "effective" LSCs as judged by school staff. At the same time, schools taken over by the central administration in the late 1990s showed "very limited" achievement gains.

Despite this promising view, LSCs remain controversial. District office staff have been known to interfere with the LSCs, and the district's chief operating officer has publicly belittled them. This has undermined the public's support of LSCs, discouraged people from running for seats on the councils, and demoralized those who do serve. It has also made them less effective. In 2004, Chicago Mayor Richard Daley announced a plan to restructure as many as 60 Chicago Public Schools, abolishing the LSCs in those schools. Community groups are fighting the so-called "Renaissance 2010" plan.

Many school reform groups and foundations that pushed for the 1988 Act, as well as LSC members, continue to believe in the potential of the LSCs to improve schools. They fought off attempts to weaken the Act and are working to strengthen LSCs. Members and experts alike recommended more training for LSC members, especially on conflict resolution, teaching and learning and consensus building, and groups like the Chicago School Leadership Cooperative have received substantial grants to try to fill the gap.

Sources: **Chicago's Local School Councils: What the Research Says**, Donald R. Moore and Gail Merrit, Designs for Change, January 2002, www.designsforchange.org.

Catalyst: Voice of Chicago School Reform, *Growing up: Local leaders say it's now or never for LSCs* and *Prescriptions for improved LSCs*, both by Mario G. Oritz, March 2002, www.chicagocatalyst.org.

State Level:
Education Departments, Courts, Legislatures

Governors and **legislatures**, the chief decision-makers in state government, have primary responsibility for public education at this level. States, through budgets set by governors and legislators, contribute the largest share of funding for schools – as much as 50% of school budgets. Most states also set requirements for teacher certification and licensing, create accountability systems such as standards and tests, set the rules for school bonds, develop standard courses of study, and determine the parameters of negotiations and benefits policies for school employees. Beyond these issues, there is wide variation in how much control states exert.

Governors and/or legislators usually appoint **state boards of education** and **state superintendents**, though these are elected positions in a few states. Superintendents and state boards or departments of education (in federal parlance, known as "State Education Agencies" or SEAs) typically create guidelines for how districts implement education legislation on topics such as those listed above. How active they are and how much influence they have over the actions of the governor and the legislature varies from state to state.

A good source of information specific to your state include local "education funds" – a network of progressive education advocates affiliated with the Public Education Network (PEN). There are ed funds in 34 states. You might also contact your state PTA and state teachers' unions. Many states also have fiscal analysis institutes that are excellent sources of information about budgets and tax equity issues. Contact information for each of these resources are listed in the Resource section. [PEN is at www.publiceducation.org.]

Parent Teacher Associations (see other levels, too) often have state-level staff who lobby the governor or state legislature. Some also provide technical support to local chapters.

School boards usually have a state association, made up of district boards, that lobbies governors and state legislators.

Unions are major players in most states. The teachers' unions in

particular usually have professional lobbyists and contribute generously to political campaigns. The two umbrella groups for local teachers unions are the American Federation of Teachers (www.aft.org) and the National Education Association (www.nea.org). Both organizations typically have state-level offices in each state, though one may be dominant, based on the number of members/locals it has within the state.

State court decisions can affect school policies on school funding, materials, student access and assignments, civil liberties issues such as dress codes and drug testing, freedom of speech, religion and more. In the last 30 years state and federal courts also have issued many rulings defining the states' responsibility for providing free public schools and the distribution of available resources. (See, Suing for Equity, in the School Funding section.)

Federal Level: Department of Education and Congress

Department of Education In 1979 the federal "office of education" became a department and the secretary of education achieved cabinet-level status. "Ed," as it is referred to, conducts research, administers programs – including grants to schools and other groups – and represents the President in matters relating to schools. The secretary of education under George W. Bush is Roderick Paige, former superintendent of the Houston, Texas, schools.

Federal court decisions, including those made by the Supreme Court, may influence a wide range of school policies and practices from dress codes to drug testing to school prayer. For more information see **Courts** in the ***State Level*** section above.

Federal laws applying to schools include those that define and outlaw discrimination based on race, sex, or disability and those that protect employees – for example, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, the Americans with Disability Act, the Fair Labor Standards Act and the Occupational Safety and Health Act. The federal government also regulates how schools use federal funds.

The largest federal program that provides funding for public schools is the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)

of 1965. It created and regulates most federal K-12 programs. Title I, designed to improve achievement among poor children and children of color, is the heart of ESEA and provides the most funding, about $13.8 billion in fiscal year 2003. Congress allocates funds for ESEA each year and must reauthorize the law every five or six years. In addition to Title I's focus on disadvantaged children, ESEA also typically addresses programs for bilingual students, education on military bases and Indian reservations, funding for special programs such as dropout prevention or drug programs, and other provisions.

Until the 2002 reauthorization of ESEA, known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), federal involvement in school policies and practices was minimal beyond the areas listed above. However, the new ESEA/NCLB requirements on assessment, school performance and teacher quality will significantly influence schools across the country. Under the new law, Title I schools face sanctions for failing to meet the new mandates.

The current version of ESEA dictates, to an unprecedented degree, practices historically controlled at the state and local level. Many educators and parents view this federal "intrusion" into local school policy as particularly invidious, made more so by the President and Congress' failure to fully fund the authorization levels set in the law. Despite the onerous mandates required of districts by NCLB, the federal share of local school funding remains at about 7%. (For more information on the law's major provisions, see the section of this Action Guide called "No Child Left Behind".)

National Association of State Boards of Education (www.nasbe.org) and the **National School Boards Association** (www.nsba.org) are the major national organizations of school boards. They lobby at the federal level and publish journals and other materials. For instance, **The American School Board Journal** (www.asbj.com) is written without a lot of jargon and frequently has useful articles.

The National Parent Teacher Association (see other levels) lobbies at the federal level, publishes a magazine and other materials and maintains national offices in Chicago and Washington, DC (www.pta.org).

Unions (see other levels) are also major players in Congress. The teachers' unions have government affairs offices, professional lobbyists and make generous campaign contributions.

Getting to a Power Analysis

As you begin to look at and hear about issues within the schools in your community, develop a plan for leaders to conduct a local power analysis. Look at who's on the local school board; who contributes to their campaigns; what authority do individual schools (through principals or site-based management councils) have over the issues that you're concerned about? Meet with a representative of the teachers union to evaluate their interest in working with community residents. Sit down with a district official, or see if the district publishes a guide to district finances and school budgets. These fact-finding exercises will help you and your leaders figure out how to approach the issues they care about.

In addition, it's important to be aware of many parents' reluctance to approach schools or engage in issues that directly affect classroom practice. Cultural or historic experiences sometimes make parents uneasy about approaching teachers (cultural differences between mostly white, mostly middle class teachers and the communities from which their students come are often legion), or feeling that they might not have anything to offer the school. Schools are good at sending subtle messages about the limits of parent involvement. Some organizing groups have found that the level of leadership development needed to engage in campaigns addressing real instructional issues is much higher than with many other issue campaigns. Take your time. Get active inside the school house only as your leadership and membership are ready. Most organizing groups begin with "outside the school" issues such as facilities or safety first. Building relationships, learning about education reform and getting comfortable with you instincts about what goes on inside a classroom or school takes longer.

School funding
Where does it come from? Where does it go?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT ***Money Matters: A Reporter's Guide to School Finance*** *(2003, Education Writers Association, Washington, D.C., www.ewa.org)* was of immeasurable help in preparing this section. *We also are indebted to* ***Protecting Public Education From Tax Giveaways to Corporations*** *(2003, National Education Association, Washington, D.C., www.nea.org) for an explanation of state funding formulas.*

Access to a free public education has been constitutionally guaranteed to children for a century. But for about just as long, a debate has raged over how that education will be funded, what the spending priorities ought to be, and who will pay for it. The same fundamental tenets that have shaped – and complicated – the formation of our public school system (see chapter 1) also emerge in the debate over how it is funded. Do *all* children have a right to the *same* resources? Do they have the right to whatever is needed to provide an "adequate" education? Or, do state constitutions guarantee only a basic level of support, onto which districts or states, or individual schools may build to the extent of their political and economic power.

The conservative political climate that has been building nationwide since the 1970s has affected public schools dramatically. The rising power of corporations and the diminished import of the public sector to provide for society's needs have created a difficult climate in which to secure adequate funding for public schools. The result has been fierce battles, unending lawsuits, complicated political maneuvering and usually a stalemate when it comes to making sure resources reach low-income children. Thus inequities remain. The gap in spending between the highest poverty and lowest poverty districts averages $966 per pupil nationwide, which means in some states the gap is even greater. (*The Education Trust publishes an excellent annual report on the funding gaps between high and low poverty districts, by state. For the 2004 report, see:* http://www2.edtrust.org/NR/rdonlyres/30B3C1B3-3DA6-4809-AFB9-2DAACF11CF88/0/funding2004.pdf.)

The battle over school funding is an important dimension of the modern-day struggle for equal opportunity for low-income students and children of color. The following description of school funding fights in New York State exemplifies the nature of the challenge to obtain equal educational opportunity.

The McDonalds Standard. Is it Enough?

In New York State, a grassroots coalition of more than 230 groups is organizing to shape the way an "adequate education" is defined and how the state should pay for it. The battle in New York provides a model for engaging community groups in school funding debates.

The Alliance for Quality Education (AQE) was formed to establish a grassroots voice to help amplify the legal battle over school funding in the Empire State. The case took off in 1995 when New York's highest court said litigators with the Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE) had standing to challenge the education finance system on the grounds that thousands of students were being denied the "sound, basic education" required by the state's constitution.

In 2001 Judge Leland DeGrasse ruled in favor of CFE, declaring that New York State had "over the course of many years consistently violated the state constitution by failing to provide opportunity for a sound basic education…." He ordered the state to reform its funding system. Then, in 2002, an appellate court rejected DeGrasse's decision. Many were outraged by the appellate court ruling, which implied that money is not that important and that an eighth or ninth grade education fulfilled the requirement of "sound and basic." *The New York Times* decried the decision, writing that it "suggested that the state would satisfy its constitutional duty if the educational opportunity provided students would qualify them for jobs as fast-food cooks or bike messengers."

A year later, New York's highest court weighed in again. Money does matter, it said, expressing concern that thousands of students are "placed in overcrowded classrooms, taught by unqualified teachers, and provided with inadequate facilities and equipment." The decision said that all students are entitled to a "meaningful high school education . . . which prepares [them] to function productively as civic participants." (*Campaign for Fiscal Equity V. State of New York*). What *that* means must now be defined in New York.

The Alliance for Quality Education is taking the lead in organizing so that the voices of parents, students and teachers can be heard

in that debate. Together with the Campaign for Fiscal Equity, community leaders in dozens of districts across the state are coming up with a definition of what they believe schools need in order to be successful and are conducting local organizing campaigns to demand those resources.

The battle for new school funding systems is being fought throughout the country. Moving from the state courts to the streets and back again, these campaigns are defining "adequacy" and at the same time looking for ways to provide it to all children regardless of where they live.

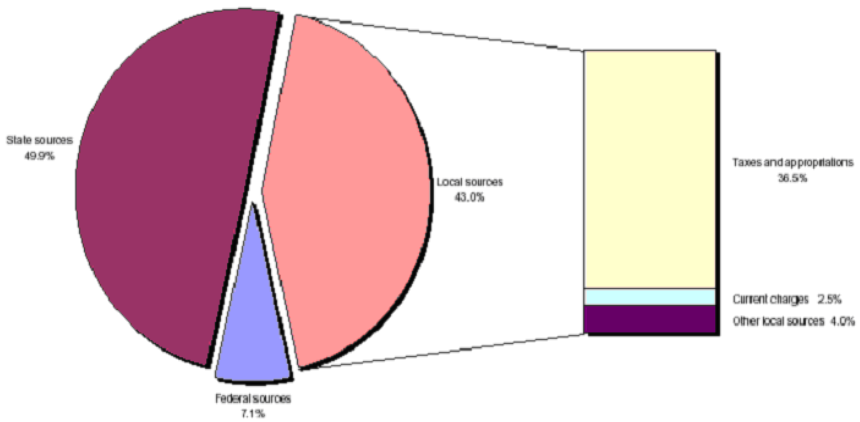
This chapter provides a basic summary of school funding: where the money comes from, and how it is spent.

Where does the money come from?

The State. The share of school funding covered by state dollars varies significantly. The trend, however, has been toward rising state shares: in 1940 states provided 30 percent of school funds, by 1970 it was 40 percent, and in 2000, 49.9 percent. K-12 public education is the single largest expense for state governments, an average of 35.4 percent of their 2000 budgets.

Figure 1. Percent Distribution of Public Elementary-Secondary Education Revenue: 2000-01

Total: $402.4 billion



Source: Public Education Finances, 2001. U.S. Census Bureau

State-level funding for education is dependent on the revenues generated from sources such as sales and personal income taxes—which together account for nearly 70 percent of total state revenues. Both are strongly affected by the health of the economy, prompting experts and activists to look for ways to stabilize and increase state incomes. An additional challenge is that, reflecting the increase in corporate power mentioned earlier, corporate income taxes have declined in recent decades. As recently as 1989, 9.7 percent of state tax revenues came from corporate income taxes; in 2002 it had fallen to 5.1 percent. Meanwhile, states have tried to raise revenues other ways, such as through state lotteries. However, research shows that lottery revenues earmarked for education tend to supplant, rather than supplement, the existing state education resources.

Local governments provide nearly as large a share of school funds as the states – an average of 43 percent in 2000-01[1]. Local contributions were highest in Nebraska (57.7 percent) and lowest in Arkansas (18.7 percent). Most local education funding comes from property taxes. Nationally these taxes provide nearly a third of all funding for K-12 education. In many states local voters must approve increases in property tax rates which also are known as millage rates. As a result, school boards or local governments must ask voters to approve school budgets or special expenses, such as buildings, that will increase millage rates.

In large cities and urban counties with a single district, school funds are often part of the overall budget. These budgets are typically developed by mayors or county executives and their staffs, are finalized by a city or county council and do not require a public vote. Therefore activists have to insert themselves in the process early on in order to have an impact on spending priorities and overall funding.

Regardless of the budget process, the mechanics of property taxes are the same. A mill equals one-tenth of a cent. So, for example, if voters agree to increase the millage rate by one percent, they would pay an additional one dollar for every $1,000 worth of property. Local officials, or in a few cases state governments, periodically reevaluate the worth of property for tax purposes. The result is known as assessed value and is usually less than market value. So, continuing with the example above, a

house assessed at $100,000 would be taxed an additional $100 for each one percent millage rate increase.

Local governments like property taxes because they are relatively dependable, predictable and easy to administer and collect. But property taxes often impose unfair burdens on the elderly and those on fixed incomes as well as property owners whose incomes do not keep pace with property values. These problems can be particularly pronounced during recessions and real estate booms.

In the last 10-15 years homeowners have tended to bear heavier property tax burdens than businesses. Reasons for this include a boom and bust in commercial and office space in the 1980s, underassessment of industrial and commercial property, declines in manufacturing and increased home ownership[2]. The same dynamics that have resulted in reduced corporate income taxes at the state level are allowing companies to reduce their property tax burden as well. *[Education Organizing addressed one facet of this decline in corporate contributions to school revenues. See http://www.communitychange.org/education/pdffiles/edorg9.pdf.]*

Reliance on property taxes contributes to huge inequalities across states and among schools in the same state. Communities with the neediest children often have the weakest property tax bases and, therefore, raise the least amount of money even when they tax themselves at high rates. To date efforts to address these inequalities have been only marginally successful. Every state that has changed its funding formula in response to a lawsuit has in some way restricted the use of property taxes.

Federal government. The federal contribution to state education budgets ranged from 3.8 percent to 17.3 percent in 2000-01. The average was 7.1 percent and most districts received 5-8 percent of their budgets from the federal government.

The source for this funding is Congress' annual appropriation to the Department of Education, authorized by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Congress enacted the ESEA in 1965, and has reauthorized it every 5-6 years since then. The law was a cornerstone of President Lyndon Johnson's "War on Poverty," and for the first time, targeted federal funds and programs specifically to disadvantaged students.

Title I of the ESEA became the single largest federal expenditure on elementary and secondary education, with appropriations of $1 billion dollars in 1965. These appropriations have risen to roughly $13 billion in 2003, though these increases have barely kept pace with inflation and rising student enrollments in elementary and secondary public schools.

This federal intervention was tacit recognition that the states' performance on this front was uneven and insufficient. Title I of the ESEA became the single largest federal expenditure on elementary and secondary education, with appropriations of $1 billion dollars in 1965. These appropriations have risen to roughly $13 billion in 2003, though these increases have barely kept pace with inflation and rising student enrollments in elementary and secondary public schools. *(The National Center for Education Statistics has good information on state-by-state Title I allocations, as well as district allocations. See http://nces.ed.gov. The U.S. Department of Education website also allows you to search states for Title I allocations by district. See http://www.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/titlei/fy04/index.html#allocation.)*

A separate law governs federal funding for children with disabilities. In 1975 Congress passed the first such law, then called the Education of All Handicapped Children Act. The law has been amended numerous times—most recently in 1997—and is now titled the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). A critical aspect of IDEA is the principle that all eligible school-aged children and youth with disabilities are entitled to receive a free appropriate public education ("FAPE"). In addition to FAPE, the other key principles of the law are: appropriate evaluation, individualized education programs, least restrictive environment, parent and student participation in decision making, and procedural safeguards. States must comply with certain minimum rules and standards in order to receive federal IDEA funds. Each state also has its own special education law that may go beyond the federal statute.

Under the law, provision of FAPE must occur, to the extent possible, in the same school and classroom setting that a child would otherwise attend were the child not disabled. In other words, every effort should be made to mainstream disabled students. In the past, children with disabilities were often segregated from other students and stigmatized for their difference. In the early 1970s, more than one million disabled children were excluded from school, and hundreds of thousands were housed in state institutions.[3] Children of color and poor children were more likely than white, wealthier children to be separated, and to receive inappropriate educational services. [http://www.aypf.org/forumbriefs/2002/fb092302.htm]

The federal government has failed to meet the funding goals set out in IDEA. Originally the law called for a federal target of covering 40 percent of the extra costs of educating children with disabilities. Although federal appropriations for special education increased from roughly $315 million in 1977 to $7.4 billion in 2001, the federal contribution today pays for only about 13 percent of the excess costs of special education. States and localities must make up the difference.

Some states try to distribute property taxes more equitably to improve education equity

In recent years efforts to more equitably fund public education have focused largely on the state level, and have been fought primarily in the state courts. In some cases the result has been a state role in the distribution of local property taxes. Kansas, Montana, Texas, Wyoming, and Vermont (see below) require local governments to pool all or some property tax revenues in a state fund. These funds are then distributed more equitably throughout the state. Michigan replaced most local property taxes with a statewide property tax and a higher sales tax in 1994. Per-student spending gaps between the lowest- and highest-poverty districts are below the national average in all of these states except Michigan and Montana. *(Source: The Education Trust based on 1999-2000 U.S. Dept. of Education and U.S. Census Bureau data. See spending gap charts comparing the states at http://www2.edtrust.org/NR/rdonlyres/EE004C0A-D7B8-40A6-8A03-1F26B8228502/0/funding2003.pdf.)*

Where does the money go?

All the resources that are funneled down from the federal, state and local level end up in school district hands, where they are allocated to schools. Funds are apportioned to the districts in a variety of ways, depending on the source of funds and the formulas used for their distribution, which are described in detail below. Once they reach the school level, funds are used for a number of different purposes; the bulk of resources are used for operating expenses.

Controversy in Vermont

In 1997 Vermont's Supreme Court ruled that every child in the state should have basically equal access to funds for teachers, libraries and textbooks. The legislature responded with Act 60; it says districts that spend the same dollar amount on their students should have the same tax rate. The practical result is that property-rich districts subsidize districts with less valuable property. The act does not require equal spending.

Under Act 60 the state sets property tax rates, combines the monies collected and redistributes funding at a fixed amount per student. The statewide property tax covers about two-thirds of what is needed for Vermont's basic per student grant plus its contribution for special education, transportation, and other categorical aid. (See definition of categorical aid below.) The remainder comes mostly from income and sales taxes.

If a district wants to raise additional funds it must send some of the money raised to the state to be shared with poorer districts. Some districts avoid this provision of the Act by asking for donations rather than raising taxes. Act 60 tries to protect those with valuable land but fixed or limited incomes by allowing low- and moderate-income homeowners to pay up to two percent of their income instead of the property tax.

Act 60 is complicated and controversial. It has cost some politicians their careers and has angered residents of wealthy towns. Still, it has withstood six court challenges. Most importantly, it seems to be working. When the lawsuit reached the state Supreme Court in 1997, one school district in Vermont was spending $2,979 per student while another spent $7,726 – a difference of $4,747 or 160 percent. In 1999-2000, the gap between Vermont's lowest and highest-poverty districts was only $939 – below the U.S. average.

Every state constitution requires a free public education though the precise language differs.

Operating expenses are the costs of running schools day to day including everything except capital expenses. Wages, salaries and benefits account for about 85 percent of these costs. When school budgets have to be cut, reductions usually come from the remaining 15 percent of the budget since collective bargaining contracts with employees cannot usually be changed.

Capital expenses cover new school construction, renovations, and major repairs. Capital funds almost always have to be borrowed. Instead of taking out a bank loan, school districts typically sell bonds. Voter approval is usually required before a district can sell bonds. The buyers – most often banks or other institutions – charge a fixed interest rate that ordinarily costs the district less than a typical bank loan. The district also agrees to a repayment schedule. Repayment costs appear in district budgets as "debt service" and cover principal, interest and any fees to banks or other financial agents.

How are state funds divided? One answer is – not fairly. As you will see below, complicated formulas are used to determine how state money is shared among school districts. In most states, formulas were designed or have been adapted, at least in part, to make them more equitable. Nonetheless, in 1999-2000 the *average* national per-pupil-spending gap between the highest- and lowest-poverty districts was $966 per student.

The states with the largest gaps in 1999-2000 were Illinois, New York and Montana. For example, New York's wealthiest district was able to spend $8,598 (including both local and state revenues) per student to fund public schools, while the poorest spent $6,445 per student. In Illinois the wealthiest district had state and local revenue totaling $7,460 per student while the poorest had $5,400. Montana's wealthiest district had $6,361 per student, its poorest, $4,826.

Every state constitution requires a free public education though the precise language differs. About 25 percent say the state is responsible to provide a "thorough and efficient" public education for all students. In recent years this has been understood to mean that states must provide districts with enough money to succeed. Unfortunately there is little agreement about the meanings of "enough" and "succeed."

Most state money for schools is described as ***basic*** or ***general*** aid. It is usually distributed using complicated ***formulas***. Most formulas take into account each district's ability to raise funds locally. The measure of this ability is usually the value of taxable property, known as ***net tax capacity***. State formulas may also consider factors such as personal income, number of students defined as "poor," and other indicators of a district's relative wealth or poverty. Some formulas also consider each district's size and cost of living, including expenses such as teachers' salaries, real estate prices and special education needs.

A majority of states use some version of a ***foundation*** or ***guarantee*** formula. This method sets a minimum level of funding per student, the foundation or guarantee. Aid is then allocated based on the difference between the foundation and what each district can raise locally; some states require localities to impose a minimum tax.

"Costing out" is the process of determining the minimum level of state funding per student. Calculations vary from state to state. Here are short descriptions of some "costing-out" methods states use to determine foundation spending or guaranteed minimums. Many states have been influenced by lawsuits filed during the last 30 years (see box below, *Suing for equity and adequacy*) and while some have increased resources available to poor schools, it will be years before we know whether schools improve as a result.

- ***Successful schools.*** Some states identify schools and/or districts where students regularly meet state standards. Then, they calculate average per-student expenses in those places and that becomes the foundation. One criticism of this method is that it underestimates resources needed to help the poor and children of color because most "successful" schools and districts are suburban, not poor, and mostly white. States using this method or variations on it include Illinois, Mississippi and Ohio.

- ***Professional judgement.*** A panel of experts lists resources needed to create a "model" school. The cost of creating this school becomes the base funding level that the state must guarantee each district. Critics say this approach is hard to justify because it is based on opinion. States using versions of this model include Maine, Oregon and Wyoming.

- ***Teacher allocation.*** A few states guarantee that every district will have enough teachers regardless of cost. They use class-size ratios, approved by the state legislature, and district enrollment levels to determine how many teachers each district needs. Then, funds are distributed to make up the difference between that number, plus the cost of state-mandated special programs and local property revenue. Even though districts may hire additional teachers or offer salary supplements at their own expense, critics of this approach complain that it is inflexible.

Alabama, North Carolina, Tennessee, Washington, and West Virginia use versions of this formula. In 1999-2000, with the exception of Alabama, all of these states had a lower than average gap between low- and high-poverty districts; however, their overall spending also tends to be lower than average. Because wages, salaries, and other labor costs make up the vast majority of most districts' expenses, teacher allocation formulas may tend to reduce gaps between rich and poor districts. Another factor, at least in North Carolina, is that many, if not most districts lack the local tax base required to fund budgets much greater than what the state offers, thereby reducing variations in spending among districts.

- ***Hybrids/Blends.*** Some states use a combination of methods. For example, to come up with its foundation, Maryland calculated budgets based on both the successful schools and professional judgement models. The state found that the second model would cost about 25 percent more and, therefore, used the successful school model. Districts may, however, raise money for the higher budget if they share some of their wealth with poorer districts. In 1999-2000 the gap between Maryland's high- and low-poverty districts was less than the national average. For the first two years Maryland paid for the new plan with tobacco settlement funds; it is unclear where future funds will come from.

States also use: (1) ***flat grants*** that give districts a set amount for each student or teacher, and (2) ***matching programs*** that match dollars raised by local districts, thereby encouraging them to raise more money. California, for example, uses a matching program to help fund school construction. In some states the match is dollar for dollar, but more typically matches vary with the size of a district's property tax base, so that richer districts receive proportionally less.

Suing for equity and adequacy

Beginning in 1971 parents and advocacy groups began challenging school district spending gaps in state and federal courts. Just two years later the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez* that education is not protected by the U.S. constitution, putting an end to the federal suits. With that door closed, so-called "equity suits," based on language in state constitutions, were pursued in some 20 states. In most of these cases, existing state funding systems were ruled unconstitutional and legislatures were ordered to revise them. Legislative action – or inaction – in response to these orders, has sparked extended debate that can last for years without any discernable positive impact on students in the meantime.

More recent lawsuits, involving 25-30 states, have urged the reworking of formulas to ensure "adequate" funding for all districts. Adequate funding usually means money needed by a particular district to meet goals, inputs or a combination of the two. It is also sometimes described as 'opportunity to learn' or succeed. ***Goals,*** also known as benchmarks, usually apply to student results. Examples include graduation rates, attendance rates and test scores. ***Inputs*** measure district effort, such as teacher qualifications, accreditation, or access to college-preparation or Advanced Placement (AP) courses. Of 28 suits filed since 1989, states have lost 18 times.

Texas and Vermont (see sidebar on *Controversy in Vermont*) made some of the most dramatic changes, opting for what is sometimes called a Robin Hood solution. In both states local property taxes are now collected by the state and then distributed more or less evenly among school districts—yielding dramatic decreases in per-pupil spending gaps. In 1999-2000 both states had spending gaps below the national average. Both programs also have political enemies constantly looking for ways to undermine equalization.

Neither equity nor adequacy suits are easily settled. Both tend to give rise to additional cases. In New Jersey, where the first suit was filed in 1970, it took eight years for the state to respond to a 1990 Supreme Court order. Now, a commission appointed by the governor is revisiting the 1998 plan, which based minimum per student allocations on the spending of the state's wealthiest 100 districts.

Despite the ongoing legal wrangling, more money is available to poor districts in New Jersey.

Districts that adopt a comprehensive school reform program from an approved list receive extra state funds. As a result, in 1999-2000 state and local spending per student was higher in New Jersey's high-poverty districts than in low-poverty districts. That year basic per-student spending in New Jersey was $10,903—compared to national average of $7,392. This costing-out model, based on research and proven practices, is sometimes called ***evidence-based*** or ***comprehensive reform***. Arkansas and Kentucky are considering adopting similar approaches.

What other kinds of aid do states give? State funds typically come to districts as ***categorical*** or ***general*** aid. The first is for a specific use such as transportation, special education, or buildings. The second can be used for any purpose. Some states use 'state-adjusted payments' to help small districts cover costs, such as busing students over long distances, which larger districts may not have.

Aid is usually based on a count of students in class each day, Average Daily Attendance (ADA), and the number of students enrolled, Average Daily Membership (ADM). States make these counts at least twice a year. In some places these numbers are weighted to account for expenses that vary from district to district such as busing, cost-of-living, or the number of students requiring English language instruction. When weighting is used the abbreviations are WADA and WADM.

What's the Future of School Spending?

A number of states are now wrangling over how to redesign their school funding formulas in order to achieve greater equity. But experience has shown that the legal side of these cases can and does go on for years. With the latest fiscal crisis forcing states to reduce, rather than increase spending on public schools, community organizing for school funding becomes more and more important.

A number of state funding coalitions, like the Alliance for Quality Education in New York, the Ohio Fair Schools Campaign, and others, have formed to demand that state policymakers maintain and increase support for public schools.

In Mississippi, the organizing collective Southern Echo is experimenting with a call for "Justice Funding," arguing that neither equity nor adequacy is enough in school districts with historic disparities between educational opportunities for children of color and white children. *(For a description of Justice Funding, see Education Organizing #18, Winter 2004-2005 at http://www.communitychange.org/issues/education/publications/.)*

Vigilance at the local district level is critical as well. New research *(see Where to Find It)* is demonstrating that, even in a district that

purports to spend equally on all students, schools in low-income communities tend to receive fewer resources than schools in more affluent neighborhoods. In addition, local corporate tax abatement programs, like Tax Increment Financing, often draw away local revenues used for schools, and channel them back to corporations or developers.

Whether at the local, state or federal levels, communities can provide a powerful voice for more resources for low-income students.

Endnotes:

[1] The District of Columbia and Hawaii are special cases: 89% of D.C.'s funding is local since it lacks statehood. Hawaii has just one school district and nearly 90% of funding comes from state government.

[2] Robert Strauss, professor of economics and public policy, Carnegie-Mellon University, quoted in *Money Matters: A Reporter's Guide to School Finance*, 2003, Education Writers Association, Washington, D.C., www.ewa.org.

No Child Left Behind – Understanding the Federal Education Law

"No Child Left Behind" (NCLB) is the designated name of the 2001 law that reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) – the largest federal K-12 education program. The ESEA was originally passed in 1964 as a key component of President Lyndon Johnson's "War on Poverty" initiative. ESEA sought to provide states with additional educational resources to serve disadvantaged students. Later, other programs were added to ESEA, including support for children with limited English skills, programs to reduce violence and drug use and others.

The reauthorization of ESEA in 2000 became a political football that bounced from the end of the Clinton administration, through the 2000 election campaigns and into the first two years of the Bush Administration. Both Democrats and Republicans struggled to gain ownership of the education issue, creating a debate that was high-profile, high stakes and ultimately, probably highly problematic for low-income students in the nation's elementary and secondary schools.

The result of the tug-of-war over ESEA – which passed with strong bipartisan support – is a law that fundamentally changes the federal relationship to local schools and districts. No Child Left Behind represents a massive expansion of the federal oversight of schools. While many of the fundamentals of the law represent the work of progressive education advocates like the Education Trust and the Citizens Commission for Civil Rights, conservative forces managed to wrest control of the details of how those fundamentals play out. Many public school advocates believe that the law will eventually serve to undermine the very existence of public schools, transfer millions of public dollars into private hands and leave millions of children – mostly poor and minority – behind. Further, these advocates believe that these effects will not be accidental.

One set of key foundations of No Child Left Behind focuses around the accurate tracking of achievement and progress by all students within a school, not just the best and the brightest. Provisions include:

- a requirement that student achievement be tracked by *disaggregated* racial and economic groupings. Under previous versions of ESEA, schools could report average student achievement scores, masking the vast gap along race and class lines;
- required assessment of students annually in grades 3 – 8 in reading, math and eventually science;
- the setting of annual benchmarks for student achievement on standardized assessments, and penalties for certain schools (those with large populations of low-income children) that fail to meet those goals;
- a requirement that 95% of all students in the school, including special education and limited English proficient students take these annual assessments. Again, many schools have traditionally presented higher student achievement averages by excluding certain categories of students from the tests – or even suggesting that some kids stay home on test days. Under the new law, such exclusions are prohibited.

A second fundamental requirement of No Child Left Behind is that students be provided with teachers who are "highly qualified," meaning that they have a degree in the subject or subjects that they are teaching, and can demonstrate content knowledge. The law recognizes what so many academic studies and community organizing campaigns have demonstrated over the last decade: that there is a shortage of highly qualified teachers in the nation's public schools, and that low-income schools and schools with a majority students of color have disproportionately low numbers of these excellent teachers. No Child Left Behind requires that all teachers and paraprofessionals in Title I schools be "highly qualified" by the start of the 2005-2006 school year.

These cornerstones of No Child Left Behind created the foundation for what could have been a revolution in public education beneficial to low-income children and children of color. But through the course of reauthorization, as the Republicans attempted to claim control over the reformation of the public educa-

tion system in the United States, the President attempted to stake a claim as "the education President" and the Democrats struggled to remain at the table despite Republican control of Congress, the details of the Act emerged to support a conservative agenda that includes a focus on:

- punitive measures *against*, rather than *support for* low-income schools and schools with a majority of African American and/or Hispanic students;
- increased regulation of public schools, coupled with policies that encourage families to move their children to largely unregulated charter or private schools;
- diversion of federal education funds from low-performing schools and the transfer of that money to private for-profit entities;
- a windfall for corporations that create and sell standardized assessments, "supplemental services" (tutoring services) and other off-the-shelf curricula and "school reform" products;
- supporting a set of pro-voucher, pro-privatization nonprofit organizations with millions of federal dollars, ostensibly to help "educate" the public around various provisions of NCLB;
- mainstreaming of limited-English-proficient students, requiring them to become English language speakers within 3 years, with no acknowledgement or emphasis on the value of bilingualism.

Other provisions of the law that have angered progressive activists require schools to turn over student information to military recruiters, to require schools to allow discriminatory organizations like the Boy Scouts of America access to school facilities, and to stigmatize schools as "persistently dangerous" based on violent *student* behavior (that statistically is minimal and decreasing), rather than on the much more pervasive dangers that millions of students face in school each day, including crumbling facilities, lead paint, poor air quality, chemical exposure and other hazards.

After its passage in January, 2001, No Child Left Behind quickly drew a chorus of opposition from those with the closest contact with classrooms across the country – teachers, school administrators, superintendents and others. In the ensuing years as the provisions of NCLB have incrementally taken effect, the challenges

Does Adequate Yearly Progress Discriminate?

According to the Philadelphia School Notebook*, in schools with significant demographic diversity, high student mobility and/or large numbers of limited-English-proficient students, the rigid requirements of AYP will result in schools being designated as "low-performing," even if they are making significant progress. Under the law, if any single subgroup of students fails to make the targeted assessment goals in any given year, the entire school is designated as low performing. In the case of many suburban schools where schoolwide averages have masked the underachievement of small cohorts of minority students, AYP has effectively exposed disparities between the achievement levels of different groups of students and forced schools to address the academic needs of all students. But the more sub-groups a school has (differing racial groups, English language learners, low-income children), the more separate targets the school must meet.*

The Philadelphia Public School Notebook*, a quarterly newspaper, has an excellent description of AYP's impact on diverse schools in it's Winter, 2004 issue. See: www.thenotebook.org.*

of implementation are becoming clear. Supporters of the law have argued that the law is working, by forcing districts to focus on disadvantaged students and schools. This is certainly true and laudable. Opponents however, argue that its implementation is routinizing education to the point where students as well as teachers are frustrated, stressed out and frequently unmotivated. Across the country, school administrators are decrying what they believe are unrealistic goals of the law, and the Administration's failure to provide enough additional federal money to help districts pay for the changes it requires.

The Administration, meanwhile, has dismissed all criticism of No Child Left Behind as "whining," and charging that supporters of the law want "change," while opponents favor the status quo. In November of 2003 then- Secretary of Education, Roderick Paige, actually referred to the National Education Association – the nation's largest union of teachers – as a "terrorist organization," further polarizing the debate. In such a climate, rational conversation about how to strengthen public education and boost student achievement is impossible.

No Child Left Behind: Title by Title

(for an organizational chart of No Child Left Behind, click here)

Title I: "Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged"

Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was a cornerstone of President Johnson's "War on Poverty" program. For the first time, the federal government signaled that it was prepared to step in and insist that states provide an equal education to disadvantaged children – low-income students and children of color.

Title I has always been the centerpiece of the ESEA, and accounts for over 50% of the law's total funding. Title I is even more central under No Child Left Behind.

Virtually all of the high-profile provisions of No Child Left Behind

are embedded in Title I. While in the past, Title I provisions largely applied only to the individual schools that receive the funding, NCLB includes all schools within a *district* that receives Title I funding, making its reach much, much broader than past versions of the law.

The key provisions in Title I of NCLB include:

Adequate Yearly Progress — Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is the state defined, quantified annual goal for bringing students of different socioeconomic status, race, and ethnicity within individual schools and districts to a set level of "proficiency" by 2012.

The law requires all schools to demonstrate that all groups of students are making progress each year, with the eventual goal of having 100% of students scoring in the "proficient" range on standardized assessments by 2013. Failure to meet AYP goals – even in just a single segment of the student population – leads to sanctions against a school. Importantly, however, while the AYP requirements apply to all schools in a district, NCLB's *sanctions* are required only for schools that receive Title I funds.

Sanctions under this section include the "Public School Choice" provision, which allows students enrolled in certain designated "Low-Performing Schools" to transfer to another public school in the district, and to have transportation costs paid for; and "Supplemental Educational Services," which allow parents of students in certain "Low Performing Schools" to contract for tutoring services for their child. In each case, the costs are paid through district Title I dollars. Under No Child Left Behind, districts must use 5% of its Title I funds to pay for transportation costs, and an additional 10% of its Title I funds for either transportation or supplemental services, as necessary. In short, as much as 15% of a district's Title I funds may be channeled outside of its Title I schools to cover these costs.

Annual School Report Cards - Comparing data about local schools to data from other schools in the district and state is an important way for parents to monitor school success. Organized parents can analyze and act on the basis of these data. No Child Left Behind requires states to produce annual report cards for individual schools as well as districts, and to make these available

to parents. Report cards *must* include both aggregated and disaggregated information on student achievement, as well as graduation rates and information about teacher qualifications. The reports must be available in other languages as needed in the district. In addition to the report cards, NCLB requires school districts to proactively notify parents that information on teacher quality is available to them, and to notify parents of any student being taught by a long-term substitute or a teacher who is not fully certified.

Critics of No Child Left Behind worry that the teacher quality language, and the law's requirement that thousands of teachers be tested to prove their knowledge base, along with the law's rigid mandates and focus on standardized assessments, will push many of the most creative and experienced teachers out of challenging schools and classrooms, and perhaps out of teaching altogether.

***Teacher Quality**:* A new focus of research over the last decade has shown that teacher quality has a significant impact on student achievement. At the same time, research has consistently shown that the most highly experienced and qualified teachers are disproportionately assigned to more affluent and successful schools. No Child Left Behind attempts to solve the problem of disparities in teacher quality on several fronts. Title I contains new requirements for schools to hire "highly qualified" teachers and paraprofessionals, and sets deadlines for all public school teachers and paraprofessionals to meet the new definition. It allows the state to intervene if school districts do not meet interim teacher quality goals. The law provides designated funding in Title II and allows use of Title I funding for a range of activities intended to achieve the goal of every teacher being highly qualified. Finally, it requires state data collection on the distribution of teachers to determine the extent to which poor and minority students are taught by unqualified teachers.

Critics of No Child Left Behind worry that the teacher quality language, and the law's requirement that thousands of teachers be tested to prove their knowledge base, along with the law's rigid mandates and focus on standardized assessments, will push many of the most creative and experienced teachers out of challenging schools and classrooms, and perhaps out of teaching altogether.

Title I of No Child Left Behind requires all local school districts to ensure that all Title I teachers hired after the first day of the 2002-03 school year are "highly qualified" as defined in Title IX. *All* public school teachers must be highly qualified by the end of the 2005-06 school year.

Title II: "Preparing, Training, and Recruiting High Quality Teachers and Principals"

Title II authorizes funds to be used for a broad range of activities to enhance teacher and principal quality.

Eligible local activities include: reforming teacher/principal licensure; creating alternative routes to licensure; recruitment and retention of teachers/principals (includes emphasis on recruiting teachers from highly qualified paraprofessionals, minorities, and others underrepresented in the teaching field); developing merit-based performance systems; professional development; teacher training to integrate technology into teaching; enabling teachers to become highly qualified; reforming tenure systems; implementing teacher testing for subject matter.

States and local school districts must develop plans with annual measurable objectives to ensure that all teachers in core subjects are highly qualified by the end of 2005-06.

Districts that fail to make progress toward these objectives after two consecutive years must develop an improvement plan and receive technical assistance from the state.

After three years without progress, the district must agree with the state on how teacher quality funds will be used and must jointly plan activities with the state. Also, the district cannot hire paraprofessionals from that point on (unless to fill a vacancy or address higher enrollment or special needs).

In addition, Title II authorizes several discretionary grant programs that support teacher and principal quality.

Title III: "Language Instruction for Limited English Proficient and Immigrant Students"

Title III of NCLB replaces the Bilingual Education Act (formerly Title VII of ESEA), and provides resources for districts with large numbers of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students. The law does not require schools to use English immersion programs. However, NCLB does require that LEP students take standardized tests – along with everyone else – in English, within three years of entering the school system. Advocates for students with limited English skills worry that this new rule puts unfair pressure on schools to

immerse students in English-only programs rather than provide high quality bilingual or dual language programs with academic content to students in their native language while helping them learn English. Advocates predict that schools will reduce the time students spend in native-language or bilingual classes in order to get them ready for the tests.

Title IV: "21st Century Schools"

This section of No Child Left Behind contains the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act, which provides some support to districts to implement violence prevention programs in and around schools, as well as some drug and alcohol abuse programs. In addition, the 21st Century Schools portion of the title provides resources for community learning centers to provide tutoring and non-school hour programs for disadvantaged children.

Title V: "Promoting Informed Parental Choice and Innovative Programs"

This section of the bill contains provisions to support Charter Schools. Throughout reauthorization, Republicans fought hard to win federal funding for vouchers as a part of ESEA. While those efforts were successfully halted by Democrats opposed to vouchers (with the exception of the eventual passage of a $75 million voucher program for the District of Columbia), the law does provide significant support for charter schools, including the law's only funding stream for school facilities.

Title V also includes a program to provide additional counseling services to secondary schools – an important and valuable effort that the Bush administration has failed to fund for the past two years.

Title VI: "Flexibility and Accountability"

Republicans attempted unsuccessfully to provide much of the federal ESEA monies as block-grants, with few requirements attached. However, Title VI allows states to apply for waivers on some provisions of the bill, and authorizes the transfer of funds between Titles II – IX. In effect, a state can decide to use funds

provided for teacher training, for example, to support charter school programs or anti-violence programs within schools. Democrats managed to protect Title I from being raided; under Title VI, states may transfer funds from other sections of the bill *into* Title I programs, but may not transfer money out of Title I to any other section.

Title VII: "Indian, Native Hawaiian and Alaska Native Education"

Title VII provides special programming and support to school districts located on Indian Reservations and districts with high percentages of Native peoples. Supports include the development and use of curricula that focus on Native history and culture, early childhood programs, health and education programs and others.

Title VIII: "Impact Aid Program"

Impact Aid is provided to schools and districts that serve majorities of children of those serving in the military. This includes programs to support military base schools.

Titles IX and X: General Provisions

Title IX is generally a catch-all for a range of other programs and provisions that found their way into the law. It includes technical details about the use of federal funds and waivers. But nestled within this language are several important provisions.

One is the law's definition of a "highly qualified teacher" as referred to in Titles I and II *[for the definition, and a discussion of its pros and cons, see the Organizer's Guide to NCLB]*. These pages also contain a description of "quality professional development" that is comprehensive and could be very useful to community groups working to improve the quality of training and support for teachers.

In addition to these definitions, Title IX has provisions that:

- require schools to allow the Boy Scouts to meet on school facilities (a response to many schools that barred meetings of local Boy Scout troops in protest of the organization's discriminatory practices against gay men and scouts);

- require schools to provide student information to military recruiters; and
- require states to allow students in schools designated as "persistently dangerous" (referring to violence, rather than the perhaps-more pervasive environmental or facilities hazards) to transfer out to "safer" schools.

A noteworthy program included in Title X is the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance program. The program requires that school districts immediately enroll homeless students in their school of origin or in another school, depending on the child's best interest. The program provides funding for special services to homeless children including educational services as well as health care referrals and other supports.

Implementation and Timeline

Implementation of No Child Left Behind by states, districts and schools has been anything but smooth. Many education experts charge that the law's mandates, if fully implemented, will result in a majority of the nation's schools being designated as "in need of improvement," including many, many schools that are making great strides in student achievement. The law has clearly – for better or worse – caused many states and districts and teachers to begin a mad scramble for compliance – with mixed results. In some schools, pressure to ensure that students pass annual assessments as required by NCLB has resulted in a wave of preparatory tests, and even tests to prepare for the preparatory tests. Some Texas schools are now testing students *weekly* in an extreme effort to improve student performance on fill-in-the-bubble assessments. Teachers report high levels of frustration and anxiety as their jobs become nothing more than so-called "drill and kill."

Other stories about the law's impact on schools and districts provide a glimpse into some of the implications for the nation's schools:

- In New York City, a high-performing school with special small class-size programs was forced to become a "receiving school" under NCLB's choice provisions. Incoming students from low-performing schools raised class sizes

above school limits and resulted in a lack of space and a higher student:teacher ratio.

- People for the American Way, in a 2003 report (*Funding the Movement*, November 2003) publicizes the fact that the Department of Education has, in the past three years, provided grants totaling $75 million to organizations that promote vouchers and privatization of schools. Many of those grants have utilized No Child Left Behind provisions that fund "community organizations" to help educate the public about the law.

In addition to the confusion and struggle over implementation of NCLB, much of the national debate has revolved around Congressional funding for the law. Though the language of the bill included authorizations of $26.4 billion, Congress appropriated only $22.2 billion in the law's first year — $4 billion under the authorization. This under-funding has led states to challenge No Child Left Behind as an "unfunded mandate." Many states raised attention to this issue by passing legislative resolutions prohibiting the use of state money to implement provisions of the federal law, or threatening to refuse to comply with No Child Left Behind, at the cost of turning back federal education money. While the Department of Education has smoothed over these ruffled feathers in states and large cities, some smaller districts have, in fact, declined participation in NCLB at the cost of losing their federal dollars for education.

Implementation Timeline

The requirements of No Child Left Behind are scheduled to take effect over a period of several years. Some of the key implementation milestones include:

January 8, 2002: No Child Left Behind is enacted into law and provisions become effective in general.

- All new paraprofessionals hired after this date, working in a Title I school or program supported with Title I funds must meet new eligibility criteria.

First day of 2002-03 school year: All new Title I teachers must meet definition of "highly qualified."

Beginning with 2002-03 school year:

- States must have established process for determining whether schools meet Adequate Yearly Progress.
- States must assess Limited English Proficient (LEP) students annually.
- States and districts must produce annual report cards.
- States must use 2% of their Title I, Part A funds for school improvement.
- States and districts must report annually on their progress in having all teachers "highly qualified" by the end of the 2005-06 school year.
- School Improvement sanctions begin to take effect.

School year 2003-04:

- States continue to use 2% of their Title I, Part A funds for school improvement.
- Districts must continue to spend 5-10% of Title I, Part A funds on professional development activities to assist teachers to become "highly qualified."

School year 2004-05

- Districts must spend 5% of Title I, Part A funds on professional development activities, as above.
- Sanctions for schools in need to improvement continue.

January 8, 2005: The Secretary of Education must submit to the President and Congress an interim assessment of Title I programs and their impact on States, districts, schools and students.

School year 2005-06

- States must develop science standards.
- States must implement annual assessments required under Title I.
- Secretary of Education must submit an annual report to Congress with a list of each state that has not made Adequate Yearly Progress under Title I and has not met its objectives under Title III, based on department reviews.

- States must use 4% of their Title I, Part A funds for school improvement.
- Sanctions for schools in need of improvement continue.

January 8, 2006: Deadline for paraprofessionals who were hired prior to 1-8-02 to meet new eligibility criteria.

End of 2005-06 school year: All teachers must be "highly qualified."

School year 2006-07

- States must continue to use 4% of their Title I, Part A funds for school improvement
- Sanctions for schools in need of improvement continue.

January 8, 2007: Deadline for Secretary of Education to submit to President and Congress a final assessment of Title I programs and their impact on states, districts, schools and students.

School year 2007-08

- States must administer an annual science assessment at least once in each of grades 3-5, 6-9 and 10-12.
- States must continue to use 4% of their Title I, Part A funds for school improvement.
- Sanctions for schools in need of improvement continue.

End of 2007-08 school year: No Child Left Behind expires. If not reauthorized by that date, it will be automatically extended.

By the end of the 2013-14 school year: All students must be proficient on the annual state assessments in reading, math and science.

(Excerpted from "No Child Left Behind Act [P.L. 107-110] Effective Dates and Master Timeline by National Education Association Government Relations office. Revised February 15, 2002. For additional information, contact Joel Packer, NEA Government Relations, Jpacker@nea.org.)

A report by the Education Commission of the States, released in July, 2004 details state-by-state progress in implementing these

provisions. It is available at: http://www.ecs.org/ecsmain.asp?page=/html/special/nclb/reporttothenation/reporttothenation.htm.

Conclusion

As of the summer of 2004, most community organizing groups have not (yet) launched local campaigns aimed at forcing compliance with, challenging the provisions of, or focusing on opportunities raised in No Child Left Behind. The significant exception is the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, or ACORN.

In 2002, ACORN conducted a series of investigative actions across the country, leading to a report on the implementation of the Supplemental Educational Services provisions called for in Title I. ACORN found that many states had not yet created an official list of "authorized providers" of tutoring services, and that in several states, such providers were not available to parents in various parts of the state.

ACORN's next target was the requirement that data on qualified teachers be provided to parents. During the fall of 2002 ACORN members in many cities demanded the teacher quality data for their schools, compared the distribution of highly qualified teachers across the district, and called for programs to support and retain teachers and increase the quality of professional development available to teachers, particularly in low-income schools.

In January 2004 ACORN launched a national "Invest in Schools, Invest in Kids" campaign to challenge the Administration's insufficient funding of its federal education initiative. The campaign is aimed at raising the level of debate nationally around our collective investment in public education. For more information on "Invest in Schools, Invest in Kids," see ACORN's website at www.acorn.org.

Aside from ACORN, many community organizers have not yet focused on No Child Left Behind and have maintained their own agendas and strategic plans for working on education issues. Indeed, the degree to which NCLB implementation has a direct impact on individual schools seems to vary widely across the country, based on a variety of factors.

In 2004, the Center for Community Change, the National Center for Schools and Communities, and the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform surveyed community organizations to see whether NCLB was having a significant impact on their work at the local school level, and what parents were reporting. The results of that survey can be seen in the report: "26 Conversations About Organizing, School Reform and No Child Left Behind."

Regardless of whether you are feeling the direct impact of NCLB at the neighborhood level, it's important for organizers and leaders to have a solid base of knowledge about No Child Left Behind. Even if your organization chooses not to engage directly around the law and it's implications, it is likely that the decision-makers that you target in your education organizing work *will* be heavily focused on compliance with NCLB. Through that lens, virtually any demand on a school district – whether or not it directly relates to NCLB – is likely to be seen as either supporting or interfering with the district's efforts to comply with the federal law. For that reason, astute leaders and organizers will develop ways to frame their education demands within the context of the massive new federal mandates.

There is a wealth of information, and a range of impressive resource materials on No Child Left Behind. In addition, the Center for Community Change has developed a web-based resource for organizers. Organizers Guide to NCLB provides information by issue about NCLB mandates, funding, the political implications of the issues and which groups have organized around which issues. Some of the best documents we've found are included in the Where to Find It pages of this guide. If you know of other particularly helpful materials, we'd appreciate receiving them from you!

Case Studies of Education Organizing

This chapter includes three case studies that highlight the effective use of a variety of issues, strategies, and organizing models to build power and create systemic change in public education.

The choice of organizations reflects three different organizing approaches. Power U in Miami is an individual member, neighborhood–based organization; Sacramento ACT is a congregation-based organization that is part of a larger organizing network, and Youth United for Change in Philadelphia is a chapter-based organization of high school students. Despite using different models, all three groups are engaging the most important stakeholders—parents, students, teachers and administrators—in their quest for school reform.

All three organizations are taking on issues that focus both inside the school and outside. Sacramento ACT focused on issues inside the schools that affect student performance, but for their solutions they looked at improving parent-teacher relations by going out of the classroom and into the home environment. Power U is looking at environmental issues both outside and inside the schools that affect students' capacity to learn. Youth United is tackling issues within individual schools, as well as system-wide structure and funding concerns.

While the first two case studies focus on specific campaigns and issue demands, the third case study on Youth United for Change explores in depth the unique challenges and strengths of organizing high school students. The process of organizing youth, which raises many new issues, is described in detail.

Throughout the case studies, key strategic decisions and lessons are highlighted in the text. Many other profiles of education organizing campaigns can be found in the articles of Ed Organizing, at http://www.communitychange.org/issues/education/publications/?page=educationorganizing.

A fourth case study, “A True Bronx Tale,” about the power of a collaborative campaign between a coalition of parent groups and their local teachers union, is available on the Center’s website, at: http://www.communitychange.org/issues/education/publications/downloads/actionguide_09b.pdf

The Case Studies:

Organizing Outside the Classroom:
Power University, Miami, Florida

Organizing Inside the Classroom:
Sacramento Area Congregations Together/PICO

Mobilizing Students:
Youth United for Change, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Case Study:

Organizing Outside the Classroom: Power University

Introduction

Effective community organizing is a constant balancing act: operating outside the system without ignoring the internal dynamics, holding decision-makers accountable without alienating supporters, and agitating people to get involved without turning them off. The emerging work of Power University, in Miami, FL is an excellent example of another essential balance: the need for people to see, hear, and feel the problems they're trying to address while becoming connected to a larger movement.

Power U, which was formed in 2001, began with a campaign called Neighborhoods in Action (NIA) that organized to build sound walls along Interstate 95 where it passed through several low-income Miami neighborhoods. The more affluent neighborhoods bordering on I-95 had had sound-walls for a long time. Research showed that the federal government had appropriated money for more sound barriers, but they had never been built in the poor neighborhoods. The transportation campaign was successful and spurred a group of parents to approach Power U about school issues, resulting in several Parents in Action (PIA) campaigns to improve conditions at individual public schools. Power U also developed a campaign focused on health and safety issues: Residents in Action for Safety and Health (RASH).

According to the Center for Health, Environment & Justice (CHEJ), environmental justice is "the principle that people have the right to a clean and healthy environment regardless of their race or economic standing."

However, it wasn't until Power U held several strategic planning sessions around their most recent campaign that the thread uniting all of the organization's work became clear: environmental justice.

The Problem: Environmental (In)Justice

As part of its organizing around issues affecting public schools,

Power U found that many residents were concerned not only about the quality of education, but about the environment in which their children were learning. Parents reported that their children were constantly sick, suffered from asthma, headaches, eczema and rashes, concentration problems, and other health issues. They often stated that they knew their children were smart but had difficulty concentrating. Many parents believed that conditions in the local schools and the surrounding neighborhood were compromising their children's ability to learn. At the same time, all 15 schools in Power U's target area were rated as "low performing" based on Florida's mandatory standardized testing requirements, and had some of the State's highest numbers of children labeled as having "special needs," such as learning disabilities or behavioral disorders.

As Power U began to look deeper into possible connections between student achievement and the environment, they discovered some appalling statistics about Miami-Dade County:

- The county has 4 times as many toxic waste sites per square mile as the rest of Florida, with most of them located in communities of color. As a result, the county has one of the highest levels of inhaled mercury, benzene, and diesel particulates, which can cause cancer, nervous system damage, and other illnesses.
- More than 55 percent of homes in the low-income communities of color in the city of Miami show elevated lead levels.
- In Miami, people of color are 3 times more likely to be exposed to toxic chemicals than white people.

SMART MOVE!

Decided on an issue that deeply affects their base and framed it in a way that they'll be able to expand their base.

In response to these concerns and statistics, Power U began looking at these problems in the context of environmental justice, and developed a mapping program to identify toxins in the community. Through a combination of internet research, neighborhood visual surveys, and outreach to the community (especially to older residents who have known the community as businesses have come and gone over the years), members found that their communities were in an environmental justice crisis, plagued by facilities such as:

- 3 cement plants and a natural gas pumping station located adjacent to a busy playground;
- at least 2 waste transfer facilities;

SMART MOVE!

Started where they're strongest and made decisions based on realistic assessment of the organization's capacity.

- a rat infested food distribution area; and
- cell phone towers throughout the neighborhoods.

These neighborhoods, not surprisingly, are high-poverty areas with large concentrations of people of color.

At the schools themselves Power U identified possible contamination sources such as arsenic-treated wood in playgrounds; lead and other contaminants in the water from leaking underground storage tanks or peeling paint; highly toxic insecticides and herbicides; mold and mildew; and pollution and safety concerns related to traffic issues. Booker T Washington High School, one of two local high schools, has an electric substation on one side and a cable satellite dish pointed directly at the school on the other, as well as an underground storage tank under the football field from a former beer facility. Several members say that their children constantly complain that they suffer from headaches, nausea, and rashes while at school.

SMART MOVE!

Found strategic way to keep members involved as children get older.

Power U believes that these health and environmental problems are stifling children's ability to learn and thrive. This belief, combined with both the absence of other organizing groups working to address these problems—and the realization that Power U has been working on environmental justice issues all along—led to a clear conclusion: Power U needed to position itself as THE environmental justice organization in Miami-Dade County.

SMART MOVE!

Determined who the relevant decision-makers are and are strengthening their base accordingly. Also anticipated challenges.

Building Leadership: Taking a "Toxic Tour"

In order to achieve this status, Power U decided it had to continue building its base. Power U is one of the only organizing groups in the area that has successfully engaged a diverse base, which includes Haitians, African-Americans, and Latinos. This base is concentrated in several specific neighborhoods where the initial research is being conducted and decisions about the campaign are being made. Moving forward, Power U intends to maintain its

SMART MOVE!

Developed a clear tactic – the toxic tour – to recruit and involve new members.

diversity while reaching out to new communities by working on environmental justice issues that affect many neighborhoods throughout Miami-Dade County. Staff and leaders also believe that this issue will enable them to engage citizens who are affected by the same environmental hazards that impact schools but who generally do not mobilize around education issues.

In addition, the organization is starting to organize students. Because students are the most affected by these problems, Power U decided that they should have an opportunity to be part of the campaign to fix them. Students also strengthen the campaign, and often bring creativity, energy, numbers, and their parents to the effort.

SMART MOVE!

Allocated resources strategically. Realized that building a coalition would not necessarily add value.

Power U is beginning its recruitment efforts around two school feeder patterns (sets of elementary, middle and/or junior high schools that feed students into a particular high school), which include 2 high schools, 2 junior high schools and 11 elementary schools. The organization already has a base of members within these areas from earlier campaigns around individual elementary schools, and organizers believe this is the maximum number of schools they have the capacity to organize around at this stage. By focusing on the entire feeder pattern, Power U will be able to keep members involved as their children progress to middle and high school, in addition to organizing the older students. The feeder patterns are also strategic because they coincide with the areas of representation on the school board. [One challenge that has surfaced though is the complicated line of authority beyond the school board. The school feeder patterns are not consistent with the areas of representation of city and county officials who might be targeted in the future.] The campaign will extend beyond this area after the initial stages have been completed.

SMART MOVE!

Analyzed self-interests of potential allies to find strong partners.

Power U staff and leaders are door-knocking in the neighborhoods around the schools, facilitating house meetings and approaching students and parents within the schools to catch those

who may not come from the immediate vicinity (Miami-Dade County's schools are primarily neighborhood-based, but there are "choice" options, so there is some movement between neighborhoods). They are also recruiting students at local sites such as libraries and the YMCA.

SMART MOVE!

Found technical resources to support organizing goals.

Interested residents are recruited for an "orientation meeting," where there is a general discussion of the issue and people are encouraged to take a "Toxic Tour."

The "Toxic Tour" goes to several sites that exemplify the environmental hazards affecting children and communities of color. One site is a local waterway, Wagner Creek, where children play and people fish. The creek is highly contaminated with dioxin, heavy metals, and fecal coliform. It is believed that most of the contamination came from an old incinerator and ash landfill that operated for more than a decade next to area homes. The community has been virtually excluded from a plan to dredge this toxic creek, and there has not been sufficient testing of the surrounding area to ensure that the many homes in the area are safe from these dangerous contaminants.

Participants on the tour each get a sheet of paper on which they can comment on the tour, raise questions, and list other sites that they are concerned about in their own community. They are then encouraged to recruit others for the next tour. Thus far the "Toxic Tour" has been very successful as an organizing tactic because it makes the issue of environmental racism tangible. It is also an excellent leadership development tool as new leaders are trained to lead the tours. Power U is waiting to involve the media in these tours until they have concrete demands.

Building Support: New Allies

Like all community groups, Power U has limited resources. This creates a need to make strategic decisions about where and how to allocate those resources. Power U has decided to focus on organizing its primary constituency – parents, students, and community members – and to place less of an emphasis on collaborating with other organizations. This decision is based in part on previous attempts at collaboration, in which Power U felt that the

SMART MOVE!

Determined what, if any, existing legislation applies to the problem.

other organizations, which lacked any real base of their own, were trying to co-opt their members. They are therefore understandably cautious about participating in one-way relationships and feel that they do not feel they have the capacity to spend a lot of time educating and mobilizing other organizations.

An exception to this decision involves local unions who have a vested interest in these issues and in protecting their own members. Specifically, Power U is working with the local chapter of AFSCME and the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists. These unions are engaged in a struggle to prevent the privatization of school service jobs. Power U believes this issue relates to environmental justice because of the importance of maintaining competent employees that can be held accountable.

SMART MOVE!

Found innovative way to tie their issue in with others.

The organization recognizes the need to develop cooperative relationships with principals and teachers in order to conduct the site tours. However, organizers are not focusing on actively engaging teachers and principals in the campaign because they want it to be lead by people from the community. They are concerned that professionals might naturally assume the campaign's leadership roles, which would limit the growth of new leaders. In addition, community members can take actions that staff members whose jobs are at risk cannot. Therefore, Power U sees teachers and principals as allies rather than members. School staff are assured that they will not be the targets of the campaign and reminded that unhealthy conditions affect them as well.

Thus far this has proven to be a challenging step. Having only existed for three years, Power U does not yet have a widespread reputation. They are beginning with schools where they have organized before and where they are trusted by school administrators. Expanding these relationships to include more schools as well as system-wide administrators is key to increasing the scope of the campaign.

Getting Help: Technical Resources

Recognizing that environmental justice issues can involve extremely technical data and scientific knowledge, Power U has secured several key resources. First, the organization hired a part-time staff person who had previous experience with environmental justice issues, to conduct research and make connections with other resources.

Second, Power U learned that Florida A&M University has a "Center for Environmental Equity & Justice" that reaches out to communities on these issues. Power U is currently approaching the Center to see whether it is willing to test and analyze samples taken from the schools, and to offer "training" to emerging leaders in the campaign.

Power U also took fourteen leaders on exchange visits to Gainesville, FL and Brunswick, GA to discuss strategy and technical resource development with environmental justice groups who have been organizing for over ten years in their respective communities. The Power U leaders had a chance to ask questions about the pros and cons of environmental testing methods, as well as to build networking alliances for the future.

Finally, Power U has developed a relationship with the Center for Health, Environment & Justice (CHEJ), a national organization working on these issues. They found that the CHEJ website (http://www.chej.org/) has an entire section focused on schools and includes evaluation tools. CHEJ initially said that if Power U used one of its evaluation tools, CHEJ would analyze the results. However, Power U found that the template needed to be customized, so they're now trying to see whether CHEJ can be persuaded to do the analysis anyway.

Approaching Decision-Makers: A New Demand For "Zero Tolerance"

Rather than focusing primarily on school-by-school remedies, Power U's demands will be aimed at the district as a whole and at broader, systemic change. For example, if members find that there's lead in the water at Dunbar High School, they will be demanding that the district test the water in *all* schools, and take

steps to alleviate all lead problems.

When violations are found within schools, Power U has a couple of handles for gaining enforcement. The school system has some existing laws about basic standards and requirements for records and testing that can be used to force compliance. In addition, there may be applicable state and federal standards under the Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) that can be used to effect change at the local level.

Beyond working toward compliance with existing regulations, Power U wants the school district to expand its language around "school safety" to include environmental safety. Until now, school safety has focused primarily on guns, violence, and police or security presence, and Florida has a "zero tolerance" law for discipline problems of this nature. Power U believes that just as parents have a right to know that their child is in a school where kids cannot bring in guns, they also have a right to know that the building is free of asthma triggers or lead in the water fountains. They therefore hope to establish a "zero tolerance" policy for hazardous environmental conditions and exposures, which should be viewed as equally dangerous safety violations.

Current Status

This environmental justice campaign kicked off in summer and fall of 2003. In January 2004, Power U held a "rollout meeting" led by key leaders from the various arms of the organization, as well as new leaders who have emerged during the recruitment drive.

At the rollout, a professional researcher talked about what's known and not known about hazards in schools. Teams were then created to go from school to school to investigate possible hazards, and were equipped with an easy-to-use survey. The survey includes not only point-by-point visual inspection, but also the collection of specific data from the school. Finally, the leaders decided it was time to unite all of Power U's campaigns under the name "Operation Urban Recovery," aka O.U.R. Campaign.

Conclusion

The uniting of Power University's transportation and education

campaigns under one banner is symbolic of Power U's growth and maturity. Previously the organization's members identified more with specific campaigns than with the organization as a whole. Now they see themselves as members of an emerging organization that is working toward systemic change, not just fixing individual problems. The realization that environmental justice is the organization's calling has helped leaders and organizers to focus and think more strategically about their work, and gives the entire organization a clearer identity under which to fight for social change.

Case Study:

Connecting Families and Schools: Sacramento ACT

Introduction

One of the largest obstacles facing parents, community members, and organizers who are concerned about public education is the difficulty of figuring out how to get access to good quality schools. While it is critical that community groups continue and expand their efforts to improve schools from outside the system, organizations such as Sacramento Area Congregations Together (ACT) have proven that it is possible and necessary for community groups to improve schools while working with those on the inside – teachers and administers – as well.

Sacramento ACT, a member of the PICO network in California, was founded by a group of eight pastors in 1991. According to PICO's institution-based model, the first step toward forming a chapter is to create a sponsoring committee of local congregation and community leaders. The committee oversees the initial organizing effort and establishes a secure local funding base to support an organizer.

The Problem

At that time and throughout most of the 1990s, Sacramento Unified School District, which was made up of students speaking over 40 different languages, was one of the lowest performing districts in the state. District-wide, only 1 out of 10 students could read at grade level, and many of the children that belonged to ACT congregations were attending the lowest performing schools within the low performing district. One elementary school in the community, the Susan B. Anthony School, had 140 suspensions in one year. Not surprisingly, education emerged as one of ACT's first priorities.

Organizers and parents began visiting the schools located near the member congregations to obtain information and build relationships with the principals. ACT also conducted a listening campaign, inviting teachers, parents, and principals to meetings

SMART MOVE !

Used an intensive listening campaign to build a broad base of support.

held in the evenings at congregations and schools. They made lists of problems and experiences and found that concerns kept arising about the atmosphere in the schools.

Many parents were uncomfortable in the school environment and in their interactions with teachers. The felt that they were ignored and unwelcome, and were unsure how to help with their children's education or even ask the right questions. According to Sacramento ACT's Executive Director Gloria Hernandez, "It was an intimidating and toxic environment for parents."

SMART MOVE!

Tackled the fundamental paradigm of parent-teacher relationships: "You have to know my child in order to teach him/her."

For their part, teachers and principals were frustrated by the lack of parent involvement and support.

Sacramento ACT believed that this lack of mutual support and confidence and the resulting alienation of parents were largely responsible for the district and school's low student achievement, high suspension rates, and other problems. Sacramento ACT was able to use the listening campaign to build a base of support among parents, principals, and teachers. They were also able to get a sense of a potential solution.

The Idea: Home Visits

SMART MOVE !

ACT's proposal adapted the successful relationship-building aspects of their organizing model.

In their discussions, parents consistently stated that they would be more comfortable if they met with teachers at home, instead of at school. Leaders and organizers explored this idea, asking teachers what they would need to feel comfortable visiting parents at their homes. They talked with administrators to see whether they would support the idea. Out of these conversations grew a proposal for a teacher-home visit program.

As a testament to the innovativeness of this concept, ACT was unable to find a model for this type of program anywhere else in the country. ACT researched models of parent engagement, and while organizers gained important knowledge of what it takes for

SMART MOVE !

Quietly built relationships with strategic allies before going public or confronting decision-makers – in other words, got their ducks in a row.

parents to be successful partners in their children's education, they did not identify any templates for teachers visiting parents as the first step. The closest concept was the home visits conducted by social workers. However, those visits often create a power dynamic in which parents feel as though they're being accused of wrongdoing. By contrast, the idea behind the teacher home visit program was to engender a positive environment where parents and teachers were able to learn how to support each other's efforts to help children learn. ACT realized that the one-on-one conversations central to community organizing were a more helpful model and incorporated the relationship-building components of these conversations into their proposal.

SMART MOVE !

Listened to and addressed their allies' needs.

For the program to work, ACT recognized that teachers needed to be trained in order to conduct effective visits. They developed an outline for training that included role plays, the sharing of preconceived notions between parents and teachers, and eventually testimonials from parents and teachers about the impact of these visits.

SMART MOVE !

Anticipated decision makers' objections.

Building Support: Enlisting Allies

Recognizing that such a proposal would require the support of the teachers union to be viable, Sacramento ACT leaders met with the union president and executive director to discuss the proposal, explain how students would benefit, and determine whether the union would support the effort if teachers wanted to go on these visits. The presence of teachers who were already committed to the program at these meetings played a significant role in gaining the union leaders' support.

SMART MOVE !

Did their homework – knew what they were asking for and where it could come from.

The union's main concerns were that teachers be compensated for the visits and that teachers not be forced to participate in the program. Both of these concerns were already important issues to ACT as one of their key goals was to increase respect for everyone involved, and they viewed compensation and choice as key elements of this respect. Once these concerns had been

addressed, the union agreed to support the program.

SMART MOVE !

ACT was prepared to escalate pressure on decision makers as the situation demanded.

Approaching Decision Makers: A Pilot Proposal

The next step was to discuss the proposal with the district's school board to gauge the level of support or opposition. Fortunately, ACT had already built an initial relationship with the board during a brief, earlier campaign around public safety. The district had supported the safety initiative, establishing a foundation for future efforts and building ACT's credibility and reputation.

SMART MOVE !

Gave public officials opportunities to look good, not just save face.

By the time ACT approached the school board about the teacher home visits program, they not only already had a relationship with board members but had also secured the support of teachers, principals, and union leaders for the proposal. This support proved critical because the district's initial response was that the union probably would not support the program. Once ACT had dismissed this barrier, board members had little objection other than the potential cost of the program.

ACT had determined that $40,000 would fund a pilot version of the home visit program at eight schools. In each school the teachers would have the opportunity to vote on whether to participate. This money would be used to provide a $30/hour stipend for the teachers, based on the highest of the district's stipend rates. ACT's parents and staff would provide the training and monitor the impact of the program.

SMART MOVE !

Took advantage of community resources and obtained concrete figures on the outcomes of the program.

The 1997-98 school year was already underway when ACT went to the school board and the superintendent to ask for the funds. However, they knew pots of money were dedicated to parent involvement and engagement, including part of Title I funding. They also knew that at most of their schools, the existing parent involvement activities were ineffective and that the staff involved in these activities were excited about participating in the home visit program. ACT therefore asked that schools be allowed to use the parent involvement

funds to pay teachers an hourly stipend for conducting home visits.

The school board and superintendent were supportive but ACT was concerned that they were moving too slowly. To increase the pressure, they issued a challenge directly to the superintendent to accompany teachers on 20 home visits in one week to see the program in action firsthand. The superintendent was reluctant, stating that he already knew the district well, so ACT issued their challenge publicly through the local media, and the superintendent agreed.

This challenge proved to be a tremendous success for both sides. The superintendent became a hero to the 20 families he visited and got great press for his efforts, and ACT gained a powerful champion for the program in the now-committed superintendent.

Shortly thereafter the school district agreed to allow eight pilot schools to use the parent involvement funds to support the teacher home visit program. Teachers in the eight schools voted overwhelmingly to participate in the program.

The Results

During the 1998-99 school year, teachers in the pilot schools conducted 3,000 home visits. They went in pairs and brought an interpreter or the school nurse when necessary. Teachers would make at least two visits to each family. During the first visit, teachers focused on building relationships with the parents and encouraging parents to participate in school activities and remain in contact with them throughout the school year. In the second visit, the teachers brought tool kits that parents could use to work with their children at home. The kits were tailored to each child's grade level and needs, and usually included an age-appropriate book, accessible information about state standards, and guides to help parents monitor their children's progress. In the case of non-English speaking parents, teachers created pictorials that illustrated the skills and progress parents should expect their children to make during the year.

Jocelyn Graces, a parent who worked with Sacramento ACT to champion the home visit program, said, "The teacher showed me

how to make sure my son was understanding what he was reading by asking questions or asking him to write something about a story. I learned not to be afraid to ask a teacher questions or to admit that I don't understand something." Now, she adds, "I don't wait for a teacher to contact me. Now I call teachers and set up appointments when I have questions or need help."

In order to ensure that there was clear data on the outcomes of the program, ACT recruited faculty at a local university to conduct a formal evaluation. The evaluators found that after just one year, there were improvements in standardized-test scores, classroom behavior, parents' and students' attitudes toward school, and homework completion rates.

The results were even more dramatic over the next few years. For example, at the Susan B. Anthony Elementary School, where 21 different languages are spoken and 100% of the students receive free or reduced-price lunches, suspensions dropped from 140 per year to 3, the attendance rate rose to 97.4%, and students' average score on the statewide Academic Performance Index test increased from 448 to 662, all within five years.

By 2000, 39 schools in the district were participating in the program, which now had a full-time administrator and an in-house evaluator. ACT had already trained 775 teachers who had conducted over 7,000 home visits.

Then, in 2002, State Assemblywoman Nell Soto heard about the project and sponsored a bill to get state funding for the teacher home-visit program without even discussing it with ACT. When ACT found out about the bill, they went in to make sure the mechanics of the project would be maintained and to provide the data from their outside evaluation. Their testimony helped pass statewide legislation that provided $15 million in grants to school districts throughout the state that wanted to implement similar programs. Over 500 schools statewide have launched teacher home-visit programs, and ACT parents, teachers, and staff have traveled across the state and the country to "train the trainers." Moreover, Sacramento Unified School District has been recognized statewide for its tremendous improvement, part of which can be attributed to the Home Visit Program.

Current Status

The “Nell Soto Parent/Teacher Involvement Program,” as it is now known in California, has survived the state’s severe budget cuts thus far and is still going strong. Locally, in Sacramento, ACT recognized that a large percentage of their staff time and resources were needed to address the growing demand for the trainings. So ACT leaders and organizers met with representatives from the teachers union and the school district and agreed to create a separate organization that would administer the program, with the board of directors evenly divided between school district officials, local teacher union officials, and community and parent groups.

This arrangement had numerous benefits. First, all of the organizations involved in the program would continue to play a role but would not be burdened by the increasingly extensive administration. Second, the spin-off organization could apply for federal grants that ACT could not access (due to its policy of refusing state and federal funds). Finally, the continued operation of the project would be ensured, giving ACT the opportunity to focus on new issues and expansion. This unique partnership has been going strong for over a year and now has a website, a library and resource center, and a cadre of teachers who have volunteered to help with training.

Conclusion

Carol Sharp, a former principal and currently the Sacramento City Unified School District’s administrator for the home visit program, summed up nicely the significance of Sacramento ACT’s school reform efforts: “This is an incredible story of how a community group can work together beautifully with a district to change practice.”

Case Study:

Mobilizing Students: Youth United for Change

Introduction

Organizing for school reform often presents a contradiction. Community organizing is based on the premise that those affected by a problem can and must join together in order to build enough power to create meaningful change, and in the case of school reform, the group most affected by the problems is obviously the students. However, many education-focused groups are largely or even entirely devoid of students. Why the contradiction?

Several reasons immediately present themselves. First, students ostensibly lack two basic forms of power: votes and money. Second, community groups tend to be formed and led by adults, who are either hesitant to share leadership with students or unsure how to engage them. Often the very reasons that school reform advocates feel so passionately about helping children and youth – their vulnerability, inexperience, and immaturity – turn out to serve as disincentives for organizing them. Finally, adults may feel threatened by young people's energy, outspokenness, and perceived lack of discipline.

The history and experiences of Youth United for Change, a student-led organization based in Philadelphia, PA, present a potent challenge to these assumptions as well as practical lessons for groups interested in broadening their base to include youth.

History & Accomplishments

Youth United for Change (YUC) traces its origins to a drug prevention program in the 1980s that was funded by former First Lady Nancy Reagan's "Say No to Drugs" campaign. The program's coordinator, Rebecca Rathje, was recruiting students in Philadelphia public schools to serve as peer educators and was horrified by what she saw: lethargic students with their heads on their desks and the absence in many classrooms of anything resembling teaching and learning. At one school, she saw a teacher

reading the newspaper while students read magazines or slept, and one student told her that if she "just showed up and didn't bother the teacher, she'd get an 'A.'" Frustrated by these situations and what she saw as the drug campaign's ineffectiveness, Rebecca began looking for more meaningful ways to engage students.

SMART MOVE !

Gave students opportunity to see potential of organizing firsthand and to learn from experienced peers.

Around this time, Rebecca and some of her student trainers learned about the juvenile justice work of a group called Youth Force in the South Bronx. They contacted Youth Force to learn more and were invited to New York to see their work for themselves. Fifteen teenagers and two adults from Philadelphia accepted the offer and spent a day following Youth Force's student leaders around as they demanded summer programs for young people in housing projects. This model of collective action as opposed to direct service struck a chord in the group, which decided to invite Youth Force to come back to Philadelphia and train them on the basics of community organizing.

SMART MOVE !

Let members see for themselves how power is needed to access decision makers.

The training took place in October 1991, and Youth United for Change was born. Their first real organizing efforts remained a couple of years down the road.

YUC began by focusing on leadership training and having students speak publicly at town hall and school board meetings because they wanted to make sure there was a presence of neighborhood youth in community conversations about education. They also began publishing a youth newspaper and created a documentary on why students were dropping out. During the documentary project, students wanted to interview the superintendent but had to go through major bureaucratic hurdles and never got the interview. This made the students very angry about how little power they had to meet with the people who were making decisions that directly affected their lives, and set the stage for deeper immersion into the principles and strategies of community organizing.

SMART MOVE !

Were open to news ways of organizing and new ways of structuring the group.

In 1993, YUC's student leaders and Rebecca, by then their full-

time staff person, were at a community meeting about education that was being run by Steve Honeyman, the founder of the newly formed Eastern Philadelphia Organizing Project (EPOP).[1] The meeting was focused on dropout rates at Kensington High School. Community members were blaming the dropouts for causing trouble, which angered YUC's student leaders, most of whom attended Kensington. The students explained that students dropped out and caused problems because the conditions in the school were so terrible.

SMART MOVE !

Started by finding people who WANT to organize.

After the meeting, Steve approached the students and asked them who they were and how they were creating the "change" referred to in YUC's name. Seeing an opportunity to increase the effectiveness of their efforts, Steve began meeting with 15 students and Rebecca to teach them about organizing from an institution-based model. As a result, YUC decided to change its model and begin building chapters in different high schools.

YUC chose Kensington High School as the site for its first chapter, based on the strength of its existing relationships with the principal and students. The next year a second chapter was formed at Edison High School (no connection to Edison Schools, Inc.), and by 2003 the organization had grown to represent three more high schools – Olney, Strawberry Mansion, and Mastbaum Vocational-Technical.

SMART MOVE !

Recognized the power of gatekeepers and worked to build relationships with them.

During this 10-year span, YUC not only grew but also racked up an impressive list of victories:

- Pressured the school district to double the amount of computer and technology aid it was providing to Olney High School.
- Secured funding for a college-resource center designed by students at Olney.
- Created a partnership between the state, the city, the school system, and a private company to ensure that a previously crime-ridden tunnel used to reach Kensington High School would be well-lit, clean, and most importantly, safe.
- Replaced general math with algebra at Kensington.
- Helped prevent the privatization of city schools.

SMART MOVE !

Built strategic relationships based on each campaign. As the adage says, "No permanent allies, no permanent enemies."

These successes are the result of strong organizational structures and strategies that have allowed YUC to take advantage of young people's potential and to overcome their challenges.

Building Leadership: Structure & Strategies

Youth United for Change is made up of chapters built at specific schools. The schools are chosen, or more accurately, choose themselves, based on several factors:

- ***Interest among students.*** This is one of the most basic principles of community organizing – if people don't want to be organized, you can't organize them. Among the ways that YUC seeks to create and gauge this interest are classroom presentations and workshops, sometimes at the request of a principal or teachers.

SMART MOVE !

Remained flexible enough to recognize exceptions to less important criteria.

- ***Support from the principal and/or teachers.*** If the adults in charge of the school are not behind an outside group's efforts, access to the students can be extremely difficult. The chapters at Edison and Olney High Schools resulted from invitations by a group of teachers and the principal, respectively. At the other schools, leaders from YUC met with the principal and with individual teachers to build initial relationships before establishing a chapter.

SMART MOVE !

Created an organizational structure that reinforces the mission of empowering youth.

These relationships have been complicated by frequent changes in leadership at Philadelphia schools – at least one principal transition occurred at each of the first four schools where YUC built chapters. Fortunately, since YUC was already established at the schools prior to the new principals' arrival, the organization was accepted as part of the existing infrastructure.

The tenor of the relationships with principals has also been determined by the issues selected at each school. When possible, YUC has tried to select issues in their first year at

each school that did not target the principal and therefore allowed for cooperation. Principals were particularly helpful during the anti-privatization campaign, partly due to their tacit support for YUC's position and their relief at not being the campaign's target. As a result, several principals turned a blind eye to students who participated in the group's coordinated school walkout to protest the potential private takeover of public schools. In other cases, however, the principals have been the key decision-makers and therefore the key targets, creating a more oppositional dynamic.

SMART MOVE !

Developed strategies for dealing with scheduling difficulties and gave students the power to choose in each situation.

Similarly, the group has experienced varying levels of support from teachers. Some teachers have felt threatened by outspoken students, while others have embraced students' decision to take an active role in their own education. A third category of teachers has based its support on specific issues, agreeing with the anti-privatization campaign for example, but opposing work on individual school issues.

SMART MOVE!

Built structures to allow for communication and dialogue as an entire organization and in smaller groups.

- ***Enrollment from the surrounding neighborhoods.*** YUC was founded in eastern Philadelphia and tends to focus on "comprehensive" schools in that area (neighborhood-based schools that serve the majority of students, including those who aren't accepted into citywide magnet programs) because they believe that students shouldn't have to travel to magnet schools to get a quality education.

SMART MOVE!

Found ways to address members' barriers to participating.

Exceptions were made in two cases – Mastbaum Vocational-Technical High School, which is not a comprehensive school, and Strawberry Mansion, a high school located outside of YUC's immediate vicinity. In both cases, students were actively interested in organizing and the principal was supportive, so the most important criteria were satisfied.

In addition to the importance of the criteria that YUC uses to determine where they will build chapters, another key to the group's success has been its ability to go beyond the rhetoric of

youth involvement and leadership to provide real opportunities for youth to own the organization.

Students are responsible for the majority of organizational decisions, except for budget decisions, which are made by the board in consultation with students. YUC decided not to have any youth members on the board because they are not legally able to vote on boards of directors. The board does include YUC alumni, along with representatives of other organizing groups and experts in education policy. Because there are no youth members, the board has been given no decision-making power over campaigns or issue selection.

With the advice and guidance of board members, students choose the issues, develop strategies and tactics, meet with decision-makers, interact with the media, conduct trainings, and generally participate in all aspects of the organization.

This isn't always easy. As every organizer who has worked with youth or even adults knows, public hearings and meetings with elected officials are often held at times of day when it is nearly impossible for people to attend, whether because of school or work. At these times, organizers often face a difficult choice: (1) skip the meeting/hearing, (2) encourage members to leave school or work in order to attend, or (3) go to the meeting without any members and act as advocates. Each option has its serious drawbacks: The first option eliminates strategic opportunities for dialogue or impact. The second can only be done a limited number of times without jeopardizing people's jobs or risking being seen as hypocrites who fight for education while taking students out of school (though one could easily make the argument that these experiences are an invaluable component of their education). The third choice contradicts the most basic tenet of community organizing: people must speak for themselves.

YUC has employed all three of these strategies at one time or another. In some cases, they have pushed officials to reschedule meetings or hearings to accommodate students. For example, when Kensington High School students won a new building for their school, they convinced the design team to move their meetings to the evenings so that students and parents could attend. At times when the meeting or hearing couldn't be rescheduled and the presence of student voices was essential, such as the School

Reform Commission's hearings at 1:00pm, YUC student leaders got permission slips to leave school for as short a time as possible. When neither of those approaches is an option, students decide whether or not to have staff organizers serve as advocates. So even when adults are advocating for students, it is the result of strategic decisions made by the students themselves.

In order to strategize and make decisions, each high school chapter meets once a week. Three of the chapters hold their meetings at their schools; the other two use YUC's office. Then every other Friday, members of all the chapters come together to determine the direction of the entire organization. Currently there are approximately 80 members of the organization, and generally about half of them attend these bi-weekly meetings.

To ensure that transportation issues do not prevent students from attending meetings, YUC purchases bus tokens for students and made sure their office is easily accessible by public transportation.

Building Support: Strategic Relationships

Other strategies that have been critical to YUC's success have focused on the importance of relationships. One set of these relationships has been with key elected officials who have been able to leverage their positions to put pressure on other more recalcitrant officials. For example, at one point the organization was pushing for a college and career center at Olney High School. Students had conducted a school-wide survey and research on the importance of such a center, and needed the principal to designate a room and offer time and resources for its creation. However, the principal didn't want to give the students credit for their efforts and dragged his feet. Fortunately, the group had developed a positive working relationship with the then-president of the school board who happened to be from the same part of the community. So YUC asked the board president to attend the opening of the center – which had not been scheduled – and he wrote a letter to the principal expressing his excitement. This gentle nudge succeeded in convincing the principal to allocate the needed space and resources for the center.

SMART MOVE !

Made sure that members knew the risks of organizing.

SMART MOVE !

Found creative ways to take advantage of strategic relationships.

Another set of relationships has been with other student- and adult-led organizing groups in Philadelphia. These groups have provided significant support on city- and statewide issues when YUC has needed more power and large turnout. It has also proven critical to be in communication with other groups in order to prevent divide-and-conquer strategies. YUC has gotten better at this over the years. One set of such relationships has been fostered and maintained through the Cross-City Campaign for Urban School Reform. By bringing together leaders and providing a safe space for discussion and collaboration, the Cross-City Campaign has helped strengthen ties between EPOP, the Philadelphia Student Union, ACORN, and YUC. YUC also worked closely with several of the unions representing school employees during their anti-privatization campaign.

SMART MOVE !

Considered how the inclusion of adults would impact students' feelings of ownership and power.

In addition to relationships, YUC has also been successful at using creative tactics to gain public support and positive press. One recent example was a response to an announcement by the CEO of the school district that there would be two city police officers in every school. 75 students attended a school board meeting wearing orange t-shirts that said "Philadelphia School Correctional Facility," and when three of them got up to speak, all 75 stood up with their hands clasped behind their heads. The demonstration generated significant press coverage, which prompted the school board to back the students and the police commissioner to state that he didn't want his officers in the schools. The CEO never followed through with the initiative.

SMART MOVE !

Acknowledged the help they could and could not provide, and sought out resources to fill the gaps.

Challenges of Student Organizing

SMART MOVE !

Built relationships with other organizations to achieve collective citywide power.

While transportation and scheduling issues affect groups organizing people of all ages, organizing students presents an additional logistical challenge: parental permission. Students do not need permission to attend regular meetings, but for any additional activities – retreats, trips, hearings, etc. – organizers must make sure that students bring in signed permission slips from their parents or

guardians. They also must have liability insurance to enable organizers to drive students when necessary. This insurance costs approximately $5,000 per year and is included in the group's general operating budget (YUC receives the majority of its funding from foundations).

SMART MOVE !

Developed creative tactics for generating public support.

However, logistics are just the beginning of the challenges that student-based groups face, particularly when those groups pose a significant threat to adults in power.

Schools tend to have extremely hierarchical structures, and the top tiers are almost exclusively in the hands of adults. Students attempting to reform those structures are therefore confronting authorities who have ***direct power over them without their consent***. This is not the case, say, when a neighborhood association targets city council members, or even when workers seek to form a union. Students are required by law to attend school, and therefore their freedom of movement is extremely limited.

SMART MOVE !

Took precautions to prevent legal harm to the organization.

This arrangement produces several major obstacles to organizing students for school reform:

- ***Access.*** Outside organizers are not legally guaranteed access to schools. They must get permission from school officials, at the district level and/or from individual school principals. This creates a complicated dynamic in which those in power have the legal right to deny organizers the opportunity to recruit or interact with students, at least on school grounds, and the enormous benefits that this access presents. Therefore it is extremely important that student-based organizing groups have a positive, or at least neutral, relationship with school officials, principals in particular. While this relationship has tremendous advantages – access to students on school grounds, opportunities to address classes or hold workshops, convenient meeting space, ability to conduct surveys or research – it also raises an additional consideration when determining which battles to fight and which strategies to employ.

SMART MOVE !

Recognized that organizing students requires constantly developing new leaders

While some groups have decided to address this issue by only organizing where they have an official partnership with

the school, YUC has opted for a less formalized approach. Particularly because school leadership changes so often, YUC has found it easier to build relationships and gauge the openness to organizing on a school-by-school basis.

SMART MOVE !

Created an environment in which young people feel valued and free to express themselves.

➢ ***Culture.*** The culture in many of this country's schools is based on the belief that young people should be submissive, unquestioning, and passive. Whether or not one agrees with this philosophy under ideal circumstances in which students are engaged and learning, it is difficult to argue that anyone should be forced to resign themselves to an inferior education, as is so often the case with low-income students of color.

YUC teaches its students that they have a voice and that they have the right to question the adults who make decisions that affect their lives. Not everyone, however, is ready for the newfound sense of power that this training produces in students. For example, when several YUC students began challenging their teachers regarding the contents of their classes (for example, one student asked his English teacher why they hadn't read any African-American authors during African-American History Month), the teachers became angry and upset and complained to their principal that the students were being "disrespectful."

These types of complaints are almost universal in community organizing, but they have different repercussions for students. Adult groups who are labeled as "disrespectful" might have a harder time getting a meeting with elected officials or might receive negative press, but "disrespectful" students face much more tangible consequences.

SMART MOVE !

Recognized pros and cons of needing to maintain good relationships with decision-makers.

➢ ***Consequences.*** Young people take tremendous personal risks when they confront school authorities, and members of YUC have experienced many of the consequences. Student members have been harassed by teachers, yelled at by principals, made to feel like traitors, and blamed for creating the problems they hoped to address. They've received detentions, suspensions, and have been thrown out of class, often for vague and minor

infractions. Their parents have even been called in and told that their children were being brainwashed. These punishments are not isolated incidents; they have happened consistently since the group began organizing chapters in 1995. And after all of this, the students have little choice but to drop out or go back to school.

Therefore, YUC organizers make certain to discuss the potential consequences up front and directly, often making analogies to students involved in the Civil Rights Movement. YUC has also established a connection with the Education Law Center as a potential resource.

Other challenges of organizing students are the result of the culture and structure of our society, which are also reflected in the schools. Adults often dismiss the value of young people's opinions and insights. This makes it difficult to simultaneously organize adults, including parents, for fear of stifling the students' voices.

In addition, students lack both money and the ability to vote, the two forms of power most respected by elected officials. The combined result is that student groups frequently have to work harder than adults to get meetings with elected officials or even to get a seat at the table with other community stakeholders. Even when students succeed in securing an audience, they are often put down or ignored.

Perhaps the most emotionally challenging aspect of working with students is recognizing that the organization doesn't have the capacity to deal with the personal issues that arise. Adult organizers often find, as a result of the trust that has been established, that students confide in them, seeking help for issues that they aren't trained to handle. YUC would like to hire a social worker in the future to work with students' personal challenges, and in the meantime the organization is beginning to develop relationships with smaller local agencies that have social services.

The temporal nature of being a student is a challenge as well. New leaders must constantly be developed as students graduate, and in many cases, students never get to experience the fruits of their labors as school reforms often take years to implement. Given this reality, students' willingness to take risks and to sacri-

fice time, energy, and even relationships with their teachers and principals is all the more impressive. What is it that keeps students in the struggle? Why are they willing to fight for wins they won't get to experience?

Strengths of Student Organizing

YUC's staff has found several reasons that students are work so hard for reforms they might never see, and they are all testaments to students' strengths:

- Students feel connected to their communities and see how their communities would benefit from improving the public schools. They also recognize that they will still be members of the community once they graduate.
- They have younger brothers or sisters or nieces or nephews who will benefit from the improvements.
- They're angry and want injustices to be corrected, regardless of who benefits.
- It's an opportunity to be part of something bigger than themselves, which is not a common offer for young people. Public high schools tend to be large and anonymous, with little or no sense of connection or community.

Organizations such as YUC not only provide that community, they provide training that connects students' experiences to larger issues of racism and classism. They listen to young people, to their thoughts and experiences, and encourage them to develop skills that they aren't allowed to use elsewhere: thinking critically, challenging what they're given, asking tough questions, using their music and their art to communicate.

Through this training, YUC helps students to capitalize on their strengths: their creativity, inquisitiveness, energy, expressiveness, and sense of justice. Students learn about the powers they possess:

- ***The power to surprise.*** Students tend to be underestimated and not taken seriously, so decision-makers often ignore their efforts to organize. Then when, as in YUC's case, 500 students showed up at an action and were so uniformly silent that you could hear a pin drop, they created a strategic advantage.
- ***The power of publicity.*** Officials often try to create posi-

tive images of schools, e.g. that all students have textbooks, and brush over contrary facts. So it can be extremely effective (and appealing to the media) when students present contrasting images by standing up and saying, "No, we don't have enough books," and by countering stereotypes of youth as criminals and dropouts. Public officials can often be moved by embarrassment, and sometimes just by its prospect.

- ***The power of votes*** (current and future). When the Mayor of Philadelphia, John Street, tried to walk off the stage during a YUC action saying publicly, "I don't need to listen to these young people," a student stood up and said, "Yes, you do, because by the time you're up for re-election I'll be able to vote." Students represent an emerging voting bloc, and in the meantime, they can often influence the votes of their parents.
- ***The power of numbers.*** During YUC's anti-privatization campaign, they coordinated a 3,000-student walkout.

Conclusion

As with any constituency, organizing students presents unique challenges and obstacles. By virtue of their age and station, youth tend to be disrespected, undervalued, and disregarded, and any boat-rocking they engage in subjects them to a wide range of potential consequences. However, as Youth United for Change and other youth-led groups across the country have found, youth possess a tremendous store of often untapped strength, energy, creativity, and passion. By providing opportunities for youth to prove themselves, by being committed to creating a vehicle for them to speak their minds, by trusting their ability to make strategic decisions, YUC has shown the potential of harnessing these gifts and succeeded in making significant, concrete changes in Philadelphia schools.

The potential of an individual student to become a leader is often assessed by looking at grades or test scores. Youth United for Change made a decision to base their recruitment on a different indicator: desire. Students who want to participate in efforts to effect meaningful change in their schools and communities need only volunteer, and measured by YUC's standards of success, it is difficult to argue that there exists a more predictive measure of

potential. Like most organizing, these standards are twofold: impact on the community and impact on the participants. But, again, YUC has resisted the traditional yardstick. Rather than evaluating the impact of involvement on the students according to graduation and college acceptance rates, YUC organizers look at more qualitative indicators: students' leadership development, skill sets, and ownership over their personal lives and their educations. By these measures, and by looking at concrete changes in the community, Youth United for Change has been tremendously successful.

Endnotes:

[1] Since then, EPOP has grown to represent Eastern Pennsylvania and is now a member of the Pacific Institute for Community Organization (PICO), a national network of faith-based community organizations.

Where to Find It: Resources on Public Education

There are lots and lots of resources on public education, and on education organizing. It would be impossible to compile a comprehensive list. The materials listed here are some of those that we find most useful. You should also check on the "Education Resources" page of the Center's Education web pages (www.communitychange.org/issues/education/resources).

If you'd like us to include additional resources or links, please notify us! Contact: Ldingerson@ communitychange.org.

History

School: The Story of American Public Education, Sarah Mondale, editor. Beacon Press, Boston 2002

The Great School Wars: A History of the New York City Public Schools. Diane Ravitch. Johns Hopkins University Press 2000

A Nation At Risk

Read the report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education:
http://www.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/risk.html

[For information on standards, see the Education Commission of the State info pages at: http://www.ecs.org/ecsmain.asp?page=/html/issues.asp.]

No Child Left Behind

For a range of resources on NCLB, see our "No Child Left Behind" web pages at www.communitychange.org/issues/education/nclb.

An Action Guide for Community and Parent Leaders, Public

Education Network, 2002.

The National Center for Fair and Open Testing focuses on standardized assessments and alternatives to high stakes tests. See their website at www.fairtest.org.

School Funding

Money Matters: A Reporter's Guide to School Finance is a guide to trends and court cases in school finance for reporters. Copies are $12 and available from the **Education Writers Association,** 2122 P Street, NW Suite 201, Washington, DC 20037. Phone: (202) 452-9830. Fax: (202) 452-9837 E-mail: ewa@ewa.org Web site: http://www.ewa.org

For a state by state comparison of per pupil spending from 1959-60 to 1999-2000, see the NCES table at http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d02/tables/PDF/table168.pdf.

Another excellent source on the funding gap, is the Education Trust. See their report on school funding and inequities at: http://www2.edtrust.org/NR/rdonlyres/EE004C0A-D7B8-40A6-8A03-1F26B8228502/0/funding2003.pdf.

National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities: A Q&A on IDEA can be found at http://www.nichcy.org/pubs/newsdig/nd21txt.htm.

Twenty-Five Years of Educating Children with Disabilities: The Good News and the Work Ahead, American Youth Policy Forum and Center on Education Policy, 2002. Report can be found on the web at http://www.ctredpol.org/specialeducation/25yearseducatingchildren.htm.

Reports, Books About Education Organizing

Organizing for Urban School Reform, by Dennis Shirley. University of Texas Press, 1997

Strong Neighborhoods, Strong Schools. The Indicators Project on Education Organizing. Research for Action, Cross City Cam-

paign for Urban School Reform, March 2002.

Organizing for School Reform: How Communities are Finding their Voice and Reclaiming their Public Schools, Institute for Education and Social Policy, Steinhardt School of Education, New York University, October 2002