

# Education ORGANIZING

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## Partnerships for Change

### *Community-Union Collaboration in Public Education*

For a generation, “common wisdom” has held that organized teachers and organized communities have separate and irreconcilable agendas when it comes to public school reform. In the past several years, the reality has suggested otherwise.

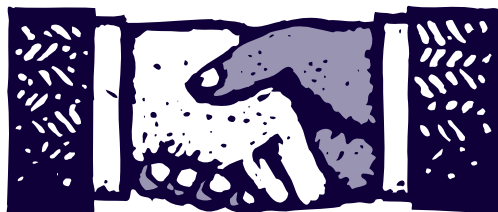
A handful of exciting collaboratives has emerged among community organizations and local teachers unions. These partnerships suggest that, when they focus on improving education for low-income children and children of color, organized teachers and organized parents *can* work together. And we believe they *must* work together if we are to create the comprehensive reform needed in our schools.

Early in 2002, a small group of foundation officers began a series of conversations with community organizers and teachers union officials about their common interest in public school reform. Recognizing the emergence of promising partnerships between unions and organizing groups, they decided to bring together some of the leaders in these efforts to learn from and identify ways to support them.

In July 2002, the Center for Community Change (CCC) was selected to plan and coordinate the gathering.

#### **Building A Table For Talk**

The Center’s vision for the event encompassed multiple interests. Together with the Planning Committee (as the original group came to be known), we wanted to provide an opportunity for union leaders and organizers, teachers and parents to learn from and build relationships with each other.



We wanted fledgling partnerships around the country to know they aren’t alone – and to share experiences with others. And we wanted to be able to learn from their stories. We wanted lessons that would be useful in other school districts, and ideas for how funders, parent organizations and others could support and encourage such partnerships.

We decided participants should come in *teams* of union and community representatives, rather than as individuals. This would allow the local relationships to build outside the pressures of day-to-day business, and let us learn

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*Education Organizing* is a newsletter of the Center for Community Change. This special issue reports on the Partnerships for Change gathering in April, 2003. The convening brought together teams of teacher union and community organizing representatives from eight school districts around the country. The report was developed by Leigh Dingerson of the Center for Community Change, and Debi Duke.

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*Education Organizing* shares the efforts of grassroots organizations around the country to engage low-income people—especially parents—in efforts to improve public schools. We will include news about strategies, actions and tactics, wins, losses and significant policy opportunities. If you would like to comment, or provide materials for future issues, contact Leigh Dingerson at the Center, or email her at: [ldingerson@communitychange.org](mailto:ldingerson@communitychange.org).

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Center for Community Change  
1000 Wisconsin Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20007  
202-342-0567  
[www.communitychange.org](http://www.communitychange.org)

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## Partnerships for Change

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from the exchange among team participants. It would also create a core of organizers and leaders from each participating district who had shared the experience of the conference and could build on what they heard and learned as a team.

### Power Dynamics— A Key Consideration

CCC's own leads, progressive union activists, the Planning Committee and contacts at the national teachers unions led us to over 60 unions and community organizations in 25 school districts in 21 states. Everywhere we could we spoke with both a union and a community organizing contact.

We were looking for more than just talk. A key hypothesis was: local teachers unions – traditionally powerful players within school districts – will only dedicate substantial time and energy to building relationships with parent or community groups they see as having a track record and some degree of power to bring to the table. Parent/teacher associations and other community-based agencies often have the best of intentions but no real base from which to wield power. We wanted each side to recognize their self-interest in working together. Otherwise, our experience told us, relationships are destined to be short-lived and one-sided.

By the fall of 2002 we had developed some understanding of the landscape. Certain themes were emerging that helped us refine our ideas about the convening. We also got a better sense about some of the nuances of these relationships and how they develop and function. These observations helped us shape the agenda.

We decided to seek up to ten teams of four to come together. Each team would include an elected union official, preferably a president or vice-president, and an active member from the teachers union. Partnered with them would be a lead organizer and active leader from a community group. Beyond these basics, we offered the planning committee a set of criteria for selecting teams to participate in the Partnerships for Change convening (see box, page 13).

Once the criteria were agreed on, we began a second round of conversations and site visits. By February 2003, we had issued invitations to ten teams.

### Partnerships for Change

The Partnerships for Change meeting was held in Chicago, Illinois, April 2-3, 2003. Nine teams from eight school districts participated. Our agenda squeezed time for peer-to-peer conversations, issue discussions, and relationship building into just over 24 hours. The meeting gave participating teams an opportunity to think about next steps and to meet with peers committed to similar work in other cities. It exposed participants to a wide range of organizing styles and models, allowed debate on strategies and addressed existing and potential “common ground” issues.

This issue of *Education Organizing* provides some observations, lessons, insights and struggles from the Chicago meeting. It serves as a record of a tremendous amount of work done in just a few short hours together.

The Planning Committee is now in the process of deciding how to move forward to support these and other partnerships between organized teachers and organized parents. We all fully believe that they hold significant promise for our students. ●

# The Nature of These Relationships

“Community-based organizations and education unions have a joint interest – the children,” said the Hyams Foundation’s Henry Allen as he opened the Partnerships for Change gathering. Other opening remarks addressed the importance of finding common ground between teachers and parents: “We hope problems, misunderstandings, and missed signals that keep us from acting on that shared interest can be addressed here,” said ACORN executive director Steve Kest.

And addressed they were. Participants were eager to explore what it means for community groups and unions to come together, what the barriers and challenges are, and what the potential is for significant change in our schools. They talked about whether the best relationships grow from conversation, shared work or some combination. They debated the significance of trust, respect and integrity.

The two days were filled with questions. While we didn’t agree on everything there was a nearly unanimous feeling that asking questions and exploring a wide range of responses was key to building the kinds of partnerships that are effective and lasting. Here is a sample of the conversations that went on.

## Why bother?

The Center for Community Change and the other conference organizers wanted to know the basis for the rela-

tionships – what brought them together and what keeps them together?

“It’s in our self-interest to work with unions as partners,” said Gloria Hernandez, executive director of Sacramento Area Congregations Together (ACT). “We say: ‘this is what parents want. What do you think teachers need? How can we work together?’”

“We focus on what needs to happen,” agreed Angelica Otero, lead organizer with the

Parent Action Committee (PAC).

“We have our own platform and issues and we build relationships based on those.” The PAC is part of a larger coalition based in New York’s South Bronx, the Community Collaborative to Improve District 9 Schools.

“The union gains political power by having partnerships,” said Herb Katz, a staff representative with the United Federation of Teachers in New York City. “It helps in negotiations. It helps with legislators. The union gains the ability to accomplish more for its members.”

Louis Malfaro, president of Education Austin, represents Texas teachers who have no legal bargaining rights. He sees

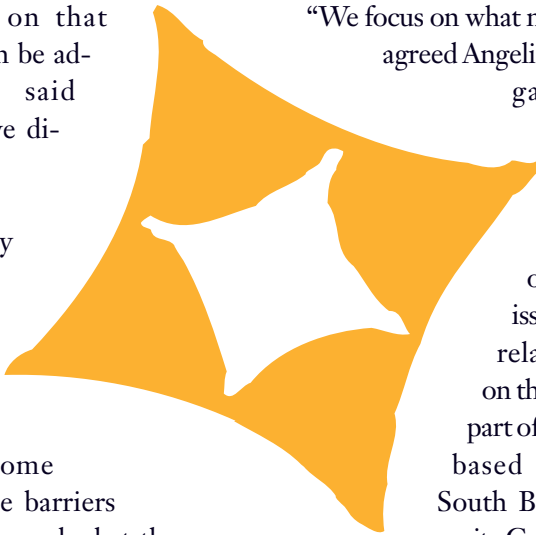
these relationships as a way to reinvigorate the labor movement. “Community organizations and unions share history,” Malfaro said. “Saul Alinsky [viewed by many as the father of community organizing] learned much of what he knew from the labor movement. I see a real long-term benefit to reconnecting with immigrant and working class communities.”

Like Malfaro many participants said they hope partnerships will help them build their own groups and develop a stronger constituency for public education. Some unionists said they believe parent and community support will increase the legitimacy of their demands for better teaching and learning conditions. And some community organizers believe the unions’ size and resources will enhance their credibility and access to decision-makers. Both agreed that collaboration is a means to an end – improving schools – not an end in itself.

## What is trust and how do we build it?

Many parents and teachers have fears that make it hard to trust each other.

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*The Boston Partnership Team develops a “story wall,” describing their developing collaborative work.*

Naomi Baden

## Relationships

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For instance, teachers worry parents will judge curriculum and teaching quality without the necessary expertise. Parents, on the other hand, fret that teachers are more concerned about protecting themselves and the profession than ensuring all kids are well served.

But within these partnerships, both sides are slowly revising their views of each other. Boxes accompanying this article describe some of the ways this is happening in districts around the country. At our meeting in Chicago, participants addressed this issue more philosophically.

“Trust is narrow,” said Louis Malfaro. “For me it’s more about ‘fit.’ Is there an internal commitment? An external commitment? Common programmatic glue? Are the leaders willing?”

### THE PROOF IS IN THE PUDDING.

Sometimes the best way to build trust is to come through when you’re needed. The United Federation of Teachers felt it would look self-serving if they led the fight to defeat Edison’s takeover bid in NYC a few years ago. They relied on ACORN and other groups to lead the charge. The campaign was successful and according to Amina Rachman of the UFT it changed teachers’ views.

“It was important for UFT members to see that ACORN was really out there doing this,” says Rachman. “Now, if our president goes into a meeting and mentions ACORN it’s not about ‘those wild-eyed fanatics.’ It’s totally changed ACORN’s image in teachers’ eyes.”

Are members committed? Are we making time? When we really embed social justice with community organizing, we need to change how we do business. It’s not just adding money or staff. To sustain this we need to come together more.”

“We need to embed the education fight in a broader struggle for social justice and involve other unions, central labor councils, and so on. We need as much broad-based power as we can get to fight these battles in cities and states,” added ACORN’s Steve Kest.

“There has to be respect in all directions before we can be a joint power,” offered Carol Pacheco, an elementary school field representative with the Boston Teachers’ Union.

Mike Clements, senior organizer with IAF affiliate L.A. Metro described a practical implication of being in these relationships: the two-way street. “We really prefer to spend our time organizing,” he said, but there are times when the unions want their friends to do other kinds of actions. “We might decide to do it because it’s important to them, but we want something in return.”

“Follow-through is critical,” argued Deborah Hernandez, a parent leader in Albuquerque ACORN. “If parents offer great ideas and there’s no follow through, we lose interest in working with unions.” “Accountability is critical. Unions can’t go against agreements they’ve achieved with parents,” agreed Salvador Valdez, a leader of L. A. Metro.

“I think about integrity,” said Chicago ACORN’s head organizer Madeline Talbot. “Is the ‘big guy’ in the relationship only collaborative when

### YOU CAN'T SAY, 'OUR WAY OR THE HIGHWAY.'

One union local found that both the Chamber of Commerce and a community-based organization it tried to partner with wanted to control the agenda. Both groups “expect us to have the same culture and values they have,” said the union president. “But we have our *own*.”

“They’ve been judgmental and conditional. We can’t work with groups that assume we’re no good if we don’t do things their way.” On top of this, both the Chamber and the organizing group publicly criticized teachers in ways the local president described as “offensive.”

The local has dropped its membership in the Chamber and is building a partnership with another community organization. They share an interest in better schools, but maintain their own identities and respect each other’s character. “The conversation has been a dialogue, not a ‘pitch,’” says the union president.

there’s something in it for them? Ultimately we have to be planning together instead of just buying into each others’ ideas.” The tension emanating from a perception that one partner was pushing their agenda on the other was an oft-heard theme. Successful partnerships seem to have an element of a *commonly conceived agenda* at their core, although there were examples of each working on behalf of the other on occasion.

“Trust is a bogus issue,” said Tom Maher a Boston teacher. “*Issues* are what keep you together. We need ways to develop issues, goals and strategies.

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## Talking About Issues

Relationships between community-based organizations and unions are a means to an end. That end is better schools, and there are a lot of issues we have to find ways to talk about if we're going to get there. Some of them will provide – and are providing – common ground for organizing. Partnerships for Change participants experimented with a wide range of topics. Here is a peek at their conversations.

### Using No Child Left Behind

The budding partners shared many reservations about No Child Left Behind, the 2002 reauthorization of the federal

State University reinforced this approach. “Always argue for information, sunlight, analyses,” he said. “It’s a wonderful way to expose the dual system. The right says, on the one hand, we have to deregulate, but on the other, the public school system has to be tightly controlled. I’d advocate a combination of common sense and strong research support for change.”

### “Choice” and Supplemental services.

No Child Left Behind requires schools deemed failing to provide the opportunity for students to transfer to better performing schools, and “supplemental services,” i.e. tutoring, for individual students. Many of those at the Chicago meeting were concerned that these provisions transfer federal education funds away from the schools that need them most.

Some organizing groups have tar-

getted the supplemental services programs. Matt Henderson, ACORN’s head organizer in Albuquerque, asked, “Has anyone looked at building alliances with supplemental service providers?” Madeline Talbot of Chicago suggested, “It’s possible for teachers to provide these services and for community groups to work that alliance. You can also investigate the providers and become a consumer bureau or hold a fair for providers. In Chicago, though, we found that much of the money allocated

for supplemental services could be better spent in the regular school day.”



Michael Charney, professional issues director at the Cleveland Teachers Union and a guest speaker at the conference, agreed and cautioned, “We have to be careful about these providers. It’s a form of privatization, and you can end up supporting companies that are more interested in profits than kids.”

Participants also dismissed the new law’s “choice” provisions – which allow a small number of students in low-performing schools, to use Title I funds to pay for transportation to another, higher achieving public school – as a stealth opening to vouchers. Many participants also noted that in large urban districts the choice provisions are a farce, either because *all* the schools are considered low performing, or the few best schools are already overcrowded. Again, there was general agreement that the organizing handle is around keeping the federal money in the schools and using it to improve the program for *all* students. Talbot noted that Chicago ACORN had publicly opposed the choice busing provisions, and that their stand on the issue had further cemented their relationship with both the union and the district administration.

### Focus on Title II – Teacher Quality

Title II of the new law, which focuses on teacher quality, was seen by participants as a better organizing and

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Doug Bloch

California ACORN members oppose cuts to schools, March, 2003

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Dangerous mandates and trends in the bill evoked frustration, as did the administration’s failure to adequately fund its own program. Like all good organizers, though, participants identified requirements they could use. Community groups seemed particularly pleased with the right to information the legislation promises parents.

Alex Molnar, director of the Education Policy Studies Lab at Arizona

## Talking About Issues

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collaboration opportunity. NCLB requires that all children have “highly qualified” teachers by the 2005-06 school year. And, it requires that data on teacher qualifications be provided to parents annually.

Gwen Stewart, a leader with Chicago ACORN, put it this way, “We’ve had no way to know whether or not a teacher is highly qualified. We see No Child Left Behind as an opening to get that knowledge.”

The new mandates prompted union and community participants to talk about how they might collaborate to recruit, train and place great teachers in schools that need them most.

Nationally, ACORN has been researching teacher quality in their schools and districts. In several cities they have found a strong correlation between student assessment scores and teacher qualifications, and a disparity in the quality and experience of teachers in the lowest-income schools versus more affluent district schools. Their results in both are supported by a growing body of academic research that shows that highly qualified teachers are key to improved student achievement, and that low-income kids face disproportionate numbers of inexperienced or under-qualified teachers. (For examples, see resources section, page 19.)

### Attracting, supporting, and retaining the best

Louis Malfaro, president of Education Austin, framed the discussion by asking, “What teacher support and retention practices should we be working for?”

“Systematic, full-time support, such as mentors and peer coaches, for teachers who need to improve,” recommended Michael Charney, of the Cleveland Teachers Union. “They should be enthusiastic and believe all

model. He described New York’s state-funded teacher centers that help support and retain teachers. “The program aims to have someone in every school who can help teachers without sharing informa-

Judy Horton



Austin Interfaith members walk for public schools.

kids can learn; they shouldn’t just teach teachers how to survive.”

Charney also suggested reduced class sizes for new teachers, opportunities for new teachers to meet together and talk through issues and problems and exit interviews for teachers that leave.

In Chicago, the union and community have worked side by side to get teachers trained. The Chicago Teachers’ Union runs a program to bring teachers up to full certification. ACORN encourages parents to push teachers they like to join the program. Parents have especially focused on recruiting bilingual teachers and permanent substitutes to enroll in the union’s training program.

Vince Gagalone, Bronx borough representative for the United Federation of Teachers, shared another

tion with principals. Of course some principals do not want the centers because they’re autonomous.”

### Identifying Good Mentors

Lisa Clauson, head organizer with Boston ACORN, formulated the proverbial ‘Yeah, but...’ question: “How do you make sure these teachers are top quality, not just senior?” she asked.

“Originally, CTU developed criteria, and built a pool of mentors based on them,” said Allen Bearden, director of the Chicago Teachers Union’s Quest Center, a professional development resource for teachers. “Now, the principal picks mentors and doesn’t always use our standards. Mentors also need release time that we haven’t yet won here in Chicago.”

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## Talking About Issues

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“Many teachers, especially in elementary schools, are reluctant to leave the classroom so we have to convince teachers that this is important and their responsibility,” added UFT’s Gaglione.

“In Boston we negotiated a process and criteria for lead teachers and mentors,” said Carol Pacheco, an elementary school field representative with the Boston Teachers’ Union. “But its implementation has been underfunded and erratic.”

Tim Kinney, president-elect of Associated Pomona Teachers outside Los Angeles said, “We also negotiated the whole process. Teams of teachers and administrators visit the classrooms of those interested in being mentors and select them based on agreed upon criteria. Mentors also have release time.”

In general, activists from both sides agreed that urban school districts must experiment with many ways to reduce

turnover and constantly upgrade teachers’ skills and knowledge. But, they acknowledge, it likely will fall to them to create the political will to provide permanent funds for such initiatives.

### Seeds of change

Three experts with experience in just these kinds of initiatives joined the partners in Chicago: Michael Charney, director of professional issues for the Cleveland Teachers Union (CTU); Alex Molnar, director of the Education Policy Studies Lab at Arizona State University; and Louise Sundin, president of the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers. Here is a bit about their work.

Charney and the CTU have worked for several years with the state legislature and groups like the Children’s Defense Fund to close the achievement gap in Ohio. They use a plan developed by the National Black Caucus of State Legislators’ education committee (see Resources, page 19). “The NBCSL plan includes things like smaller class sizes and was the impetus for the winning class-size

ballot referendum in Florida,” Charney said.



Oakland ACORN members oppose cuts to schools, March 2003.

Through Ohio’s “Close the Gap Campaign,” the legislature is creating pools of money to help ‘needy’ schools attract, train and retain teachers, Charney said. “At the same time, we’re arguing that responsibility must be shared among administrators, teachers and families.”

Molnar has been tracking SAGE – an innovative Wisconsin program designed

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## GRASSROOTS TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND SUPPORT

District and union programs like those described above are long-term propositions that take years to negotiate, fund and fully implement. While community groups support these efforts they’re also looking for initiatives that have more immediate payoff.

Chicago ACORN conducted local research and reviewed national studies on what makes a difference for kids. Based on their results, they decided to focus on putting high quality teachers in every classroom. According to Madeline Talbot, “If you want to build an effective campaign you need a constituency of parents and community folk who know whether or not a teacher is highly qualified. In Chicago, we had no way of knowing that.”

Gwen Stewart, who chairs ACORN’s North Lawndale chapter, described how ACORN activists “went down to the state board of education to try to get teacher qualification data and were told they didn’t have time

to compile it. So we became the guard dogs. We visit principals, teachers, parents and grandparents to get information on what makes a good teacher.”

North Lawndale ACORN also set out to recruit good teachers to neighborhood schools. “We held a teachers’ fair and gave principals and prospective teachers tours of the neighborhood and packets of information. We also held a one-week seminar for new teachers,” explained Stewart.

More than 30 teachers participated in the seminar which was designed to help new teachers understand and respect the neighborhood. According to Talbot many of the new teachers were white, suburban, and unfamiliar with – or even afraid of – the kids and the neighborhood. The seminar included conversations with parents and even some door knocking. Talbot says principals have told ACORN that teachers are already staying longer.

Doug Bloch

## BETWEEN THE LINES

### *Can We Talk About Teacher Quality and Student Needs?*

Most people agree that highly qualified teachers are critical to student success. Most also acknowledge the growing body of evidence showing that poor children and children of color are taught disproportionately by teachers who are less experienced and less qualified than their counterparts in more affluent schools and districts. There is widespread agreement about the problem.

And, yet, it's excruciatingly difficult to talk about this issue. History and the current political climate have pulled parents and teachers apart on issues of quality teaching. The community and union activists at the Chicago gathering are no exception, but they are working hard to overcome the trends.

#### **PARENTS: MY CHILD DESERVES THE BEST**

Involved parents – especially those in poor, urban schools – are angered by evidence that their children are on the receiving end of low expectations and less challenging curriculum. Data showing that their children's teachers are disproportionately under-qualified or inexperienced just add fuel to the fire.

In many cities, teachers' unions are portrayed by district leaders, politicians and the media as fighting to preserve the rights and jobs of teachers who are not serving the best interests of students. Their efforts to improve the schools and teacher quality, on the other hand, often go unnoted. These negative images feed parents' mistrust of teachers unions and the contracts under which they work.

#### **TEACHERS: UNDER SIEGE, MARGINALIZED PROFESSIONALS**

Conscientious teachers – especially those in poor, urban schools – and their unions are defensive. Politicians and the media condemn them for students' low test scores. When teachers point to large classes, dilapidated buildings, lack of textbooks and high needs children, they're accused of not being accountable. When they ask for compensation that even *approaches* that of similarly educated professionals, they are dismissed.

Teaching is rocket science, they say. We need more resources and better support. Working conditions in high-needs schools can be horrible – everyone is under siege. It's no wonder experienced teachers use their hard-fought seniority and transfer rights to get out and go somewhere less stressful.

If you can't stand the heat, policymakers say, we'll "teacher proof" the schools with deadening scripted lesson plans and multiple-choice tests.

*"In this climate, teachers' ability to respond to the needs of individual kids and to make professional decisions is being reduced. If people aren't allowed to act like professionals, they won't stay."*

—Alex Molnar

#### **THE BEGINNINGS OF COMMON GROUND**

It's no wonder that both parents and teachers are wary about this topic. One lesson from the partnerships that came together in Chicago in April is that if we build relationships and trust, the delicate issue of teacher quality *can* be one in which common ground is found and important progress made.

Some positioning was the first step. Participants conceded that there is inevitably some degree of subjectivity in describing what makes a teacher "highly qualified." Though there are measurable components – advanced degrees, subject majors and years of experience – both community and union representatives agreed that those are not always the most accurate indicators of successful teaching.

Several participants and invited guests began to address some ways community organizations and teachers unions can struggle and campaign together for change. Here are a few initiatives that were presented or discussed:

- Work by the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers to establish a career ladder for teachers that rewards teaching excellence with additional compensation and responsibility;
- Negotiations underway in several partnership cities around pilot programs to place "master teachers" in high needs schools;
- Peer evaluation programs that more effectively and fairly support, improve or get rid of teachers who are ineffective;
- Joint efforts to structure opportunities for (or encourage) teachers to participate in high quality training;
- Programs to bring uncertified teachers up to standards and encourage teacher aides and others to take advantage of programs that can lead to certification;

These and other ideas for supporting teachers and elevating the profession must be supplemented by other improvements. Among the needs mentioned by the partners were smaller class sizes, adequate materials, high quality before- and after-school programs, and salaries and conditions that will draw the best and brightest into the profession.

The urgent need to create more equitable schools – and the difficulty in creating them – is precisely why relationships between parent-community and teacher organizations are so important. None of the community groups and unions present in Chicago believes they are on the verge of solving these problems – or even completely understanding them. They do know that the right question is not "*can* we talk?" but "*how* can we talk?" ●



# Establishing Balance

## *The Community Collaborative to Improve District 9 Schools*

**T**hree issues arise again and again when parent and community organizations try to work with teachers' unions. One is that local unions are almost always larger, better staffed and wealthier than parent and community groups, allowing them to act and be heard in ways that community-based organizations cannot.

A second concern is the difference in political capital. Unions, especially, in large cities, are often "insiders" while parent groups are frequently "outsiders." Groups already in the game, so to speak, need a reason to work with those who are not, or are viewed as rabble-rousers. And third, once they're at the table parents may be intimidated by the power or language of professional educators and may back down even though their ideas are sound.

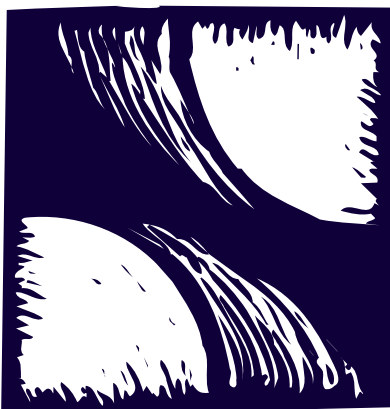
The development of the Community Collaborative to Improve District 9 Schools (CC9) in New York City's South Bronx illustrates how a relatively small parent group can develop into a powerful force, able to address all of these potential barriers to equitable cooperation.

### **Creating infrastructure**

In 1996 residents of the non-profit New Settlement Apartments (NSA), came together over concerns about schools. They held a series of workshops on parents' rights, from which sprang the Parent Action Committee (PAC). NSA's support was critical. They helped parents acquire skills, provided space, staff and fundraising support; and they connected PAC with broader school organizing efforts throughout New York City. NSA also secured ongoing and invaluable technical assistance from the Institute for

Education and Social Policy at New York University.

As PAC members learned more about their schools—that only 17% of students read at grade level, for instance—they began asking questions. When school and district administrators failed to provide clear answers, PAC narrowed its focus to a single, local elementary school and set about organizing parents.



### **Building power**

Next PAC took its concerns to the District 9 school board where the principal and superintendent blamed low achievement on families and denied serious problems. A visit to a successful school with similar students reinforced PAC's conviction that the principal was more responsible for the school's failures than families. They decided a new leader should be the first step.

With more than 1,000 signatures on a petition demanding the principal's removal, PAC confronted District 9's superintendent. When she rejected their request, they went to the chancellor (New York's superintendent) with a dramatic action that drew media attention to their cause. The principal finally resigned, and PAC won a seat at the table

in the selection process for a replacement. When the new principal failed to offer significant improvement, PAC again organized, and won a replacement. Finally, the school has a principal that welcomes PAC's input and has helped the group investigate school safety issues.

### **Increasing political capital/clout**

By the fall of 2000 the Parent Action Committee saw the need to expand its work beyond one school, by bringing its research and ideas to other parents and community organizations. PAC held a series of meetings with Bronx ACORN, the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition, Citizens Advice Bureau, Highbridge Community Life Center and the Mid-Bronx Senior Citizens Council. The meetings led to the creation of the Community Collaborative to Improve District 9 Schools – CC9.

Several of these groups had a history of effective community organizing. Some were already working on education, and ACORN, in particular, had an ongoing relationship with the teachers' union. Add to that the support of New Settlement Apartments and IESP and the groups have real political weight and a chance to partner equitably with the 140,000-member United Federation of Teachers (UFT).

### **Setting goals and sticking to them**

A detailed *Platform for Educational Improvement* guides CC9's work, outlines its interests in improving schools, and directs its relationships with teachers and other school personnel. "We have one goal: educating children," said Denise Moncrief, a public school parent and leader at the Citizens Advice Bureau.

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# Partnerships For Change

## *What They Look Like*

Participating teams at the Chicago meeting came from urban school districts with many shared characteristics: high concentrations of poor students, large numbers of English language learners, lots of schools designated as “low-performing.” They came with a common interest in working collaboratively to help more kids succeed at higher levels.

According to Marcie Launey, president of the Sacramento City Teachers Association, “Our organizations need to form a power block to be heard by politicians.” “Failing schools are a political problem,” added Matt Henderson, head organizer with Albuquerque ACORN. “We need to be more organized and take more control.”

Most of the teams represented new and tentative collaborations. Still, some have achieved real accomplishments and all hold significant potential. Here are snapshots of the teams:

### ■ ALBUQUERQUE, NM

#### **ACORN and the Albuquerque Teachers Federation (ATF)**

In 2001 the Albuquerque Teachers Federation (ATF) helped ACORN research teacher quality in low-income schools and advised them on using the data. ACORN’s recommendations to the district, supported by ATF, included incentives for teaching in low-performing schools, more money for professional development, more pay for teachers with national certification and a program to attract and retain teachers.

When Edison Schools appeared on the scene in 2002 and school takeovers were proposed, it provided another opportunity for the two groups to work together. ACORN and ATF agreed that their work should be parallel rather than publicly collaborative. ACORN played the much more aggressive, public role in a successful campaign to keep Edison out of Albuquerque. The effort brought the two groups closer together.

Members of the team included ATF President Ellen Bernstein; James Chavez, the union’s vice president for high schools; ACORN head organizer Matt Henderson and parent/leader Deborah Hernandez.



Naomi Baden

*Members of the Sacramento Partnership Team confer during the April Conference.*

### ■ AUSTIN, TX

#### **Austin Interfaith (IAF) and Education Austin (AFT and NEA)**

In 1999 Austin Interfaith (AI) approached the newly merged AFT/NEA local about its comprehensive Alliance Schools Project and opened its leadership training programs to union members so they could learn more about AI.

When the union won state legislation establishing scholarships for students planning to teach, the two groups began recruiting school support staff – especially bilingual – to apply for the assistance. In 2002 Austin Interfaith actively worked for pay raises for teachers, further cementing the relationship. Now the two groups are working on raises for support staff.

Both organizations see strength and progress in the partnership. AI says parents become more sophisticated consumers by learning from teachers about curricula and other issues. The union presses teachers to have high expectations for all kids and finds that Austin Interfaith parents reinforce the message.

Participants in the Austin team included Sister Mignonne Konecny, lead organizer with Austin Interfaith; Juquin Gloria, an AI leader and assistant principal at Ridgetop Elementary School; Louis Malfaro, president of Education Austin and Babs Miller, a teacher and active union leader.

continued on the next page

## What They Look Like

continued from the previous page

### ■ BOSTON, MA

#### ACORN and the Boston Teachers Union (AFT)

ACORN first reached out to the BTU in 1999 recognizing the union's critical role in education reform. When the Chamber of Commerce spearheaded a community campaign perceived as being anti-union, during the last round of contract negotiations, ACORN remained neutral and convened a forum for all sides. Their principled stand was a key relationship-builder with the Boston Teachers Union.

ACORN's campaign for improved parent-school communication led to the formation of a joint working group of administrators, ACORN and BTU representatives. The group hammered out details for a pilot voice mail system, instituted academic orientations for parents and created more parent-friendly visitation policies. It also convinced the district to interview substitute teachers before hiring them and enlisted a university to help the district design and implement a training program for substitutes.

ACORN and the BTU got \$15 million added to last year's school budget and are working to limit cutbacks this year. They also continue to work to establish quarterly progress reports for parents, delay the use of standardized assessments as a graduation requirement and improve teacher quality and retention.

The Boston team included Carol Pacheco, elementary field rep for the BTU; Tom Maher, a teacher and union leader; Lisa Clauson, head organizer for Massachusetts ACORN, and Yvonne Ferguson, an active parent and ACORN leader.

continued on the next page

## NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

All of the teachers union locals represented, and almost all of the community organizations are affiliated with national organizations.

**ACORN** (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now) was founded in Little Rock in 1970. Its members include 150,000 families in 700 neighborhood chapters in 50 cities. Most members live in low- or moderate-income neighborhoods. ACORN is committed to organizing the poor and powerless and to multiracial, multi-issue organizing. Issues include affordable housing, community reinvestment, living wages, better schools and voter participation. Education became a key ACORN issue in the 1990s.

**NATIONAL OFFICE:** 88 Third Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11217, 718-246-7900, [www.acorn.org](http://www.acorn.org).

**AFT** (American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO) was founded in 1916 with the idea that teachers needed a labor union rather than a professional association. In the 1960s AFT paved the way for the unionization of professionals and public sector workers when it organized and won collective bargaining rights for teachers. Dramatic growth followed; AFT went from 55,000 to 907,000 members in about 30 years.

**NATIONAL OFFICE:** 555 New Jersey Avenue NW, Washington, D.C. 20001, 202-879-4400, [www.aft.org](http://www.aft.org).

**IAF** (Industrial Areas Foundation) was founded in 1940 by the Catholic bishop of Chicago, the daughter of Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) leader John L. Lewis and organizer Saul Alinsky. IAF has more than 60 affiliated groups in the U.S. IAF groups are broad-based, cover cities or metropolitan areas, and are rooted in what they call "mediating" organizations, i.e., religious congregations, unions, schools and/or other community groups.

**NATIONAL OFFICE:** 220 W. Kinzie St., 5th Floor, Chicago, IL 60610, 312-245-9211.

**NEA** (National Education Association) has 2.7 million members working as professionals and support staff at every educational level from pre-school to university graduate programs. It has affiliates in all 50 states and 13,000 local communities. NEA was founded in 1857 to "elevate the character and advance the interests of the profession of teaching and to promote the cause of popular education."

**NATIONAL OFFICE:** 1201 16th St. NW, Wash., DC 20036, 202-833-4000, [www.nea.org](http://www.nea.org).

**PICO** (Pacific Institute for Community Organization) is a national network of congregation-based community organizations active in 12 states and more than 150 cities. Affiliates are multi-issue-organizing groups campaigning to improve education, health care, and more. PICO also recruits and develops community organizers, provides technical assistance, and trains leaders. PICO's principles are respect for human dignity, creation of a just society and development of the whole person.

**PICO CALIFORNIA PROJECT:** 930 Alhambra Blvd., #200, Sacramento, CA 95816, 916-447-7959, [www.piconetwork.org](http://www.piconetwork.org).

## What They Look Like

continued from the previous page

### THE BRONX, NY

#### Community Collaborative to Improve District 9 Schools (CC9) and the United Federation of Teachers (AFT)

Team members included Angelica Otero, lead organizer for the Parent Action Committee; Denise Moncrief, a parent leader with the Citizens Advice Bureau; Eric Zachary of the NYU Institute for Education and Social Policy; Vince Gagalone, borough representative in the Bronx for the UFT and Herb Katz, District 9 representative for the UFT.

*For more on this collaboration see page 9.*

### CHICAGO, IL

#### ACORN and the Chicago Teachers Union (AFT)

ACORN was among the first to call and congratulate CTU's Deborah Lynch after her hard-fought election as union president in May 2001.

The developing relationship was strengthened in the spring of 2002 when the Chicago Public Schools announced plans to close three poorly performing schools. Although teachers and school staff faced possible layoffs under the plan, neither the union nor the individuals had been forewarned of the announcement. The union met with parents and teachers at the school and contacted ACORN for help.

ACORN swung into action. At a school board meeting ACORN members took the mike in opposition to the closings, and reminded the board that the district's CEO [Chicago's superintendent] had recently stressed the importance of teacher retention at low-performing schools. Surprise announcements that could mean the loss of their jobs was no way to support these teachers, said ACORN members. ACORN's quick and aggressive support impressed CTU President Lynch.

The two organizations have continued talking about a range of teacher recruitment, retention and support issues and hope to build towards collaborative work to improve the quality of teachers in Chicago's highest need schools.

Illinois ACORN head organizer Madeline Talbot; Lawndale ACORN chairperson Gwen Stewart; CTU communications director Debby Pope and CTU's QUEST Center director Alan Bearden participated in the Partnership meeting.

### NEW YORK, NY

#### New York ACORN and the United Federation of Teachers (AFT)

A loose relationship between ACORN and the UFT stretches back to the mid-90s when the union helped ACORN research racial inequality in city schools and cooperated in the opening of some alternative schools.

But the first real test came in 2000 when the district announced a plan to turn several city schools over to Edison. ACORN and the UFT quickly mobilized a powerful campaign that resulted in a reduction in the number of threatened schools, and an agreement to allow parents to vote on the proposed takeover.

As the elections approached, the UFT felt it would be inappropriate for teachers to take the lead and was happy for ACORN to do so. ACORN pulled together a coalition that organized an electoral-style campaign that

organized an electoral-style campaign that Edison lost in all five schools. Victory changed many rank-and-file teachers' views of ACORN. Instead of "wild-eyed fanatics," teachers now see ACORN and its members

as effective and valuable allies and concerned parents willing to fight for their schools.

This change has carried over to other issues, notably the ongoing battle for adequate city and state education funding. ACORN and the UFT were key founders of the Alliance for Quality Education, a statewide coalition of more than 100 organizations. ACORN also encouraged the city to settle the last teachers' contract and has been instrumental in fighting against budget cuts and for increased revenues for the city's schools.

Participating in the NYC team were New York ACORN lead organizer Bertha Lewis; Gloria Waldron, the president of NY ACORN; Amina Rachman, assistant to the president at the UFT, and Michelle Bodden, vice president for elementary schools at the UFT.

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*"Failing schools are a political problem....*

*We need to be more organized and take more control."*

—Matt Henderson, head organizer with Albuquerque ACORN

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## Criteria For Invitation

In planning for this event, staff and Planning Committee members discussed and agreed on the following criteria for participation:

- 1 The community group is an organizing entity as distinguished from other types of community-based groups working with parents for school reform. (We used the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform's definition of "community organizing." See below);
- 2 The community organizing group has demonstrated its ability to implement a campaign that impacts schools or a school system in a fundamental way;
- 3 The teachers union has a "transformative" vision about schooling – in other words, the union is engaged in issues broader and deeper than wages and working conditions and understands its role in improving the quality of education particularly for low-income students;
- 4 The union is an influential player in district politics, and has demonstrated its ability to implement campaigns that are about structural reform in the district;
- 5 Both groups are willing to pursue an ongoing strategic relationship;
- 6 Both groups need to commit to fully participating as a team in the Partnership convening.

In addition to these criteria, a range of other representational interests informed our site selection. These included:

- geographic representation
- representation from several major organizing networks;
- representation of both NEA and AFT locals.



### What Is Community Organizing?

The Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform developed the following definition of community organizing for their "Indicators" Project, March 2002. Organizing groups:

- work to change public schools to make them more equitable and effective for all students;
- build a large base of members who take collective action to further their agenda;
- build relationships and collective responsibility by identifying shared concerns among neighborhood residents and creating alliances and coalitions that cross neighborhood and institutional boundaries;
- develop leadership among community residents to carry out agendas that the membership determines through a democratic governance structure;
- use the strategies of adult education, civic participation, public action and negotiation to build power for residents of low-to moderate-income communities that results in action to address their concerns.

## What They Look Like

continued from page 4

### ■ POMONA, CA

#### L.A. Metro (IAF) and Associated Pomona Teachers (NEA)

L.A. Metro is an institution-based organizing group that is building towards an Alliance School-type structure for education reform in Los Angeles. L.A. Metro's member groups have worked closely with the California Teachers Association, United Teachers of Los Angeles and other unions as well as Associated Pomona Teachers. In 2002, leaders mobilized several thousand volunteers to play a key role in passing a statewide school construction bond measure and a county tax to maintain hospital trauma centers.

In Los Angeles, L.A. Metro joined with others to secure the release of intervention and intercession funds to reduce resource disparities for 200,000 students attending school on the "B" calendar. (LA schools operate year-round to reduce overcrowding.) The group is also looking for ways to minimize drastic state budget cuts resulting from a \$36 billion deficit.

Pomona's team included Mike Clements, senior organizer with LA Metro; Salvador Valdez, an LA Metro leader; Tim Kinney, president-elect of the Associated Pomona Teachers, and Morgan Brown, vice president-elect of the APT.

### ■ SACRAMENTO, CA

#### Sacramento Area Congregations Together (PICO) and Sacramento City Teachers Association (NEA)

In the late 1990s, Sacramento ACT developed the Home Visits Pro-

gram to encourage substantive, two-way communication between families and schools. [For more information on the Home Visits program, see Education Organizing #3]. Close ties developed between participating teachers and the community organization.

In 2002 the state legislature appropriated \$15 million to duplicate the home visit program throughout the state. SCTA and the California Teachers Association (CTA) joined ACT and PICO to support the bill.

This rapid expansion taxed ACT's capacity. In the spring of 2002 it decided to form an independent nonprofit to implement the home visits project statewide. The new organization includes representation from ACT, the school district, and Sacramento City Teachers Association on a governing board that also includes parents, higher education experts and advisors from CTA and PICO.

Experience has deepened the relationship between ACT and SCTA. The groups now hope to expand the *Healthy Families Insurance Program* into the city schools. ACT and SCTA have developed a set of principles that help ensure they are supportive of each other and consistent in dealings with the district.

The participating team included Gloria Hernandez, executive director of Sacramento ACT; Howard Lawrence, president of the board of ACT; Marcie Launey, president of the Sacramento City Teachers Association, and David Fisher, an active teacher/union leader. ●

*See the sidebars on this page and on page 15 for other resource people and guests who attended our conference in Chicago.*

## PARTNERSHIPS FOR CHANGE

### Planning Committee

HENRY ALLEN

Hyams Foundation

LORI BEZAHLER

Edward W. Hazen Foundation

PANCHO CHANG

Walter S. Johnson Foundation

BOB CHERRY

California Teachers Association

BILL DEMPSEY

Unitarian Universalist Veatch Program at Shelter Rock

CYRUS DRIVER

Ford Foundation

JIM KEDDY

PICO California Project

STEVE KEST

ACORN

SPENCE LIMBOCKER

Neighborhood Funders Group

AMINA RACHMAN

United Federation of Teachers

DELORES ROZIER & KATRINA THOMPSON

National Education Association



## CONFERENCE GUESTS

LAUREN ALLEN

Senior Program Director, Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform

DARA BARLIN

Education, Sexuality & Religion Unit  
Ford Foundation

MICHAEL CHARNEY

Professional Issues Director  
Cleveland Teachers Union

SEGUN EUBANKS

Director of Teacher Quality  
National Education Association

REGINA MCGRAW

Executive Director, Wieboldt Foundation

PHIL MCLAURIN

Director of External Partnerships &  
Advocacy, National Education Association

ALEX MOLNAR

Education Policy Research Unit, College of  
Education, Arizona State University

CATHERINE M. PINO

Deputy Director, Urban High School  
Initiatives, Carnegie Corporation of New York

DAVID SHERMAN

Vice President, United Federation of Teachers

LOUISE SUNDIN

President, Minneapolis Federation of Teachers

BOUYTE

Director of School System Capacity  
National Education Association

ROBERT WADSWORTH

Program Director, The Boston Foundation

JOHN WILSON

Chief Executive Officer  
National Education Association

LIZ WOLFF

Research Director, ACORN

## Establishing Balance

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“We asked ourselves: What do we need to make it happen? And the answer was, ‘Parents, teachers, and principals working together.’ We knew we had to bridge the gaps. We don’t have a choice about working collaboratively despite ego issues or other agendas. We butt heads but because we keep our eyes on the goal we are able to compromise.”

One of the issues that the group debated early on was CC9’s demand that parents be allowed to visit their children’s classrooms. The proposal didn’t sit well with the union. “Classroom visits raise a lot of trust-related issues. We understand that the need to ‘see’ is important, but many teachers believe visits are disruptive and disre-

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***“We butt heads but because we keep our eyes on the goal we are able to compromise.”***

—Denise Moncrief, a public school parent and staff member at the Citizens Advice Bureau.

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spectful,” the UFT’s Amina Rachman told us last winter. District 9 Rep Herb Katz added, “Visits raise safety issues. If you have a lot of people coming and going guards let down their guard.” Even so, Katz prophesied, if the groups can “build the bonds first, things will work themselves out.”

CC9 parents agreed. To ensure they keep their eyes on the goal, CC9 members meet regularly at multiple levels, as does the broader CC9 planning committee, which includes the regional superintendent of the school district, the UFT and other parties. Parents develop all agendas and chair all meetings, providing another check and balance. Meetings that mix school people and parents feature icebreakers designed to equalize power in the relationships between participants.

## Looking toward the future

The Chicago meeting provided CC9 and the UFT the space and time to work on their relationship. And the work paid off almost immediately upon returning to New York.

In May, CC9 won a giant nod of respect from the Chancellor of the New York City Schools, when he agreed to make CC9’s 10 focus schools a “network” of its own under a new district-wide reorganization plan. The move creates some exciting autonomy for the collaborative.

Then in early June, the Collaborative celebrated agreement on a set of guidelines for implementing the Platform for Educational Improvement. And one of the guidelines? Asking each school to come up with policies

allowing parents to visit classrooms. Under the proposal, parents, administrators and teachers at each of the 10 schools will be able to negotiate a visitation policy that makes sense.

The new guidelines were signed by representatives of all the stakeholders, including the administration, the union and the community groups, each of whom pledged to support them and work together to raise the necessary resources to implement them.

The Collaborative, with the strength of the community and the experience of the union, seems poised to realize significant changes in District 9 over the next few years. Their participation in the Chicago Partnerships for Change meeting both inspired other collaborations, and energized their own. ●

# Talking About Issues

continued from page 7

to improve student achievement in the state's neediest schools. SAGE provides early childhood education, reduces class size to no more than 15, extends school hours and requires professional development and rigorous academic curriculum.

SAGE costs less than Wisconsin's voucher plan but its results are much more significant, Molnar told the group. African American kids in SAGE schools started behind their peers in comparable schools but by the end of third grade were half a grade ahead of the control group.

Equally important, African American kids in SAGE schools narrowed the gap between themselves and white students and have so far maintained the improvement.

Molnar urged members of the group to "frame the characteristics of good teaching, stress the feasibility of teachers doing those things and insist on what we know works."

## Teachers Developing High Standards

For more than a decade Louise Sundin and the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers have worked to do exactly that. They are regaining control over the teaching profession by developing new programs for recruitment, induction, retention and recognition.

The local has a canon of ethics for teachers and a sophisticated pay plan that rewards skill and knowledge as well as seniority. MFT's initiatives include special preparation for teachers unfamiliar with urban settings, a professional practice school, assistance with national certification and much more.

Naomi Baden

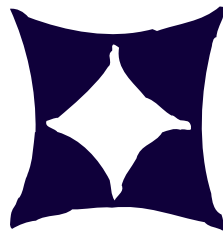
Sundin sees the lack of personal contact between teachers and families as harmful. "A hundred years ago," she said, "the family with the best horse and buggy would be sent to pick up the teacher at the train. It's my hope that parents, community

organizations and unions can reconnect and spark something new. We've been working with the NAACP, the Minneapolis Foundation and others to develop our own list of indicators of school improvement – both standards-based and growth measurements."

CTU and MFT initiatives, as well as programs like SAGE, force teachers and parents to come to a common definition of what a high-quality teacher is and what it takes to create, support and retain one. For more information on the projects and programs Charney, Molnar and Sundin described, see the resource section on page 19. ●



*Sister Mignonne Konecny, Juuquin Gloria, Babs Miller and Louis Malfaro of Austin, Texas, work as a team during the Partnerships for Change conference.*





## Relationships

continued from page 4

Trust follows. The key is nuts-and-bolts organizing. The transcending agreement has to be that we are fighting for the kids. We shouldn't focus on our more selfish interests."

### If we build it, will our members come?

Most partnerships represented at the Chicago meeting were relatively new. Wary of duplicating past coalitions or collaborations that involved only top leaders, they were eager to hear about practical ways to inform and involve their rank-and-file members.

"How do you integrate the relationship into the union's work in a way that allows you to find members who want to be involved?" asked Debby Pope, the Chicago Teachers Union's communications director.

"One strategy is to make time for conversation at board of directors and representative council meetings," said Tim Kinney, president-elect of Associated Pomona Teachers. "Also, our area reps meet regularly with building reps and they have to carry the word."

"There has to be an understanding at the schools that this is important. We have to do good internal education.

How do our members even know? It's about becoming more relational with them. We need to have conversations instead of just sending information down the line," suggested Austin's Louis Malfaro.

"Education and history are important, but we also have to repeat again and again *why* the alliance makes sense and what the shared interests and issues are," said Lisa Clauson, lead organizer with Boston ACORN.

"You need to build relationships in every school," proposed Herb Katz of the UFT. "If a rally is coming it's

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## WHAT'S THE GLUE?

Tom Maher's chicken and egg dichotomy – trust and relationships v. issues and goals – was heard throughout the conference. On the surface, it reflected the different community organizing models represented in Chicago. But the conversation went deeper into thinking about school culture and the requirements for engagement and change.

IAF members repeated what some called their mantra, "power before program." They believe groups have to create a base – relationships – before they take on issues. L.A. Metro's Salvador Valdez argued, "If you don't build the relationship, activity will subside after you win a specific issue. We saw that happen when we worked to get rid of a hazardous oil tank on school grounds."

On the other hand some participants advocated building trust and relationships *through* campaigns. "When we work on issues, we build relationships," said Liz Wolff, ACORN's research director. And CC9's Angelica Otero recalled how ACORN and the UFT [United Federation of Teachers] built trust during the Edison campaign in New York City (see page 12).

"Build relationships and you eventually get to trust," said Herb Katz, UFT staff representative for District 9 in New York City. "Working together in meetings is not necessarily trust. What happens when you get into a school together? What happens if things start to fall apart? What do you do the first time a teacher and a parent fight?"

Common ground included agreement on the critical importance of *relationships* and a desire to make them last and grow rather than remain temporary and opportunistic.

Based on what we heard in Chicago, partnerships heading in the right direction are probably:

- rooted in negotiation and openness and engaged in deep communication;
- mutually respectful of each other's work and organizational culture;
- talking about big issues, each group's assumptions, and long-term goals;
- developing a common agenda – not trying to push pre-existing programs;
- aware that these are *public* relationships, not private ones;
- not stuck in the details of phone calls, meetings and rallies and, conversely, not missing opportunities for action while developing relationships.

If this level of communication and trust – relationship – has been built, it should not only be able to weather the storm of occasional disagreements, but have the power to negotiate and win substantive improvements for our students.

## Relationships

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a straightforward task for a union rep to get people to come out. But after the rally the rep still faces ten failing schools; to counteract that you must build relationships in those buildings.”

“We’re trying to do that by having parent-teacher groups that plan family-staff activities at school – small dinners and that kind of thing,” said CC9’s Angelica Otero.

Juaquin Gloria, an assistant elementary school principal and leader in Austin Interfaith said, “As an administrator, I develop a relationship with each teacher in my building. I trust people. I don’t send memos.”

### Who represents parents?

One issue participants said they’d like to explore further is whether, when and

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*“As an administrator, I develop a relationship with each teacher in my building. I trust people. I don’t send memos.”*

—Juaquin Gloria, assistant elementary school principal and leader in Austin Interfaith

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### THINK AHEAD ABOUT THE IMPLICATIONS.

In October 2002, Chicago ACORN demanded that parents be notified, as required by No Child Left Behind (the federal education law), if their children were being taught by teachers who were “not highly qualified.” By February notices still had not gone out, and ACORN complained again. At that point, the group’s leaders learned that the Chicago Teachers Union had requested more time for teachers to insure the reports were accurate.

ACORN decided to support a new timeline in order to advance its relationship with the union. When the data was released ACORN leaders might have received substantial media coverage by attacking CTU or the district. Instead, they put a positive spin on it realizing that in the long run its developing relationship with the teachers union was more important.

how to work with PTAs, PTSOs, “official” parent groups, and school decision-making teams that include parents. A central question is whom do they represent and who controls them?

“Unions in New York *can’t* bypass the official parent groups or school leadership teams,” argued Amina Rachman, assistant to the president for parent and community outreach at the United Federation of Teachers. In some places, including New York, the administration or board of education has designated certain groups as the “official” representatives of parents. Such a designation makes them hard to ignore.

When such groups were first recognized it was often perceived as progress by and for parent activists. The powers-that-be were taking notice and acknowledging parents’ right to seats at the table. Over time, though, many of these groups have become creatures of their creators – their agendas and roles set by administrators or board members.

### HELP MEMBERS THINK MORE DEEPLY.

When Austin Interfaith first convinced some principals that teachers should do neighborhood walks and house meetings, Education Austin heard about it from their members. According to President Louis Malfaro, “Teachers would call the union and say, ‘My school is making me work on a Saturday to visit households. Do I have to?’ and at first we said, ‘No.’

“But once we took time to understand what Austin Interfaith was doing, we got on board. Now we say to folks, ‘No, you don’t have to do it. But have you thought about the value of meeting the families of kids you’re teaching? When you want support from the community you’ll know them.’ We’re bringing the union beyond ‘If the policy doesn’t require it, you don’t have to do it,’ to realizing the importance of engaging with parents and the community.”

In other cases, “official” parent groups are controlled by an elite within the school – parents with the most money, best connections, “smartest” kids, and so on. In fact many of the community-based organizations that have taken up education issues have done so because the official groups have not lived up to their potential.

Still, suggested ACORN’s Steve Kest, “The official parent groups are a potential resource we should figure out how to use.” Lori Bezahler, a program officer with the Edward Hazen Foundation, cautioned, however, that “When the membership is eight people I’m not sure they’re legitimate. On the other hand, these groups also have members who are parents of kids in school.” ●

# RESOURCES

Contact information for national organizations that participated in the Partnerships for Change gathering appears on page 11.

## ORGANIZING

### **New York University Institute for Education and Social Policy:**

726 Broadway, 5th floor, NY, NY 10003, [www.nyu.edu/iesp](http://www.nyu.edu/iesp), 212-998-5880.

Recent publications, available online, include:

- *From Governance to Accountability: Building relationships that make schools work* (25 pp.) Kavitha Mediratta and Norm Fruchter, Jan. 2003, Drum Major Institute for Public Policy
- *Organizing for School Reform: How Communities Are Finding Their Voices and Reclaiming Their Public Schools* (52 pp.) Kavitha Mediratta, Norm Fruchter and Ann C. Lewis, 2002, Steinhardt School of Education

*Reasons for Hope, Voices for Change: Annenberg Institute on Public Engagement for Public Education*, 1998, Annenberg Institute for School Reform, Brown University, Box 1985, Providence, RI 02912, 401-863-1290, [www.annenberginstitute.org/resources/community.html](http://www.annenberginstitute.org/resources/community.html).

*Strong Neighborhoods, Strong Schools: The Indicators Project on Education Organizing* (60 pp.) 2002, Eva Gold, Elaine Simon, and Chris Brown, Research for Action and Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform, 407 S. Dearborn, #1500, Chicago, IL 60605, 312-322-4880, [www.crosscity.org](http://www.crosscity.org).

*Unlocking The Schoolhouse Door: The Community Struggle For A Say In Our Children's Education* (47 pp.) 2002, National Center for Schools & Communities, Fordham University, 33 W. 60th St., 8th Floor, New York, NY 10023, 212-636-6699, [www.NCSCatFordham.org](http://www.NCSCatFordham.org).

## NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND/ESEA

*The Basics of "No Child Left Behind"* (25 pp.) *Public Voices for Public Schools*, Winter/Spring 2003, Vol. 10/Issue 2, Pittsburgh Council on Public Education, 2934 Smallman St., 2nd Floor, Pittsburgh, PA 15201, [www.ed4allkids.org/PVPS\\_site/NCLB\\_basics.html](http://www.ed4allkids.org/PVPS_site/NCLB_basics.html). Although this series of articles makes local references, it will be useful to activists elsewhere.

*NCLB: Conspiracy, Compliance, or Creativity* (12 pp.) Hayes Mizell, *The Hayes Mizell Reader*, [www.middleweb.com/HMnclb.html](http://www.middleweb.com/HMnclb.html).

*No Child Left Behind?* (16 pages), May 2003, National Education Association's *NEA Today*, Washington, DC, [www.nea.org/neatoday/0305/cover.html](http://www.nea.org/neatoday/0305/cover.html)

### **ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now)**

739 8th Street SE, Washington, DC 20003. [www.acorn.org](http://www.acorn.org)

ACORN has published two reports on NCLB implementation:

- *Parents Left Behind* (28 pp.), A study of state, federal and school district implementation of No Child Left Behind. *Parents Left Behind* focuses on whether school districts and states are complying with the choice, supplemental services, and reporting provisions of NCLB. January, 2003
- *Leaving Teachers Behind* (14 pp.), *Leaving Teachers Behind* looks at state and federal implementation of the Title II, "highly qualified," provisions of NCLB. May, 2003.

### **Center for Community Change**

1000 Wisconsin Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20007.

[www.communitychange.org/education](http://www.communitychange.org/education)

The Center has published four "briefing papers" on NCLB:

- *School Improvement*. Students ARE being left behind – how do we improve struggling schools?
- *Annual School Report Cards*. Getting information to parents.
- *Teacher Quality*. The promise of qualified teachers in all classrooms
- *Title III: English Language Acquisition*. An end to bilingual education, new money to support it, or both?

## TEACHER QUALITY

*Achieving More. Quality Teaching, School Leadership, Student Success* (48 pp.), Governor's Commission on Teaching Success, 25 S. Front St., Columbus, OH 43215, 614-387-2246, [www.teaching-success.org](http://www.teaching-success.org). February 2003.

### **Minneapolis Federation of Teachers**

67 Ace Avenue NE, Minneapolis, MN 55413, 612-529-9621, [www.mft59.org/mpsta/index.htm](http://www.mft59.org/mpsta/index.htm). The MFT website includes information about the union's professional pay plan.

### **National Board for Professional Teaching Standards**

[www.nbpts.org](http://www.nbpts.org). The National Board provides advanced certification for teachers. Their website describes the requirements for the program.

### **National Commission on Teaching and America's Future**

2010 Massachusetts Ave. NW, #210, Washington, DC 20036-1012, 202-416-6181, [www.nctaf.org](http://www.nctaf.org). Several excellent publications on teacher support and development models are available online and for purchase. These include:

- *Developing Careers, Building a Profession: The Rochester Career in Teaching Plan* (74 pp.) by Julia Koppich, Carla Asher and Charles Kerchner. 2002, \$15.25
- *New Haven Unified School District: A Teacher Quality System for Excellence and Equity* (120 pp.) Jon Snyder, 2002, \$20.25.
- *No Dream Denied: A Pledge to America's Children*, Jan. 2003. Summary (37 pp.), \$15.25; full report (150 pp.), \$30.25.

**Research for Better Teaching**, 56 Bellows Hill Rd., Carlisle, MA 01741, [www.rbteach.com](http://www.rbteach.com), 508-369-8191. RBT holds programs and publishes materials aimed at teachers and administrators.

## RESOURCES *continued from page 19*

### STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

**Education Policy Studies Laboratory**, College of Ed., Box 872411, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ 85287, [eps@asu.edu](mailto:eps@asu.edu), 480-965-1886, <http://edpolicylab.org>. EPSL conducts and coordinates original research to create materials of practical use to activists, educators, and other lay people. Alex Molnar, the director, was a presenter at Partnerships for Change. Among EPSL's specialized web sites are:

- **Education Policy Reports Project** produces occasional papers summarizing research on major issues with special emphasis on how the poor and students of color are affected by policy and practices, <http://edpolicyreports.org>.
- **Education Policy Research Unit** conducts original research, provides independent analyses of research and policy documents, and facilitates innovation, <http://educationanalysis.org>. A typical publication is *School Reform Proposals: The Research Evidence* featuring short critiques of available research and then makes recommendations based on the research for 13 issues such as small schools, class size, and grouping.
- **Language Policy Research Unit** promotes research and policy analysis on the challenges and opportunities posed by global multilingualism, <http://language-policy.org>.

**Research for Democracy** has developed *High School Issue Papers* a set of new publications designed to help parents, young people, teachers and community leaders in their efforts to transform high school education. The papers profile success stories, present key national statistics, summarize education research and offer strategy ideas and resources for further research. The issue papers cover *Curriculum, Instruction, Standards, Assessment and Accountability, Professional Development and Teacher Quality, Whole School Change Models, Small Schools, School Climate, Discipline and Safety* and *Technology and School Libraries*. The papers were researched and written by Research for Democracy, a joint project of the Eastern Pennsylvania Organizing Project (a member of the PICO Network) and the Temple University Center for Public Policy, with collaboration from Youth United for Change in Philadelphia. The issue papers are available at [http://www.temple.edu/cpp/hs\\_issue\\_papers.htm](http://www.temple.edu/cpp/hs_issue_papers.htm).

### GENERAL SOURCES OF GOOD INFORMATION

EDUCATION COMMISSION OF THE STATES [www.ecs.org](http://www.ecs.org)

EDUCATION TRUST [www.edtrust.org](http://www.edtrust.org)

EDUCATION WEEK [www.edweek.com](http://www.edweek.com)

NATIONAL CENTER FOR FAIR AND OPEN TESTING (FAIRTEST)  
[www.fairtest.org](http://www.fairtest.org)



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Washington, DC 20007

[www.communitychange.org](http://www.communitychange.org)

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