FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND EDUCATION

A Research Scan and Recommendations

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Cover: Keysha Gomez (right) and Faye Cosby.
This picture was taken last August when the
Pittsburgh Langley K–8 Parent Nation group
conducted a walkability survey to determine
how dangerous the routes children walk to
school might be. Photo by Kirk Holbrook.

DEAR COLLEAGUES:

FAMILIES ARE CHILDREN'S FIRST TEACHERS. However, it is too often the case that when children enter into the K–12 school system, the role of family members is overlooked or underutilized. Increasingly, communities across the country recognize that, while a high-quality education is perhaps the most crucial component in setting up children for success in life, schools cannot do it alone. In these communities, families are organizing to demand and to support schools that work for their children.

In 2010, the Education Program at The Heinz Endowments engaged in a strategic planning process to sharpen its focus on equity in education for two key populations: African American students and students living in poverty. This was driven by the belief that, by virtue of being born a person of color and/or into poverty in this country and in our region, students and their families experience a variety of social injustices that negatively affect their quality of life. Chief among them is the lack of access to a high-quality educational environment and the necessary educational supports that lead to academic and social success. From this premise, the Education Program settled on a three-pronged strategy to (1) advance effective and responsive teaching; (2) eliminate policies and practices that minimize opportunity; and (3) engage youth, parents and the broader community in organizing for change.

In 2012, program staff asked the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University to conduct a research scan of community-based, education-related family engagement, leadership and organizing work in Pittsburgh. The goal was to inform the Endowments' knowledge of the current landscape to ensure any future grant making was responsive to the communities' needs and expanded current work driven by parents. The scan was guided by Annenberg's *Three Rs Framework*, which states that in order for a community-based group to have the capacity to support and sustain effective parent engagement and organizing, it must possess "Three Rs": roots, relationships and resources. Organizations must have strong *roots* in a community or neighborhood, solid and familiar *relationships* with parents and residents, and the financial and human *resources* necessary to build and leverage capacity.

The scan, which included interviews and focus groups with directors and staff of community-based organizations, parents and Pittsburgh Public Schools representatives, found that while there are organizations working in this space, few solidly possessed all of the Three Rs necessary to sustain organizing work in the community for the long term.

To put into practice what we have learned from this report, the Endowments will support a two-year capacity-building opportunity for community-based organizations interested in engaging and organizing parents and families around core equity issues in their schools and throughout the district. This will include a yearlong process for 10 organizations, their staff and parent leaders to participate in a series of learning opportunities and capacity-building activities facilitated by the Annenberg Institute. Our effort will focus on organizations that are mobilizing, engaging, and working with families from low-income communities or families of color whose voices are far too often marginalized in the public discourse.

We are excited to share this report with you and invite you to stay engaged with this exciting work. It is our hope that this initiative connects with Pittsburgh's growing youth organizing movement, creating even more spaces for authentic community voices in public education and leading to more equitable, high-quality learning opportunities for all.

Onward,

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INTRODUCTION

n September 2012, The Heinz Endowments asked the Annenberg Institute for School Reform (AISR) at Brown University to conduct a research scan of family engagement[1], leadership, and organizing work related to education happening in Pittsburgh, as a part of the Endowments' larger work in supporting families as important stakeholders in their children's education. Annenberg's goal was to produce a well-researched scan and analysis of the family engagement and organizing for school reform landscape in Pittsburgh and to provide recommendations for viable funding strategies to support family engagement and organizing capacity building. Research questions for the scan included:

1. Given the overall context of school reform efforts in Pittsburgh, what are the opportunities and challenges for influence from community-based parent leadership and organizing?

2. What community-based organizations with a current or potential focus on equitable education reform exist in Pittsburgh?

3. What is the capacity of each organization to engage in parent / family leadership and organizing work to influence school reform?

All of the work completed for this report was done from September 2012 through April 2013. More specifically, data was collected from November 2012 through February 2013. Thus, new developments and changes related to what is reported here that have occurred since the spring of 2013 are not reflected in our data, findings, analysis, or recommendations.

What follows is an overview of the methodology and conceptual framework driving the design and analysis of our scan research, a detailed summary of what we learned about the landscape for family engagement and leadership in Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS), a scan of current community-based organizations' (CBOs) work and capacity for supporting family engagement and leadership, and recommendations of potential strategies for cultivating family engagement and education organizing in Pittsburgh.

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[1] The term "family engagement" is generally considered to be more inclusive than "parent engagement" as it encompasses family structures that extend caretaker and childrearing roles beyond "parents" (including partners, extended family, guardians, close friends, and more). In our report, we will use the terms "family" and "parent" interchangeably when referring to "engagement," "leadership," "organizing," and the like.

METHODOLOGY

AISR has been developing and refining its methodology for conducting community-based scans to assess the potential and capacity for growing parent engagement and organizing for school reform. From nationwide scans mapping existing education organizing groups[2] to more localized scans of community organizations working in the field of education more generally,[3] AISR's research scan work has spanned broad scope and functionality. While each scan employs a basic set of qualitative data collection and analysis practices, each also considers specific purposive and contextual factors that shape our approach. For instance, this scan of Pittsburgh was charged with both outlining the context within which family engagement, leadership, and organizing occurs, as well as an assessment of current efforts. This dual charge caused us to pay close attention to perceptions of and experiences with PPS-based family engagement practices *and* take stock of the related work happening outside of schools through CBOs. Generally, our data collection focused most heavily on individual and focus group interviews with CBO directors and staff, parents, and PPS district and school-based staff (see Figure 1). Document reviews of organizational websites and other organizational literature helped further illuminate the work and capacity of CBOs included in the scan. Please see Appendix B (page 31) for a more detailed account of the scan methodology.

FIGURE 1. **SUMMARY OF INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED FOR PITTSBURGH SCAN**

PARTICIPANTS	CBO DIRECTORS AND STAFF	PARENTS	DISTRICT CONSULTANT	FACE COORDINATORS AND DISTRICT STAFF
Phone interview participants	27	6	1	6
Focus group participants	14	9	N/A	4
Total participants	**37***	**13***	**1**	**10**

*Four CBO directors/staff and two parents participated in both phone interviews and focus groups.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Our conceptual framework was designed to help determine which organizations to include in the scan, and how to analyze and assess an organization's potential for asserting parents as leaders in school reform efforts.

Assumptions

Over the last several years, more and more evidence has emerged that effective parent involvement can positively impact school culture, working conditions, and student achievement.[4] Recent research, as well as our own experience, has shown that effective community organizing has

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[2] See Mediratta, K. & Fruchter, N. (2001). *Mapping the Field of Organizing for School Improvement: A Report on Education Organizing in Baltimore, Chicago, Los Angeles, the Mississippi Delta, New York City, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Washington D.C.* New York: NYU Institute for Education and Social Policy.

[3] See AISR's *Community Organizing as an Education Reform Strategy Series*, which included a literature review (Renee & McAlister, 2011) and scan of New England community-based organizations engaged in the field of education (Renee, McAlister, & Potochnik, 2011).

[4] See *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family and Community Connections on Student Achievement* (Henderson & Mapp, 2002), which continues to be the most comprehensive review of research on the positive impacts of family engagement.

resulted in better student outcomes, helps build school-community relationships, parent involvement, and trust, and can stimulate important changes in educational policy, practices, and resource distribution.[5] Thus, we approach this work from the premise that effective parent engagement and education organizing will have positive impacts in the ways described above. It makes sense, then, that we included in this scan only organizations who at least share the recognition of parent engagement as a key component of student educational success. Some organizations, however, did express that this was not their top priority and wondered if it was worth the investment given their limited resources or if it would get traction in the city. We explore these questions further in the findings section.

An additional assumption about the organizations included in our scan is that they have a basic level of commitment to working on equity-focused education policies that promote achievement and success for low-income students and/or students of color. AISR, like the Endowments, has a clear and consistent focus on issues of equity and holds as a core belief that "equity matters."[6]

Approach to the work

We understood that the Endowments was interested in understanding community capacity for asserting parent leadership in school reform and that organizations may approach this work from various angles, such as direct service, advocacy, or organizing. In broadly assessing organizational potential for taking on parent engagement and leadership work, it is useful to consider this array of approaches as each type will influence what an organization is in the position to do. We used the following definitions to determine how to characterize each organization's work.

- **Service:** These are agencies or organizations that provide direct services free or at a cost. These could include afterschool care, medical care, legal assistance, social services, counseling, childcare, or housing assistance. Some service providers are independent nonprofits, and some are affiliated with government programs or agencies.

- **Advocacy:** These groups work on issues or sets of issues that impact a class of people. While they often work on behalf of low-income and underserved constituencies, the work of advocacy groups is carried out by professional staff. Most work is focused on putting pressure on elite places of power—public elections, elected officials/civic leaders, agency rule making, or school district decision-makers. Activities include research, building public awareness, advancing policy positions, and lobbying and advising elected officials and other decision-makers.

- **Community Organizing:** These groups have a membership and leadership drawn from a constituency that represents the community. Decisions are made by members/leaders, not by paid staff. Grassroots organizing groups provide members with political education and train them in leadership and organizing skills, including public speaking, negotiation with public officials, and member recruitment. Grassroots organizing groups use organizing tactics, including collective action, and put pressure on decision-makers and public systems where necessary. Community organizing is focused on systemic solutions and demands for equity.

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[5] For the most recent and wide-ranging research analyzing the accomplishments of education organizing efforts, see *Match On Dry Grass* (Warren, Mapp, & The Community Organizing and School Reform Project, 2011) and *Community Organizing for Stronger Schools* (Mediratta, Shah, & McAlister, 2009).

[6] For more information about AISR's four core principles — results matter, equity matters, communities matter, and learning matters — see http://annenberginstitute.org/mission-and-core-principles. All of AISR's work strives to reflect these principles.

Capacity

On top of the approach that an organization has toward its work, its capacity to successfully execute work in the area of family engagement and leadership is of crucial importance. For the purposes of a scan, we assess an organization's potential capacity for family engagement and leadership work on a scale of high to low by considering three elements that have been identified through our extensive experience in the field. Our work in multiple cities, with dozens of organizations and hundreds of parents, organizers, educators, and other community leaders, has made it evident that for organizations to have the capacity to support and sustain effective parent engagement and organizing, they must possess the "Three Rs": roots, relationships, and resources.[7]

Organizations with *roots* in a particular neighborhood or community have history in and with that neighborhood or community and demonstrate a sustained commitment to serve and develop it. Organizations with deep roots identify and are identified with the neighborhoods or communities where they exist. *Relationships* are evident in an organization's connections with parents and residents in the neighborhood or community where it works. Strong relationships between an organization and the parents and residents often manifest in the degree to which that organization is democratically controlled by or directly accountable to its parent / resident constituencies. Partnerships, collaborative efforts with others, and connections with elected officials or other influential actors are also indicators of organizations with high-capacity relationships. Finally, organizational *resources* are key to leveraging the capacity necessary to support and sustain effective engagement and organizing work. Important resources include trained staff, administrative infrastructure, high-quality and developed programs, empowered leaders and constituents, and stable financial support.

Mapping organizations

We use our conceptual framework to place organizations somewhere within the nine-cell matrix shown below (Figure 2). It is our experience that the most effective parent engagement and leadership work occurs the more "up and to the right" it falls inside of this matrix.

FIGURE 2. **SERVICE–ADVOCACY–ORGANIZING AND CAPACITY MATRIX**

	Service	Advocacy	Organizing
High Capacity			
Medium Capacity			
Low Capacity			

THE LANDSCAPE:
FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP IN PITTSBURGH PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Largely due to the research that demonstrates the important benefits of effective family engagement and leadership for improving schools, districts and schools across the country have placed more and new emphasis on parent involvement and engagement and family–school partnerships. This trend is evident in Pittsburgh; therefore, any community-based efforts to increase the engagement, leadership, and power of parents will benefit from considering how to interface with, support, or challenge current district and school practices. The central importance of context is one reason we spend a significant amount of time reporting our findings and analysis related to PPS family engagement and leadership work. Parent and family engagement is an area of priority in the PPS strategic plan, and there are several structures and efforts in place at both the district and the school levels to increase opportunities for engagement and, in some cases, include parent voice in decision-making. However, there are few efforts to increase parent engagement and leadership in school reform and school improvement originating in the community in Pittsburgh. Yet, in our assessment, a key factor influencing this lack of widespread parent engagement and leadership work is the way in which PPS efforts in these areas are perceived and understood by parents and CBO leaders. What follows is not a comprehensive review or summary of PPS family engagement efforts, but rather a description of the landscape for this work in schools from the perspectives of the CBO leaders, highly engaged parents, and district/school staff we interviewed, including feedback that we heard from participants regarding the functionality and efficacy of these efforts.

School-based structures

There are three school-based structures that PPS has developed to address family engagement. These structures cover roles and responsibilities, such as communication, event planning, and leadership, in each PPS school. Here, we describe each structure and interviewees' perceptions of these structures.

Family and Community Engagement (FACE) Coordinators: In the 2012–2103 school year, PPS implemented this new position focused on school-level family engagement. Previously, the district had Parent Engagement Specialists—full-time positions that existed primarily at Accelerated Learning Academies to facilitate a high level of community involvement. In contrast, FACE Coordinators are in place at all schools. They are teachers (or school staff such as counselors and social workers) who spend 15 hours a month working with principals to improve school-level parent engagement structures. These 15 hours are in addition to their full-time teaching load or scope of work, and FACE Coordinators receive a stipend for the extra time dedicated to this role. Typically, there is one FACE Coordinator per school, though we did hear at least one example of two individuals who split the fifteen-hour position between them.

The role of FACE Coordinators varies, depending on the needs of individual schools and the strength of existing parent engagement structures. FACE Coordinators that we talked to focused on a range of duties, including establishing relationships with parents and making them comfortable in the school building; conducting needs assessments around family engagement in their schools; providing training to teachers and parents; recruiting members for, serving as a liaison to, or in some cases facilitating Parent School Community Council (PSCC) or Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) meetings; coordinating parent volunteers; conducting outreach to community organizations; and coordinating school communications structures including

newsletters and school websites, often to include more substantive resources on supporting academic achievement as well as school announcements. Typically, the school principal has a significant role in defining what a FACE Coordinator will do at a particular school.

Seven parents, six district staff / FACE Coordinators, and one CBO staff member told us that there has been confusion on the part of parents, community members, teachers, principals, and, in some cases, FACE Coordinators themselves about the parameters of this role. The strength and efficacy of individual FACE Coordinators seems to depend largely on the overall school environment and the orientation of the principal, as well as the level of initiative or experience that the FACE Coordinators themselves have with parent engagement efforts. Some of the FACE Coordinators whom we spoke with were very passionate about the position and had a significant role in developing innovative solutions to issues like engaging parents from communities that were new to a school (due to school closings and district restructuring). Others expressed a need for more direction or support to be effective in their role.

One common challenge we heard from FACE Coordinators themselves was the limited amount of time that they have to dedicate to the role. One said:

> [This] should be someone's full-time job … It is difficult to try to do it on a part-time, a quarter of time … If we are going to take parent engagement seriously, we need to really show that and not just have somebody who already has a full-time job trying to fit it into their already major responsibilities.

At the time of our interviews (December 2012–January 2013), the district was beginning to put more consistent support structures in place for FACE Coordinators, including training; tools such as needs assessments to help them determine how they can be most effective in their buildings; the formation of a learning community to share best practices; and the provision of peer-to-peer support, networking, and connections between FACE Coordinators and the district's Excellence for All Steering Committee. We heard a call from at least five parents to evaluate the effectiveness of the FACE Coordinators overall, and FACE Coordinators themselves suggested that looking at what has and hasn't worked well in this pilot year would likely lead to necessary refinement of the role.

Parent School Community Councils (PSCC): PSCCs are designed to bring together parents and families, communities, school staff, and sometimes students to discuss significant school-level issues and provide advice to school leadership in areas such as student achievement, increasing parent and community support for the educational program, dress codes, the use of Title I funding, and development and revision of School Improvement Plans. It is expected that all schools have a PSCC and that PSCCs meet monthly. Unlike PTAs and PTOs, which typically involve more traditional forms of family engagement, such as recruiting volunteers or fundraising, PSCCs are designed to give parents and community members a role in policy and decision-making—a role that, as defined, appealed to the highly engaged parents that we interviewed. One participant discussed the distinctions between PTA/PTOs and PSCCs:

> Not to diminish [PTA activity] … but what's happening at PSCCs should be more policy, decision-making, or information that [parents] need to know. Everything that comes in front of a PSCC might not necessarily be for decision making, but it is to make sure that the parents are informed about what is happening and why … Some things are informational, some things are for advice, some things are partnerships, some are decision-making.

Three CBO staff members, five parents, and five district staff / FACE Coordinators noted that there are significant differences in how PSCCs operate from school to school, showing consensus on this issue across stakeholder groups. A few participants noted that PSCCs that engage parents actively around policy decisions are in the minority, and that even functional PSCCs may fall short of the goal of involving parents in school-based decision-making. One community partner said:

> *Every school does have a PSCC. They meet once a month; typically, the principals give them some tidbit of knowledge, and once a year they have the School Improvement Plan that the principal creates and that the group ratifies. I don't know how much input they have in creating it, but they do ratify it.*

A number of factors contribute to those differences across schools, including principal openness and comfort with parents engaging substantively in policy decisions (particularly when the principal is the convener of the PSCC), meeting times (often during the work day) that make it difficult for parents to participate, and a lack of diversity in PSCC membership. One parent said, "The problem with the PSCC at [my school] — there's one black parent. So their answer to cultural diversity is Fiesta Day or a picture of Martin Luther King Jr. in the hallway."

We did hear examples (from two parents and one FACE Coordinator) of PSCCs that involve parents in more of a decision-making role and that have implemented positive practices, including coupling PSCC meetings with school events to increase participation, providing food and childcare, enabling parents to participate in meetings remotely via webinar, and communicating information and outcomes from PSCC meetings to parents throughout the school community. A few participants from both inside and outside of the district stated that better monitoring is needed to bring more consistency to PSCCs across schools. As a first step, the district is in the process of revising the PSCC manual, including the addition of current best practices.

Parent Teacher Organizations: PTOs in PPS typically engage in more traditional parent engagement activities such as fundraising, event planning, and volunteer recruitment. Though PTOs were discussed less by participants, in part due to our focus on structures that engage parents as decision-makers, a few did note that particular PTOs were able to engage a broader and more diverse base of parents, build relationships among parents, or build significant participation. In some schools, the PSCC and PTO operate jointly as one group.

District structures

There are a handful of district-based structures designed to support family engagement and leadership in PPS. Below we discuss a district-level steering committee, district policies and practices, and communication efforts aimed at enhancing family engagement and leadership, along with perceptions of each area of work.

Excellence for All Parent Steering Committee (EFA): The EFA is a district-level committee that includes up to four parent or family representatives from each school (typically PSCC members). The purpose of the committee is to "[work] directly with the superintendent as a sounding board for ideas, suggestions, issues, concerns, new initiatives, and discussions."[8] Members are also expected to serve as ambassadors in bringing district-level information to their schools and neighborhoods, and to communicate parent concerns back to the district. The committee

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[8] As described on the PPS district website (Last retrieved August 2014: www.pghboe.net/Page/627).

meets monthly and has bi-monthly meetings with the superintendent. Although one district staff member / FACE Coordinator noted, "Really allowing parents from different schools to come together … and have access to the superintendent is something that we definitely should be proud of," we heard from five highly engaged parents—some of whom were EFA members—that they felt the group functioned more as a communications vehicle for the district, with relatively little opportunity for members to have input on policy. Staff from one CBO and one district staff member / FACE Coordinator agreed with their assessment. One parent told us, "EFA … is not really meeting its assumed intention or mandate, what we assumed it was for. They call it EFA Parent Steering Committee. We're not steering anything, we're just passengers." Another said:

> We weigh in on some things that are already done deals—it further angers people. Like, are you really asking me my opinion? Parents have stood up and said, "Are you asking me because you're really going to take into consideration what I'm going to share, or are you asking me because you can put on a checklist that you asked parents?"

Two parents did mention opportunities for EFA members to have a more substantive role in efforts such as the revision of the parent survey and parent involvement policy. One parent noted an additional benefit: "On the upside, we're connecting with other parents who are interested in parents having a larger role than before. I'm seeing that grassroots thing start to build."

Policies and Practices: One effort that seems to have gained some recent traction is the district's parent survey, which was revised this past year by EFA members. Previously, the survey focused on district-level questions, but the revision included school-level questions, including parents' perceptions of their child's connections with teachers. Overall, the number of surveys returned increased, and there is an effort this year to improve the response rate further. At the district level, a high number of survey responses indicated that parents wanted more information about bullying, and so the district has worked to develop an anti-bullying toolkit. At the school level, survey data ideally should inform school-level plans, with issues raised being discussed and addressed at least in part through the PSCC.

The district also has in place a parent involvement policy, in compliance with federal law, that clarifies the district's beliefs and definition of parent involvement, as well as the roles that various constituents (school, district, and parent/family) have in promoting it. That policy is in the process of being revised with the help of a team of parents, including EFA members, and will then be presented for broader feedback from families and community members.

One promising effort that has emerged from the district is a Family Leadership Conference, which was in early stages of planning at the time of our interviews. Led by the district's Office of Equity, this one-day conference took place in August 2014. The focus was "The Power of Advocacy: Families and Communities Working Together." In total, 200 parents attended, representing each of the district's schools and reflecting the demographic diversity of the district overall. Workshops were conducted by a mix of national and local experts, including many Pittsburgh community-based organizations. The conference also featured a parent panel and whole-group community conversation. Information from these sessions will be used to inform the work of the FACE Coordinators. Pittsburgh Public Schools is working to build on the event's success and is considering making the Family Leadership Conference a regular occurrence.

Communications: We heard about various communication structures in place at the district and school levels. Interactive efforts include the district's parent hotline, which is described as the "central point of contact for parents, families, and community members."[9] Though designed to increase access to information, the three parents who mentioned the parent hotline described it as frustrating or ineffective. School websites, another vehicle for broad communication, were described by three parents as frequently out of date, while two FACE Coordinators expressed frustration that they could not easily make real-time changes on their own schools' sites, instead having to go through the district technology office.

We also heard frustration from six parents and eight CBO staff around the district's communication of important policies, such as the magnet school admission and applications process, coupled with a sense that, as a parent, you had to be especially savvy or "in the know" to take advantage of particular opportunities. One CBO staff member who also has children in the district said, "Unless you're a parent who actively seeks those things out [magnet school application information], you're going to miss every deadline. I do this for a living and I almost have."

Two parents, two CBO staff, and two FACE Coordinators noted that the district is missing opportunities to communicate the positive family and community engagement practices that are in place and failing to promote those efforts that they have undertaken in response to parent feedback or that have been developed with the engagement of parents and families. When parents do not see the fruits of their labor, it can lead to increased skepticism and a perception that the district is not responsive to parent voice. One district staff member said:

> There's a belief and trust factor that the district has to overcome—many parents didn't believe [the district] would launch the [parent] survey or share the data with parents, or actually act on it. But this year they've done most of that…The EFA's projects came right out of the parent survey.

Barriers to parent and family engagement

Like many districts, PPS has pushed up against a number of barriers that can dissuade or prevent parents from engaging in structures and efforts such as those mentioned above, or from even participating in parent–teacher conferences or more casual school events. We asked our interviewees to identify these barriers to parent engagement, and lack of time was mentioned most consistently, by four CBO staff, four parents, and three FACE Coordinators. With busy lives, particularly for parents who are struggling and, as one participant said, "drinking life through a fire hose," finding time and energy to attend meetings after school can be difficult. Additionally, we heard that it is often difficult for parents to attend school-based meetings that are scheduled during school/work hours; even those parents who were already dropping off or picking up their children from school often could not take off time from work (or find child care) to attend. One CBO staff member noted that existing parent engagement structures may no longer fit with the reality of parents' lives, saying:

> There is a view of parent engagement that almost seems like it was set in a different time. The structure seems to be set up for two-parent families where only one parent is working…

The traditional parent engagement structures haven't caught up with the social and economic realities that we live in now.

Another example is the scheduling of parent-teacher conferences, which according to at least four FACE coordinators is set for one specific day per year district-wide.

Transportation was also seen as a barrier, and several participants noted that the closing of neighborhood schools has led to logistical challenges in that parents now may have to take several different buses to get to their child's school, which entails an additional investment of both time and money. The closing of neighborhood schools also was noted to have a negative impact on community ownership of a school and to reduce opportunities for parents who live in close proximity to network with one another, thus decreasing the potential for collective engagement.

Negative perceptions of PPS commitment to parent engagement and a general mistrust of the district were also mentioned as potential barriers. We will discuss these issues more fully below.

We heard about promising practices that both schools and CBOs are using to try to overcome those barriers that are rooted in issues of time and location. As mentioned above, at least one school is using a webinar format to allow additional parents to attend its PSCC meetings, and one CBO also uses webinars to increase involvement in its meetings. This same organization also creates YouTube videos from its webinars and trainings so that people can access them when it is convenient; the videos are also translated into Spanish. Many CBOs meet parents at spaces where parents already are, such as churches or barber shops, and staff from these organizations suggested that the district and schools shift some of their events from the schools to these other, more community-friendly venues. Finally, one CBO staff member suggested that schools think about providing satellite parent engagement nights to help mitigate expenses of both time and money for parents.

Parent engagement as a priority

Overall—from 12 CBO staff, 11 parents, and five district staff/FACE coordinators—there is a common perception from parents and CBOs that parent engagement is not a true priority for the district, even with the additional efforts that have been put in place in recent years and an acknowledgment that there has been some improvement in this area. One staff member of a CBO said:

The culture is such that [the district and school board] don't really want parent engagement… There's verbiage around it because it sounds like the right thing to do. The trend word. [But they] don't honor or appreciate it. And if we represent community agencies, the district doesn't honor them either.

Another said:

There has been a real shift in the last few years in a positive direction, and sometimes [the district] thinks they're done. They think they've done that, and that's a mismatch with community perceptions. They have a hotline that is frustrating to use; they think that's parent engagement. They do community meetings but they are limited in scale. It's usually by invite only, small groups of people. It frequently feels that our voices are not being heard.

At least five FACE Coordinators did see parent engagement as a district priority, though one framed it more as a need than a true priority and another said, "I don't think it's a priority. I think it's this year's thing."

One district staff member, though, noted that by including parent engagement in its primary goals and giving greater attention to efforts such as the parent survey, the district was "signaling something different" and attempting to demonstrate its beliefs around the importance of family engagement. One CBO staff member said:

> In general, the district needs to have something very visible to parents that they can believe in, that [proves] that they really do want parents involved. Without something very visible and obvious, I don't know that parents would believe enough to continue to participate.

Accountability and variability across schools

Central to the skepticism that PPS truly does prioritize parent and family engagement is a perceived lack of accountability for efforts and policies as they are implemented at the school level. Twelve different participants, including six parents, five CBO staff, and one FACE Coordinator, referred to a disconnect between what policies say and what is actually happening in schools. One parent noted, "We have a good [parent involvement] policy … The problem that we've had with it is that it doesn't have teeth." Another added:

> Last meeting, it was pretty comprehensive around that table [for the revision of the parent involvement policy] — we don't need more policies, we need the policies that are on the books to be actionable. Some principals are doing it, some aren't, and there's no accountability.

Though a number of parent and community participants spoke positively about both Dr. Linda S. Lane, superintendent of PPS, and Errika Fearbry Jones who at the time of our interviews was the district-level family and community engagement director (and whose official title was Coordinator, Empowering Effective Teachers), there was skepticism of the attitudes and beliefs around parent engagement in the district more deeply. One CBO staff member said:

> I'll start with a metaphor. The temperature [around parent engagement] would be something like me saying, I'm committed to being on this diet, and I'm still going to eat Big Macs for lunch every day. It's like, I know I'm overweight, I know I need to do it. I'll say it, but it doesn't make it happen. And that's what we have. The district … I think Dr. Lane's administration is probably the most open, approachable, accessible administration. She's actually a good model for being accessible with parent engagement, and she's a good listener. But there's a long way between Dr. Lane and a teacher in a classroom and a principal, and even her deputy superintendents that are supervising schools … They want to keep eating Big Macs for lunch.

The importance of principals in determining at what level parents are engaged and involved at the school level was echoed across 16 participants in our interviews, with the level to which the principal valued parent involvement and how much power he / she was willing to share seen as key factors. Respondents who reported strong home–school partnerships considered the principal to be key to setting the tone for family engagement and for building relationships. One parent said, "I see [name omitted] school and I think they are doing a really great job, and the principal has a plan to really engage family members." Another said, "At my daughter's school, if you walk into the building, as a parent, she's [the principal] grabbing you and asking about you and how you can help the school."

However, in other cases, principals acted as "gatekeepers" who effectively stifled or dismissed parent engagement efforts. One parent said parent engagement "could happen within the school building, but not if you have a principal who won't allow it to happen. They kill parent engagement, and won't share power." Principals have a key role in the functioning and effectiveness of the PSCCs, and we heard examples of PSCC meetings that were principal-driven (as opposed to co-constructed with parent or community membership) and either did not seem to be structured to truly elicit parent feedback and involvement, were not scheduled at a time designed to accommodate parents, or did not address issues that were pertinent to parents and their children. This variability, and a perceived lack of district action in addressing it or enforcing existing policies, caused frustration and exacerbated the wariness felt by parents and community members. One parent said:

> Even if we got every single parent from [school name omitted] to come to school, we still won't see anything happen because our principal won't engage them. We don't trust that our principals are going to hear us and listen to us and engage us. We don't trust that the district is going to require them to do it.

District capacity

The issue of school-level accountability to the existing policies, prioritization, and district values around parent engagement, and the district's struggle to enforce it, leads us to the question of capacity within PPS's central office to implement a robust, districtwide parent engagement effort with consistency. Budget cutbacks in recent years have affected not just schools, but also the central office, with positions shifting or being eliminated altogether and individuals taking on new responsibilities to fill existing gaps. For example, while we were writing this scan, we learned that Errika Fearbry Jones, who at the time of our interviews had been responsible for overseeing the district's parent and community engagement efforts, had transitioned to a new position as Special Assistant to the Superintendent. Ms. Fearbry Jones had been in the family and community engagement position for about a year and had transitioned there from a position in Teaching and Learning Environment. Her departure from the position can be considered an example of what one CBO staff member referred to as the "swinging door" in the district on leading parent engagement efforts.

Even if there is more consistency in this district-level position, monitoring the consistency and efficacy of efforts across schools is a challenging task for one individual. A district staff person cited "building capacity to maintain and continue the things that we [as a district] think are important, and to do them with excellence" as a need, with consistent implementation across schools singled out as a particular challenge:

> Some schools are real rock stars, some schools are struggling, and we have to figure out how we build capacity to help them. Whether we just take on three schools every year, and after a four-year period, have those fixed … but really supporting schools that are struggling with consistency, and monitoring.

Though we heard a perception that there is unevenness in attitudes and beliefs about the importance of parent engagement from staff throughout the district, it does not seem from our limited sampling that PPS is devoid of will in this area. However, for parent engagement to emerge as a high priority of the district with corresponding actions to prove to parents, families, and community members that it is more than "just verbiage," particularly in the context of the

many challenges and competing priorities that the district faces, the issue of capacity will have to be acknowledged and addressed. Pittsburgh's CBOs, which we describe in greater detail below, may offer promising opportunities to bolster capacity for family engagement in PPS through their various areas of skill and expertise as well as connections and relationships with particular constituencies of parents.

PITTSBURGH COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

Community-based organizations represent a source of promise and hope for many residents in low-income urban communities. The services they provide and the value they add to neighborhoods that face myriad challenges are crucial to the everyday vitality of communities in cities like Pittsburgh. These organizations can also bring about a sustained effort to improve the quality of services and resources in low-income communities if resources are invested in building and expanding the existing infrastructure and power base within those communities to produce, direct, and support their own agendas for change.[10] Overall, while we did not find deep or widespread community-based family engagement and leadership work happening to influence school reform in Pittsburgh, the following analysis will highlight the foundation that we believe exists should there be an opportunity to invest resources to build and expand on existing work.

CBO commitment to family engagement and leadership

Across the organizations we interviewed, we found a strong belief that parent engagement is a powerful strategy for strengthening schools and improving equity, as well as growing interest and energy around delving deeper into parent engagement work. They noted the need for stronger efforts and models for helping parents support their own children's learning, advocate on behalf of their children, and build collective power to hold schools and the district accountable for meeting the needs of communities that have been the least served by the existing system. They also almost invariably noted the need for more organized and collective efforts by parents and the community to influence decision-making in PPS. In fact, most respondents were pretty clear that, without being organized, there was little chance that they could influence what happens in schools. As one participant put it:

> It's difficult to really engage the school district and have an impact without really being organized and being a major player and stakeholder. Just as an individual parent who's dissatisfied, you can go down and state your opinion down at the school board meetings, but I'm not really sure how much traction that gets you unless you're really representing a connected group of people.

At the same time, parent engagement was not embraced by all organizations as a priority in their work to support students or improve schools. A small number of organizations noted that the students they served lack access to so many basic resources for learning—books, curricular resources, musical instruments, art supplies—that addressing those glaring inequities must take precedence over what they considered a more marginal strategy. Others noted that, while they understood the potential of parent engagement, they worried that investing in their own

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[10] Kubisch, A.C., Auspos, P., Brown, P., Chaskin, R., Fulbright-Anderson, K., & Hamilton, R. (2002). *Voices from the field II: Reflections on comprehensive community change.* Washington, D.C.: Aspen Institute.

capacity to mobilize families would be fruitless without simultaneous improvements in the schools' and district's capacity to productively engage with families. Two CBO directors noted that parents who are not currently engaged in education are struggling with so many challenges, including poverty, single parenthood, working multiple jobs, drug addiction, and alcoholism, that it was unreasonable to expect them to become engaged even if they had more opportunities for involvement. While there were only a handful of organizations that saw these challenges as preventive factors to their own commitment to working explicitly on parent engagement and leadership to transform schools, these additional challenges are important to recognize.

More often, hesitance to move toward advocacy or organizing models of parent engagement was rooted in organization leaders' assessment of power dynamics and the political space that exists for raising criticisms of the schools and district, rather than a lack of prioritization or interest. Many organizations we interviewed provide services in schools or in close partnership with schools and depend on positive relationships with school or district staff to continue their work. The interviewees who raised these concerns acknowledged the need for stronger parent voices, but doubted whether their organizations were in the best position to help amplify those voices, saying things like, "I'm not going to say a word—I want to stay under the radar," or "To be frank, we still have to maintain our relationships as well. It's important to speak truth to power, but at the same time we have to be tactful … to maintain those working relationships we have [with schools]." The underlying fears of compromising their organizations' core work by being seen as troublemakers or even just outspoken advocates prevent some of the more service-oriented CBOs from feeling safe enough to openly support or fight for a shift in power dynamics.

A lack of trust

On a related note, participants from all three of our respondent groups—nonprofit directors, parents, and district staff/FACE coordinators—consistently cited the lack of trust between schools and families. A few factors were identified as fueling this distrust, the most prominent of which were family members' own negative school experiences, a disbelief that schools will listen to parents' voices, and a lack of relationship between schools and families. "Many [PPS] families were students themselves within PPS and may not have had positive experiences," one parent pointed out, articulating a sentiment that was widely acknowledged across our interviews. Adults who had negative school experiences themselves often have a hard time engaging with their children's schools, haunted by what Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot calls "ghosts in the classroom."[11] In a city like Pittsburgh, where many families have lived for multiple generations, some of these ghosts exist for parents who walked the same hallways as their children and associate their negative school experiences specifically with PPS. During a focus group conversation about this challenge, one executive director commented:

> To some extent you have decades of parents who weren't engaged in school themselves or had bad experiences, so they feel disenfranchised from the school system and it's going to be double the work to get them engaged.

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[11] Lawrence-Lightfoot, S. (2003). *The essential conversation: What parents and teachers can learn from each other.* New York: Random House.

If families' trust in schools is damaged by negative history, it does not help when there also are perceptions that schools do not have a true interest in parents' voices or opinions. One nonprofit staff member recalled a meeting between an assistant superintendent, a principal, and parent leaders at which the assistant superintendent said, "I don't think we really want parents making decisions." While others may not have referred to such explicit language, the sense that district- and school-based educators do not really value families in leadership and decision-making roles, or that they merely solicit parent input to say that they did so without any intention of following up on such input, was widespread amongst our scan participants, as previously discussed.

Finally, the lack of trust between families and schools also stems from a lack of relationships between the two. Common assessments from parents interviewed included stories of parent interactions with rude or disinterested school staff and a general sense of intimidation when relating to the PPS district office. Nonprofit staff and parents alike reported that there is a widespread sense by the community that the interactions between schools and communities is one way, most often in the direction of schools "telling" families what to do as opposed to opening up a dialogue of how to work together. One nonprofit staff member, who is also a PPS parent, reflected, "I think there's an attitude [coming from schools], especially [toward] parents of color, that somehow we know what's better for your kid than you do. That you don't know what's best for your child." Participants agreed that families and communities have ample expertise and talents to share, which are unfortunately squandered through strained or nonexistent relationships.

Racial dynamics

An underlying subtext to all the challenges we have discussed thus far is the issue of race in Pittsburgh. The racial segregation of neighborhoods and the power and privilege of affluent white families within PPS were topics frequently mentioned. FACE coordinators all noted that it is a challenge to gain African American parent involvement. From the disproportionately high number of negative schooling experiences had by Black parents who attended PPS to the observation that "those that are sitting at the table are by and large white families, middle, and upper income," to the sense that school closures have occurred mostly in Black neighborhoods, the issue of race is at the center of family engagement, parent power, and education in Pittsburgh.

Participants generally thought that the "equity agenda" being pursued and pushed by Superintendent Lane was a positive development, but some raised concern that having an African American superintendent has resulted in some interesting perceptions in the community. A nonprofit directors' focus group discussed that many in the white community believe that "now with an African American female superintendent, we don't have to worry about race anymore," and others reported that in the white community some believe that Dr. Lane is "catering" to African Americans. Still others discussed that Black political leaders in Pittsburgh still operate within historical power structures and therefore find it difficult to work in the interests of Black communities. From our interviews, it is clear that for progress to be made in developing trusting relationships between schools and families and in building parent leadership and power, issues of race and racism will need to be openly addressed.

CBOs as "cultural brokers"

A consistent shining light cutting through the sometimes-murky context drawn out through our interviews was that CBOs were highlighted as having strong, trusting, and positive relationships with families. Further, these relationships were also discussed as a potential asset to leverage for building relationships between families and schools. Several other respondents shared the sentiment articulated by one nonprofit staff member:

> *I know there's a lot of anger and hostility toward the district. They are going to need people to help broker and build relationships, and community organizations are key. In a sense, there need to initially be translators, people who explain the district to families, and those people can explain families to the district — having cultural translators until those relationships are forged.*

The importance of "cultural brokers" is well established in the field of family and community engagement. Defined by Henderson and colleagues:

> *"Cultural brokers" are familiar with families' cultural backgrounds but also understand the culture of the school. They can help school staff and parents learn strategies for interacting with each other. A cultural broker reaches out to parents and brings them to the school, translates when they get there, and explains the families' values and traditions to educators. A school's parent liaisons (or family–school coordinators) should be able to act as cultural brokers.*[12]

The confidence expressed by respondents with respect to the positive role that CBOs play across Pittsburgh neighborhoods sits against a contextual backdrop of power imbalance and distrust between communities and schools, but it also provides a foundation for hope and a clear space within which to build parent power and facilitate new trusting relationships between families and schools. The next section will utilize our conceptual framework to further define this foundation.

FIGURE 3. **MAPPING COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATION TYPES AND CAPACITIES FOR FAMILY ENGAGEMENT WORK TO EFFECT CHANGE IN PITTSBURGH PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

		ORGANIZATION TYPES		
CAPACITY	DEFINITION	SERVICE	ADVOCACY	ORGANIZING
High	Have all three "Rs": roots, relationships, and resources	4	4	0
Medium	Lacking in one "R"	3	4	3
Low	Lacking in two "Rs" or little interest in prioritizing parent engagement work	5	2	1

Note: The work of a total of 22 organizations is represented in this matrix. Three organizations are included within these frequencies more than once because they conduct substantive work across types (service, advocacy, organizing). Two organizations participated only in focus group interviews, and we did not collect enough data to determine their placement within the matrix.

[12] Henderson, A.T., Mapp, K. L., Johnson, V. R., & Davies, D. (2007). *Beyond the bake sale: The essential guide to family-school partnerships.* New York: The New Press, pg. 123.

APPLYING THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Based on our analysis of the type of work and the capacities evident in our data, we have mapped 22 of the organizations that participated in this scan into our nine-cell matrix (see Figure 3). For the most part, the type of work an organization does—service, advocacy, or organizing— is readily identifiable; however, it is important to remember that our analytic lens is focused on the work and capacities of organizations specifically for enhancing parent engagement and leadership in PPS. Thus, an organization placed in a "low capacity" cell does not indicate that its capacity as an entire organization is low but that in our assessment its capacity for contributing specifically to parent engagement and leadership for school reform is low. It makes sense, then, that most of those assessed as having low capacity are service-oriented organizations whose core mission, work, and capacities may not immediately lend themselves to the advocacy and organizing approaches necessary for increasing parent voice and power. We did not feel that any organizations demonstrated high-capacity organizing, a gap that we seek to address in our recommendations. The narratives that follow are more detailed explanations of how we applied our conceptual framework to map the current work and capacities of the organizations we learned about through the scan.

The service–advocacy–organizing typology

We heard from several interviewees that, despite Pittsburgh's economic struggles and school funding shortages, the city is relatively "resource-rich" in its nonprofit and community-based organization sectors. Indeed, the organizations we interviewed as part of this scan represented a vibrant range of programs and strategies for strengthening neighborhoods and families and supporting young people's educational achievement.

Like many cities, Pittsburgh seems to have a wider array of service-providing organizations than it does organizations focused on education advocacy or community organizing. Of the 24 organizations we were able to include in our scan, half provide direct services as a primary or core activity. These service providers include multi-issue organizations that address multiple needs in a specific neighborhood or for a specific population. For example, the Mount Ararat Community Activity Center runs a number of programs for children, including a daycare center, an after-school program, and middle school mentoring, as well as a food and clothing bank and programs for seniors. Other service providers, including the Neighborhood Learning Alliance and Communities in Schools, focus exclusively on programming for school-age children to support and enrich their educational experiences.

The advocacy organizations we interviewed include some that engage in some mix of service provision and advocacy and others that focus exclusively on education advocacy on behalf of specific constituencies. The former group includes neighborhood-based groups and CDCs like Lawrenceville United and the Mount Washington Community Development Corporation, which advocate for the interests of their geographic area and are confronting the relationships between community development and public schools but have not engaged in advocacy on specific education issues. The education advocacy organizations we identified focus primarily on ensuring that schools and other systems meet the needs of young children or students with disabilities but have developed models of parent engagement and parent leadership that could be more broadly applicable. Two additional advocacy groups—PURE Reform and Yinzercation—function primarily as blogs.

There are fewer groups in Pittsburgh using grassroots organizing strategies to address education or family engagement, but they are growing in scope and power. While Pittsburgh Interfaith Impact Network (PIIN) has a long history as a multi-issue, institution-based organizing group in Pittsburgh, it has only recently undertaken education work. A+ Schools and the Hill District Education Council focus their organizing on improving public schools. In each case, the education organizing work is relatively new but has great potential.

Finally, not every organization's work fits cleanly into one category. For instance, Community Empowerment Association (CEA) does work across types. CEA offers important services to community members through its workforce development and counseling programs and to youth through its SAFE Truancy, mentoring, and youth leadership programs. The organization is an outspoken advocate for the needs and interests of African American communities, and it organizes a variety of community-based events aimed at building social capital and community empowerment, which CEA sees as part of a wider grassroots organizing strategy, although it is not clear that they have any specific organizing campaigns. Additionally, while primarily a service provider, Lawrenceville United, as mentioned above, has found itself taking on advocacy roles around issues important to the neighborhood it serves. Also, A+ Schools describes itself as an advocacy organization that is branching out into organizing work, and much of the work done by Hill District Education Council (HDEC) seems more like a combination of advocacy and organizing. One important distinguishing factor between advocacy and organizing is the degree to which work is staff-driven as opposed to being led by a strong base of leaders indigenous to the community.

The Three "Rs" of capacity: roots, relationships, and resources

As we noted above, service providers, advocacy groups, and organizing groups all approach parent engagement and leadership from different starting points and draw on a different mix of capacities in supporting parent leadership. In assessing a group's capacity, we attempted to tease out the strength of its roots, relationships, and resources. Each type of organization is characterized by different sets of skills, knowledge, relationships, and resources. In looking across the organizations we scanned, we tried to identify strong existing work as well as untapped potential for deeper parent engagement. Our assessment of capacity across the different types of organizations identifies existing or high-potential capacity using the framing categories of *roots*, *relationships*, and *resources*. We consider organizations displaying strength in all three "Rs" as having high capacity. Lacking strength in one "R" translates to medium capacity, while lacking strength in more than one "R" indicates low capacity. Below, we discuss examples of various strengths in capacity evident across all three types of organizations. The organizations named and highlighted are not necessarily the only ones with these strong capacities, but in our assessment they are demonstrably representative of the potential described.

SERVICE PROVIDER CAPACITY

The service providers we included in the scan varied in their education expertise and experience with parent leadership. However, we observed, among the higher-capacity service providers, strong roots, relationships, and resources that could be mobilized to engage parents.

Roots

Organizations like Schenley Heights Community Development Program, Mount Washington CDC, and Lawrenceville United have long histories of working in particular neighborhoods and a nuanced understanding of local needs and priorities. They recognize the connections between school quality and other issues of community development—for example, Lawrenceville is confronting the loss of families with school-age children because of the reputation of neighborhood schools.

Relationships

The service providers we interviewed all interact in some way with public school parents, whether as parents of students participating in their programming, as neighborhood residents, or as clients. They vary greatly in how they engage families and whether relationship-building and social-capital development are central to their work. Some, like the Neighborhood Learning Alliance, communicate regularly with individual parents about their children's progress but don't engage parents collectively. Others, including Schenley Heights and the Center of Life's Fusion program, treat parent engagement in their programming as a more explicit and deliberate strategy. Neighborhood-based groups tend to have multiple points of contact with families and build social capital through community-building events, regular neighborhood meetings on various topics, and creating a range of leadership opportunities throughout the organization.

Most of the service providers we interviewed rely on strong external relationships to advance their work. Neighborhood organizations have relationships with elected officials and various agencies whose work impacts their neighborhoods. Many participate in coalitions with peer organizations on specific issues, though not on education. The groups that provide programming for children tend to have strong relationships with principals and teachers. Even groups that don't work directly with individual schools have built strong relationships with teachers to ensure continuity for students. Still, many interviewees noted fragmentation in the Pittsburgh nonprofit sector and said that they felt somewhat isolated from other organizations doing similar work.

Resources

Neighborhood-based organizations often have developed a set of skills around local advocacy for other issues that could be applied to education campaigns. Other service providers have substantial education expertise. Many groups we interviewed provide after-school programming, mentoring, college transition support to older students, credit recovery support, and a range of enrichment activities. Through their work with students and sometimes close collaboration with individual schools, these organizations have a strong sense of how well served students are in PPS and of the disparities between more and less affluent schools. East End Cooperative Ministry has strong ties to local schools and good professional

relationships with principals, teachers, and other adults; these school-based staff often seek professional support from EECM staff when facing challenges. University of Pittsburgh Early Head Start, while not involved directly in K–12 education, provides a whole host of comprehensive early childhood development supports and works closely with Head Start programs on school readiness.

Several organizations have partnered with advocacy or organizing groups, most often A+ Schools, to provide opportunities for parents to learn about navigating the public school system and advocating on behalf of students. University of Pittsburgh Early Head Start explicitly develops parent leadership skills through learning opportunities and its own internal governance structure, in which parents participate in advisory boards at each program site and a program-wide policy council. We heard from four parent interviewees that, due to support and training through Early Head Start and Head Start programs, parents whose children attended these programs are often more engaged once they reach the K–12 system and are more comfortable interacting with school and district staff.

ADVOCACY CAPACITY

We spoke with a number of advocacy organizations that have strong track records on issues of educational access, equity, and services for students with disabilities and early childhood education, including the Parent Education and Advocacy Leadership (PEAL) Center, the Education Law Center, Pittsburgh Association for the Education of Young Children (PAEYC), and the Pittsburgh Local Task Force on the Right to Education (Local Task Force). As noted above, several neighborhood-based organizations engage in advocacy on local community priorities, though they don't have extensive experience with education advocacy.

Roots

The four education-specific advocacy organizations we interviewed all have long histories, well-developed strategies, and significant expertise. All can point to meaningful results of their advocacy, including changes in the state funding formula, restored early childhood education funding, inclusion and appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities, and training for school safety staff on interacting with students with disabilities. The Local Task Force, PEAL Center, and Education Law Center all have their roots in the movement for education access for students with disabilities and continue to focus their advocacy on students with disabilities, though the Education Law Center's mission has broadened to include educational equity and opportunity more broadly. PAEYC works with early childhood education professionals and, increasingly, parents of young children, to advocate for improved early childhood policies and resources.

Relationships

The advocacy organizations vary in terms of deep and broad relationships with parents that would serve as a platform for longer-term engagement and organizing. The Local Task Force is the only Pittsburgh-specific advocacy organization we interviewed, but they engage a small number of parents. The Education Law Center engages parents on a more ad-hoc basis, and PAEYC's main focus is early childhood professionals, though the parents served by those professionals represent a large potential base for deeper involvement in advocacy. The PEAL Center staff note that they have had a hard time gaining a foothold in Pittsburgh, as compared to other communities in western or central Pennsylvania.

These organizations all maintain strong external relationships and work in partnership with other stakeholders. The Local Task Force has a legal mandate to protect the rights of students with disabilities that gives it more authority vis-à-vis the school district; its leaders note that they have strong, positive working relationships with district officials and schools. All of the advocacy organizations have strong networks of partner groups addressing similar issues. The PEAL Center's model is to partner with CBOs and "cultural brokers" to bring its trainings to specific communities.

Resources

These advocacy organizations all provide deliberate support around parent leadership and parent engagement. While the Local Task Force has a smaller reach, by law it maintains a parent majority and those parents who are engaged exercise significant leadership around working with schools and districts to ensure the rights of students with disabilities. The Education Law Center works with groups of parents on request to provide research, data, support around understanding education issues and research, and strategy development for advocating or organizing around local issues. While PAEYC has historically worked with early childhood professionals around best practice and advocacy, it has begun to emphasize in its work with those professionals the importance of engaging parents in advocacy around issues facing young children. PAEYC has begun working more directly with parents on advocacy activities, including engaging families in an Early Childhood Action Day at the state capitol, and has hired a staff person with experience in family engagement to support that work.

Of the advocacy organizations we interviewed, the PEAL Center has the most fully developed parent engagement and parent leadership work. The PEAL Center leads year-round parent leadership trainings for parents of students with disabilities that focus on a range of education topics, leadership, and advocacy skills, and whose graduates often go on to play leadership roles in other organizations and efforts. It also provides shorter on-demand leadership development trainings for groups of parents and professionals. While this training targets parents of students with disabilities, PEAL Center staff noted that "good parent leadership training is good parent leadership training" and that most of the content is easily applicable to a broader swath of families.

ORGANIZING CAPACITY

We found fewer organizations currently engaged in grassroots organizing in Pittsburgh. We spoke with three organizations—A+ Schools (A+), Hill District Education Council (HDEC), and Pennsylvania Interfaith Impact Network (PIIN)—that are working to build power among public school parents.

Roots

Sustainable education organizing requires a broad and deep base of engaged parent leaders and community members. The three organizing groups we interviewed are in the process of developing a base of parent leaders. HDEC holds semi-monthly meetings of leaders who have graduated from its trainings, and parent organizers work to build committees of parents in three local schools. As stated on their website, "A+ Schools began as an independent, non-profit community advocate for improved student achievement in Pittsburgh Public Schools. Its goal was to be a community force advancing the highest educational achievement for every public school student and to produce successive generations of young people who thrive,

and who build their families and future in Pittsburgh."[13] Its roots were largely funder-driven, but along with a recent strategic shift to focus intensely on equity and closing the racial achievement gap in PPS, A+ has been making more concerted efforts to organize parent voice and power in particular schools and more broadly. Specifically, A+ has launched an effort known as Parent Nation, which is building school-based teams of parents and community members to increase African American parent engagement and advance equity and excellence in their neighborhood schools. PIIN has a long history of organizing around public safety, housing, economic justice, and environmental justice issues, and has taken up education equity more recently. Thus, PIIN is working to build teams of parents, teachers, and school leaders at several schools to work on parent engagement and school improvement, supported by and modeled on A+'s Parent Nation effort.

Relationships

While these efforts are fairly new and the pool of engaged leaders still fairly small, the organizations have many relationships on which they can draw to continue to strengthen their base. PIIN's institutional organizing affords access to a large, citywide base of congregation members, union members, and CBOs to participate in organizing campaigns and large public events. HDEC works closely with CBOs and congregations in the Hill District. A+ also works with a range of CBOs to bring its trainings and other resources to a wider audience; they were mentioned as an important ally by a majority of the organizations we interviewed.

HDEC, A+, and PIIN all maintain positive working relationships with district and school leadership. PIIN has been working closely with both district leadership and the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers around the district's equity plan. A+ often plays the role of critical friend, providing feedback and analysis on the district's and schools' efforts and pressing for improvements. HDEC has regular access to Dr. Lane and other district leaders and has succeeded in impacting policy decisions, including capping enrollment at a local high school to prevent overcrowding.

Resources

Since its founding, HDEC has focused exclusively on organizing parents around educational equity issues. HDEC has developed weekend and month-long parent advocacy trainings for public school parents focused on navigating the system, interacting with teachers, and other issues identified through surveys, including PSSA tests and financial literacy. A+ has built considerable expertise on education policy and practice, research and data analysis, leadership development, and education advocacy; their parent organizing work is a newer strategy. A+ has a number of initiatives that provide parents and community members with leadership development and advocacy training, including its Board Watch and School Works programs. Its newer parent organizing initiative, Parent Nation, currently operates in six schools and provides training in organizing skills and on education issues. A+ has partnered with PIIN to bring its Parent Nation training to PIIN parents. PIIN's members also have access to a range of leadership development trainings through the national Gamaliel Foundation.

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[13] See A+ Schools website (Last retrieved on August 2014: www.aplusschools.org/about-us/press-room/backgrounder/)

Taken together, our scan identifies a good deal of capacity across service, advocacy, and organizing organizations in Pittsburgh. The biggest question remaining is whether and how this capacity might be leveraged to significantly increase the power and influence of parents and families with respect to school improvement and education reform in PPS. Organizations of each type bring their own respective capacities and leveraging opportunities for increasing family engagement and leadership, but one broad conclusion of our analysis is that the organizing domain is less well developed than activities in service and advocacy, thus offering a strategic target for additional investment.

RECOMMENDATIONS:
MOVING UP AND TO THE RIGHT, BUILDING CAPACITY FOR ORGANIZING

The most effective community-based efforts at increasing and supporting parent voice and power to effect school reform result when organizations take an organizing approach to their work. Community-based organizing provides a vehicle for leadership development and powerful action for parents, youth, and other neighborhood residents who have a direct stake in schools. In Pittsburgh, as in many other cities, parents and community members often do not regularly attend school-based meetings and events, and, when they do attend, they are often not presented with opportunities to engage in deep conversation, reflection, relationship building, or leadership development aimed at understanding what they would like to see for their schools and how they can help make that happen.

On the other hand, parents and community members more frequently participate in programs, workshops, meetings, and events run by CBOs and institutions with which they have more positive and lasting relationships. In these settings, parents and community members are having meaningful conversations about community issues, including public education, with friends, neighbors, and staff of local organizations. Embedded in these conversations are the hopes and dreams that parents and communities hold for their children and their ideas about how to improve schools. When CBOs begin to harness these roots in their community, their relationships with parents and community members, and their organizational resources to build organizing capacity, they can provide long-term and viable platforms for parent- and community-led efforts to improve schools. Given the many challenges that school systems face when trying to effect change, strong community-based organizing can act as a stabilizing force—across changes in educational leadership and crises—that maintains focus and energy on parent- and community-driven priorities.

The Pittsburgh context for family engagement and leadership in school reform that we have laid out in this report is characterized by two overarching findings: 1) While there are many shortcomings in the current PPS efforts aimed at parent engagement and leadership, there is a basic foundation of policy, practice, and commitment upon which to build; and 2) While there is relatively little community-based work aimed at increasing parent voice and power within PPS, promising potential for the capacity to support such work exists across the spectrum of service, advocacy, and organizing groups. Our matrix mapping the CBOs included in this report suggests that more organizations come from a service orientation and that a gap exists when it comes to high-capacity organizing. Thus, we frame our recommendations to help organizations move "up" (higher capacity) and "to the right" (more organizing) with respect to increasing parent voice and power within PPS.

Before discussing specific recommendations, it is important to say a word about the salient issue of race in Pittsburgh. In almost all of our interviews, the issue of race was present. Invariably, when participants discussed disparities and difficulties related to family engagement, they highlighted African American parent engagement, or a perceived lack thereof, as a challenge. Community change work everywhere, but especially in communities of color, must centrally address issues of race and structural racism. These issues can be elusive in community change work because people often do not have the capacity or experience to talk about the deep and difficult aspects of racial issues, neighborhood institutions themselves often are not equipped to address structural racism (sometimes their own), and there is often a mirroring of racial inequity within and across CBOs.[14] Specific investments in developing the leadership, knowledge, and skills to combat structural racism are important to any community change effort, including, and perhaps especially, for organizing for deeper and wider parent engagement and leadership in public schools. Therefore, any strategy pursued, including those described in our recommendations, must include specific attention to these important issues.

Though much of what we heard about current PPS practice with regard to family engagement and leadership was critical of the district and schools, that there is district policy to support PSCCs, FACE Coordinators, and the EFA is a sign that building an infrastructure for family engagement and leadership is a PPS priority. The challenges of implementation seem to stem from a lack of accountability, limitations in capacity, and a history of negative relationships between parents and schools. All of these challenges can be addressed through the support of community organizing. Central to education organizing are the goals of holding public schools accountable to the needs and interests of the communities they serve; marshaling support and resources to enable the capacities of schools to best serve students, families, and communities; and trusting in the power of relationship building and leadership development between and among parents and educators.

The following three recommendations represent possibilities for employing an organizing framework in Pittsburgh to increase parent voice and power to effect change in schools. They are not designed to be mutually exclusive, but rather to offer a range of possible avenues to help CBOs in Pittsburgh "move up and to the right." We understand that pursuing work that moves in this direction may not be of interest to some organizations, which is to be expected. It will be important to identify organizations with both the capacities and interest to meet the challenge of taking on new work of this nature. We should also note that these recommendations are aimed specifically at community-based work, but assume a certain level of capacity on the part of PPS to continue and improve its current family engagement and leadership efforts. Our focus on CBOs is a product of the original purpose of this report, but it should not distract from the very real need for school- and district-based work to continue to grow and be supported in this area.

[14] For a good discussion of these central racial and cultural issues in community change work, see: Kubisch, A.C., Auspos, P., Brown, P., Chaskin, R., Fulbright-Anderson, K., & Hamilton, R. (2002). *Voices from the field II: Reflections on comprehensive community change.* Washington, D.C.: Aspen Institute. pp. 58–60.

Recommendation #1: Support and expand current organizing efforts through coalition building.
Although they are currently thin and relatively new, the existing education organizing efforts in Pittsburgh are engaging parents as leaders and working to support parent voice and power in ways that are very much needed. The important work that they are doing would be deepened and enhanced in a city like Pittsburgh by intentional coalition-building, which would offer not only organizing groups a broader platform upon which to stand, but also advocacy groups and service providers an entry point into organizing.

The three CBOs who have a clear organizing orientation have all worked together in the past and present a solid foundation of relationships and resources upon which to build and expand organizing efforts. Still, as noted in our interviews, the work of these and other education groups across the city is fragmented. In fact, at our focus groups, it seemed that most of the nonprofit directors were meeting each other for the first time, and many exchanged business cards to keep in touch. Further, that A+ Schools was referenced substantially more than any other group in the city as an example of parent organizing for school reform is an indication of the level of penetration their work has had, but also concentrates the work of organizing too narrowly upon one organization with a relatively small staff (eight people). By encouraging more formal partnerships through the exploration of coalition building, A+ Schools, PIIN, HDEC, and others will be able to increase their collective capacity to push for district-wide change.

A coalition approach would also serve as an entry point for service and advocacy groups who want to support organizing but who also feel that they either lack the capacity or that it is potentially compromising of their working relationships within PPS. In being part of a coalition, organizations can offer their particular expertise and strengths for the collective cause. Service organizations, for instance, could leverage their neighborhood roots and relationships for organizing campaign efforts but would not necessarily need to develop high-capacity organizing within their organizations. In many ways, engaging with organizations that possess longer-standing histories in Pittsburgh communities can make up for the roots that the organizing groups might lack from their relatively short histories.

In addition, as important as neighborhood identity is in Pittsburgh, recent school closures have resulted in school enrollment patterns that do not map onto neighborhood residence. This situation creates even more of a need for a full, districtwide approach to change since children from the same neighborhood may attend any number of different schools with peers from any number of different neighborhoods. A coalition could integrate neighborhood-specific concerns with citywide interests. This is not to say that neighborhood-specific concerns should not be addressed in particular, and we will comment more on this topic in Recommendation #3.

Lastly, successful organizing coalitions can be formed in different ways. There are examples of issue-based coalitions that come together to push for change around a previously determined concern.[15] These coalitions tend to be time-limited, as they often end when the issue has been addressed, but they can plant the seeds for lasting ties between organizations that will continue to work collaboratively, formally and informally, on other issues in the future. Other examples

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[15] See the organizing example of the Communities for Educational Equity (CEE) in Los Angeles, a coalition formed around fighting for requirements for all LAUSD schools to offer college preparatory curriculum (known as A-G requirements). CEE's campaign, and the organizing work of one of its primary conveners, is the subject of a case study written by AISR researchers: Shah, S., Meditratta, K., & McAlister, S. (2009). *Securing a college prep curriculum for all students*. Providence, RI: Annenberg Institute for School Reform. More recently, in 2010 the Boston United for Students coalition formed to exert parent and student influence during Boston Public Schools and Boston Teachers Union contract negotiations. See http://bostonunitedforstudents.org/ for more details.

include broad-based coalitions formed to build a foundation of community power and voice in education reform in their cities.[16] These coalitions have a long-term view in mind and work to build lasting relationships and identify common interests and issues to work on together. It is hard to say which might be the best direction for Pittsburgh as so much of the success of coalitions is based on the circumstances in which they are formed. Without an obvious overarching issue around which to form an issue-based coalition, a more broad-based coalition with the expressed aim at building parent voice and power may be preferable.

Note: In the year between the completion of this report and its publication, there have been some significant shifts in the educational landscape related to education organizing in Pittsburgh. Spearheaded by a collaborative effort between PIIN and the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers (PFT), the local teachers' union, two large "town hall" meetings were held in the spring of 2013. These meetings were designed for Pittsburgh community members to discuss their priorities for education and the Pittsburgh Public Schools. Connected to a national effort to build stronger connections between labor unions and community-based organizations seeking to improve public education, the energy and excitement generated by the town hall meetings led to the formation of a new coalition called Great Public Schools Pittsburgh (GPS Pittsburgh), which seeks to promote its work through organizing strategies. Coalition members include two community-based organizations that are part of this scan: PIIN and Yinzercation. In addition, GPS Pittsburgh includes two additional community organizing groups, Action United and One Pittsburgh, and two local unions, the PFT and SEIU Healthcare Pennsylvania. The coalition has worked together to produce a shared vision for Pittsburgh Public Schools and proposed strategies for improving public schools, including the implementation of community schools and a commitment to finding the resources necessary to support public education. While in its early stages, the coalition represents a new fixture in the Pittsburgh family engagement and education organizing landscape.

Recommendation #2: Leverage existing advocacy organization assets for organizing. As noted in our scan, the advocacy organizations we interviewed possess relatively high capacity for supporting parent engagement and leadership. A major asset that these advocacy groups possess is their strong leadership development work and their know-how of the policy and practice environments within which change must occur. Supporting linkages between the leadership development work and professional expertise of advocacy organizations and organizing efforts will enhance the power behind such efforts.

What often happens when leadership development occurs outside the context of organizing is that it results in various pockets of developed leaders, but they do not have any organized outlet for that leadership beyond the advocacy for their own individual children or lives. Organizing not only brings a collective focus to leadership development, it also provides a venue for the exercise of leadership with others. In many ways, leadership development that occurs primarily for individuals and that is applied by individuals exclusively for their own or even a narrowly defined group's needs is underutilized. If advocacy organizations develop organizing capacity either through partnering with organizing groups or hiring organizing staff, then their trainings

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[16] See the work and formation of the Coalition for Educational Justice (CEJ), a citywide collaborative of CBOs and unions whose members are parents, community residents, and teachers in New York City. The film *Parent Power*, produced by AISR, documents the growth of various efforts to connect parent education organizing across the city — and the formation of CEJ — during the years 1995–2010 (http://annenberginstitute.org/publication/parent-power-education-organizing-nyc-1995-2010-film).

can be better leveraged to influence ongoing leadership development, relationship building, and community-based power.[17]

Furthermore, advocacy work tends to be more staff-driven than parent- or community-driven, which can work to perpetuate system power imbalances and inequities. Organizing develops leadership and capacity within communities so that the professional experts are not the only ones armed with "expert" knowledge. That is, parents and other community members can develop the skills and know-how to understand issues from their own experiential perspective and through an "expert" lens of research, data, and policy with the support of highly functional advocacy organizations. When advocacy groups leverage and spread out their professional expertise through community organizing, there is potential for disruption of hierarchical power relationships between educators and parents, affluent and low-income communities, and white residents and residents of color in Pittsburgh. Staff organizers or organizing partners can ensure that the expertise possessed by advocacy organizations is imparted to and empowering for parent- and community-based leaders.

Recommendation #3: Support service organizations to include organizing. Neighborhood-based service organizations, a label that characterizes most of the CBOs included in our scan, do not need to stop their core work of service provision in order to also participate in organizing work. As noted above, these organizations often have strong roots in their neighborhoods, positive relationships with parents and community members, and deep knowledge of the issues facing the people they serve. These are all invaluable assets to the work of organizing.

Sometimes service providers feel uneasy with the "political" work of advocacy or organizing, but there are various examples of how service organizations can work to support organizing. The simplest way to support organizing is to open the doors of the service organization to organizers. Because service providers work directly with many residents in the communities they serve, they offer effective venues for organizing. Simply opening up space and time for organizers to be able to meet and develop relationships with those coming in for services can offer a level of access to community members that organizing groups often need, especially those with thinner roots, like in Pittsburgh.

More explicitly, service organizations can consider supporting the development of "action committees" that function like organizing groups from within their organizations. This takes a higher level of commitment from organizational leadership and will likely increase an organization's overall budget but can be a viable avenue for organizing. Staff at service organizations, like those we interviewed, can easily identify issues and concerns that parents and community members have and also often articulate the need for there to be more concerted efforts to organize parents and community residents around these concerns. Initiating and
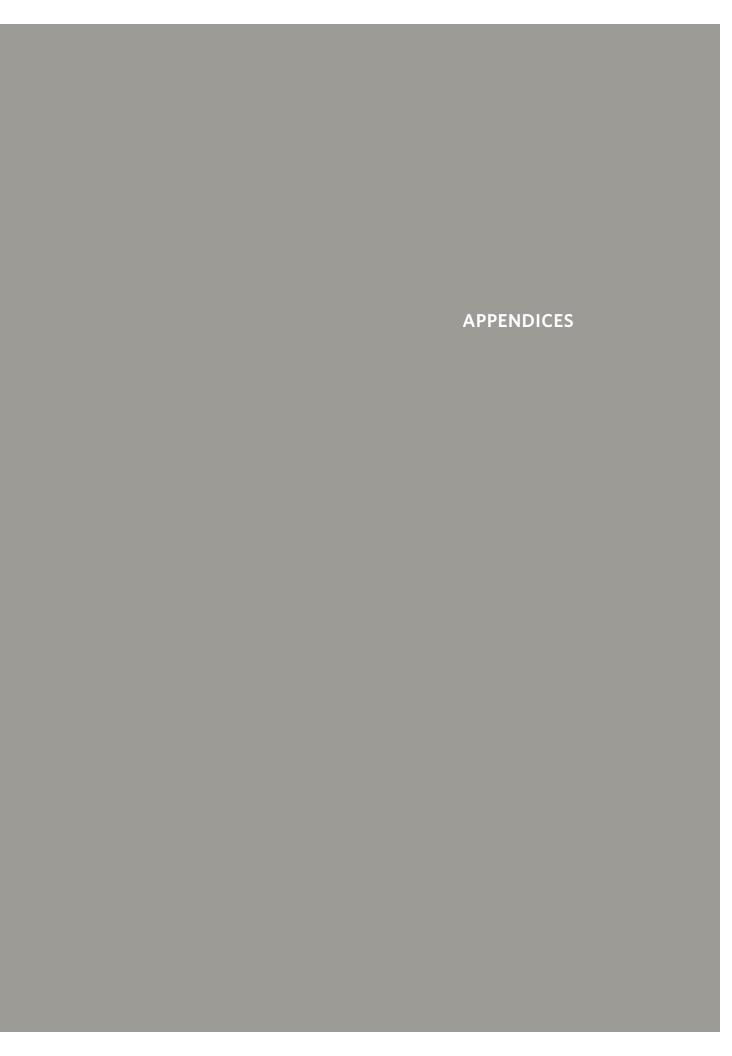
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[17] For example, Voices for Vermont's Children started as a statewide advocacy organization in 1983 and has developed extensive knowledge and expertise around research and data concerning the well-being of children in Vermont and has influenced the legislative process to ensure that the interests of children are being represented. AISR has been involved in supporting their recently formed partnership with Vermont Interfaith Action, a faith-based organizing group that is part of the national PICO network, to build parent leadership and voice in school reform efforts in both Burlington and Winooski, Vermont. Thus far, the new effort has shown huge promise in activating immigrant refugee parents to speak out for their families' interests within the local schools. A constituency that had previously been marginalized by the school systems is now demanding a seat at the table, and, with the support of Voices organizers, they are taking their seats ready and prepared to exercise their leadership. A more detailed account of this work can be found in a forthcoming article: McAlister, S. & Catone, K.C. (2013, Spring). "Real parent power: Relational organizing for sustainable school reform." *National Civic Review*, forthcoming.

supporting community residents to form more action-oriented groups within the auspices of service organizations can leverage the assets of the organizations' roots, relationships, and resources for organizing.[18]

A FINAL NOTE

Building capacity for parent engagement and leadership in school reform is difficult work. It is multifaceted and takes long-term commitment. It is not a strategy that necessarily sees lots of "quick wins" or that produces immediately identifiable outcomes. Instead, it is patient work that relies upon the belief that parents and families need to be at the center of decision-making for their community's schools, and the faith that, by investing in their leadership, they will help make decisions grounded in a deep understanding of their needs and in the best interests of their children.

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[18] The Highbridge Community Life Center in New York City has a mission to empower the people of Highbridge through a rainbow of services that include counseling for families and children, adult basic education, job training, after-school activities for youth, community improvement, organizing, and many other services through a vast network of collaborative organizations spread across the Bronx. In 1999, the organization supported the formation of United Parents of Highbridge, a parent- and community-led organization working to end inequities in the New York City school system and to improve the neighborhood of Highbridge. This work has also led the organization to be a key member in the citywide Coalition for Education Justice. This work is done alongside and in conjunction with its core service programs. See the organization website for examples of the wide array of social services it provides: www.highbridgelife.org/.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A:
PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

Organizations Participating in Either Interviews or Focus Groups

A+ Schools

Center of Life: Fusion Program

Communities in Schools

Community Empowerment Association

Consortium for Public Education

East End Cooperative Ministry

Education Law Center

Hill District Education Council

Hill House Association

Homewood Children's Village

Lawrenceville United

Local Task Force for the Right to Education

Mount Ararat Community Activity Center

Mount Washington Community Development Center

Neighborhood Learning Alliance

Parent Education and Advocacy Leadership (PEAL) Center

Pennsylvania Interfaith Impact Network

Pittsburgh Association for the Education of Young Children (PAEYC)

Pittsburgh Partnership for Neighborhood Development (PPND)

PURE Reform blog

Schenley Heights Community Development Program

University of Pittsburgh Early Head Start

Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh

Yinzercation

Organizations Participating in Pittsburgh Parent Power Program

Action United

Hill District Consensus Group

Lawrenceville United

Local Task Force for the Right to Education

One Pittsburgh

Parent Education and Advocacy Leadership Center

Pennsylvania Interfaith Impact Network

Pittsburgh Association for the Education of Young Children

Project Destiny

The Ready Freddy Program: University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development

We proposed a four-stage process for conducting the scan and defining a role for parent engagement in school reform.

Stage 1: Development of a shared research scan framework and design

During Stage 1, AISR researchers drafted and refined — with The Heinz Endowments staff — a research- and practice-driven research scan framework to guide the scan and the development of future capacity-building funding strategies. This framework was based on one previously developed by AISR and modified to meet Pittsburgh's needs. (See below for further discussion of the scan conceptual framework.)

Based on our research questions, conceptual framework, and previous research, researchers also developed four interview protocols for the scan: organizations active in education, organizations currently not active in education, parents, and FACE coordinators. We went through multiple layers of refining the protocols and incorporated feedback from the project team and staff members from The Heinz Endowments. We also developed three focus group protocols for our visit to Pittsburgh: executive directors of community organizations, parents, and FACE coordinators. (See Appendix C for interview and focus group protocols.)

Stage 2: Identification of scan participants

During Stage 2, AISR researchers worked with Endowments Education Program staff, local contacts, national organizing and family engagement networks, other funders, and key Pittsburgh community stakeholders to identify organizations for the scan. We contacted 30 organizations and scheduled interviews with staff from 22 of those organizations. We also contacted a number of engaged parent activists and staff members from PPS.

Stage 3: Data collection

We developed a short online survey that we sent to organization contacts as we set up individual interviews. The survey responses provided much of the detail included in the organizational profiles. We also conducted phone or in-person interviews with executive directors and other staff from 22 CBOs, six parents, one district consultant, and six FACE coordinators and district staff. During our site visit to Pittsburgh, we conducted three focus groups with CBO staff (15 participants), two parent focus groups (seven participants), and a focus group of FACE coordinators (four participants). There were two organizations represented in CBO staff focus groups with which we did not conduct phone interviews, bringing the total number of organizations included in the scan to 24.

In addition, throughout the course of the scan, we continually searched the Internet for community organizations in the Pittsburgh area that fit within the conceptual framework and for materials from PPS on their family engagement efforts. We also did more extensive reviews of websites for organizations mentioned in interviews, and we used organizational websites to gather key information, cross-check information we gathered during interviews, and identify links between organizations. We also collected and reviewed relevant documents from organizational websites that provided insight into organization programming, mission, vision, growth, budget, and staffing structure.

Stage 4: Data analysis

In order to collect and analyze interview data quickly, we created a qualitative database consisting of interview and focus group notes. Using the conceptual framework, our research questions, and themes that emerged during our data collection, AISR staff coded each of the documents and, as a team, developed a list of preliminary findings across the organizations and provided an overall assessment of the landscape for community-based family engagement and organizing for school reform in Pittsburgh. In addition, team members also developed organizational profiles for 20 CBOs that include details on their vision, programs, and successes.

AISR has a long history of conceptualizing, facilitating, and researching the engagement of parents, young people, and community organizations in school improvement. We feel that this scan methodology allows us to use an applied research frame, is flexible, and utilizes our staff's skills as applied researchers with extensive field experience. The scan helps to lay the groundwork for possible partnerships between organized communities and schools.

APPENDIX C:
INTERVIEW AND FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOLS

Community-Based Organizations Active in Education, Heinz Endowments Scan

AISR is conducting a research scan of family engagement, leadership, and organizing work related to education happening in Pittsburgh. The scan has been requested by The Heinz Endowments as part of its larger work in supporting families as important stakeholders in their children's education. We will be interviewing staff and leaders from various organizations throughout the city of Pittsburgh and expect interviews to last up to 90 minutes. We know how busy people are with their day-to-day work and very much thank you for your time and willingness to participate.

In the end, the scan will include organizational profiles of community-based organizations doing work in the field, as well as recommendations for how The Heinz Endowments can support capacity-building in this area and promote the development of parents as leaders in school reform efforts in Pittsburgh. Data from the interviews (aside from the descriptive organizational information that will be pulled for profiles) is confidential and will only be shared among the AISR team involved in the scan.

General (Questions included in online survey)
- Name
- Name of organization
- Position within organization
- How long has the organization existed?
- How would you best describe your organization? (e.g., community-based organization, advocacy organization, research, faith-based, service provider, etc.)
- What is the size of your staff?
- What constituency or constituencies does your organization work with?
  (youth, parents, adults, low-income, specific immigrant or ethnic constituencies, etc.)
- Is your organization a chapter of or affiliated with a local, state, or national organization?
- Is your organization a membership organization?

For Membership Organizations
- Who are the members (individuals, congregations, institutions)?
- What is the size of your membership?
- Roughly how many active leaders do you have?
- How often do leaders/members meet?

Organization's Focus
Tell us a bit about yourself and your organization.
- How long have you been with the organization? How long in this position?
- How would you describe your organization's mission and goals?
- Do you work directly with parents and families? If so, please describe the type of work that you do.

If your organization provides services, could you describe them?

Do any of them take place in schools?

What education issues does your organization focus on?

- Are you focused on a particular age group? (elementary, middle, high)
- Who do you hope to influence in your education work? (teachers, principals, school board, district admin, city officials, state dept. of ed., etc.)
- Does your education work focus on school, district, city/town, state, or national level?

What other non-education issues do you work on? How do any of these impact young people or their families?

What are some successes you've had in your education work or work with parents and families?

What are the main challenges your organization faces?

What are the main strategies and/or tactics your organization uses to reach its education goals?

For membership organizations: Describe the operations of your organization: How do you recruit members? How often do leaders/members meet? Are there regular activities you undertake? Is there a regular cycle of training/leadership development?

For organizing/advocacy groups: Do you have an education committee? Do you have staff specifically focused on organizing or advocacy? Do you have staff specifically focused on education?

Context and Landscape

Can you describe the major education issues in Pittsburgh? In the state of Pennsylvania?
- Who is most affected?
- Has the education landscape changed in recent years? [Prompt for budget cutbacks, school closings, leadership changes, accountability requirements, etc.]

What are the opportunities and challenges in working on education in Pittsburgh?

In what ways are parents/families engaged or involved at the school or district level? Are there opportunities for parent/family leadership and voice in decision-making?

What needs to happen to increase parent and family engagement in school reform and leadership opportunities for parents in Pittsburgh?

Networks

Do you have relationships with administrators or educators at the school or district level? Teachers unions? How would you characterize those relationships?

Do you have relationships with elected officials with education connections? Reform or research organizations? How would you characterize those relationships?

What other organizations do you know of in Pittsburgh that are engaged in family engagement, advocacy, or organizing? [Prompt for whether involved in education issues.]
- Who are your main allies/partners?

Has your organization worked through coalitions or partnerships? How did your group get involved in the coalition/partnerships? What were the successes? Challenges?

Other than your organization, which one organization in Pittsburgh would you say is doing the strongest work in parent/family organizing and engagement?

Other

Do you have anything you would like to add that we didn't get a chance to talk about?
Do you have any questions for us?

Would you be willing to participate in a focus group to further discuss issues that have been raised in this first round of interviews?

[Prompt for or follow up about documents such as organization brochure/overview, strategic plan, organizational chart, annual operating budget, annual/community reports, publications, press releases, program/event calendar, newsletters, training materials, and curriculum.]

Community-Based Organizations Currently Not Active in Education, Heinz Endowments Scan

AISR is conducting a research scan of family engagement, leadership, and organizing work related to education happening in Pittsburgh. The scan has been requested by The Heinz Endowments as part of its larger work in supporting families as important stakeholders in their children's education. We will be interviewing staff and leaders from various organizations throughout the city of Pittsburgh and expect interviews to last up to 90 minutes. We know how busy people are with their day-to-day work and very much thank you for your time and willingness to participate.

In the end, the scan will include organizational profiles of community-based organizations doing work in the field, as well as recommendations for how The Heinz Endowments can support capacity-building in this area, and promote the development of parents as leaders in school reform efforts in Pittsburgh. Data from the interviews (aside from the descriptive organizational information that will be pulled for profiles) is confidential and will only be shared among the AISR team involved in the scan.

General (Questions included in online survey)
- Name
- Name of organization
- Position within organization
- How long has the organization existed?
- How would you best describe your organization? (e.g., community-based organization, advocacy organization, research, faith-based, service provider, etc.)
- What is the size of your staff?
- What constituency or constituencies does your organization work with?
  (youth, parents, adults, low-income, specific immigrant or ethnic constituencies, etc.)
- Is your organization a chapter of or affiliated with a local, state, or national organization?
- Is your organization a membership organization?

For Membership Organizations
- Who are the members (individuals, congregations, institutions)?
- What is the size of your membership?
- Roughly how many active leaders do you have?
- How often do leaders/members meet?

Organization's Focus

Tell us a bit about yourself and your organization.
- How long have you been with the organization? How long in this position?
- How would you describe your organization's mission and goals?

- Do you work directly with parents and families? If so, please describe the type of work that you do.

If your organization provides services, could you describe them? Do any of them take place in schools?

What issues does your organization focus on?
- Are you focused on a particular age group?
- Who do you hope to influence in your work?
- Does your work focus on the neighborhood, city/town, state, or national level?

If your organization does not currently focus on education issues, has it in the past? If so, how? If not, could you imagine focusing on education in the future and in what way?

How do the issues that you currently work on impact young people or their families?

What are some successes you've had in your work?

What are the main challenges your organization faces?

What are the main strategies and/or tactics your organization uses to reach its goals?

Do you have staff who focus mostly or exclusively on organizing or advocacy?

For membership organizations: Describe the operations of your organization: How do you recruit members? How often do you leaders/members meet? Are there regular activities you undertake? Is there a regular cycle of training/leadership development?

Context and Landscape
Can you describe the major education issues in Pittsburgh? In the state of Pennsylvania?
- Who is most affected?
- Has the education landscape changed in recent years? [Prompt for budget cutbacks, school closings, leadership changes, accountability requirements, etc.]

What are the opportunities and challenges in working on education in Pittsburgh?

In what ways are parents/families engaged or involved at the school or district level? Are there opportunities for parent/family leadership and voice in decision-making?

What needs to happen to increase parent and family engagement in school reform and leadership opportunities for parents in Pittsburgh?

Networks
What other organizations do you know of in Pittsburgh that are engaged in family engagement, advocacy, or organizing? [Prompt for whether involved in education issues.]
- Who are your main allies/partners?

Do you know of other organizations doing similar work to yours, or working on the same issues?

Do you have relationships with those groups?

Has your organization worked through coalitions or partnerships? How did your group get involved in the coalition/partnerships? What were the successes? Challenges?

Other than your organization, which one organization in Pittsburgh would you say is doing the strongest work in parent/family organizing and engagement?

Other

Do you have anything you would like to add that we didn't get a chance to talk about? Do you have any questions for us?

Would you be willing to participate in a focus group to further discuss issues that have been raised in this first round of interviews?

Executive Director Focus Group, Heinz Endowments Scan

AISR is conducting a research scan of family engagement, leadership, and organizing work related to education happening in Pittsburgh. The scan has been requested by The Heinz Endowments as part of its larger work in supporting families as important stakeholders in their children's education. We will be interviewing staff and leaders from various organizations throughout the city of Pittsburgh and expect interviews to last up to 90 minutes. We know how busy people are with their day-to-day work and very much thank you for your time and willingness to participate.

In the end, the scan will include organizational profiles of community-based organizations doing work in the field, as well as recommendations for how The Heinz Endowments can support capacity-building in this area, and promote the development of parents as leaders in school reform efforts in Pittsburgh. Data from the interviews (aside from the descriptive organizational information that will be pulled for profiles) is confidential and will only be shared among the Annenberg Institute team involved in the scan.

Participant Background
- Name
- Name of organization
- Position within organization, length of time with organization
- Length of time lived in Pittsburgh
- Gender/race/ethnicity

Parent Engagement

What is the role for parent voice in Pittsburgh Public Schools? What is it now, and what should/could it be? [Prompt for level of involvement: school level? Policy level? What are some of the different forms of parent engagement that might be useful?]

What are the barriers or challenges to parent/family engagement in schools or at the district level?

How might community organizations and organized families and parents begin to have more of a voice in education issues?

Are there particular education issues that you feel are especially important to address?

Achievement Gap

What are the ways that families and parents might address the achievement gap in Pittsburgh?

Race

Can you reflect more about the issue of race in Pittsburgh and how that influences the way school reform decisions are made? How does race impact the issue of parent and family engagement? How can community organizations or the district work to address issues of race, especially as it relates to parent and family engagement? [Prompt for cultural competency.]

Distrust

How would you build trust between parents and families and schools?

Teacher Effectiveness

How can positive relationships between families and educators be built? How would you like to see parents and educators partnering for student success?

Types of Connections Between Community Organizations

How do you perceive the balance between community organizations that provide important services to families/community versus those that work to mobilize, organize, and advocate for families/communities (especially in the area of education)? [Prompt for strategies to increase level of organizing and advocacy work.]

What connections and partnerships do you and your organizations have with other community organizations in Pittsburgh? Do you see advantages in building stronger connections between community groups? What supports could help you to do this?

Do you have anything you would like to add that we didn't get a chance to talk about? Do you have any questions for us?

Family and Community Engagement Coordinator Focus Group, Heinz Endowments Scan

AISR is conducting a research scan of family engagement, leadership, and organizing work related to education happening in Pittsburgh. The scan has been requested by The Heinz Endowments as part of its larger work in supporting families as important stakeholders in their children's education. We will be interviewing staff and leaders from various organizations throughout the city of Pittsburgh and expect interviews to last up to 90 minutes. We know how busy people are with their day-to-day work and very much thank you for your time and willingness to participate.

In the end, the scan will include organizational profiles of community-based organizations doing work in the field, as well as recommendations for how The Heinz Endowments can support capacity-building in this area, and promote the development of parents as leaders in school reform efforts in Pittsburgh. Data from the interviews (aside from the descriptive organizational information that will be pulled for profiles) is confidential and will only be shared among the Annenberg Institute team involved in the scan.

Participant Background

Name, school, how long you've taught in Pittsburgh Public Schools, grade(s) you teach.

What made you interested in taking on the role of Family and Community Engagement Coordinator?

What are your major tasks/duties as an FACE Coordinator in your school?

How are parents engaged/involved in your school? [Prompt for Parent School Community Council, PTA, and opportunities to be involved in decision-making.]

Does your school partner with any community-based organizations working on education issues in Pittsburgh? Do you work with those partners directly? How?

Is parent engagement an area of priority in the district? Is there an understanding across schools of what parent engagement means? [Prompt for role of Excellence for All Steering Committee, and opportunities to be involved in decision-making.]

What have been your school's major accomplishments or successes in engaging parents and families? The district's major accomplishments or successes?

What have been your school's major challenges in engaging parents and families? The district's major challenges?

What could Pittsburgh Public Schools do to better engage parents and families? What types of support from the community could help you to do this?

How do you think stronger parent and family engagement could contribute to student success?

The FACE Coordinator position is relatively new. What's working and what isn't? Are there ways in which you'd like to see this role evolve or change over time?

What supports do you receive in your role as FACE Coordinator? What supports would you like to have?

What education issues do you feel are especially important in Pittsburgh? Who is most affected?

What needs to happen to build trust and positive relationships between families and schools?

Do you have anything you would like to add that we didn't get a chance to talk about? Do you have any questions for us?

Parent Focus Group, Heinz Endowments Scan

AISR is conducting a research scan of family engagement, leadership, and organizing work related to education happening in Pittsburgh. The scan has been requested by The Heinz Endowments as part of its larger work in supporting families as important stakeholders in their children's education. We will be interviewing staff and leaders from various organizations throughout the city of Pittsburgh and expect interviews to last up to 90 minutes. We know how busy people are with their day-to-day work and very much thank you for your time and willingness to participate.

In the end, the scan will include organizational profiles of community-based organizations doing work in the field, as well as recommendations for how The Heinz Endowments can support capacity-building in this area, and promote the development of parents as leaders in school reform efforts in Pittsburgh. Data from the interviews (aside from the descriptive organizational information that will be pulled for profiles) is confidential and will only be shared among the Annenberg Institute team involved in the scan.

Participant Background

Name, how long you've lived in Pittsburgh, neighborhood, ages of child/children, and what school(s) they go to?

In what ways are you involved in the Pittsburgh Public Schools?

Are you involved with any community-based organizations working on education issues in Pittsburgh?

How are parents engaged/involved in your child/children's school(s)? [Prompt for involvement in/ opinion of Parent School Community Council, PTA, opportunities to be involved in decision-making, changes resulting from parent input.]

Is parent engagement an area of priority in the district? Is there an understanding across schools of what parent engagement means, and is there a role for parent voice? [Prompt for role of Excellence for All Steering Committee, and opportunities to be involved in decision-making.]

What are the barriers to parent/family engagement in schools or at the district level?

How would you like to see Pittsburgh Public Schools engage parents? What should/could the role of parent voice be? [Prompt for level of involvement: school level? policy level? What are some of the different forms of parent engagement that might be useful?]

How do you think stronger parent and family engagement could contribute to student success?

What education issues do you feel are especially important in Pittsburgh? Who is most affected?

How might community organizations and organized or engaged families help to address those issues?

How do issues of race impact relationships between families and schools, and parent engagement? How can community organizations and organized / engaged families help to address issues of race?

What needs to happen to build trust between families and schools?

How can positive relationships between families and educators be built? How would you like to see parents and educators partnering for student success?

Do you have anything you would like to add that we didn't get a chance to talk about? Do you have any questions for us?

Melanie R. Brown has been the Education Program officer at The Heinz Endowments since 2007. Her portfolio focuses on advancing equity for African American students and students from low-income communities. She leads the foundation's grant making on grassroots community-based organizing. A Pittsburgh native and former teacher, Melanie has a bachelor's degree in secondary education and literature from American University, a master's degree in education from Harvard University, and a master's in public management from Carnegie Mellon University.

Keith C. Catone manages the Annenberg Institute's technical assistance and capacity-building support for community organizing and engagement in the New England region and is a member of the Center for Education Organizing program staff. Previously, he taught high school social studies at Banana Kelly High School in the South Bronx and co-founded the New York Collective of Radical Educators, a citywide teacher activist organization. Keith holds an A.B. in public policy from Brown University, and an Ed.M. in school leadership and an Ed.D. in culture, communities, and education from the Harvard Graduate School of Education.