VUE

Skills for Smart Systems

Annenberg Institute for School Reform | *Voices in Urban Education*

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Building Capacity for Smart Education Systems

Robert Rothman

As school systems and communities struggle to improve student learning and bring all students to proficiency, the idea of *building capacity* has become increasingly critical. As the early years of No Child Left Behind have made clear, simply pointing out that students need to learn more is not enough; schools and school systems, community organizations, and other agencies need to have the ability to function effectively to ensure that all students learn at high levels.

Much of the initial focus on capacity building has emphasized the *technical* abilities all stakeholders need. Teachers need the knowledge and skills to be able to teach diverse learners effectively; school leaders need to be able to supervise instruction and manage learning organizations; district leaders need to operate nimble systems that provide the support schools need in a timely fashion; community organizations need to be able to provide support to students, families, and schools on a scale large enough to ensure equity; and much more.

All of these capacities are critically important. Yet equally important are some abilities that are receiving less attention. For example, school districts need to be able to manage multiple partnerships with national and local philanthropies, community organizations, and civic agencies. Municipal leaders need to be able to negotiate among groups with varying levels of power. And all stakeholders need to be able to work through differences in race and class that are ever-present but seldom discussed.

Robert Rothman is a principal associate at the Annenberg Institute for School Reform and editor of Voices in Urban Education.

These political and social capacities are particularly important in building *smart education systems,* in which schools, community organizations, civic agencies, and parents are linked to provide supports in and out of school to ensure that all young people develop a broad range of outcomes. Although smart education systems are not a completely new idea, they have not existed on a large scale in any city, and creating one requires institutions and individuals to work together in new ways. At the same time, all of these institutions and individuals need the technical capacity to ensure that they work effectively for young people.

What are the capacities schools and community organizations and agencies need? How have nascent smart education systems managed to build such capacities? What kind of professional development or support is available to build capacities for smart education systems?

This issue of *Voices in Urban Education* will address these and other issues by examining how communities are attempting to build smart education systems.

Warren Simmons outlines the features of an infrastructure needed to support the connections between schools and community organizations that smart systems require.

Bill Strickland describes the abilities needed to build and sustain a long-term partnership between a community organization and a school district.

Jesse Register and Joanne Thompson recount how the Hamilton County Schools engaged multiple partners to reform low-performing elementary schools, redesign high schools, and ensure college access and success for students.

Joanna Brown illustrates the Logan Square Neighborhood Association's approach to engaging parents in school development and improvement.

Kavitha Mediratta describes how the Urban Youth Collaborative develops youth leadership in sup-

port of educational improvement in New York City.

Mark Warren considers ways that school reformers and community builders can break down their traditional isolation from one another.

These articles show clearly that the partnerships necessary to build smart systems flow in many directions and require a new view of leadership. Such systems are not hierarchical, with one leader at the top; rather, leadership is distributed across all partners, with different leaders taking on responsibility for areas where they have the most expertise and experience.

In addition, these systems require considerable attention to the political, social, and cultural aspects of educational improvement. As an enterprise involving people with widely varying backgrounds and divergent histories and experiences, education depends on the ability to negotiate and build bridges that might not have been even considered in the past. And in cities in which racial and ethnic divisions are prominent, though usually unspoken, such bridge building is particularly critical.

To address these political, social, and cultural aspects of improvement, community involvement is crucial. Partnerships must be developed *by* and *with* community members, not just *for* them. That will ensure that the services the partnerships provide actually serve those they are intended to serve.

Such involvement would also help build and maintain community support for education systems. Educators, public officials, and funders increasingly are aware that community support is essential to sustain educational improvement. Only with full community involvement can such systems maintain – and deserve – support.

Building a Foundation for Smart Education Systems

Warren Simmons

Alliances between school networks and community agencies and organizations promise to improve educational opportunities, but they require an infrastructure to support and sustain them.

Warren Simmons is executive director of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform.

The heightened attention devoted to district reform in recent years is a welcome development. It represents a recognition that the reform movement's attempts to ignore or bypass districts would fail to yield results in an equitable way, and that the state-based or school-by-school approach would be unlikely to engage communities in a way that would sustain reforms over time.

But the evidence indicates that the efforts to redesign and strengthen districts, while important, are not sufficient. Educators and community members must intensify or expand their efforts so that the vast majority of students, particularly African Americans, Latinos, and students from low-income families, move beyond basic skills to attain levels of performance needed to participate meaningfully in our democracy, in the global economy, and in their communities.

Despite heartening evidence that a growing number of schools serving African American, Latino, and low-income students can beat the odds and produce dramatic improvements in academic performance (Education Trust 2005), a lack of resources and stability within many large urban school districts and the poor communities they serve prevent success from spreading across schools and over time. Edmund Gordon and Beatrice Bridglall (2005) note that middle-class and affluent families often have the resources needed to build the various forms of capital that enhance and extend school-based learning. The music lessons, sports leagues, national and international travel, concerts and museum visits, and internships that dominate the weekend and after-school experience of more advantaged children and youth serve to build the networks, values, dispositions, and knowledge that reinforce and accelerate school-based learning.

Using Community Resources to Support Networks of Schools

Some districts have attempted to bring community resources to bear in support of students. This approach to district reform is reflected in the work of school districts in Philadelphia, Chicago, and New York City. These districts tend to put into the foreground the importance of designing a

system that can support a portfolio of schools. Such a system includes a range of schools, including those operated by nonprofit and for-profit organizations, as well as those operated by the district, in order to provide options for students and families and a range of approaches

to match varied student needs. Other districts are collaborating with colleges and universities, reform support groups, and community development organizations to establish partnerships that support networks of schools rather than individual ones. These neighborhood-based networks of schools and partner organizations are known as Local Education Support Networks (LESNs). The shift of emphasis from school-based partnerships to LESNs allows multiple schools and partners to pool their resources (e.g., knowledge, tools, funds, facilities). Moreover, LESNs typically treat a local neighborhood or community as a hub for learning, thus increasing opportunities to engage families, cultural institutions, businesses, faith institutions, and community development organizations in the design and implementation of learning activities.

District transformations such as the ones in Philadelphia, New York City, and Chicago that result in school systems with permeable, rather than closed, boundaries have enhanced opportunities to strengthen and align school- and community-based learning activities by incorporating the assets of communities in ways that integrate in- and out-of-school learning opportunities on a systematic basis. At the same time, LESNs in New York, Sacramento, and other communities are able to draw on the resources of schools, community organizations, higher education, and cultural and faith institutions to construct meaningful learning activities that incorporate academic, cognitive, social, and cultural components of learning. And they have done so without sacrificing high standards and attention to basic skills, something that schools would find difficult to do alone under the pressure to improve standardized-test results.

Smart Education Systems: Connecting the Networks

The next step in the transformation of these systems to support high levels of learning for all students is to connect the neighborhood web of educational supports that LESNs provide with the citywide partnerships that have the capacity to engage a broader range of partners. We call this bigger system a "smart education system."

The kind of smart education system we envision does not yet exist, citywide, in any city in the United States. However, an essential foundation for change has been laid as a result of the pressure for school-district

transformations that promote high standards, along with decentralized decision making and resource control (fiscal, human, material) to school networks and community partners.

This practice must be accompanied by citywide governance structures that forge interfaces among city agencies responsible for children, youth, and families, as well as partnerships with cultural institutions and museums, businesses, and nonprofit organizations that provide services to support student learning. Moreover, linking neighborhood-based and citywide alliances ensures a more equitable exchange between elites and grassroots organizations than is possible through citywide collaboratives that are often dominated by the perspectives, politics, and values of elites.

Characteristics of Cities Working toward Smart Education Systems

Smart education systems require the development of shared values, experiences, and aspirations across a diverse swath of communities that exist within most cities – the communities flush with energy and ambition based on new housing and business development, and those with equal hope and ambition, but with fewer resources (political, social, fiscal) available to support their efforts.

The cities that build alliances – wary and sometimes temporary, but often productive – between the multiple communities within their borders possess a common set of features that act as scaffolding for cross-cultural and cross-sector dialogue and action and that, collectively, represent the beginning of an infrastructure to support and sustain smart education systems. These common features are described in this section.

grass roots

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Leadership Development

Cities comprise diverse communities with varying sources of leadership (e.g., neighborhood associations, unions, community development corporations, faith institutions, social clubs, civic organizations, governmental agencies, arts and cultural institutions). These varied sources pose a challenge for developing leaders with a core set of shared values, beliefs, and knowledge from communities with divergent experiences and cultures. Building a consensus and knowledge base, while respecting differences, requires skilled and concerted cross-sector leadership development that is often lacking at the local level. Advocates, community leaders, government officials, and school board members with major roles in education often come to this endeavor with little formal or shared knowledge about education practice and policy and few vehicles to address this shortcoming. These types of supports are sorely needed to provide a common foundation for shared understanding and collective action.

To build smart education systems that improve the quality and effectiveness of reform, local leaders and practitioners need more information and data that discern the course of implementation, not just its destination.

Local intermediary and reform support organizations, such as the local education funds in Chattanooga and Portland and the collaborative in El Paso, have included this role in their already crowded portfolios of work. In addition, local affiliates of the Industrial Areas Foundation assume this responsibility for parents and community groups. These organizations, however, often perform this function as a byproduct of their other work, rather than as an explicit responsibility, and they often do so with little direct funding from foundations. To develop the leadership needed to strengthen and expand cross-sector coalitions, local communities and their partners must invest in leadership development that will create and inform a network that includes local government leaders and their key staff, school board officials, union leaders, community-based organizations, faith institutions, and higher-education representatives, among others.

Applied Research

As with education, the various systems that provide support for youth and community development offer diverse services that vary widely in quality. The quality varies within programs as well as between them; a low-performing school might include an exemplary arts program, for example. But the heterogeneous nature of these services contributes to varied perceptions of the nature of the "elephant." And often, these differing perceptions fuel conflicts about the nature and urgency of problems based on experiences that vary along lines of race, ethnicity, income, and neighborhood.

Applied research provides an essential base for building a shared understanding of a system and its

differential impact on outcomes and experiences in specific settings. While guided by theory, organizations such as Research For Action in Philadelphia, Education Matters in Boston, the Consortium for Chicago School Research, and the Annenberg Institute's own Community Involvement Program (formerly housed in New York University's Institute for Education and Social Policy) conduct research on problems posed by local constituents that include community-based organizations, school districts, local funders, and municipal leaders.

In doing so, they pay specific attention to the enactment of policy and practice with an eye toward understanding how and why change achieves or fails to achieve desired outcomes within or across communities. Research of this kind is more context sensitive and practice oriented than traditional scientific research and evaluation activities, which often seek to minimize or control the very factors (e.g., teacher and student mobility, practitioner choice and motivation, prior levels of achievement, community resources) that affect the shape and progress of reform.

To build smart education systems that improve the quality and effectiveness of reform, local leaders and practitioners need more information and data that discern the *course* of implementation, not just its *destination*. These data often fuel constructive discussions in superintendent cabinet meetings, local business roundtable gatherings, editorial board briefings, teacher network meetings, parent and community forums, and labor-management negotiations –

the very settings that the scientific-research community struggles to reach through national clearinghouses, regional laboratories and centers, and scholarly journals.

Local "Skunk Works," or Innovation Incubators

Contrary to the widespread perception that we know little about "what works" in education, school districts and other systems can avail themselves of a cornucopia of "best" practices, "effective" programs, and evidence-based designs. What they often lack is the knowledge and means to incubate and adapt

"proven" practices at the scale needed to improve and connect learning activities across distinct communities. Although this challenge is complicated by basic research and evaluation studies that overlook implementation prerequisites, a growing number of university- and community-based nonprofit organizations are creating for school systems what Lockheed, the aircraft corporation, called "skunk works": a site for applied research and development.

Examples of organizations partnering with local school districts to support

We have much to learn about the design and implementation of effective strategies to engage the public within and across communities in different regions of the country. To advance this work, communities need a broader understanding of how partnerships and leadership emerge and develop.

the design and implementation of new ideas include the Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools; New Visions for Public Schools and the Center for Arts Education, both in New York City; the Boston Plan for Excellence and the Center for Collaborative Education, in Boston; and the Philadelphia Education Fund, along with Foundations, Inc. The work of these partnerships includes the development of small schools; arts curricula and programs; authentic forms of student, school, and district assessment; and the development of school networks operated by nonprofit and for-profit organizations.

Local skunk works have also helped national and locally developed designs make the mutual adaptations needed to foster improvement, rather than chaos, within larger systems of schools. The critical role played by these organizations is often ignored by national research and evaluation studies focused more narrowly on outcomes and design fidelity, rather than adaptations required by varying contexts.

Alternative Governance Structures
Structural or policy barriers that require the intervention of independent governing bodies involving different sectors (e.g., education, housing, health, social services) stymie even the best design and implementation efforts. Educators in secondary schools, for example, are often frustrated by student attendance and behavior problems exacerbated by the policies and practices of the foster care and juvenile justice systems, which operate beyond the reach of schools, but whose presence is felt deeply by them just the same. Similarly, community groups operating recreation, education, and health programs chide districts for policies that limit their access to students and facilities while calling for families and neighborhoods to do more.

To achieve the kind of smart education system we envision, communities must restructure larger systems in education, health, recreation, and economic development that pose boundaries for cross-section planning and collaboration. While the creation of cross-agency collaboratives and neighborhood councils represents a step in the right direction, these arrangements are usually voluntary and operate within the constraints of systems that fragment communities and families into isolated individuals with specific needs (Annie E. Casey Foundation 1995). Mayoral cabinets for children and families established in Boston and New York lend authority to these arrangements, but often sacrifice community engagement for centralized collaboration.

Public Engagement Mechanisms and Strategies

When local governing bodies are slow to respond to felt needs, communities can pursue change through court actions, appeals to state and federal governments, and the building of local demands for change. All of these actions involve some form of public engagement to raise awareness, build constituency, and drive action. Data from public opinion surveys indicate that the American public, overwhelmingly, considers education a top national priority (Annenberg Institute 1998; Public Education Network & *Education Week* 2002). However, these same surveys show that the public believes that the nation's schools are not equipped to provide a high-quality education for all.

As a result, the volume has been turned up on the "quiet revolution": public engagement. Yet, we have much to learn about the design and implementation of effective strategies to engage the public within and across communities in different regions of the country. To advance this work, communities need a broader understanding of how partnerships and leadership emerge and develop, given differences in context and purpose, as well as the kinds of tools and expertise that individuals and organizations need to heighten the quality and effectiveness of their engagement strategies in the context of an ever-changing community.

Vision and Action Artifacts

The leadership, research, and public engagement endeavors outlined previously often lead to the production of vision frameworks and action plans intended to guide ongoing or periodic reviews of progress and action by the community. The form these vision statements and frameworks take varies considerably, along with the manner in which they are distributed and used.

Despite the paucity of information about promising practice in this area, communities continue to extrapolate the business sector's emphasis on the importance of mission statements and action frameworks for organizational development and restructuring. Given the importance placed on these tools, several questions warrant further study:

- What level of detail and sophistication is necessary for these frameworks to inform and engender action on the part of key target groups and systems?
- What corollary activities, tools, and products are needed to augment these frameworks so multiple groups can inform their development and use them to guide changes in policy and practice?
- How might different audiences modify these resources over time to address the need for continuous, evidence-based inquiry and adaptation to promote equity and excellence?

- What role can educators, community-based groups, intermediary organizations, higher-education institutions, and others play in the development and modification of these resources over time?

Partnerships to Transform School Systems

While much work remains to define and develop the scaffolds needed to create smart education systems, the potential payoff is high. And there is a strong desire on the part of municipal leaders, community organizations, and philanthropic groups to work through the challenges.

For years, cities and funders have tended to focus either on schools or on out-of-school learning opportunities, even while recognizing that each needs the other. But they have been reluctant to work together. The demands to close the achievement gap and the innovations and outcomes resulting from system transformation informed by community development could finally create optimal learning environments. These would be the kinds that partnerships, educators, and community leaders have long sought – the ones needed in smart education systems to build creative communities that drive an economy and derive benefits from it.

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Creating a "Common Geography":
A Long-Term Partnership in Pittsburgh

Bill Strickland

A fifteen-year alliance between a community organization and a school district offers lessons in partnerships that benefit young people.

By his own admission, Bill Strickland's life turned around in 1963, when he was in high school and a teacher introduced him to ceramics. Five years later, while a student at the University of Pittsburgh, Strickland sought to provide other young people with similar experiences when he opened the Manchester Craftsman's Guild (MCG), which offered informal, after-school arts programs and an exhibition space in a neighborhood devastated by economic decline and urban strife.

Nearly forty years later, MCG has grown into a nationally recognized enterprise, MCG Youth, which offers programs for middle and high school students and teachers during the school day, after school, and in summers. The Apprenticeship Training Program is an after-school program that offers a variety of courses in ceramics, photography, visual arts, and design; more than four hundred students enroll each year. An evaluation of an MCG program for middle school students found that suspensions and referrals for behavioral problems plummeted among participating students. The organization has created similar programs, through partnerships with public school systems, in Cincinnati; Grand Rapids, Michigan; and San Francisco.

Strickland also operates the Bidwell Training Center, a vocational training organization originally created for displaced steel workers. The center now includes programs in gourmet food preparation, chemical, office, and medical technologies, and the arts and runs a national label, MCG Jazz, that has won four Grammy awards.

The programs of the combined Manchester Bidwell Corporation have won numerous awards, and in 1996 Strickland was named a MacArthur Fellow by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

In 2006, MCG's partnership with the Pittsburgh Public Schools expanded when the organization was asked to implement a whole-school reform model, Learner Centered Arts Integration, in the Helen S. Faison K–8 Arts Academy.

Strickland spoke of the capacities needed to build and sustain partnerships with the school system with *VUE* editor Robert Rothman.

Bill Strickland is president and CEO of Manchester Bidwell Corporation and its subsidiaries, Manchester Craftsmen's Guild and Bidwell Training Center.

board. That's resulted in both the after-school program and this relationship with the Faison school, where we are helping to co-manage the program.

Has that relationship developed over time?

We've had a fifteen-year relationship with the Pittsburgh public school system. So it didn't start yesterday. But the Faison program – we're going into our second year, where we actually have faculty at that school every day working with their faculty on behalf of the kids.

That's a two-year relationship. But Manchester has had a fifteen-year relationship with the Pittsburgh Public Schools – a very successful one.

Do you have similar relationships with other organizations that work with the schools?

No. We have an exclusive relationship with the Pittsburgh Public Schools.

So it's a bilateral relationship.

Yes.

Skills for Building Partnerships

How would you say you've built that partnership? What skills did you have to develop in order to make it effective?

It was important to spend a lot of time with the public school system itself and with the administrators at the local school level in order to understand what their needs and opportunities were, as well as ensure that our faculty and their faculty had time to get to know each other and that activities were conducted in both locations. That is, we've done teacher in-service training here at Manchester, physically, on our property. We, of course, have the after-school kids who come here to our property. But we've also had opportunities to do exhibits of student work from the public school system here at our facility.

> It's very important that staff from the public schools come to our facility, in addition to our folks going to theirs.

How would you characterize your partnership with the Pittsburgh Public Schools?

Our partnership with the public schools is a good one. The superintendent and the board of education are actively engaged in this partnership. We actually have an agreement – a legal agreement – that outlines the expectations and the hoped-for accomplishments.

So it's a situation where we have pledged assets – some of our own money, some of our staff, some of our ideas – to this collaboration with the

So it's really a two-way street. It's very important that staff from the public schools come to our facility, in addition to our folks going to theirs. So it becomes part of a "common geography."

Have you developed new capacities in order to operate this Faison arrangement?

We've had to deepen the number of staff people that we have. And we've had to learn how to translate more of our work into more of an academic setting. So we've increased our capacity to work on curriculum as a part of this capacity building.

How have you done that?

By getting experts in the field to help us develop the curriculum, like Dr. Bruce Jones, who's a nationally renowned expert in curriculum and evaluation. And working, of course, with the curriculum people at the district itself, who are pretty good.

Extending the Model to New Cities

How do you go about building partnerships in the new cities with which you're working?

Going to talk with people in the school districts in partnership with the people who are running the centers in those cities. We really take the Pittsburgh experience and translate it into Cincinnati, for example, where the woman who runs the Cincinnati center used to work for the Cincinnati public schools. She was a principal.

We got a chance to meet the school superintendent when we were beginning the conversation. We met the president of the school board there. We actually made a presentation to the school board itself. And there were community leaders in Cincinnati, for example, who helped us set up meetings with the school district, because they were more familiar than we were.

We have used that as the way of building relationships. We did the same thing in Grand Rapids, where the corporate sector – in this case, Steelcase, in particular – was able to get us to meet the new school superintendent in Grand Rapids, brought him to Pittsburgh, and had him see our center, so that we began to form a partnership on the basis of mutual familiarity. It was local people in Grand Rapids who actually set this thing up. And it worked out very successfully.

In San Francisco, the director of the center initiated the relationship with a middle school program in her neighborhood. And that's, literally, how the program got started.

So, we've all learned from each other in terms of how to approach the public school system to ensure that they are full and active partners in these relationships. And there's just no substitute for doing that.

The Role of Community Organizations in Education

After all this time, what are the lessons you've learned about the role of community organizations in education?

I think that they're fundamental. To the extent that we're going to have an educational system that is effective

We've learned how to approach the public school system to ensure that they are full partners.

in this country, I think community organizations are going to play a vital role in the rebuilding of our educational system. And they have much to contribute by way of expertise, knowledge, familiarity, and community and relationship building.

I think it just makes good practical sense for any school system to take advantage of these built-in partnership opportunities in their community. And I think the future of school systems is going to be a function of the ability to form relationships in the community where they are, with both corporations and community-based organizations. I think both are essential to the rebuilding of our educational system.

Developing Effective Multiple Partnerships

Jesse Register
and Joanne Thompson

Reforming low-performing elementary schools, redesigning high schools, and ensuring college access and success for students require school districts to engage multiple partners across a community.

If we are unable to substantially close the existing skill gaps among racial/ethnic groups and substantially boost the literacy levels of the population as a whole, demographic forces will result in a U.S. population in 2030 with tens of millions of adults unable to meet the requirements of the new economy.

— Irwin Kirsh, Henry Braun, Kentaro Yamamoto,
   and Andrew Sum, *America's Perfect Storm*

Jesse Register is Annenberg Senior Advisor for District Leadership and Joanne Thompson is a research associate in district redesign at the Annenberg Institute for School Reform.

The report *America's Perfect Storm*, published by the Educational Testing Service, reminds us again how changing conditions in our country and the world magnify the need to fundamentally change the outcomes we have been obtaining in America's public schools (Kirsh et al. 2007). We must learn how to succeed where we have not, up to now, succeeded – at least, not on a broad scale. Robert Marzano, Timothy Waters, and Brian McNulty (2005, p. 67) note in their discussion of second-order change:

> Witness the decades-old problem of the achievement gap between children from poverty versus children not from poverty. This issue has been a focus of educational reform for decades.... In spite of decades of attention, the problem persists.

Indeed, addressing this challenge requires attention to very complex issues. In Michael Fullan's words, "The big problems of the day are complex, rife with paradoxes and dilemmas. For these problems, there are no once and for all answers" (Fullan 2001, p. 73).

Given the complexity of the challenges we face in public education and the lack of large-scale success, we must ask if school districts across the country have the capacity to be successful with these complex issues. The development of collaborative working relationships with multiple partners is one way that districts can increase capacity to change and reform. Learning how to develop and become members of highly effective partnerships merits serious consideration by district leaders.

This approach is consistent with the concept of *smart education systems* envisioned by Warren Simmons (2007).
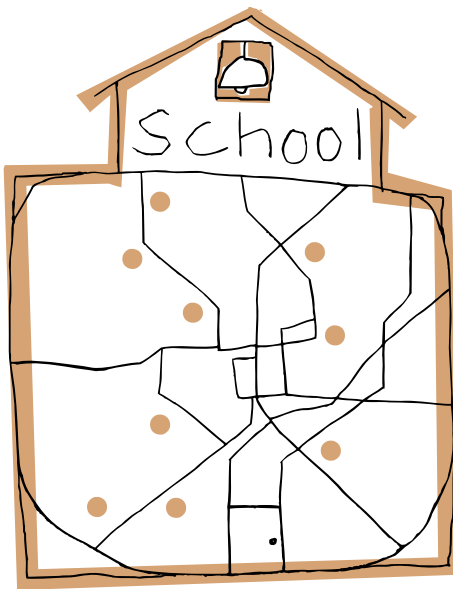
Simmons notes that attention to district-level reform is a factor in gaining equitable results and has the possibility of engaging communities over time. However, Simmons goes on to say, efforts to strengthen districts alone are not sufficient; he suggests that "smart education systems" in which community organizations and school districts join together to provide needed supports for children and families are necessary.

Written from the perspective of a district leader, our article will explore some concepts and strategies for district leaders to use in helping to create highly effective systems of multiple partners, recognizing that the capacity and the will to work effectively with multiple partners may not be among the skills and attitudes that many district leaders have learned or been taught.

Chattanooga and Hamilton County, Tennessee

As recently as 1975, nearly half of the employed residents of Chattanooga, Tennessee, worked in factories and foundries. College attendance was traditionally low because local plants provided decent wages and lifelong employment for the county's citizens. Recently, however, as the bulk of the manufacturing sector has left the South, many well-paying blue-collar jobs have gone with it. Today, fewer than twenty percent of the county's jobs are in manufacturing. With no traditional imperative for post-secondary education, Tennessee ranks forty-second out of the fifty states in the proportion of adults with four-year college degrees.

It was in this context that the Chattanooga City Schools and the Hamilton County School System merged, in 1997, combining two very different systems. The county system was largely rural and suburban, with a student population of around 22,000, the majority of whom were White, primarily from blue-collar, middle-class families. The city system was primarily urban, with a student population of around 21,000, the majority of whom were African American and from low-income families. A new school board subsequently chose one of us [Jesse Register] to plan the merger and lead the unified district.

Since that time, Hamilton County Schools (HCS) has been immersed in two major reform initiatives that have been quite successful. These initiatives focused on eliminating the achievement gap in urban, high-poverty schools and on systemic high school reform. The multiple partnerships that enabled success in these initiatives are highlighted in the following descriptions. Although it is understood that one model will

certainly not fit all districts and communities, suggestions are made that may have general applicability for others as new "smart systems" of engaged, multiple partnerships are attempted.

Addressing the Achievement Gap: The Benwood Initiative

The first major initiative was designed to turn around poor-quality schools in inner-city Chattanooga. The issue became a high priority in 1999, after test-score data were used to rank all elementary schools in the state by reading level. Nine of the bottom twenty were in Chattanooga. Interested in doing something about the problem, the board and the executive director of the Benwood Foundation approached the president of the Public Education Fund (PEF) and the superintendent of HCS to develop a joint effort to address the issue.

Six months later, convinced that PEF and the district had a reasonable plan of action, the Benwood Foundation agreed to spend $5 million over five years, and the PEF an additional $2.5 million, on a plan to reform the nine lowest-performing elementary schools in Chattanooga – the Benwood Schools. This plan, devised jointly by the district, the PEF, the Benwood Foundation, and a growing number of partners, took as its primary strategy improving and stabilizing the quality of faculty and supports for each school. Funding was used primarily to train classroom teachers in reading instruction, hire reading specialists to work with struggling readers, provide coaches for new teachers, and provide leadership training for principals and other school-based instructional leadership.

The Benwood Initiative represented a true partnership involving multiple partners. The Foundation got the ball rolling and showed its confidence in the district by approaching the superintendent to develop a plan. But the Foundation made its funding contingent on a plan that showed the promise of success. The PEF brought coherence and focus to the work by providing careful analyses of the data and making sure that attention didn't wander from the initial goals.

Chattanooga's mayor, Bob Corker, joined the effort as well. He gave a $5,000 bonus to identified high-performing teachers in the Benwood Schools whose students' test scores grew more than the expected growth. He held a yearly reception at his home for high-performing Benwood teachers and arranged for teachers in these schools to get low-interest mortgages as a part of recruitment-incentives packages. He also formed a Chattanooga Education Alliance to garner support for the program from top local business and community leaders.

In addition, the Osborne Foundation agreed to fund a program through the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga to provide Benwood

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The Benwood Initiative represented a true partnership involving multiple partners. The Foundation got the ball rolling. The PEF brought coherence and focus to the work. Chattanooga's mayor, Bob Corker, joined the effort as well.

The PCAS partnership is one of equal players: no single partner drives it or controls it. Instead, a steering group representing twenty organizations and community groups meets monthly and uses a set of agreed-upon priorities to drive the work.

teachers a free master's degree, and the University agreed to develop a tailor-made program for urban educators in these schools. The PEF contributed $500,000 to the master's program and serves as the coordinator.

The Hamilton County Education Association, the teachers union, was also a valuable partner, and their involvement made the challenge of reversing a decades-old problem of low performance and low teaching standards easier to overcome. The union and the district agreed to reconstitute faculties and to develop school supports that could recruit and retain high-performing groups of teachers. The union and the district formed a collaborative working relationship to address issues such as hiring, transfer policies, and differentiated pay in the contract, and this relationship helped accelerate the overall effort.

Systemic High School Reform: Schools for a New Society

In 2001, PEF and HCS received a five-year, $8 million grant from Carnegie Corporation of New York to participate in its Schools for a New Society initiative. The goal of the initiative was to improve all of the district's high schools by creating a more engaging, challenging, and personalized learning experience for all students. The strength of the PEF-HCS partnership and the success of the Benwood Initiative contributed to the successful attainment of the grant.

Under the initiative, Chattanooga high schools were reconfigured into small learning communities organized as theme-based academies, ranging from construction and engineering to liberal and fine arts that, simultaneously, would prepare students for college-level work and create interest in the world of work. While each school had considerable autonomy in identifying needs and determining priorities for the academies, each had to address four basic district-wide goals:

- Establish a more challenging, relevant, and engaging curriculum.
- Improve teaching by providing more professional development for teachers, leaders, and staff.
- Create a more personalized and engaging experience for students.
- Allow more flexibility to meet student needs more effectively.

Each academy offers classes in all core subject areas, as well as a range of classes in the theme-based program. Each academy is also designed to attract students who reflect the demo-

graphics and academic achievement of the school as a whole. As with the Benwood Initiative, a wide range of local partners played vital roles in the success of the high school reforms. For example, East Ridge High School has a strong connection with the Association of General Contractors. The academy prepares students for the workforce, for apprenticeships, and for college. Similarly, the health academy at Red Bank High School has a strong connection with Memorial Hospital, a nationally recognized partner of the year. In addition, city and county elected officials, district administrators, principals, teachers, parents, and students, as well as leaders in community organizations, higher education, and business, joined in the effort to redesign the district's high schools.

The Partnership for College Access and Success

Directly complementary to the high school reform initiative, the Partnership for College Access and Success (PCAS) is an eight-city program that helps communities bring together a broad variety of local organizations – the school district, institutions of higher education, community- and faith-based organizations, businesses, and government – to prepare students to succeed in college. Funded by the Lumina Foundation for Education, the Community Foundation of Greater Chattanooga, and the PEF and coordinated by the PEF with technical assistance from the Academy for Educational Development, PCAS also aims to increase family awareness of opportunities for enrolling in and paying for college. PCAS chose Chattanooga as one of its eight sites, in

part, because of initiatives already under way to improve students' access to and success in college, including the Schools for a New Society (SNS) high school reform initiative.

The PCAS partnership is one of equal players: no single partner drives it or controls it. Instead, a steering group representing twenty organizations and community groups meets monthly and uses a set of agreed-upon priorities to drive the work. Currently, the partnership is focusing on three high schools, representing diverse urban, suburban, and rural populations, which are serving as pilot schools for the project. Leadership teams at these schools are implementing strategies and approaches such as college-night programs, sophomore and senior retreats, college tours, test-preparation activities, and faculty training to ensure that all students and parents have the information they need to plan for, apply to, and pay for college.

College-access counselors, funded by Lumina, SNS, and district funds work to help each school build its short- and long-term capacity to make the changes implicit in the move to a single-path curriculum, the goal of which is to ensure that all students graduate with the option of college. Summer interns help high school upperclassmen and their families explore post-secondary aspirations by taking them on college visits, helping them refine post-graduation education plans, and meeting families in their homes.

PCAS's work is not limited to these three schools. The partnership has provided five full days of professional learning for all high school counselors and community-based organization staff who want to attend. The sessions, developed by counselors and community-based organization staff, includes topics such as financial aid, college visits, challenges for freshmen, and help for students in writing essays. In addition, partnerships with the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga and Chattanooga State are aimed at improving retention for entering students.

A Strategy for Building the Capacity of Districts to Engage in Multiple Partnerships

It is crucial that district leaders put aside old behaviors and attitudes so that districts can effectively function as discrete and independent organizations in their communities. A defensive posture of maintaining control and holding authority close and inside the organization does not support the concept of smart education systems or smart districts and inhibits the development of a spirit of collaboration.

Our experiences with the Benwood Foundation and the teachers union, among others, demonstrated for me

and other leaders in Hamilton County the importance of partnership and helped us build our capacity to work with organizations that could provide needed ideas and resources. We learned that a welcoming attitude and the cultivation of equal and engaged partners will contribute to building a culture of cooperation and collaboration.

A basic principle of effective collaboration is that participants must have parity. Too often, as districts engage in partnerships with community-based organizations, there is a mindset that the district must be in control. While district control is appropriate in some respects, district leaders need to understand that engaging partners as equals has much greater potential for success. Ownership is important for all participants in successful reform initiatives. Furthermore, district leaders need to cultivate this change in attitude with district executive staff, middle management, and school-based staff. Cooperative relationships among people within the various organizations can lead to success; the absence of these relationships can cause failure. Bringing down barriers to effective collaboration is necessary.

Many partners will be more narrowly focused on single issues, but that is not bad. In fact, that narrow focus may create much greater capacity to effectively deal with an issue. There were many examples in Hamilton County in which the sharp focus of various partners added real value to what the district could accomplish. Perhaps the unique role for the district leadership is keeping the big picture clearly in mind. The idea of equal part-

ners – some with a razor-sharp focus on key issues and others that keep a broad perspective of how various pieces fit together – makes sense.

It is reasonable to assume that a district could have twenty, thirty, or more partnerships at any given time and that the work of these partnerships would continue to increase the capacity to reform as trust between the partners grows. It is important for the district leader to balance these multiple working relationships with the vision and direction of the district.

A good analogy to potential problems with multiple relationships is a district that was very successful in receiving grants from governmental, as well as private sources. With multiple funding partners, it would be easy to lose central direction and focus and have different grants taking the district in divergent or, at least, uncoordinated directions. Hamilton County was very successful in gaining competitive grants from public and private sources, but there were also attractive opportunities for funding that were not taken simply because they did not fit the reform agenda and direction of the district. For example, we almost turned down a major grant from the National Science Foundation because it was not aligned with our goals. Instead, we negotiated with the Foundation and agreed to redefine the grant so that it matched our priorities.

Identifying a few key partners that can coordinate the efforts of many other participating organizations with a district is an effective strategy. The PEF in Hamilton County was invaluable in working with other philanthropic and community-based organizations that became engaged in the two comprehensive reform efforts. That key partner

greatly enhanced the capacity of the district reform efforts in these two initiatives and helped to organize the efforts of other participants. Without that partnership and a good working relationship between the leadership in the district and in the PEF, it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to engage as many participants and find the success that resulted.

A high degree of trust must be established and an effective working relationship must be grown over time to fully develop the capabilities of such

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Too often, as districts engage in partnerships with community-based organizations, there is a mindset that the district must be in control. District leaders need to understand that engaging partners as equals has much greater potential for success.

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a key partnership. District leaders should seek out and cultivate organizations that have the capacity to become that key partner. The advantages for the district leader are significant when these types of relationships are built. The district leader can develop contact with multiple participants in the effort and not be overwhelmed by unmanageable time requirements, in addition to the other responsibilities of overseeing the complexities of a big district, but can still be very connected to the work.

An effective change leadership team was established in Hamilton County to steer the work of systemic high school reform. The leadership team was composed of the superintendent, the president and one other representative from the PEF, the SNS director hired by PEF, and two key participants in the reform initiative from the district. This team met on a monthly basis, and all aspects of the reform were discussed. The superintendent and president of the foundation were always present, an agenda was prepared in advance, and follow-up plans were made at each meeting. This standing team participated in the Change Leadership Group at the Harvard University Graduate School of Education, where the team had the opportunity to further develop leadership strategies to steer the comprehensive reform effort.

Other district, school, and foundation leaders, as well as teachers and other outside participants, were very involved in the reform effort. The lead-ership team did not make all the decisions, and, in fact, one of the strengths of the reform effort was that many teachers and parents were involved over time in the planning and implementation of high school reform. Schools were given flexibility; outside partners were involved at the district and the school levels, and business and higher-education organizations were involved in key decisions. The level of ownership in the reform effort was extensive, and the superintendent stayed closely involved in the work through the leadership team.

The strategy of developing key partnerships and leadership teams can be expanded to manage multiple complex reform initiatives in a district at the same time. Creation of leadership teams of district leaders and key outside partners can increase the capacity to engage many participants in multiple reform initiatives, keep close connections to the work, maintain focus and direction in the district, and successfully lead complex reform.

The Challenges of Scale and Sustainability

Bringing a successful reform initiative to scale is often a concern for district leaders. If an initiative is successful in one school or community, district leaders will most likely feel pressure to make that initiative available in all schools or communities that have similar needs. Lack of effort to take successful reform to scale may generate negative reaction both inside the district and in the community. In addition, if successful initiatives are brought to scale, the possibilities for sustainability are also much improved. District leadership will likely be more aware of the need to go to scale than many of the

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participating community partners. Eliciting the help of community partners that might be focused on a single school, community, or project is an important district responsibility.

The urban reform initiative in Hamilton County is a good example of a successful effort to help a set of low-performing elementary schools and the pressure that arose from other schools in the district to have access to the same system of supports. District and school leadership in the initial set of schools responded by first inviting other schools to participate in staff- and leadership-development opportunities. Then, because of the success of the initiative and effective partnerships with key partners that were very engaged in the work, grant funds were offered to expand the initiative beyond the original set of schools, and lessons learned are being incorporated into districtwide plans. Potentially negative reactions have been turned to positives. Furthermore, the strategic use of grant funds, federal funds, and district funds has helped to ensure sustainability.

A district's capacity to reform can be greatly enhanced by effective development of multiple partners. For many traditional school leaders, learning how to function effectively in such an environment is challenging, but not unrealistic. Perhaps the key to success is a change in attitude for district leaders to engage as partners on an equal basis with other organizations.

Developing key partners to organize the work, engaging many community-based partners that are passionate about their constituencies and their agendas, collaborating with teachers and the teachers union and finding common purpose, engaging the business community and local government, and engaging philanthropic partners, both locally and nationally, can lead to successful reform. Then it becomes easy to envision annual summits convened by the district, a local education fund, or a local governing body to bring many partners together to consider the community vision for public education and the various roles that each partner plays to accomplish that vision.

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Parents Building Communities in Schools

Joanna Brown

An effort to engage parents in Chicago schools results in benefits to both the schools and the parents.

Joanna Brown is director of education organizing at the Logan Square Neighborhood Association in Chicago.

On any given day, in nine public schools in Chicago's Logan Square community, about 170 parent mentors and parent tutors are in elementary school classrooms tutoring children; every evening two or three teams of parents and teachers make Literacy Ambassador home visits; about eighty mentors and several hundred other parents are attending school-based community centers to learn English or learn skills, while another sixty parents are in college classes to become bilingual teachers.

Most of these parents are immigrant mothers or the daughters of immigrants. Their schools are part of a network of schools serving low-income, largely Latino children, brought together by the Logan Square Neighborhood Association (LSNA) to create schools as centers of community – and serve the needs of the immigrant students.

Enter an LSNA school and you see mothers sitting in hallways with small groups of students who are intently reading out loud. A mother comfortably enters the principal's office to remind her of a meeting. Mothers meet in a corner of the cafeteria to plan a family reading night for all. As a teacher passes by she calls – "Cati, your son was looking for you upstairs." In the evening, 1,000 families participate in classes and activities held at the schools and managed by parents.

LSNA is the forty-five-year-old community organization of Logan Square, a mixed-income, majority Latino immigrant neighborhood of 84,000 residents on Chicago's northwest side. LSNA has forty member organizations, including churches, social service agencies, block clubs, and nine large public schools (two K–8, four K–6, one 7–8, and two high schools.) Some 8,300 students, 90 percent of whom are from low-income Latino families, study in these schools.

For more than fifteen years, LSNA has been organizing community members around education issues. In doing so, we started with some basic principles. First, as part of the 1989 Chicago school reform movement, which established elected parent-majority Local School Councils (LSCs), we knew that the Councils needed an organized community in order for their formal

authority to select and hire principals on four-year contracts to be meaningful. Second, as the community group for a particular neighborhood, we had a vision of opening the doors of fortress schools and helping them function as centers of community. Third, as organizers, we were committed to listen to and value what residents wanted and to build on community strengths.
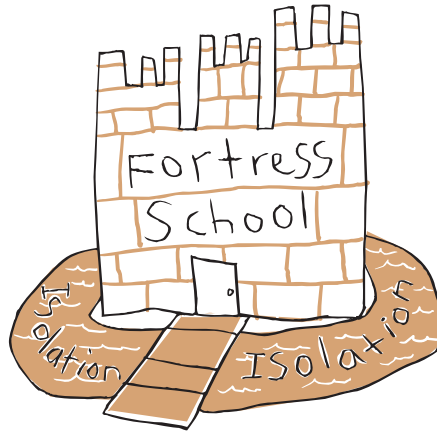
We also suspected that disparities of education, language, and income were only some of many factors that created barriers to parent involvement in schools. And we believed that transformational learning happens through experience, by doing. We also knew that we would have to raise the money to pay for whatever we built.

However, we never imagined the full results that could be achieved by deeply tapping into the strengths and skills of parents.

Building a Successful Collaboration between Schools and Parents

In the early 1990s, LSNA built a coalition of principals, teachers, and parents to address school overcrowding. This coalition represented an early version of the shift in strategy more community organizations are making – from confrontational organizing against school administrations to a sometimes complex but highly productive inside-outside collaboration in which ideas, buildings, and power are shared by the schools and the community, particularly parents.

LSNA's new school-community collaboration was successful. By 1996 LSNA had won five large building additions and two new middle schools. At the coalition's insistence, the buildings were built so that they could be used as community centers in the evenings.

The social trust built by common struggle and victory laid the basis for the collaborative community-building efforts that followed.

Parents as Leaders: The Parent Mentor Program

The Parent Mentor Program was launched in 1995 and has served as the open door for many parents, particularly mothers, to become involved in their children's schools. It began in one school, Frederick Funston, a pre-K through grade 6 school. Principal Sally Acker, who had been active in the overcrowding campaign, asked LSNA to develop a "parent mentor" internship program to involve non-working mothers and help them further their education and find jobs.

> Parents who walked freely in and out of the CLC began to see the school building as partly theirs and education as something that united their family.

Fifteen Funston mothers were recruited into the program, trained, and placed in classrooms to work two hours daily with students under the direction of a teacher. LSNA's initial one-week training helped mothers to see themselves as leaders, reflect on their skills, set personal goals, and commit to achieving them. It also provided the space within which to develop strong cohorts; mothers, isolated by such factors as their immigrant experience, lack of English, and small children shared common experiences and found personal support from each other.

Every applicant was accepted, regardless of education or language (many spoke only Spanish), and each was placed in a classroom where she could be helpful. They attended weekly workshops on a variety of topics and reflected together on their classroom experiences. They wrote journals. They held potlucks. They helped each other pursue their goals, usually involving learning English or returning to school. At the end of 100 hours they received a $600 stipend.

Changing the Family-School Relationship: Community Learning Centers

The parent mentors at Funston also helped plan the Community Learning Center (CLC) that was established as a result of the successful anti-overcrowding campaign. The mentors surveyed their neighborhood door-to-door, asking over five hundred families what programs they needed in an evening school-community center. LSNA raised funds to keep Funston open until 9:00 p.m. with adult education and children's programming and hired two parents to run the CLC.

The CLC helped change the way families and school staff saw the school. Not only was the center accessible to parents (the school was close to home; classes and childcare were free; and children were tutored while their parents studied), but parents who walked freely in and out of the CLC began to see the school building as partly theirs and education as something that united their family. The CLC held Thanksgiving and Christmas parties to bring participants together. Daytime teachers got to know parents by teaching English or classes to prepare for General Educational Development (GED) tests at night, and some of the most popular classes were taught by parent mentors – whether Mexican folk dance for children or sewing for adults. The CLC was overseen by advisory boards that included parents as well as principals.

Expanding Parent Involvement Programs into More Schools

Over the next few years, the process of establishing Parent Mentor Programs and CLCs was repeated in nearby schools as parents and principals asked for the programs. Today, LSNA has

CLCs in six schools and Parent Mentor Programs in nine schools; many other programs, activities, and organizing efforts grew out of these efforts.

The programs have reaped enormous benefits for the parents involved. Over 1,300 mothers have graduated from the Parent Mentor Program. The majority returned to school or got jobs. About fifty hold part-time jobs working for LSNA in schools running parent programs, tutoring, or working in community centers as childcare providers and security guards; ten have been AmeriCorps volunteers with LSNA; eight hold full-time jobs at LSNA as education organizers, community center coordinators, or health outreach workers; and two are teaching after graduating from LSNA's teacher training program. At the CLCs, thousands of adults have studied English, while 500 have earned their GED certificates. About 700 families participate weekly in activities that range from adult education and family counseling to tutoring, recreation, and music and art for children.

The Parent Mentor Program and CLCs have also proved highly generative. Parent mentors sought a way to involve parents who couldn't visit the school during the day and helped develop LSNA's Literacy Ambassadors program to bring parent-teacher teams to homes to read, share food, and build bridges with groups of families. Parents who surveyed neighbors became dedicated to block-club organizing and then health outreach, helping many uninsured families access affordable health care. When mentors found they loved working in classrooms, LSNA brought in experts from Chicago State University to create a bilingual teacher training program specifically for parent mentors. (It now serves as the model for a state-

funded, statewide Grow Your Own Teacher program initiated by a coalition of community organizations.)

The impact on the schools has been huge. "We add a lot of life to the school," said parent Lucila Rodriguez. "We run all the activities. And the students don't feel they are alone, because their parents are there too. And if it's not their parent, it's a neighbor, or the parent of a friend." School climates have become more positive and welcoming, and standardized-test scores have

tripled. After visiting one of LSNA's centers in 2002, Chicago Public Schools CEO Arne Duncan called for 100 schools to establish CLCs, and many have done so.

Rules of Engagement

Despite the interest in the concept, the value and function of deep parent participation in schools is less well understood, if only to judge from the many visitors LSNA gets (from as far away as the Philippines and Russia) who ask: "How do you get parents involved?"

What has LSNA done to bring parents into the schools and keep them involved over the years? Here are some simple guidelines.

- *Real work*: While schools have traditionally tapped parents – as outsiders – to help with fundraisers, costumes, and the like, there is nothing quite so empowering as becoming part of the educational process. Transformation at LSNA has come from involvement in the real, respected work of teaching and learning and parents consistently rise to the challenges and achieve success. When a parent mentor tutors a failing student and that student, for the first time, learns how to read, the parent, like the student, is transformed and committed.

- *Respect*: Respect is a complicated idea, taking on new meanings as relationships deepen. We find out what the parents know and care about. We value their culture, language, and experience – and tap their knowledge (language, culture, life experience, and knowledge about children) for the curriculum and to connect to the students. Respect also means following the "iron rule" of organizing – don't do for others what they can do for themselves. It's important to challenge them to keep moving forward.

- *Reciprocity*: Respect requires reciprocity – mutual support and mutual learning. Parents learn how difficult a teacher's job is, and teachers learn how much parents have to give, particularly their passion for children and strength in building relationships with them. Parents and students learn together and from each other.

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More specifically, here are some ways we operate:

- *Recruitment.* We recruit person-to-person, as well as by flyers. We take virtually every parent who applies, regardless of education or language; we have found from experience that everyone is useful in some classroom. We always look for new mentors and work to avoid cliques.

- *Stipends.* Money shows that work is valued. It is one way to tell mothers they are wanted and it is an extra incentive to overcome fears of the school or feelings that they have nothing to offer. For many mothers, the stipend is their only personal income, and legitimizes their work to their husbands.

- *Bridges and spaces.* A Parent Mentor Program graduate who runs the program can be the bridge across the school-community divide, backed by LSNA staff who help deal with cross-class or cross-cultural tensions. The initial training is a bridge and a space: on Day 1, mothers are shy and scared; by Day 5 they are ready, though a bit anxious, to meet their teacher and enter the classroom. The Parent Mentor Program creates a legitimate parent space inside the school, with its own rules and identities and its own cohort for support.

- *Apprenticeship.* We're not against informational workshops, but we believe deep knowledge and commitment come from experience. The Parent Mentor Program structures experience to provide the learning. Teachers are told that parent mentors must work directly with children, not make copies or clean floors. Parent mentors learn about the school as they experience it every day.

- *Leadership development.* The theme of the parent mentor training is, "You are leaders in the home, school, and community." Parents are challenged to be leaders – not clients. At every possible opportunity, LSNA is preparing parents to take on leadership roles – working as an "assistant teacher," speaking in workshops or public meetings, telling their story to the press or to funders, recruiting new parents.

- *Community engagement.* Parents are always encouraged to take on new challenges and to organize together to improve schools and community. Some forty-nine LSNA parents sit on the school councils, where they help select principals and approve budgets. They participate in LSNA issue committees, community meetings,

campaigns, and marches – taking positions on immigration reform, affordable housing, safety, or health. They pass petitions, testify, and meet with aldermen and state legislators.

Parent mentors and Parent Mentor Program graduates have reciprocated by creating community schools where families feel at home. They have:

- organized hundreds of family reading nights in the community centers where mothers provided storytelling and reading games side-by-side with teachers;
- created school assemblies where mothers explained Mexican history, displayed various kinds of Guatemalan houses and food, and told the story of Puerto Rican baseball hero Roberto Clemente;
- built Day of the Dead altars to Mexican grandparents, Princess Diana, and Mother Teresa in their school library and explained them to classrooms of students who visited;
- created parent lending libraries where mothers with small children can bring them during school to take out books in Spanish and English, drink coffee with neighbors, and learn about the community;

By truly welcoming parents, providing them a legitimate space within the school, and encouraging and respecting their knowledge, one opens the door to limitless opportunities.

- organized Mother's Day assemblies and Children's Day festivals to celebrate these highly popular Latin American holidays, which they felt were neglected in their schools.

These are only a few examples. The point here is not to provide a list of things that organizations and schools should do. The point is to emphasize that by truly welcoming parents, providing them a legitimate space within the school, and encouraging and respecting their knowledge, one opens the door to limitless opportunities.
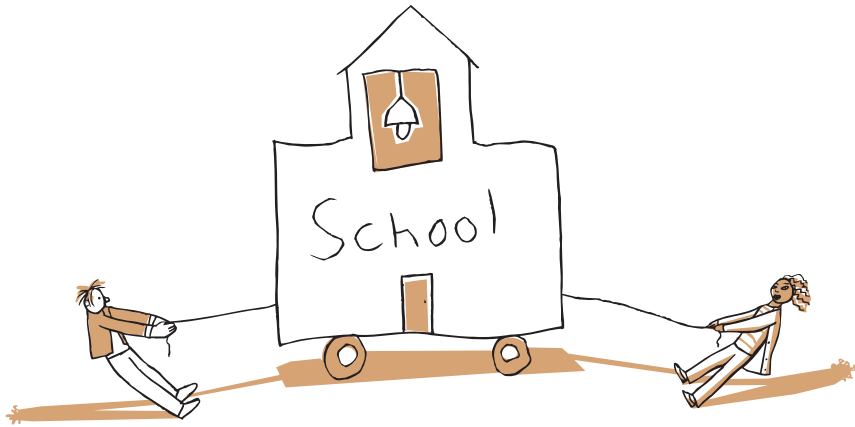
At the core of the parent mentor experience is a personal transformation from a private, often isolated immigrant or welfare mother to a person who sees herself as a school or community leader. Parents have led the transformation of schools, teachers, and the community.

Support and Challenges

This work may sound simple, but in practice, LSNA has had to build a structure to provide support for the parents. Each parent mentor group has a paid half-time coordinator who is a former parent mentor, works out of the school, and attends biweekly meetings with the other coordinators at LSNA. Her supervisor is an LSNA education organizer who is responsible for both the Parent Mentor and Literacy Ambassador programs in four schools. These organizers spend quite a bit of time at each school, mentoring the coordinators, meeting with principals, and getting to know the parents. In two schools, the parent mentor coordinator is paid by the school system as a "school-community representative" and, therefore, does additional work for the school.

LSNA's education organizers build bridges and trust in a variety of ways – from negotiating tensions, to inventing programs, to helping parents implement

projects they create, to giving workshops about neighborhood issues and holding discussions to get people's input. At their biweekly meetings, coordinators exchange information, make joint decisions about the program, and solve problems.

At every level, people are mentoring each other and learning from each other. Supervisors try to take advantage of every leadership opportunity to help newer people develop while helping the organization thrive – running meetings, testifying at funding meetings, talking to the LSNA board, testifying at the Illinois State Board of Education. Technical assistance comprises everything from computer training to helping people write and practice their public speeches.

New ideas are always being implemented and can come from anywhere. For example, we developed a "mini-grant" program where a group of parents in a school could apply for $300 to buy food or supplies for a parent-organized event that involved parents,

students, and teachers and had some educational or cultural purpose. We did that after various parents had said they would like to hold events in the school but had no resources to do it. Similarly, the Literacy Ambassadors program was created in response to parents in focus groups saying they wanted ways to help connect with the parents that never came to school.

Yet, as we move forward, we face challenges. The work of involving parents in schools is continually breaking boundaries and subverting the mainstream paradigm of schooling. Teachers visiting homes? Low-income parents tutoring students? Most teachers have not been trained to place a high priority on relations with parents, much less lean on them for academic support. Most new parent mentors don't believe they can really tutor. Both believe teaching is primarily a "technical" rather than a "relational" act. Many teachers are afraid to visit poor families. Families are afraid to invite them, and wonder what they can feed them and if they have enough chairs. Experience has changed these and other divisive assumptions.

But getting some people to take the first step has required belief and persistence by LSNA staff and parents.

Principals also balk initially at sharing their buildings. Community centers have raised turf and power issues. Disputes often arise from such minor concerns as missing chalk and toilet paper. Teachers and janitors may complain to principals, who are caught in the middle. And polite but empowered parents and principals sometimes disagree. In one case, a principal did not want to keep his building open in the summer for LSNA's community center. Finally, one LSNA staff person (a former LSC parent member who had hired that principal) suggested that the LSC parents meet with him to talk about it. He was cordial and agreed to open the school, given a couple of provisions – he wanted us to hire his assistant to be there while the building was open.

Logan Square schools have become more complex. They are no longer just places where professionals teach poor children and the lines of power are clear. Non-professional parents are more present, have more power, and are becoming more educated. Students feel more ownership. In this cross-class, cross-cultural, more-democratic community, conflicts and misunderstandings arise frequently. LSNA is a constant informal mediator, always clear that families are its main constituency but that the project requires full collaboration with the schools. One of LSNA's roles has been to build the social trust that supports the complexity inside the school and the political capital to support it outside – whether at the district level, in politics, or with funders.

Funding, of course, is another constant challenge. For twelve years, LSNA has pieced together public and private funding to sustain its education work, now close to $2 million a year. State funds, thanks to Latino state legislators, and federal funds, courtesy of the 21st Century Community Learning Center program, have been essential, as has support from the many private funders who value the marriage of education reform and community organizing that LSNA has modeled.

Today we face two specific funding challenges. First, under rules of the federal CLC program, our community centers will likely not be refunded if our schools improve too much and are no longer classified as low performing. The second is the short-term nature of funding from foundations, who expect our work to become "self sufficient." Ultimately, to survive and become part of "what a school is," these programs must receive permanent public funding.

Changing the Paradigm of Schooling

Logan Square schools – large, urban, low-income, immigrant schools – have moved part-way down the road to transformation, with organized mothers in the lead. Transformation of parents, teachers, and schools is possible, but the paradigm of schooling must change. Students must be seen not as blank slates ready to be filled by information, but as already partially formed cultural beings with their own cultural and social capital. Bilingualism and cultural complexity must be seen as assets, not deficits to be overcome. Parents are central to the educational system, not outsiders. And by treating them as partners and welcoming what they have to offer into the classroom, we can create schools that engage students and increase student achievement.

Stepping Up, Stepping Back: Developing Youth Leadership

Kavitha Mediratta

A youth organization in New York City develops young leaders to press for improvements in local schools and across the city.

Kavitha Mediratta is a principal associate in the Community Involvement Program at the Annenberg Institute for School Reform.

In New York City, a group of high school students came together in October 2004 to talk about how their high school experiences and, more generally, high school education in the city might be reshaped to support youth success in more powerful ways. Youth believed that by increasing the opportunities and support for young people to have a voice in schools, they could challenge pervasive low expectations for their academic success that contribute to under-resourced academic programs, overcrowded facilities, and punitive safety and discipline strategies. In framing the mission of their new effort, they wrote:

> The Urban Youth Collaborative brings New York City youth together to fight for change through local and citywide organizing strategies. We strive for social and economic justice throughout our communities. We are committed to building a strong youth voice to ensure that our high schools prepare students for college, for jobs that pay a living wage, and to work for justice in our society.

Three years later, the work of the Urban Youth Collaborative (UYC) has grown into a citywide effort that has engaged hundreds of New York City students. This fall, young people in Bushwick – the neighborhood in Brooklyn that was the site of the earliest youth struggles for voice in the city's high school reforms – are launching a Student Success Center to increase access to comprehensive college-access services.

Through its work, the UYC is redefining – and developing – youth leadership. In the parlance of youth organizing, a leader is a volunteer member of the group who actively participates in reform campaigns – who articulates the needs and desires of the group, supports the positive development of other youth, and mobilizes them in strategic action to achieve common goals. What can this practice of leadership contribute to the educational process *inside* schools and to how educators understand both the purpose and role of schools in educating students successfully?

The experience of the UYC offers a window into how young people's involvement in youth organizing builds leadership and how these processes

can be usefully supported through partnership with reform support organizations. The UYC's work suggests that youth organizing is important not only for improving educational outcomes for young people, but for transforming how those outcomes are defined and measured.

From Individual Frustration to Collective Change: Developing a Citywide Agenda to Meet the Needs of All *Students*

The UYC was founded in 2004 by three youth groups – Make the Road By Walking, Sistas and Brothas United of the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition, and Youth On the Move/Mothers On the Move. All three organizations had spent years working for public education reform in New York City and were frustrated by the lack of student involvement in educational decision making; this lack of involvement, the groups felt, contributed to the city administration's failure to fully grasp and respond to the complexities of problems in local schools.

Youth members were directly affected by these problems; many attended large, failing high schools that were in the process of being phased out as new, small high schools developed on their campuses. The pressure of the reform on schools resulted in escalating tensions between administrators, staff, and students among the different schools, increased overcrowding and safety incidents on campuses, and large numbers of older students being inappropriately counseled into new and untested alternative diploma programs in order to free up space for students in the new, small schools.

Over a six-month period, youth and organizers developed a four-part reform agenda (see Figure 1) intended to ensure that the needs of *all* high school students – not just the most successful – were being met. First and foremost, youth called for expanded student participation in their schools as a means of both enhancing school effectiveness and of supporting student agency in their own learning. As one New York City high school student explains,

> Do you think you should have a voice in your school? I do, because throughout history, students have been fighting for a voice in school that lets them decide what goes on, a voice that's theirs – [that] not even the principal or the Department of Education could take away. Now, the Department of Education thinks that by adding a student government in schools, that we have a voice. No, that's not true. Only students with 80 or 90 [grade-point] averages can join or run for it. What about the other students that don't get 80 or 90 averages, who have a different view of the school? The student with an 80 average doesn't have as many problems because of their grades or because they are [viewed favorably] by the teacher. . . .

Figure 1. The Urban Youth Collaborative's Agenda for High School Reform

Students [who don't have good grades should be involved] in the decision-making process because if the students feel like they don't have a say in the school, they aren't going to follow the rules, causing behavior problems – meaning that the student won't listen, they won't come to school, won't go to class, and [are] most likely [to] drop out.

As the UYC's work has evolved, it has grown into a citywide effort that now engages fifteen youth-leadership and organizing groups across the city. Its efforts contributed to the development of a new role statement for guidance counselors for the city schools, the expansion of conflict mediation training for school-safety personnel, improved training and safety procedures on two campuses, and, most recently, the creation of more comprehensive and integrated college-access opportunities for students. The Bushwick Student Success Center (SSC) that will open this fall provides increased access to early academic intervention and recovery programs, in addition to guidance, college, and career counseling. It also supports student leadership on the campus through youth involvement in designing, implementing, and evaluating the SSC and its services. UYC leaders hope to expand this initiative to other schools within the next two years.

Leadership in Action: How Youth Organizing Develops Young People's Leadership Capacity

How do youth organizing groups develop leadership? Though youth organizing groups vary in size, focus, and method, they generally share the following characteristics:

• They are nonprofit, community-based organizations with histories of working to improve their neighborhoods in a variety of arenas, such as environmental conditions, juvenile justice, immigrant rights, and employment opportunities.

• They are committed to developing the knowledge, attitudes, and skills

among young people to lead campaigns that challenge the status quo and raise demands for improved educational conditions and expanded youth opportunities.

- They work with the dual objective of achieving broad structural changes as well as winning specific school improvements.
- They work independently of schools and school systems, though some groups develop relationships with schools through service or youth development activities.

Most youth organizing groups work continually to identify and recruit students to join – often through classroom presentations and outreach in the lunchroom and before and after school, as well as through word-of-mouth from friends and family members. Students are invited to a meeting of their peers, in which they may discuss problems they face in the school or become involved in planning campaigns to address specific school concerns. Campaign activities include student-led surveys to gather the experiences of peers, formal student-led meetings with school leadership, and after-school rallies and social events to encourage more students to join the effort. Typically, youth groups augment these campaign activities with formal political education trainings designed to help students develop a deeper analysis of the conditions in their schools.

Over time, students are recruited into a progression of organizational activities: participation in school-based chapters leads to participation on organization-wide issue committees that grapple with systemic concerns that cut across schools and require a districtwide improvement strategy, leading, finally, to representation on the organization's governing structure that prioritizes matters of organizational development and strategy. Through this deepening involvement across cycles of organizing campaigns, young people learn how to take strategic action together to address problems. As they do, they also develop a wide variety of leadership skills, such as meeting facilitation, public speaking, speechwriting, negotiation, and consensus building.
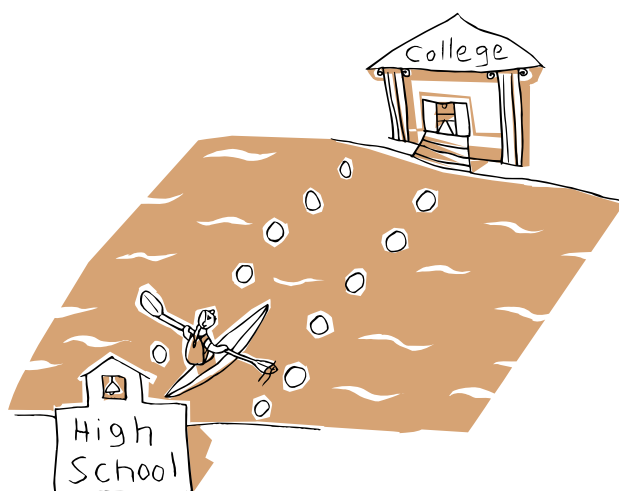
> Through this deepening involvement across organizing campaigns, young people learn how to take strategic action together to address problems. As they do, they also develop leadership skills.

"Stepping Up and Stepping Back": Structures, Roles, and Norms of Youth Leadership

Most organizing groups promote the concept of shared and distributed leadership; youth leaders are expected to demonstrate their advancement as leaders not only by taking charge (as leadership is conventionally defined), but also by supporting and encouraging their peers to play leadership roles within the organization. Though this support can be formalized through mentoring, as some groups do, it is more commonly operationalized as "stepping up and stepping back." A high school student describes this practice:

Step up is, like, taking on more roles and more responsibilities, you know; or, wanting to speak more, like chairing a meeting, creating an agenda, just participating more in general. And then you have to step back; once you've done all that, it's like – all right, it's great that you do it, but maybe it's time to step back and let other people do it. Maybe you still wanna do stuff, and that's fine, but maybe you'll step back and help other people do it too, 'cause that helps our leadership development agenda.

Stepping up and stepping back is vital to ensuring that newer members in the organizing effort are invested in the work and are developing the skills to lead it when older youth graduate from high school and age out of the organization. As another high school student explains,

> Right now, I'm co-president and I'm supposed to [be] the role model because one day I'm gonna leave, right, but before I leave, I have to pass the knowledge down. And so I mentor [newer youth] and train them so that they can become future co-presidents and so when I leave, I know that [the organization] is gonna be okay.
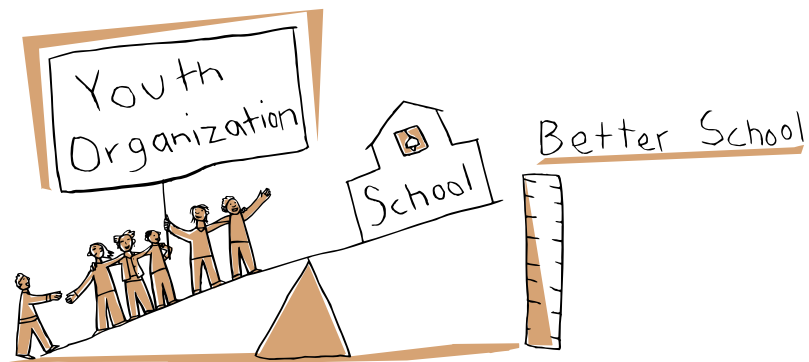
Importantly, youth leadership does not mean that adults are absent. Most youth organizations are staffed by adult organizers whose job is to help youth define roles and establish structures and norms through which young people can exercise control over the organization's activities. Within the UYC, for example, young people lead biweekly Organizing Committee meetings that develop the organization's campaign strategies. To prepare, they meet with organizers who support them in developing an agenda for the

meeting and in practicing their roles. In public events and meetings, though, only youth leaders are authorized to represent the organization to the media or with public officials.

For many students, this experience of leadership is transformational. A high school student who now attends college recounts:

> I was normally the type of person that just wrote everything down. I kept a lot of things in and I was always just writing everything down.... When the fight [with a classmate] happened, I felt like I needed to redeem myself – to myself though – because I was disappointed in the fact that I risked my high school education for a silly fight.... It was watching and hearing the positivity [within the youth organization] and knowing that what they were fighting for was to better their lives, their future, and then our little siblings. And it was just to see them stand up and be able to talk and… for the adults to sit back, the elected officials, the DOE officials who are supposed to be telling – you know, they tell our principals what to do and then our principals tell us what to do. To see them sit back and actually pay

attention and react positively to us, it was – that was it, just to see that happen… to know that I had that kind of power just with my voice meant everything to me. I was able to stop writ[ing] everything down and to bring it here.

The Role of Education Reform Partners in Supporting Youth Leadership

Education reform partners also play important roles in helping student-led efforts to succeed. These partners value student voice, yet provide their expertise and experience to improve youths' effectiveness as advocates for change. As adults, educational decision-makers are more experienced meeting-goers and more adept at educational and bureaucratic language, and they have more access to the kinds of information that can inform strategies for change. Reform partners can help level the playing field for young people.

The Community Involvement Program (formerly housed at New York University and, since September 2006, part of Brown University's Annenberg Institute for School Reform, a national reform support organization) has partnered with parent and youth-led organizations in New York City in developing multi-year campaigns that address core issues of quality and student leadership in local schools.[1] We have been a core member of the UYC since its inception. Within the UYC, we assist youth leaders in planning and leading UYC meetings, train new organizers in campaign development, provide information and analysis on alternative reform strategies, convene the directors of organizing groups to evaluate the progress of UYC campaigns, and raise funds to cover the costs of local organizers within each UYC member group.

To expand young people's leadership, in 2005 we developed a two-week Youth Organizing Institute (YOI) for

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1 Beginning in 2003, the Community Involvement Program has worked to expand young people's influence in public education reform in New York City. Our work stems from the belief that systemic improvement in the quality of public education for poor communities and communities of color requires not just increased capacity within schools and districts, but also the development of new political power so that capacity investments are distributed equitably and yield concrete results.

a core of twenty-five UYC leaders. Initiated with funding and encouragement from the Surdna Foundation, YOI introduces students to the history of the struggles for educational quality in New York City and provides skill-building opportunities to strengthen the UYC's organizing. Youth examine New York City Department of Education data on their high schools, review literature on effective reform strategies, meet other community organizers who "have gone before them," and discuss the implications of their own experiences to schooling policy and practice.

In creating YOI, we aimed to strengthen young people's leadership by providing a venue for students to learn and practice both academic and organizing skills.[2] Because UYC students predominantly attend lower-performing high schools in the city, we wanted to support the literacy skills and academic orientation of students. Each cohort of youth develops individual and group projects (including speeches, op-eds, policy briefs, and workshop outlines) that frame and communicate their reform proposal for external audiences. These products then become part of a UYC toolbox for subsequent campaigns.

As we have developed our work, we have begun to define a set of indicators of youth leadership capacity to help us assess the effectiveness of our support. This beginning framework includes:

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2 We developed YOI to link youth to educational policy experts and provide youth with networking opportunities to support cross-organizational campaign development. A scan of seventeen youth organizations in New York City conducted by the Community Involvement Program in 2004 found that though the number of young people and groups organizing to improve their schools was growing, youth and organizations consistently lacked access to data, training, and other analytic tools necessary to mount successful campaigns.

Education reform partners value student voice, yet provide their expertise and experience to improve youths' effectiveness as advocates for change. Reform partners can help level the playing field for young people.

1. Deeper knowledge of school reform and of the context and ideas structuring changes in school:
   • using data and evidence to frame reform proposals for peers, allies, and decision-makers targeted by campaigns;
   • bringing knowledge of the positions and perspectives of allies and education decision-makers into negotiating sessions.
2. Increased sense of self-efficacy and agency:
   • volunteering to take on a variety of supporting, as well as leading, roles within organizing campaigns;
   • sharing ideas regarding potential reform proposals and campaign strategies with peers, campaign allies, and educational decision-makers;
   • modeling leadership practices for other youth.
3. Increased involvement in organizing activities that provide an avenue for voice in citywide, as well as school-based, education reform discussions:
   • participating consistently in local and citywide UYC meetings to plan campaigns and assess progress;

District and municipal leaders credited youth organizations with significant roles in identifying critical schooling problems and building both political and public support for the necessary policy shifts.

• taking new roles in internal meetings with other youth and external meetings with educational decision-makers (such roles include chairing meetings, presenting reform proposals, and leading negotiating sessions regarding these proposals).

4. Increased focus on academic achievement and college going:
   • improving attendance at school;
   • completing homework assignments regularly;
   • preparing for high school exit exams and/or seeking out new high school options;
   • seeking out information on college options and taking steps towards applying for and entering college.

Taken together, these indicators of leadership development are helping us to think about the YOI program and how we can strengthen its components over time. But they also present a frame-work that might be usefully extended to schools. In addition to measuring the academic performance of students, as standardized tests are designed to do, administrators, classroom teachers, and other school staff might consider developing ways to measure and track the kinds of student growth and skill development that signal a deepening personal investment in their school and their educational experience.

Implications for Schools, Districts, and Education Reform Support Organizations

If the goal of schooling is to develop in students the knowledge, attitudes, and capacities necessary to live meaningful lives, then schools would do well to consider the role of young people's leadership in the educational process. Recent research conducted by the Annenberg Institute with funding from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation found evidence that youth organizing contributes to better schools. District and municipal leaders interviewed in our study credited youth organizations with significant roles in identifying critical schooling problems and building both political and public support for the necessary policy shifts and new resource investments.[3] Just as impor-tantly, data from our study suggest that when young people become actively engaged in improving their schools, they begin to expect more of themselves and their schools. These expectations include new goals for completing high school and entering college.

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3 For example, Sistas and Brothas United in New York City and South Central Youth Empowered thru Action (SC-YEA) in Los Angeles both helped secure funding for facilities improvements, monitor the progress of those repairs, and bring attention to neglected or uncompleted projects. SC-YEA's sustained focus on expanding college access helped secure the passage of a June 2005 school board resolution mandating college preparatory curricula in all the district's high schools. In Philadelphia, Youth United for Change's organizing led to a new set of district test-preparation standards and practices and transformed high school education in Philadelphia through a districtwide strategy of small-school creation.

Our on-the-ground experience with the UYC has shown us that the experience of youth leadership that occurs through youth organizing is a critical form of capacity building that students – particularly those in marginalized communities – need in order to be successful. Indeed, recent research by scholars such as Shawn Ginwright and Roderick Watts link the engagement of youth of color in civic and political activism to the emergence of both a critical consciousness and a sense of agency, which they believe enhances the sense of social/emotional well-being among youth of color (Ginwright & James 2002; Watts, Williams & Jagers 2003). This process of "sociopolitical development" among youth of color contributes not only to their capacity to fight for more just social and political arrangements in society, but also to their capacity to act in ways that expand the possibilities for their future.

As the work of the UYC suggests, such capacity building can happen externally to schools. Schools, districts, and reform partners need to find ways to support the community-based forms of development that youth experience – to value it, engage with it, and connect it to how student outcomes inside schools are defined and measured. Doing so will enhance, not detract, from schools' ability to create successful learning opportunities for students.

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Partners for Change:
Public Schools and Community-Based Organizations

Mark R. Warren

Community-based organizations can play important mediating roles to break down isolation and connect schools and the communities they serve.

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What sense does it make to try to reform urban schools while the communities around them stagnate or collapse? Conversely, can community building and development efforts succeed in revitalizing inner-city neighborhoods if the public schools within them continue to fail their students? Urban schools and communities share a common fate. Yet, until recently, school reformers and community builders have worked in isolation from each other.

Indeed, twenty years ago, one would be hard-pressed to find a community-based organization (CBO) that was actively working on education issues. Now, however, most CBOs realize that educational success provides the key to the future economic well-being of the children they serve. Furthermore, many would like to attract middle-class families back into their urban neighborhoods, and they would like to keep families who improve their status from leaving the neighborhood behind. They cannot achieve those goals if neighborhood schools are failing.

Many public schools, for their part, find themselves disconnected from the neighborhoods they serve. As Pedro Noguera (1996), among others, has noted, teachers and school staff typically commute to their schools and have little understanding of or connection with the lives of their students outside of school in their families and neighborhoods. Yet, educators increasingly realize that they cannot succeed without a more holistic approach. They understand that children cannot learn well if they lack adequate housing, health care, nutrition, and safe and secure environments – or if their parents are over-stressed as a result of low wages and insecure employment (see, for example, Duncan & Brooks-Gunn 1997). And they increasingly recognize that parental involvement in the education of children can improve learning (Henderson & Mapp 2002).

Community-Based Organizations as Relational Intermediaries

School leaders typically lack expertise in how to provide services to families or engage them in meaningful ways. Many CBOs, however, have established roots in neighborhoods around schools and stronger connections to families. More than schools, CBOs have an appreciation for the cultural and social assets of communities, and this is critical to fostering meaningful partner-
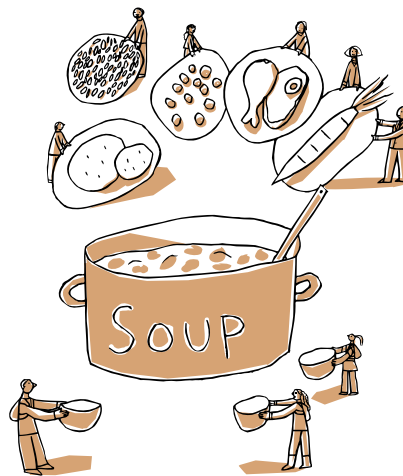
ships between schools and families. As a result, CBOs can play an important intermediary role in building relationships between families and their children's schools where they do not typically exist.

As school and CBO leaders have come to understand their mutual interests, a wide range has emerged of initiatives that seek to forge collaborations between CBOs and public schools. These partnerships can take different forms, but it is useful to contrast *service* and *organizing* approaches; schools have much to gain from both types of partnerships. My research has focused on the value of the social relationships built through both types of these collaborations.

Some CBOs bring their expertise in serving the needs of low-income families to schools. This is the central idea behind community schools, also known as full-service schools. In these partnerships, CBOs work with schools to provide health services in the school building to children, their families, and, sometimes, the broader community. They also provide after-school programs for children and adult education classes for their parents.

But something more than service provision happens here. As families enter the school for needed services, they begin to form relationships with each other and with school personnel, building what scholars call *social capital*. In fact, many community school advocates argue that services should not simply be "add-ons" to an otherwise unchanged school. Rather, as teachers consult with health-care providers and build relationships with parents, they

understand their students better and can, therefore, improve the way they teach children.[1]

Community organizing groups focus, first, on the building of social capital itself – that is, on generating participation and leadership by parents and other members of the school community. For example, the Logan Square Neighborhood Association (LSNA) trains over one hundred "parent mentors" each year across nine neighborhood schools. The parent mentors meet regularly to share their concerns with each other and receive leadership training from LSNA organizers. As they build their capacity and learn to collaborate with educators, they develop initiatives to help the school better meet the needs of children and their families. Parent leaders developed through the LSNA program have gone

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1 See, for example, my discussion of the Quitman Street Community School in Newark in Warren (2005). For a broader discussion of community schools, see Dryfoos, Quinn, and Barkin (2005).

on to work with educators to open community learning centers at the schools and play important roles in a variety of other programs.[2]

Social Capital: Building Capacity for Change

In whatever ways schools and CBOs collaborate, the building of new relationships appears critical to school change. In recent years, social scientists have been actively engaged in showing the many benefits of relationships, or social capital (see, for example, Saegert, Thompson & Warren 2001). Like financial capital (money) and human capital

When people are connected and know each other well, they can work together to make their schools and communities better. This kind of "social closure," as it is called, helps raise healthier children.

(education), social capital is a resource that can help individuals or groups achieve their goals. In other words, when people are connected and know each other well, they can work together to make their schools and communities better.

This kind of "social closure," as it is called, helps raise healthier children. For example, in community schools, parents and teachers can set standards for student behavior and learning expectations and then work together to make sure children get the same mes-

sage from all the adults around them – in the home, in the school, and in the neighborhood as they are walking home.

Anthony Bryk and Barbara Schneider (2002) have shown that schools with higher levels of trusting relationships are better able to move forward with school reform initiatives. This is, in part, because social capital in the form of strong relationships also promotes civic engagement. In other words, parents and other community members are more likely to participate in activities when they know other people and trust them. School leaders often get frustrated when they send flyers home for events and few parents show up. Yet research has consistently shown that people are most likely to attend a meeting when someone they know personally asks them to come. Absent real relationships, flyers don't work well. With a network of social relationships, schools build a collective resource for action.
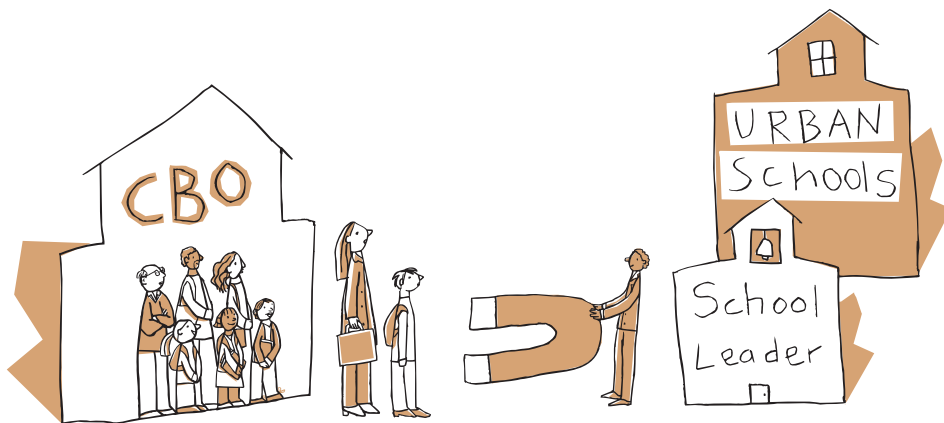
It is not necessarily easy to build social capital where it is lacking, especially the kind of "bridging" relationships that cross lines of difference. Efforts to build trust and to foster meaningful collaboration between and among principals, teachers, parents, and community members need to confront power differentials across the groups. If not, reform efforts can be derailed by mistrust and unresolved conflicts, as Bryk and Schneider (2002) have shown, or parents can withdraw if they feel they are being treated as pawns rather than respected as change agents.

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2 For a more extensive discussion of the work of LSNA, see Warren (2005) and Brown (2007).

Relational Power: Addressing Difference

The concept of *relational power* offers a useful way to approach issues of power in school-community collaboration. Relational power can be contrasted with *unilateral power*. Unilateral power emphasizes "power *over*" others – the capacity to get others to do your bidding. Yet relational power emphasizes a different aspect, "power *with*." It reflects the power to get things done collectively. Unilateral power is zero-sum, typically with winners and losers. By contrast, relational power should reflect a "win-win" situation.

Utilizing the concept of relational power can be helpful, first of all, because it puts issues of power and difference on the table. School personnel are notoriously resistant to discussion of issues of race and power. In fact, Mica Pollock (2004) has called schools "colormute." Moreover, many teachers do not feel very powerful themselves; rather, many, especially new teachers, report feeling isolated and overwhelmed (Johnson 2004). Nevertheless, teachers have greater education and status in relation to low-income parents of color, and they hold a powerful position in relation to a parent's child. In fact, many urban teachers hold deficit views of low-income parents of color (Valencia & Black 2002), seeing them as uncaring about education or as part of "the problem."

Building meaningful collaboration based upon mutual respect requires addressing these stereotypes. In fact, many studies show that dealing with conflict, rather than avoiding it, leads to stronger collaboration (see, for example, Heckman, Scull & Conley 1996). Community organizing groups, like the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), bring expertise on relationship building across lines of race and class. The Texas IAF network has build partnerships with over 120 schools across the state.

In my research on these "Alliance Schools," as they are called, I repeatedly heard community organizers state that the tension that occurs initially in open

conversations is necessary and healthy (Warren 2001; Warren 2005). Many parents in low-income communities have failed in school themselves. Moreover, as John Diamond and Kimberly Gomez (2004) have shown, many African American parents mistrust teachers and have serious concerns about racism. Teachers are sometimes afraid to deal with these issues, fearing that open conflict will lead to defensiveness and hurt feelings. So the context of collaboration matters, as does an openness to change. Under guidance from professional organizers, teachers and parents can agree to talk about these issues for the purpose of finding a way to work together. Ultimately, they share an interest in improving schools to better serve the children for whom they both care.

My research has also suggested that building relationships *among* parents helps create better conditions for meaningful participation with educators. This point is critical because schools typically view parent involvement as individualistic: it's about a parent's support of her own child at home or about the connection between one parent and her child's teacher.

However, on her own, a low-income parent typically lacks the status and education to collaborate as an equal with her child's teacher (Horvat, Weininger & Lareau 2003). But as parents come together to share their experiences, as they do in LSNA, they gain the confidence to raise their concerns, and they start to form a community. When parents view themselves as a collective group and their families as a community bounded by similar interests and desires, a potential foundation to act collectively for the benefit of all children can emerge. Drawing upon mutual support, parents can enter schools as actors ready for more powerful and meaningful forms of collaboration with educators.

The Principal as Collaborative Leader

Although the community organizer plays a key role as intermediary and catalyst for change, the principal also plays an important role in fostering collaboration. Traditionally, principals have served as gatekeepers for schools, fending off community "interference," and acting as top-down, "unilateral" administrators within schools (Goldring 1990; Hollister 1979). Newer thinking advocates the advantages of *distributed leadership* within the school (see, for example, Spillane 2006) – a more collaborative style of engaging teachers akin to notions of relational power. Community partnerships, however, entail yet a further step – toward engaging non-educators as leaders in the school community, which requires principals to cross boundaries and share their power even more broadly.
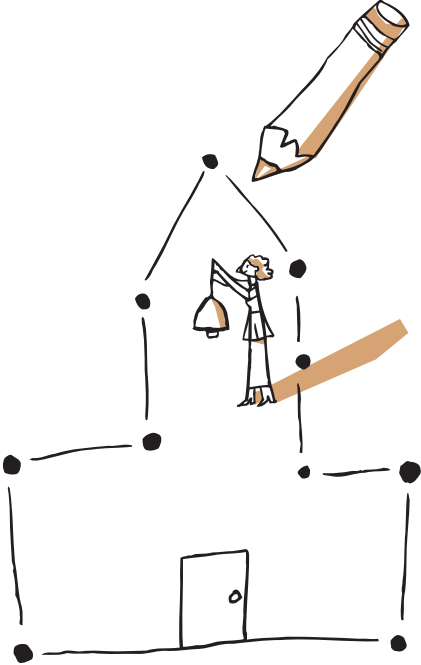
Increasing parent power through collaboration does not require that teachers lose their authority as experts in education. But it does require that teachers enter authentic processes of relationship building and engagement with parents and community leaders.

There is tension here. Principals need to recognize that teachers have expertise in education *and* that parent and other community leaders have a legitimate role to play in decisions about educational issues. Increasing parent power through collaboration does not require that teachers lose their authority as experts in education. But it does require that teachers enter authentic processes of relationship building and engagement with parents and community leaders. Rather than approaching parents with the agenda of teaching them how to be better parents or simply to support the school's agenda, the relational approach engages parents around their own interests and values and respects their contributions. In this process, both educators and parents grow and change, potentially forming a learning community together.

High-stakes testing regimes have put tremendous pressure on principals. These regimes often work to narrow the purposes of schooling to producing increases in scores; they can crowd out the space for the kind of collaborative experiments discussed here. Investing in building social capital takes time. Yet it promises a more holistic approach to student learning and development through the broader strengthening of community and civic life. Despite the pressure of testing regimes, many school leaders are beginning to see their school as one of a set of institutions that can anchor poor neighborhoods in partnership with other community organizations.

A Broader Vision of Collaboration

So far in this article, I have focused on change at the individual school level. However, that perspective is, ultimately, too narrow. Individual schools can do a

better job of educating inner-city children when they form partnerships with locally based CBOs. However, it is patently unreasonable to expect that this partnership alone can compensate for the effects of poverty and racism.

Urban schools suffer from a lack of resources tied to their location in poor communities. They often have less-qualified teachers, overcrowded classrooms, older buildings in need of serious repair and upgrading, inadequate textbooks, and outdated facilities. Meanwhile, the socio-economic conditions faced by families in these communities lie in deep structures of inequality and power differentials in American society. Governments at many levels could address low pay, inadequate health care, the lack of affordable housing, and many other conditions *if* the political will existed to do so. In other words, poverty is a problem of power – or the lack of power.

Partnerships that go beyond individual schools to the district level could help move collaborations towards a scale more commensurate with need. School districts can direct extra resources to support innovative projects between CBOs and schools and allow the kind of flexibility in policies that partnerships often require. The Austin Independent

School District, for example, has provided this kind of support to the IAF's Alliance Schools network in Texas. More than that, school administrations could work with citywide networks of CBOs to develop strategies to foster partnerships across the district. Chicago Public Schools, for example, has worked with a network of philanthropic, corporate, and community organizations to adopt a districtwide strategy to build community schools.

Ultimately, however, addressing the structural inequality in American education and community life requires building a political constituency for a combined agenda. As Jean Anyon (2005) has suggested, a movement for education reform might provide the backbone for advancing a broader social agenda for urban families. Collaborations with broad-based community organizations whose constituents have their children in urban schools can supply the foundation for the political effort necessary to address school and community inequality.

Some kinds of partnerships between schools and community organizing networks show real promise in this direction. The Texas IAF network, for itself, brings community resources into schools to help them improve. However, it also brings schools out of themselves, engaging parents and teachers in collaborative efforts

with other community leaders to build affordable housing, improve health care, and foster economic development.

School-community collaborations at the individual school level can, in fact, provide a foundation for larger political constituency building. My research has suggested that people, especially those without human and financial capital, are more likely to engage in civic and political life through their social relationships. The first step in this process is for people to build face-to-face relationships at the most immediate level – for example, in their neighborhood schools. Through that experience, they can gain the skills and build the confidence conducive to participation in wider efforts in their cities and beyond.

That experience, in turn, can help parents, teachers, and community residents become stronger leaders at the school and neighborhood level. Larger collaborations for systemic change are still rather rare. However, partnerships between individual schools and CBOs provide some of our best hope for creating the kind of change we need – both in individual schools and communities and in our broader society.

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