

Community Organizing for School Reform:

It's Growing and Getting Results

Community Involvement Program

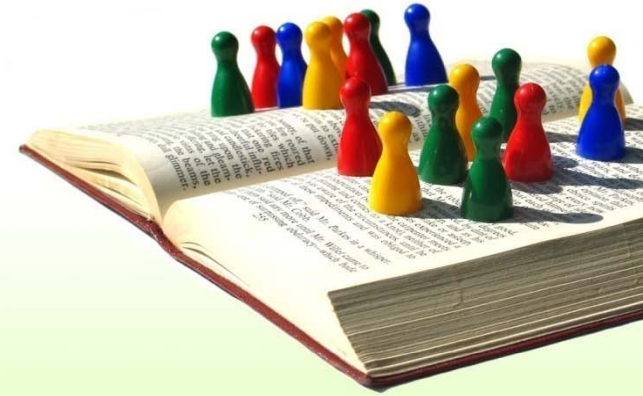
Presented:

March 30, 2005

National Coalition for Parent
Involvement in Education

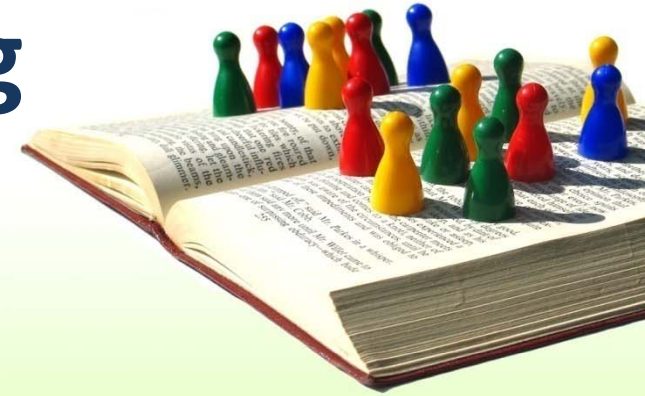


What is Community Organizing?



- An effort to build power by mobilizing large numbers of people to address the imbalance of political and economic power in society.
- Ongoing recruitment of parents, youth and, sometimes, educators and training to develop their skills to lead the organizing.
- Focused on increasing schooling accountability, quality and responsiveness.

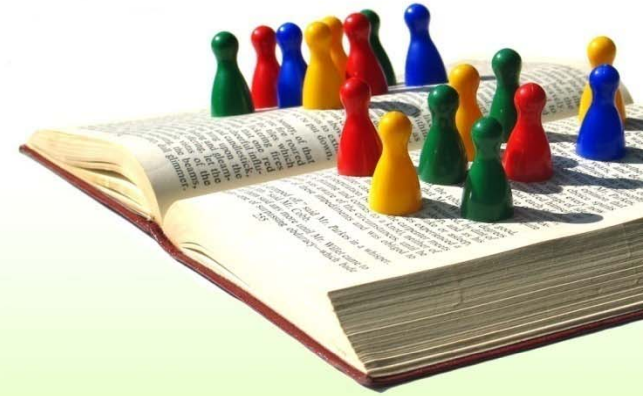
What community organizing for school reform is not:



- Not traditional parent involvement
 - Focused on all students, not individuals
 - Independent of the school
- Not service provision or advocacy
 - Iron rule: never do for others what they can do for themselves.

But community organizing often results in greater parent involvement

- Parenting
- Communicating
- Volunteering
- Learning at home
- Decision-making
- Collaborating with the community to bring services and resources to the school



What kinds of groups do this work?



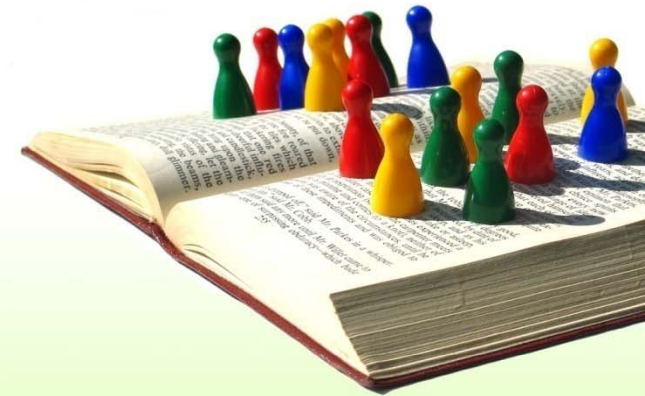
- Small, mostly indigenous groups
- Most work on many neighborhood issues
- Largely black and Latino memberships
- Some recruit individuals, others are comprised of local organizations and churches
- Over 200 nationally, and the number is growing
- 1/3 are connected to national organizing networks, such as ACORN, PICO, Industrial Areas Foundation, and others.

Why do groups organize?



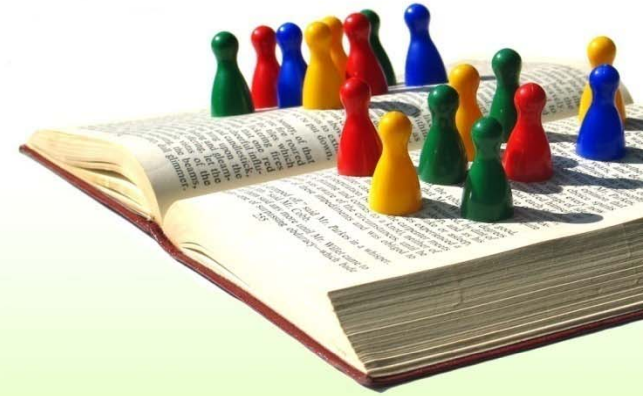
- Neighborhood improvement successes lead to school quality
- Demands from parents or young people to improve the conditions and quality of local schools
- Expansion of national organizing networks to more places
- Increased funding and support for the work

The roots of this work:



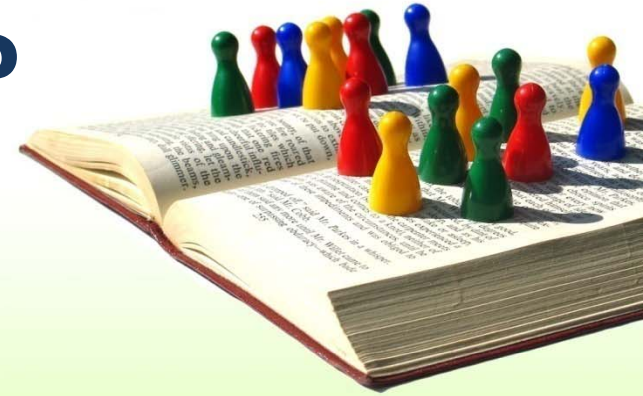
- Labor movement, and Saul Alinsky's Back of the Yards project in the 1930s
- Mobilizations of African American communities during the civil rights and Black Power movements
- Neighborhood-based citizens' organizations, initiated by War on Poverty programs, that led to poor people's organizations such as the Welfare Rights Organization and ACORN.

Other important influences:



- Consensus-based, non-hierarchical norms of decision-making within the women's movement
- Community development corporations, and other locally driven neighborhood improvement efforts
- Workplace and community-based mobilization of immigrants, youth and people of color against racial and other forms of discrimination

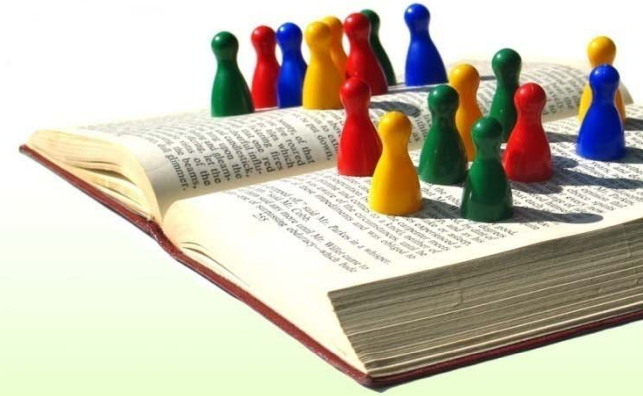
What is the work achieving?



Examples of victories:

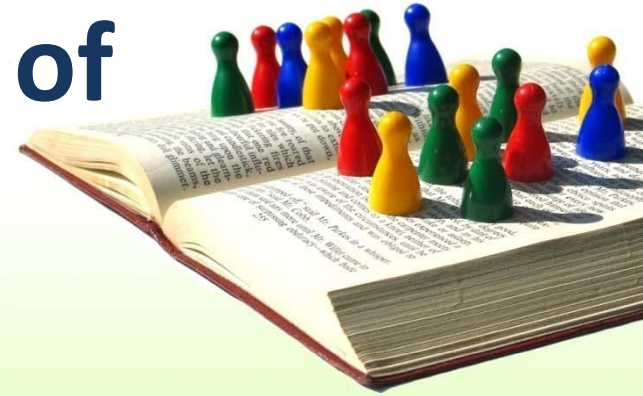
- More money for underserved schools. (Groups have brought millions of dollars for new school construction, facility repairs and new programs.)
- New policy and leadership to increase equity, access and accountability (such as a new district-wide small schools policy in Oakland).
- Innovative teacher recruitment and professional development programs (such as the Grow Your Own teacher program in Chicago).

How do groups work to change schools?



- Range of approaches:
 - big power mobilizations (rallies, public meetings) to win large scale policy reform,
 - school-by-school work to build a new culture of trust and relationships between educators and parents.
- Building power and partnerships with educators is critical..

Successful groups use a mix of organizing strategies



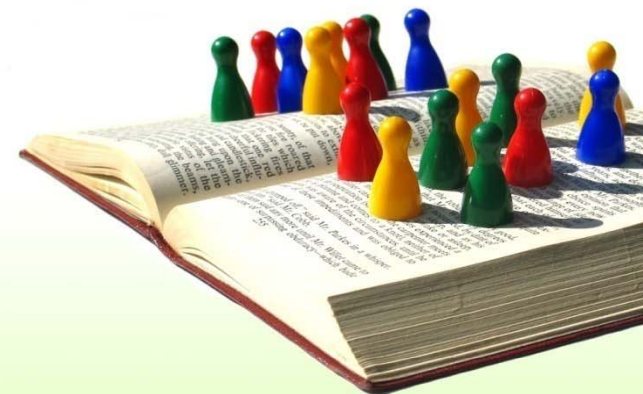
- Integrating data and research into campaigns;
- Building pressure for change locally and through district, city, regional or statewide coalitions;
- Combining collaborative and confrontational tactics to build relationships while maintaining pressure.

Example: Chicago ACORN



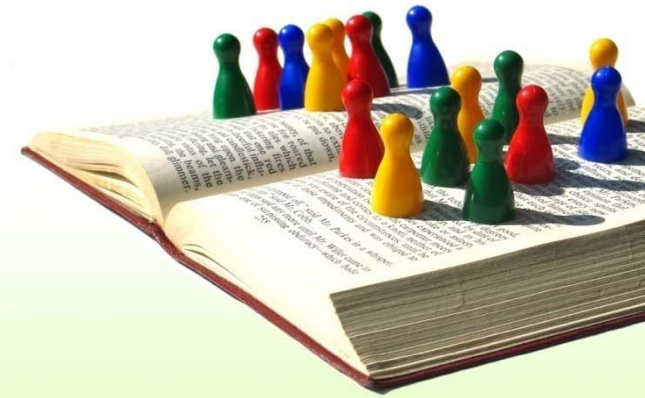
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| Background | Founded in 1983 by Madeline Talbott as part of the National Network of ACORN organizations, to organize low and moderate income families for economic justice |
| Impetus for education organizing | Began organizing in 1988 with the passage of the 1988 Chicago School Governance Reform Act. Local school councils provided an entry for organizing parents. |
| Major education campaigns | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• School facility Improvements• Small schools• New teacher retention• Teacher recruitment – “Grow Your Own” paraprofessional to teacher program |
| Level of organizing | District level campaigns for policy reform; works at the state-level through Illinois ACORN, and nationally through ACORN. |

Example: OCO



| | |
|---|---|
| Background | Founded in 1977 by John Baumann S.J. and Jerry Helfrich S.J., using a neighborhood-based direct membership approach to recruit new members. Later shifted to a congregation-based model. |
| Impetus for Education organizing | Began organizing in 1989 to address school safety concerns raised in church-based local organizing committees. |
| Major Education Campaigns | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Charter schools and new autonomous small schools• District policy and support for small schools; school facilities• State funding for small schools, school construction, after school programs, and teacher professional development |
| Level of organizing | school, district; works statewide and nationally through PICO. |

Distinctions between the two groups



- Method of recruitment & structure:
 - Direct membership-based vs. institution-based
 - Large vs. small staffs
- Focus of organizing & educators' roles:
 - School-level focus:
 - Establishing external accountability for improvement
 - Building a “relational culture” in schools to support improvement
 - District/policy focus:
 - Allying with educators to support implementation of key reforms
 - Creating and scaling up new strategies for improvement

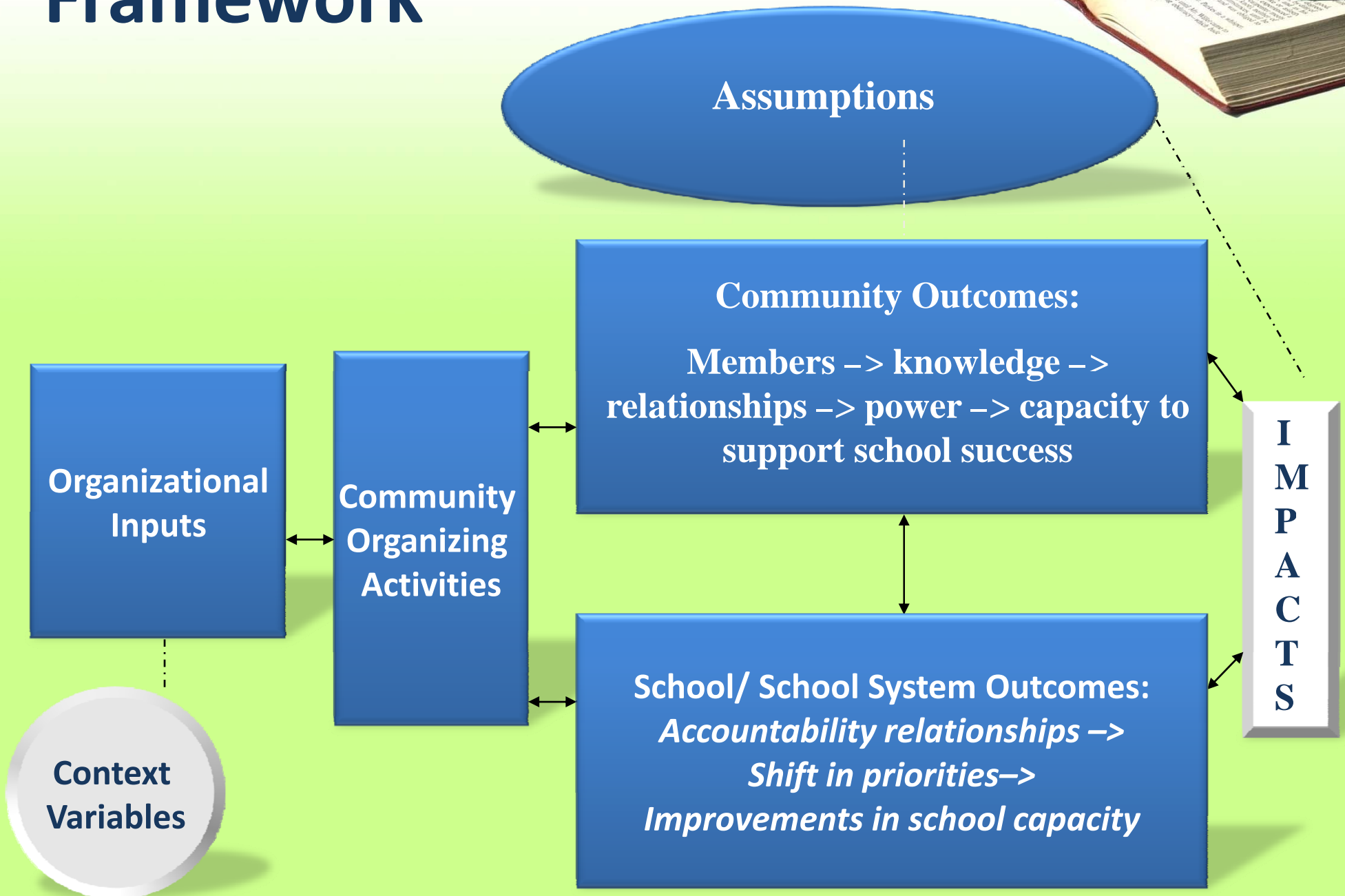
How organizing leads to change. A beginning framework.

Constituents of Change

IESP 2004



Conceptual Framework

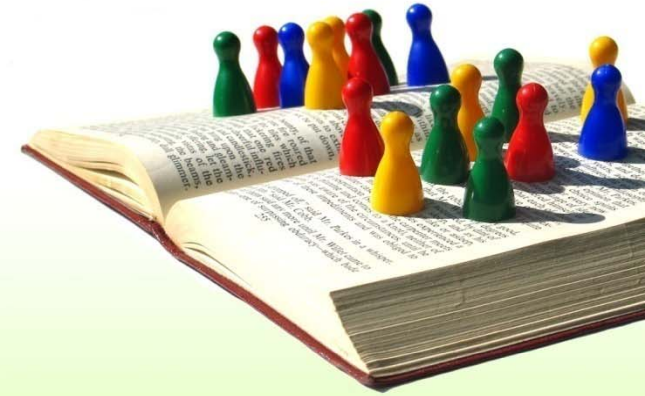




INCREASED SCHOOL CAPACITY

1. **School context:** equitable policies, public support, community involvement, student readiness
2. **School climate:** safety, relational culture, facility improvements
3. **Professional culture:** collaborative school culture, higher quality professional development, teacher morale, effective instructional leadership
4. **Instructional core:** Curriculum that reflects community values and priorities, standards-based instruction and assessment, ample and appropriate instructional materials, student engagement.

Research Study



- 6 year study of 8 community organizing groups
- Central questions:
 - Do education organizing efforts change the nature of accountability and the quality of engagement across schools, districts and communities?
 - Do the new relationships lead to new school and community priorities and capacities that result in improved learning outcomes for all children?
- Case study methodology: integrates qualitative and quantitative data; draws on grounded theory and theory of change frameworks
- Funded by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.

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