

Constituents of Change:

Community Organizations
and Public School Reform

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 to develop their skills to lead the organizing.

What Community Organizing Is Not:

- Not traditional parent involvement
 - Focused on all students, not individuals
 - Independent of the school
- Not service provision or advocacy
 - Never do for others what they can do for themselves (iron rule)

Background:

The State of Education Organizing

- Since the late 1990's, education organizing has increased exponentially.
- Increasingly, community organizing is becoming a powerful and viable strategy for public school reform.
- Mapping Study 2001: Findings

Impetus for Current Study

- Little documentation and research
- In 2002, the Mott Foundation funds NYU IESP to study 8 education organizing groups
- 6 year study: qualitative and quantitative data

The Core Research Questions:

- Do education organizing efforts change the nature of accountability and the quality of engagement across schools, districts and communities?

The Core Research Questions:

- Do the new relationships generated by community efforts to equalize power dynamics lead to new school and community priorities?
- Do these efforts, in turn, lead to capacities that result in improving learning outcomes for children?

The Eight Groups: An Overview

Study Group	Location	National Network	Youth Organizing
OCO*	Oakland, CA	PICO	
Chicago ACORN	Chicago, IL	ACORN	
AI*	Austin, TX	IAF	
MICAH*	Milwaukee, WI	Gamaliel	
PACT*	Miami, FL	DART	
EPOP*	Philadelphia, PA	PICO	YUC
CC	Los Angeles, CA		SCYEA
NWBCCC	Bronx, NY		SBU

* Faith-based

Today's Presentation

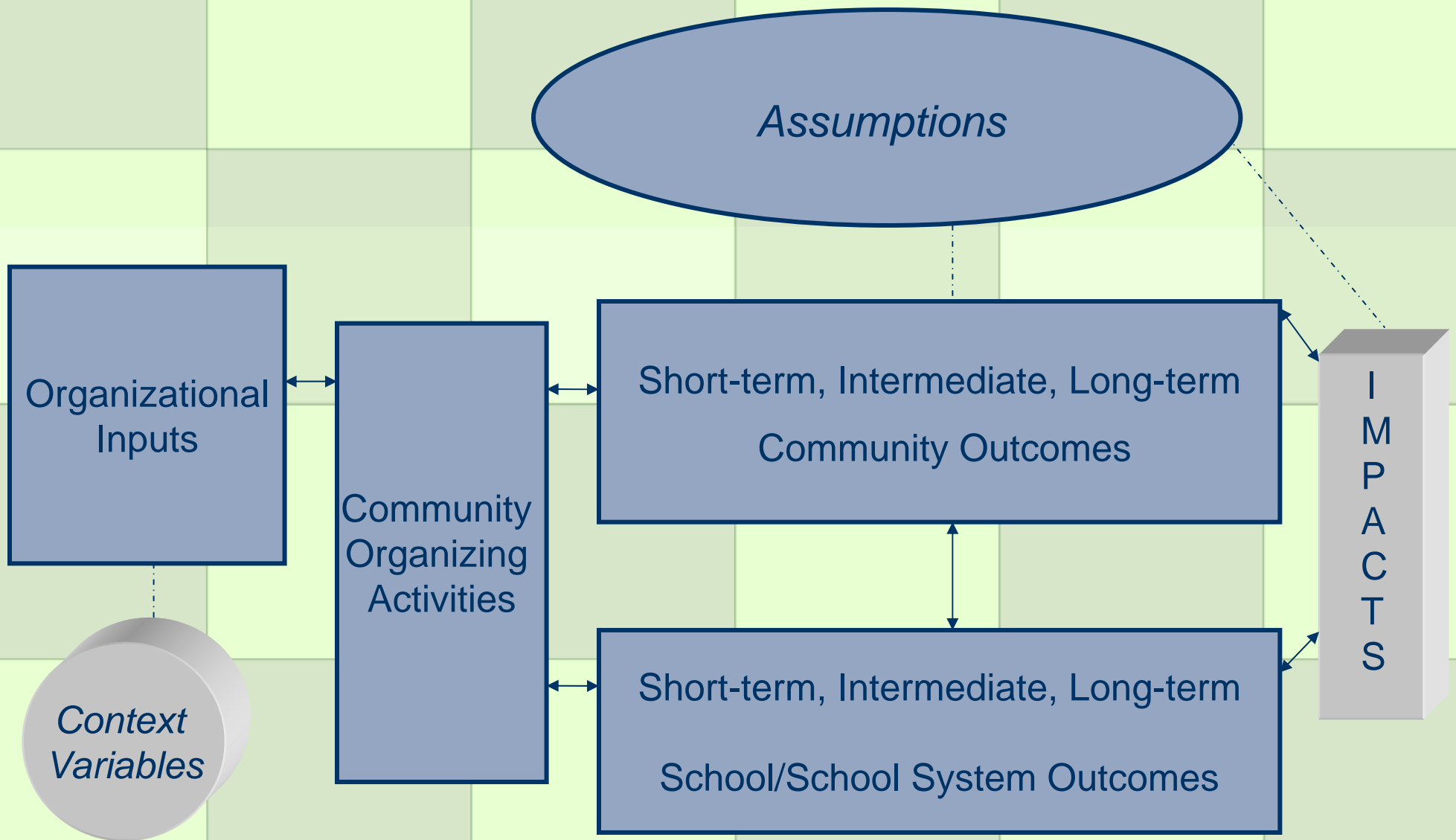
- Conceptual Framework
- Case Studies
 - Chicago ACORN
 - Oakland Community Organizations (OCO)
- Methodological Challenges

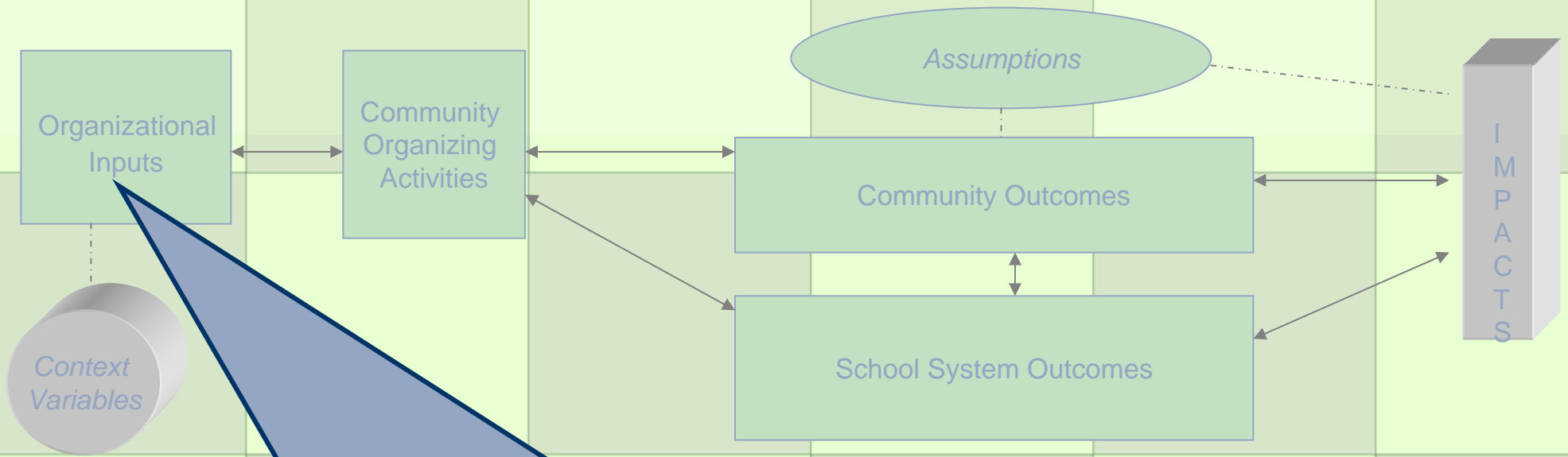


Conceptual Framework:

An Overview

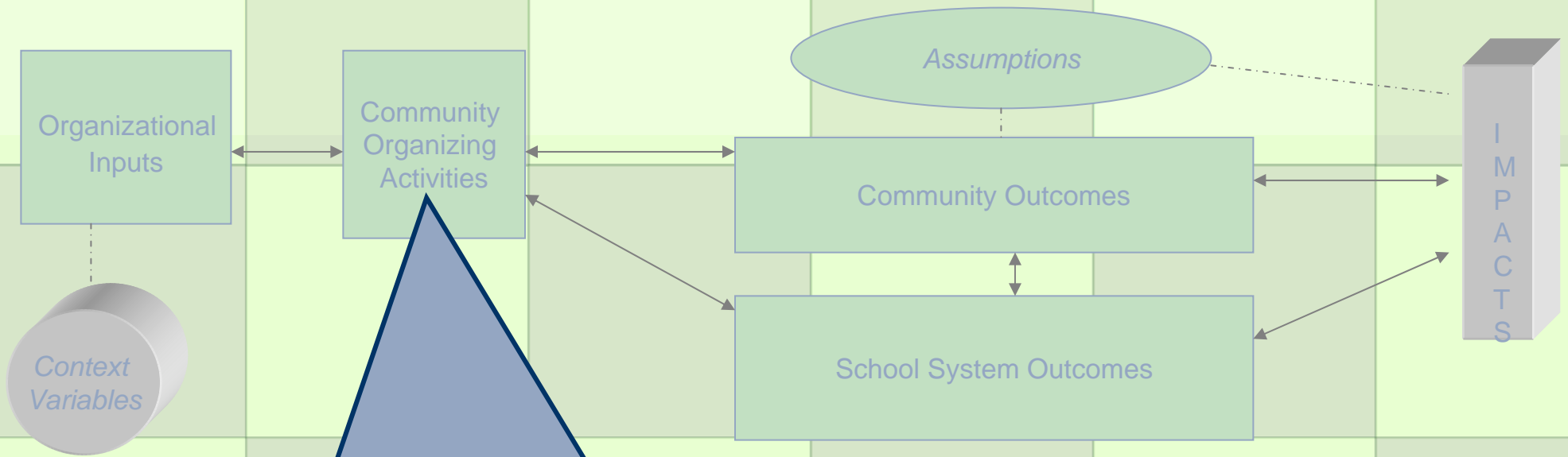
Conceptual Framework





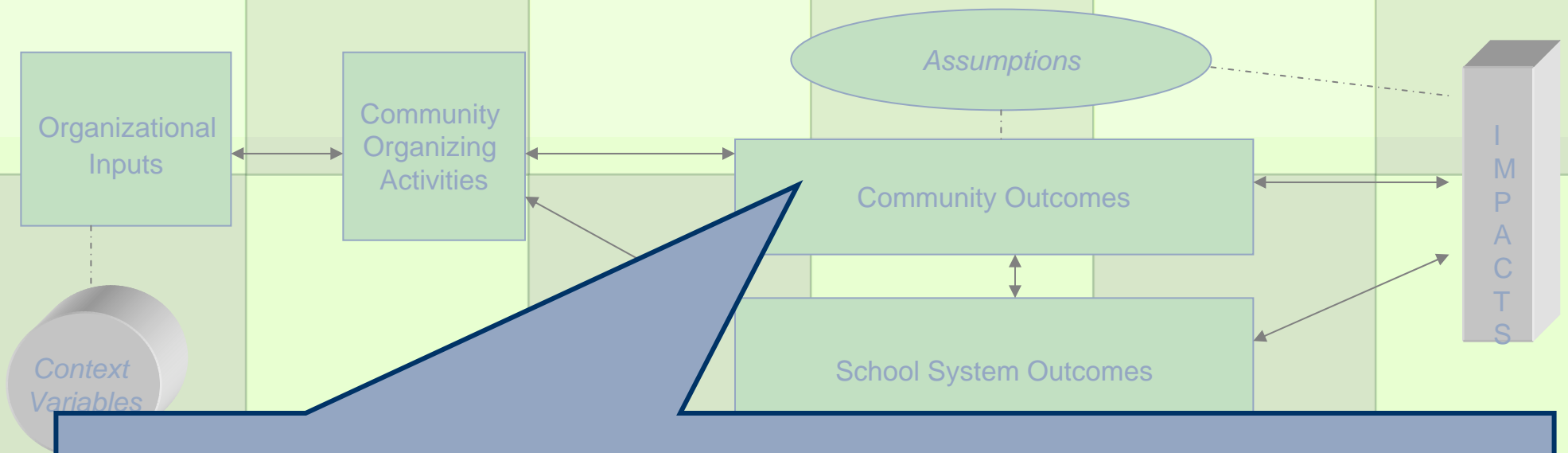
Organizational Inputs

- *Local Leadership*
- *Trained Organizers*
- *Funding*
- *Clearly Articulated Methodology*
- *Access to Outside Expertise*



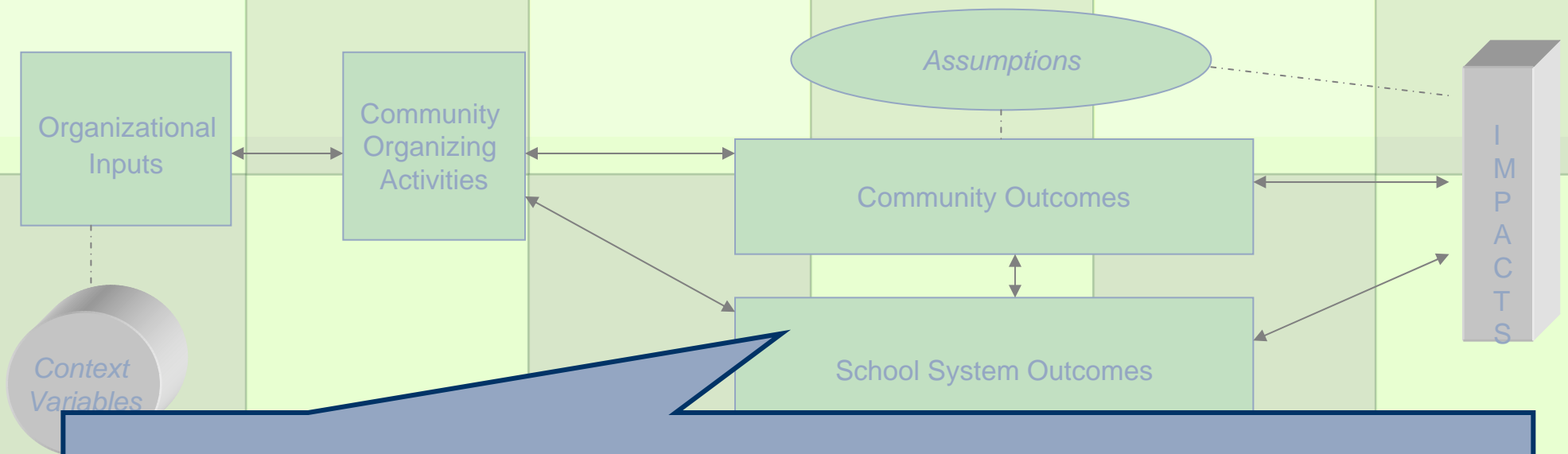
Community Organizing Activities

- *Professional CO staff work with the community*
- *Recruit parents/young people/other adults to become members*
- *Leadership trainings*
- *Identify organizing “issues”*
- *Conduct research*
- *Define targets, develop and implement campaign plan*
- *Identify data sources*
- *Define specific school reform organizing strategy*



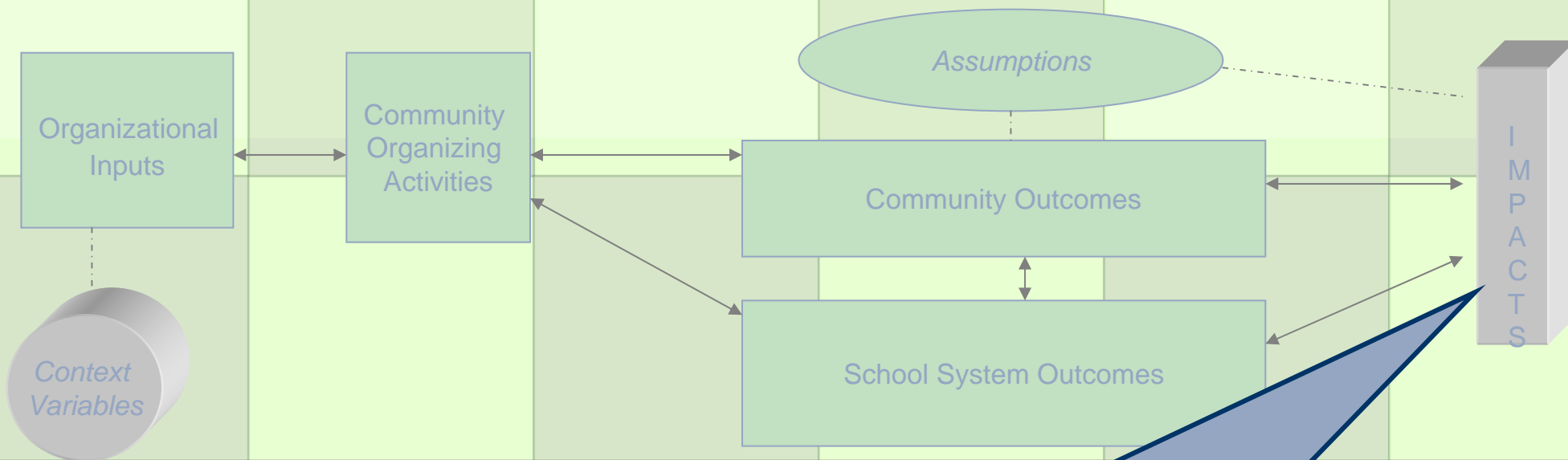
Community Outcomes

- *Stable, yet growing membership base*
- *Increasing public visibility*
- *Individual members more knowledgeable about education system*
- *Individual members take on leadership roles*
- *Increased capacity to achieve school reform goals*
- *Parents more knowledgeable and engaged in public school reform*
- *Increased community capacity*



School/School System Outcomes

- *School/school system under increased scrutiny*
- *Shifts in internal school dynamics*
- *School and/or system more responsive to the group*
- *Internal school capacity improves*
- *Transformation of educator attitudes*
- *More equitable policies, higher quality teaching, collaborative school culture*
- *Curriculum more in line with community values and priorities*



Impacts

- *Accountable schools*
- *All students learn to high standards*
- *Community capacity to advocate for better schools*
- *Broad civic engagement in support of public schools*

Case Studies:

- Chicago ACORN
- OCO

Chicago ACORN

Background	<p>Founded in 1983</p> <p>Founding organizer Madeline Talbott initiated the organization as part of the National Network of ACORN organizations, to organize low and moderate income families for economic justice</p>
Impetus for Education Organizing	<p>Began organizing in 1988 with the passage of the 1988 Chicago School Governance Reform Act</p>
Major Education Campaigns	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Capital Improvements● Safety● New Teacher Support● Teacher Quality
Level of Organizing	<p>School and district-level organizing;</p> <p>IL ACORN organizes at the state level</p>

Grow Your Own Campaign

- ACORN teacher retention study
- Collaboration with community groups and universities
- Introduced state legislation
- Grow Your Own Summit 2004

Chicago ACORN

**Until we started doing this, people did not see teacher quality as an issue for parents. You get that all the time...They relegate parents to this little area of parent involvement, not understanding that we don't want to be involved, we want quality education. We don't need any more involvement. We've got work to do, we've got homes to run, jobs to go to...the natural place for parent in schools is around teacher quality. --
ACORN organizer**

Chicago ACORN

**We captured a bit of ACORN's imagination about the fact that the system was taking much more serious this issue of recruitment and retention. And this came about because of the neighborhoods that they were working in, which were primarily North Lawndale and Englewood and Little Village, and they had gone about, I guess it's two, maybe even three years ago now already—they've gone about issuing their own little study, "Teacher Turnover in North Lawndale," which they were reporting was at like 40% in relation to the first five years of people were assigned at those schools. -
-University Researcher, former CPS official**

Chicago ACORN

So several weeks before the report was even issued, they did some briefings around the central office with people saying, we've got this report, we're going to issue it, and we want to make you aware because it's going to have some pushback. Arne's [CPS Superintendent] going to get a call from Roz Rossi at the Sun-Times and Linda Lenz over at Catalyst is going to want to do a feature on this...But they were politically smart enough to kind of position their work in such a way that they could say, we know that this is a problem. We know you're working on this problem. We're trying to bring more of a spotlight on it in relation to the neighborhoods that we serve. --University Researcher, former CPS official

Chicago ACORN

They were very well organized and they utilized a program that was already in existence as a basis for their legislation. They've done a lot of research into teacher turnover at the various schools, and primarily in the city of Chicago, and have, I think, come up with a novel way of addressing that problem. They're also looking at rural schools, where they have hard-to-staff schools as well. And they've reached out to the higher education groups and to other groups who share some of the same interests that they have so they have a networking base, that I think is very effective. --Senior State Education Policy Official

OCO

Background	<p>Founded in 1977</p> <p>Founding organizers John Baumann S.J. and Jerry Helfrich S.J. created the organizing project using a neighborhood-based direct membership approach.</p>
Impetus for Education Organizing	<p>Began organizing in 1989 to address school safety concerns raised in church-based local organizing committees.</p>
Major Education Campaigns	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● School Level: New Small Schools● District Level: District supports for small schools, school facilities● State Level: Building state support for small schools, school construction, enrichment and after school programs, teacher professional development
Level of Organizing	<p>Schools, Districts, City, State, and National</p>

New Small Autonomous Schools

- Organizing parents and teachers
- Collaboration with BAYCES
- 15 new small schools in the last 3 years
- Funding victories

OCO

During that time, the organizer read the book, *The Power of Their Ideas*. A couple of things happened, I think. He read that book and got really excited about it and he gave it to some of the moms that were working from that church to read...And I think another thing that happened was that they were complaining about the school being dirty all the time, he challenged them to do one-to-ones with the janitor. The janitors were saying we can't keep the school clean because it's overcrowded, so there's different ways that the question of size came up, like what is the relationship of size to the problems that the parents are reporting? --OCO staff

OCO

I think the other thing that's different is that it is a lot harder, one of our organizing principles is control the environment, control the outcome. I think that in churches there's a shared value...a shared language, there's also the authority of a pastor so you can really set a tone for a public meeting, where you're able to maximize your power. And I think that in the schools, it feels to me almost like the Old West, it's sort of like everybody has the guns drawn and [there are] all kinds of groups that are out there in the schools, so when you start doing something you unintentionally step on somebody's toes because they've been fighting this forever, they've dug in their heels, and they've identified all their enemies...--OCO staff

OCO

It's really about changing schools from having a bureaucratic culture to having a relational culture. So instead of thinking bureaucratically, I'll call a meeting. I'll send home flyers. I'll do this, I'll do that. The principal thinks about who do I need to have a conversation with. –OCO staff

OCO

It's interesting, we've been in meetings with BayCES now 3-4 years and I mean, clearly we play entirely different functions in the reform effort. OCO plays the parent & teacher organizing role at least initially--creating the political will to create new schools, to get them approved and then at a district-wide level to get the policy put together, and passed, and in the implementation stages as well as working at central administration redesign. So OCO plays—it's primary function has been a political ingredient, political will function. BayCES provides the coaching, research, support mechanisms in a non-coercive kind of way, in terms of people, the design teams are engaged around ideas of quality education. --OCO staff

Chicago ACORN & OCO

Chicago ACORN	OCO
Direct membership (low, moderate income residents in 3 neighborhoods)	Institutional membership (congregations, community groups, schools)
Secular	Faith-based
District policy change → School-level change	School-level change → District policy change
Improved Inputs	Relational Culture



Assessing the Impact of School Organizing

Important Issues

- Part of larger problem of assessing school change
- Difficulty of proving causality
- Need to look at change over time
- Availability of data

Indicators Framework

SCHOOL CONTEXT

Resources
Equity-based policy
Community support
Student readiness

SCHOOL CLIMATE

Facility conditions
Environment: discipline, safety, focus on learning
Student, parent and community roles in the school
School relationship with community

PROFESSIONAL CULTURE

Teacher collegiality
Teacher morale
Professional development
Instructional leadership

INSTRUCTIONAL CORE

Teacher education and experience
Curriculum, pedagogy, assessments,
instructional materials, and student
engagement

Connecting Outcomes to Campaigns

- Develop indicators that reflect:
 - each group's specific campaign goals, as well as...
 - the wide variety of intermediary changes in schools

Defining Campaigns

- Start date
- Target
- Stated goals
- Indirect consequences

Operationalizing Outcomes

	CA	IL	NY	TX	FL
Average teacher salary		X		X	
Years of teaching experience		X	X	X	X
Level of education		X	X	X	X
Type of certification	X		X		

Data Needs

- State data
- Survey data
- Observations and interviews
- Comparison group
- Multiple years



Discussant's Comments