

Educator Perspectives on the Impact of Community Organizing on Education Reform

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Today's Presentation

➤ **Emerging Findings**

In every site, district and school administrators attribute key educational policy decisions and/or innovations to youth and community organizing groups.

➤ **A Principal's Perspective**

Oakland Community Organizations case study

Background and Emerging Research Findings

What is community organizing for school reform?

- Involves youth, public school parents, and community residents and/or institutions
- Builds power by mobilizing large numbers of people
- Focuses on accountability, equity and quality
- Recruits and develops leaders as a core activity
- Uses direct action tactics to apply pressure on decision-makers

What community organizing for school reform is not:

- **Not traditional parent involvement**
 - Focused on all students, not individuals
 - Independent of the school
- **Not service and advocacy Oakland**
 - Organizing develops and mobilizes leaders to advocate for their own self-interest

Impetus for this research

- Growth of community organizing as a strategy for achieving public education reform
- Little documentation and research
- In 2002, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation funded New York University to study 8 education organizing groups
- 6 year mixed-methods study

Core Research Questions:

1. Do education organizing efforts change the nature of accountability and the quality of engagement across schools, districts and communities?
2. Do the resulting relationships lead to new schooling priorities and capacities that support improved learning outcomes for children?

The Groups: An Overview

Organization	Location	National Network	Youth Organizing
Oakland Community Organizations	Oakland, CA	PICO	
Chicago ACORN	Chicago, IL	ACORN	
Austin Interfaith	Austin, TX	IAF	
Milwaukee Inner City Congregations Allied for Hope	Milwaukee, WI	Gamaliel	
People Acting for Community Together	Miami, FL	DART	
Eastern Pennsylvania Organizing Project	Philadelphia, PA	PICO	Youth United for Change
Community Coalition for Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment	Los Angeles, CA		South Central Youth Empowered Through Action
NW Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition	Bronx, NY		Sistas & Brothas United

Examining Impact

Stage 1: Do educators attribute key school reform decisions to the organizing activities of the groups in our study?

Stage 2: Are schools showing improvement in the specific areas targeted by each of the groups?

Stage 3: Is there evidence of improved outcomes in schools that have increased capacity?

Sample and Methods

- 40 interviews (4 district superintendents, 15 district administrators, 4 school board members, 8 principals, 7 teachers, 2 teacher's union leaders)
- Purposive sample – identified interviewees based on role as a target, ally or member
- Thematic analysis of interviews
- Preliminary results from teacher surveys

Educators' Attributions of Impact

	DISTRICT-LEVEL	SCHOOL-LEVEL
Austin Interfaith	New teacher pipeline	Parent engagement Relational school culture
Chicago ACORN	New teacher pipeline	
Community Coalition/SCYEA	College preparation policy	Student voice College prep improvements
Eastern Pennsylvania Organizing Project/ Youth United for Change	Distribution of Title I funds Institutional structure for parental access Small schools strategy	Parent engagement Student voice Small school design Specific school improvements
Milwaukee Inner-City Congregations Allied for Hope	Student mobility	
NW Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition/Sistas and Brothas United	School facilities resources Teacher quality	Parent engagement Student voice
Oakland Community Organizations	Small schools policy	Parent engagement New small schools
People Acting for Community Together	Reading instructional program	Parent engagement Improved climate Increased student achievement

Attributed school-level impacts:

- Improved parent engagement and student voice
- More effective school organization, climate and culture
- Gains in student achievement

Why educators listen...

“I see them as the lenses, the eyeglasses, to assist society to see - to cut to the chase and say: Listen, you need to get here because we know this works.” Principal

“I think they’ve been influential in the district because they’ve been advocating...for school equity, making sure that all [high] schools have the same resources and that those schools that are struggling, those schools that are more racially and economically isolated...have access to the additional resources they need...”

Superintendent

Why educators listen...



What organizing contributes

1. Innovative solutions to problems district leaders care about--but have not solved—through disciplined persistence, skillful use of inside relationships and outside pressure, and research

“They were one of the most organized groups that ever came in for meetings... They utilized a program that was already in existence as a basis for their legislation, and they’d done a lot of research ... and came up with a novel way of addressing the problem.”
Administrator, State Board of Education

What organizing contributes

2. Parent involvement and youth voice in schools that is focused on problem-solving through a disciplined methodology

“What they actually do is organize the frustrations and the things these parents would like to see changed here. So they can present it to me, not screaming, not with outrage, not poking fun of me and say[ing]...I don't like this, I don't like that. But focusing it in a more realistic way and negotiating... ‘We have seen this and we think that something like this should [happen], what is it that you're able to do?’ ...For me, it makes my job a little easier because, well, in actuality, what the parents want is what I want.”

Principal

What organizing contributes

3. Increased democracy through leadership development training for parents, students, school staff and administrators

“We go to training with parents, with teachers, with congregations and churches, and we learn about what it is to be in a democratic society and how we exercise our rights and privileges as part of that democratic society.” Principal

“One of the big things we did was organize a potluck and...we presented the question, ‘What do you see as barriers to your child’s education?’... And so when we met as a core team, we would talk about how we could work on those issues.” Teacher

What organizing contributes

4. A mechanism for acting on personal values, developing new skills, and countering feelings of isolation among educators

“My principal asked me to go to a couple of new teacher orientations with [them] and I did that. And we did a neighborhood walk and I helped to organize it. ...And we just started doing all these things and it really fit in with my core beliefs about what school and teachers and parents in the community should be about and how we should all work together. It just was such a neat concept and I loved that it was happening.”

Teacher

What organizing contributes

5. External pressure to support what school system insiders want, but are unable to advocate for directly

“ I need [them] to keep hammering on – to say, ‘A good, solid public education that prepares children for citizenship and the workforce and all the other roles they have to fulfill is that child’s birthright and you are gonna make sure that it happens.’ ” School Board Member

What influences the opportunity for impact?

Example: “Grow Your Own” Campaign

- ACORN teacher retention study
- Alliance-building with community groups, advocates and universities
- Grow Your Own Summit 2004
- New state legislation
- State appropriations to provide funding

Factors affecting the opportunity for impact

1. The group's ability to capitalize on a key political moment in the local, state or national context
2. Congruence between school reform agendas
3. Mutual recognition of organizational motivations, goals and/or culture

The group's ability to capitalize on a key political moment

- NCLB pressure to improve teacher quality
- District priority to address teacher induction and retention
- New superintendent who “embraced the critics”

Congruence between school reform agendas

“I think we captured a bit of their imagination about the fact that the system was taking much more seriously 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... 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 assigned at those schools.” District Administrator

Mutual understanding of organizational goals and culture

“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...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.” District Administrator

High

Impact



Low

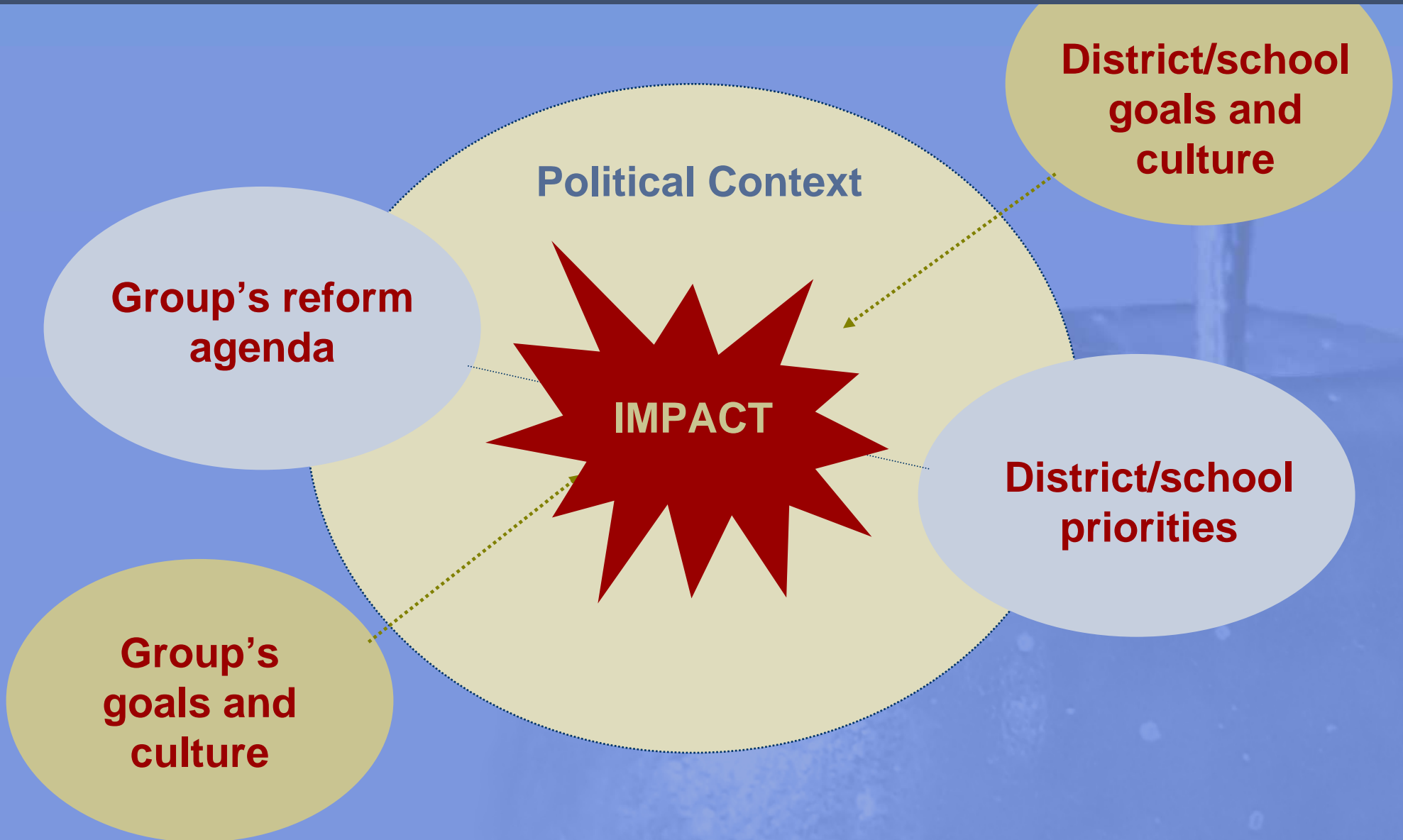
**Favorable
Political Climate**

**Convergence of
school reform
agendas**


**Mutual
recognition of
motivations, goals
and/or culture**



Getting to Impact:



Challenges

- Balancing inside and outside roles
 - Flexibility of the community organizing model
 - Analysis of school reform
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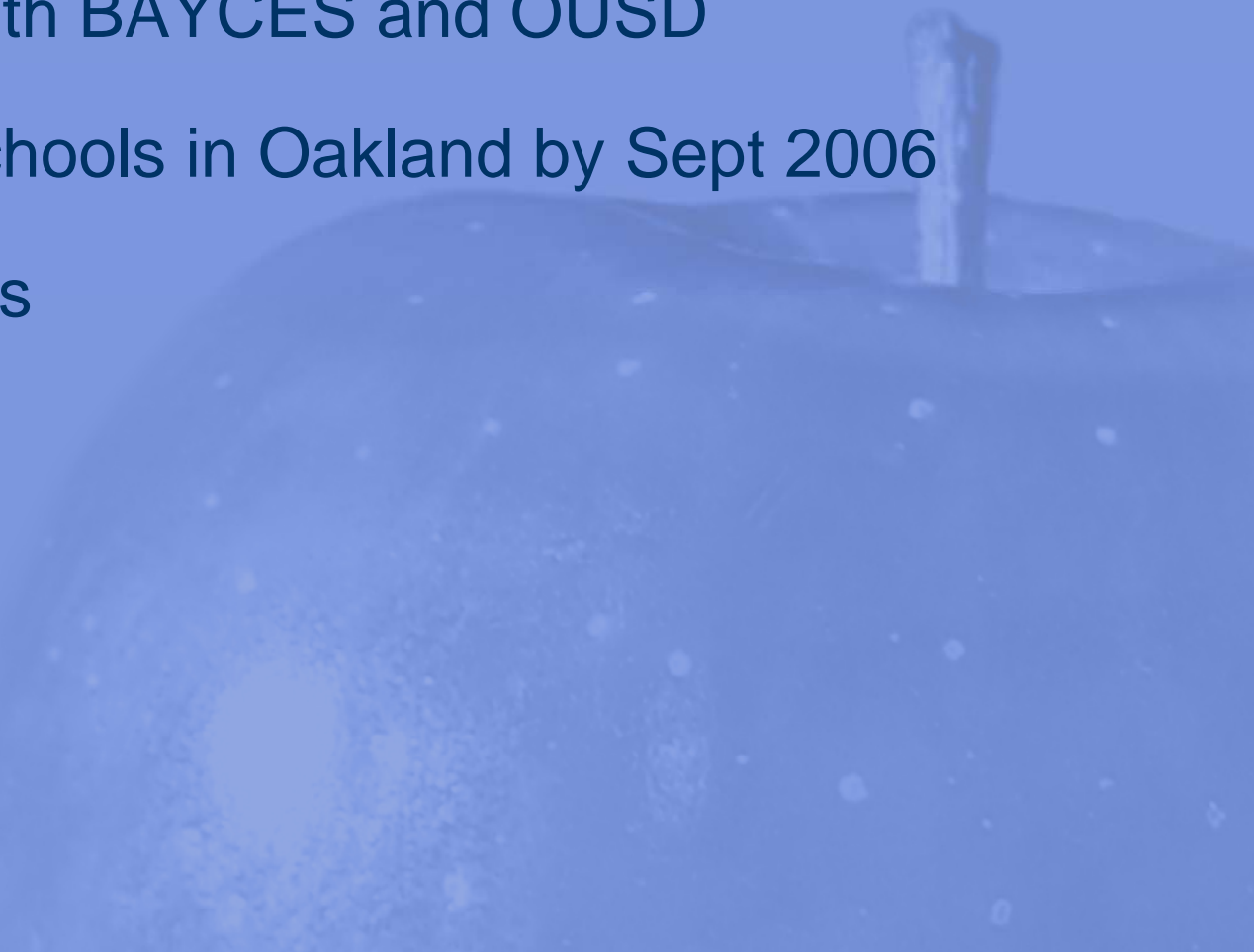
Case Study

Rick Gaston, Principal
Castlemont Business & Information Technology School
Oakland Community Organizations

Oakland Community Organizations

Background	Founded in 1977 by John Baumann S.J. and Jerry Helfrich S.J. using a neighborhood-based direct membership approach
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">➤ 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	School, Districts, City, State, and National

New Small Autonomous Schools Policies in OUSD

- Organizing parents and teachers
 - Collaboration with BAYCES and OUSD
 - 40 new small schools in Oakland by Sept 2006
 - Funding victories
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Parent and Teacher Involvement

- 500 leaders in school organizing committees
- 2000 leaders participate in actions at local, city and state
- 200 parents attend the OCO Parent Leadership Institute
- 100 teachers trained to do parent-teacher home visits
- 20 principals attend OCO Principal Leadership Training

New School Creation

- 28 new small schools created
- 7 more are in incubation (open fall 06)
- 7 charter schools created
- 3 charters in design
- 10 NCLB schools prevented from going to “in district charter” moving through the small schools incubator

Policy Victories

- Established New Small Autonomous Schools policy as driving force for district wide reform
- Sustain small school reform through 3 superintendents and a state takeover
- Incubator for new small schools incorporated in the district structure
- Partial implementation of autonomies including budgeting, hiring, and curriculum
- State legislation funding for small school facilities and teacher home visits

The Castlemont High School Story

- Overview of the school
- History of relationship with OCO
- Impact of the relationship on the school
- Challenges to maintaining the collaboration

Partnership 2004-06

Castlemont Business and Information
Technology School (CBITS)
& OCO

My relationship with OUSD and OCO

- Attractiveness of small schools work and OCO-BayCES-OUSD partnership
- Shared desire for distributed leadership among school stakeholder groups, and broad ownership for school
- Conversations and work with Liz Sullivan and OCO help my vision and practices
- Decided to affiliate with OCO in Summer 2005

New Castlemont Business & Information Technology School

- Small Design Team of students, staff, parents worked since Fall of 2002
- Opened in Fall 2004, along with 2 other small schools on Castlemont campus
- Accepted into New Technology Foundation network of small schools
- Project-Based Learning and Technology
- Overall attendance gains of about 7% in first year, gains in all standardized test areas of annual California Standards Tests

CBITS Parent Engagement

- School Design Team built in parent ownership and involvement in school as a key school design element
- Drive-by shooting at Castlemont led to OCO-organized Safety Committee
- Home Visits

CBITS Parent Engagement (cont.)

- Concrete Benefits of the OCO-CBITS partnership
 - Facilitate communications and engagement with parents and external community
 - Parent Leadership Team development
 - Parent Involvement Policy
 - Advisory structure for family engagement
 - Parents calling parents
 - Attendance improvement project
 - Parent Patrol efforts

CBITS Parent Engagement - Survey Data

- In 2006 survey, on a 5-point scale, regarding the statement “Teachers reach out to parents/guardians to work together to support each student”:
 - Teachers responded 3.9 on average
 - Students responded 3.2 on average
 - Parents responded 3.7 to a similar question

CBITS Parent Engagement - Challenges

- Broad staff ownership and implementation of parent communications and engagement, among competing priorities for attention
 - Keeping current contact info for families
 - Overloaded staff, families

Discussant

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Open Discussion