

Organized Communities, Stronger Schools: *A Preview of Research Findings*



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Presentation overview

- Study design and methods
- Research findings
 - Impact on schools, districts, and students
 - Effective organizing strategies
 - Impact on parent involvement, civic engagement, and school motivation
- Role of community organizing in promoting educational equity
- Implications for funding and future research

Background – What is community organizing?

- Recruits and develops new leadership as a core activity
 - Youth
 - Public school parents
 - Community residents or institutions
- Aims to alter power relationships
 - Builds power by mobilizing large numbers of constituents
 - Uses direct action tactics to influence decision-makers
- Focuses on transforming educational outcomes
 - Equity and accountability
 - Improved school conditions (capacity)

The literature

- Growing phenomenon nationally
- Research to date:
 - Full-length books (*Shirley, 1997; Warren, 2001; Oakes & Rogers, 2006*)
 - Case studies (*Research for Action, 2002; Zachary & olatoye, 2001; Mediratta & Karp, 2003*)
 - Indicators framework (*Research for Action, 2002*)
 - National scan (*Mediratta & Fruchter, 2001*)
 - Organizing issues and challenges (*Beam et al, 2002*)
- Need for more research on the links between organizing and student educational outcomes



Study overview

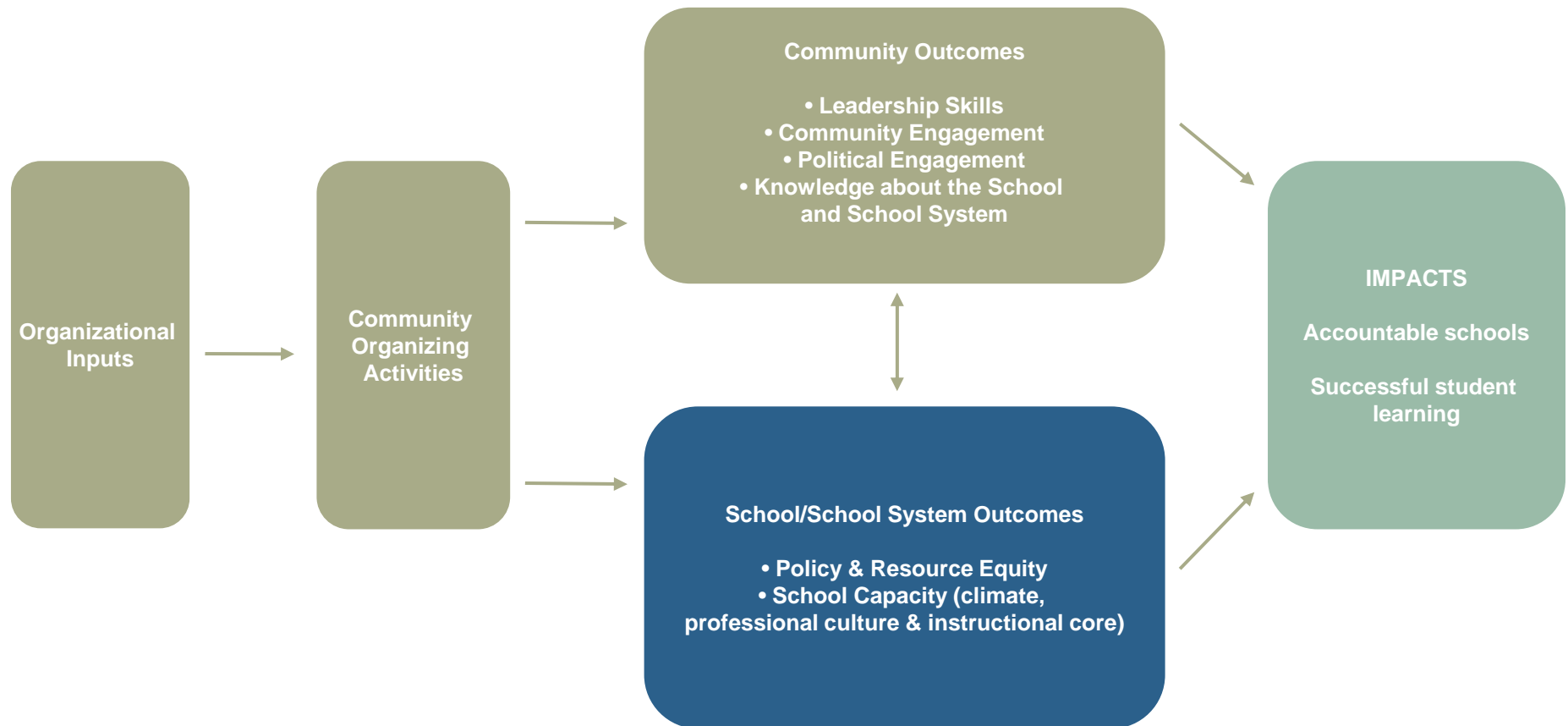
Study design

- Six-year study funded by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation
- Aims to understand the impact of community organizing on school and district capacity to support student success
- Approach
 - Multi-site case study design
 - Theory of change methodology
 - Mixed qualitative and quantitative methods
 - Collaborative inquiry process

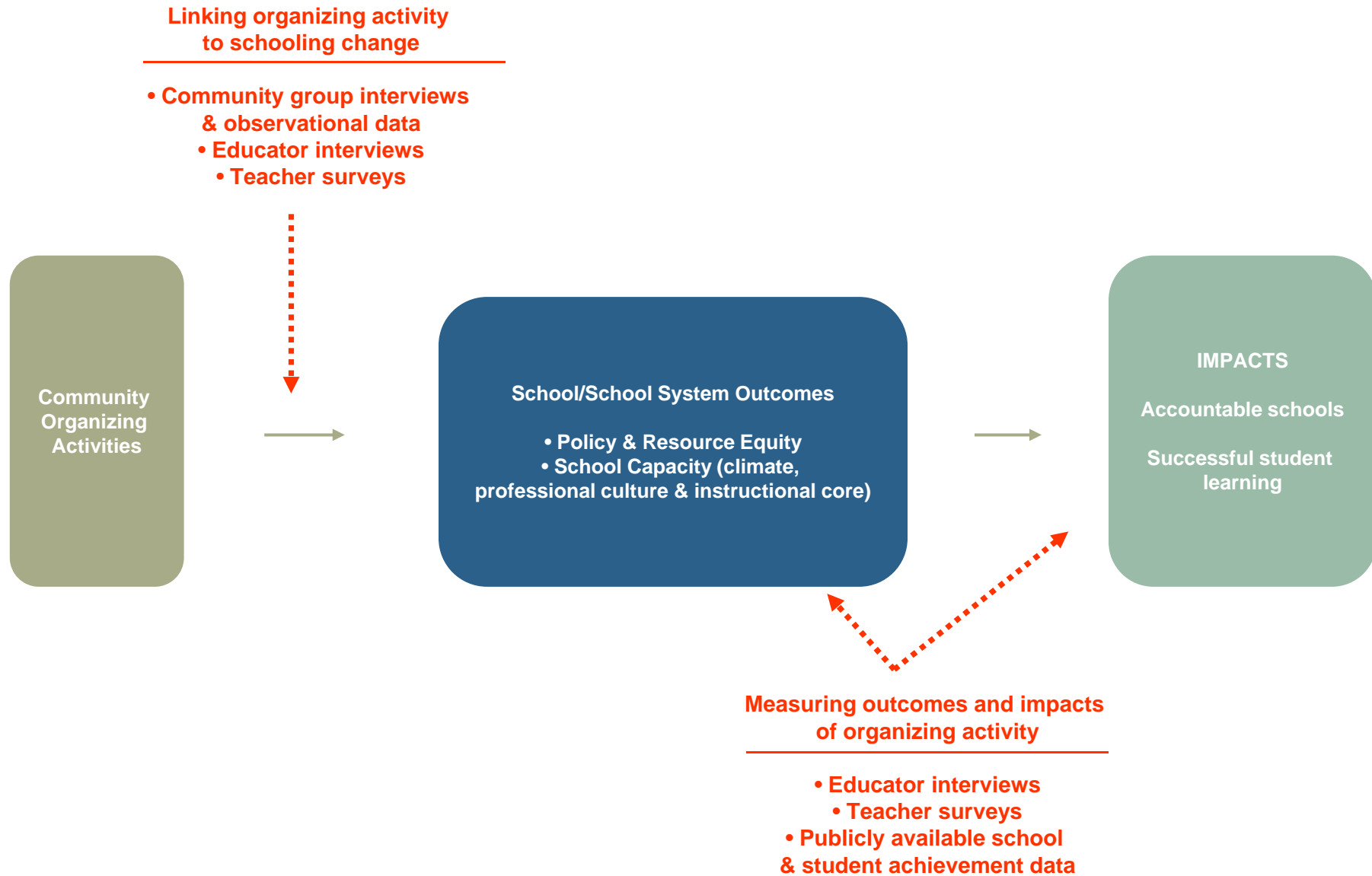
Study sites

- Austin Interfaith
- Chicago ACORN/Action Now
- Community Coalition & South Central Youth Empowered Thru Action (Los Angeles)
- Eastern Pennsylvania Organizing Project & Youth United for Change (Philadelphia)
- Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition & Sistas and Brothas United
- Oakland Community Organizations (California)
- People Acting for Community Together (Miami)

Theory of change



Assessing impact



Data sources

- Stakeholder interviews - 321 total, including 56 with state, municipal, district, school-level educators
- Observations - 75 observed meetings, strategy sessions, public actions, leader/organizer development sessions
- Context review - 1700 articles, including local media coverage
- Teacher surveys - 509 teacher surveys across Miami, Oakland, Austin
- Public datasets - census data, school-level administrative data



Impacts on districts, schools, and students

System-level impact

- In every site, district-level officials attributed policy and resource impacts to the efforts of organizing groups
- Policy and resource advocacy is focused on increasing educational opportunity and equity in high poverty, low-performing schools
- Organizing initiatives are introducing reforms that the school reform literature suggests is linked to school improvement (e.g.: teacher quality, curriculum, school organization and culture)

Major reform initiatives

STUDY SITES	MAJOR EDUCATION ORGANIZING CAMPAIGNS & COALITION WORK
Austin Interfaith	Alliance Schools network. Through the statewide Texas Interfaith, negotiated state-level fund that directed \$50 million to schools statewide for parent leadership training and teacher professional development in community engagement practices since 1995.
Miami PACT	Direct Instruction (DI) with parent/community engagement support. Negotiated \$3 million in district/state resources to bring DI to 26 schools in Miami-Dade County in three successive cohorts, beginning in 1997. DI phased out in 2005.
OCO	New small autonomous schools. Negotiated a district-wide policy of new small school creation in 2000, that led to the development of 48 small schools to replace large, low performing schools. New small schools incorporate OCO parent/community engagement practices in design phase.
Chicago ACORN	Grow your own teacher pipeline program to reduce teacher turnover in high poverty, low performing schools. Illinois State Legislature appropriated \$7 million for the program since 2005.
Community Coalition & SCYEA	District policy mandating college preparatory courses for all high school students in 2005. School facilities - \$153 million in bond monies for repairs to South LA schools.
EPOP & YUC	District-wide parent involvement infrastructure & supports in 2004. New small schools with youth & community engagement on 2 high school campuses in 2005. District-wide policy on testing standards and test preparation practices in 2005.
NWBCCC & SBU	School facilities advocacy and resources resulting in the creation of 14,000 new seats through leasing and new school facilities creation from 1997 onwards. Student leadership and voice in the design of a new small high school in 2005.

Increased school capacity – Teacher

Domains of Capacity	Teacher Survey Measures	Miami (n=232, comparison n=64)	Oakland (n=29, comparison n=70)	Austin (n=95, comparison n=49)
School Climate	Sense of community & safety	Dark blue	Dark blue	Dark blue
	Knowledge of student cultures	White	Light blue	Light blue
	Achievement-oriented culture	Light blue	Light blue	Dark blue
	Parent involvement in school	White	White	Dark blue
	Teacher outreach to parents	White	Dark blue	Dark blue
	Teacher-parent trust	White	White	Dark blue
	Parent influence in student learning	White	White	Light blue
	Parent influence in shared decision-making (elem. & middle school)	White	Medium blue	Dark blue
	Student influence in shared decision-making (high school)	White	Light blue	White
Professional Culture	Peer collaboration	Dark blue	Dark blue	Dark blue
	Collective responsibility	White	Dark blue	Dark blue
	Teacher-teacher trust	Light blue	Light blue	Dark blue
	School commitment	Medium blue	White	Dark blue
	Teacher influence in SDM	White	Dark blue	Medium blue
	Joint problem-solving	White	Dark blue	Dark blue
	Teacher-principal trust	White	Medium blue	Light blue
	Principal instructional leadership	White	Light blue	White
Instructional Core	Teacher influence in classroom	White	Dark blue	Medium blue
	Educational practices/beliefs	Light blue	White	White
	Coherent curriculum & instruction	Light blue	White	Light blue
	Instructional focus	White	White	White
	Classroom Resources	White	White	Light blue

Key: Light blue=small effect size; Medium blue=statistically significant to .05; Dark blue=statistically significant to .01.

Organizing groups' influence on school capacity – Teacher attributions

Domains of Capacity	Teacher Survey Measures	Miami (n=50)	Oakland (n=16)	Austin (n=46)
School Climate	Sense of community and trust in school	Medium blue	Medium blue	Medium blue
	School's relations with the community	Medium blue	Medium blue	Medium blue
	Safety and discipline in the school	Medium blue	Light blue	Light blue
	How students get along with each other	Medium blue	White	Light blue
	School's relations with parents	Medium blue	Medium blue	Medium blue
	Parent involvement in school	Medium blue	Medium blue	Medium blue
	How teachers get along with parents	Medium blue	Light blue	Medium blue
	Shared SDM between students, parents, teachers, and administrators	Medium blue	Medium blue	Medium blue
	Physical condition of the school building	Medium blue	Medium blue	Light blue
	Changes in school overcrowding	Light blue	Medium blue	Light blue
Professional Culture	How teachers get along with each other	Medium blue	White	Light blue
	Commitment to the school	Medium blue	White	Light blue
	Quality of principal leadership	Medium blue	Light blue	Medium blue
	Professional development opportunities	Medium blue	White	Light blue
Instructional Core	Teacher expectations for student achievement	Medium blue	White	Light blue
	Quality of curriculum and instruction	Medium blue	White	Light blue
	Teaching effectiveness	Medium blue	White	Light blue
	Classroom resources	Medium blue	Light blue	Light blue
Student Learning	Student academic performance	Medium blue	White	Light blue

Key: Light blue=mean score of 1.5 on a 3 point scale; Medium blue=mean score of 2 on 3 point scale

Student outcomes

- Test scores increases
- Gains for lowest performing students
- Lower drop out rates, and higher rates of student attendance and college-going aspirations

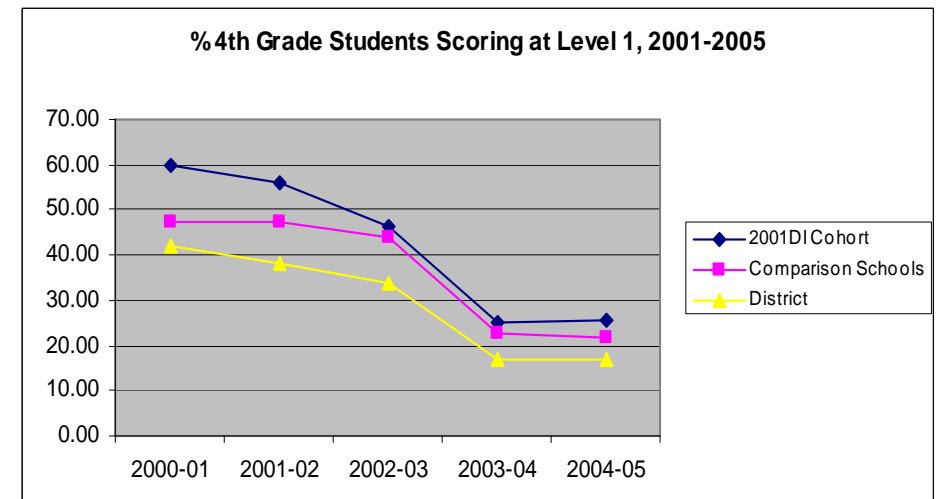
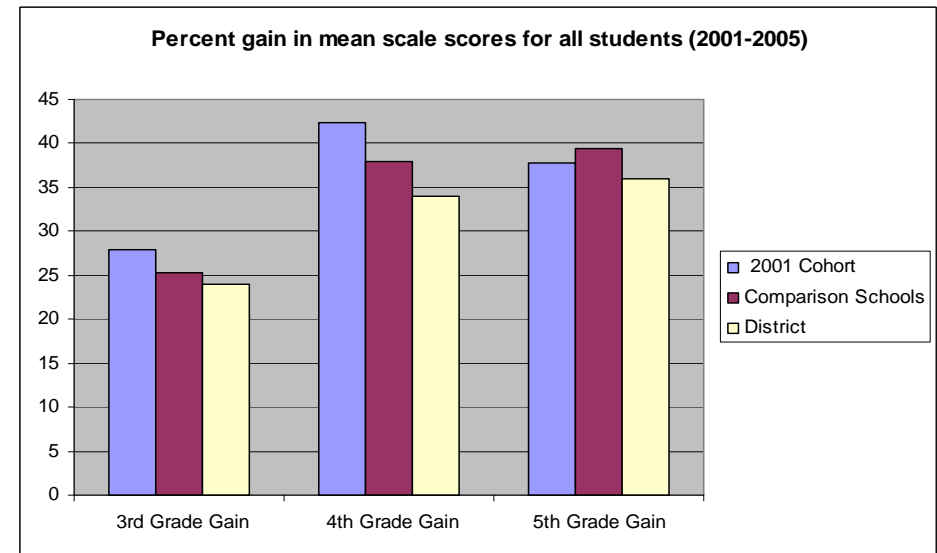
Student outcomes – Student

- Intensity of Austin Interfaith’s involvement in schools predicted gains in the percent of students meeting minimum standards on Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (1994-2002), controlling for poverty, limited English proficiency and baseline test scores (n=14).

Variable	B	SE B	Beta
Step 1			
All Students % That Met Minimum Expectations at Baseline (1992-93)	0.48	0.20	0.58**
% of LEP Students, 2001-2002	0.33	0.16	0.48*
% of Economically Disadvantaged Students, 2001-2002	-0.02	0.20	-0.02
Step 2			
All Students % That Met Minimum Expectations at Baseline (1992-93)	0.43	0.16	0.52**
% of LEP Students, 2001-2002	0.16	0.15	0.24
% of Economically Disadvantaged Students, 2001-2002	0.11	0.17	0.14
AI Intensity Averages (until 2002)	3.82	1.58	0.50**
Notes:			
R Square = .518 for Step 1			
R Square Change = .190 for Step 2 (p=.039**)			
*p < .10, **p < 0.05 (Note: Due to small sample size, we use a p-value of .10 to test for statistical significance.)			

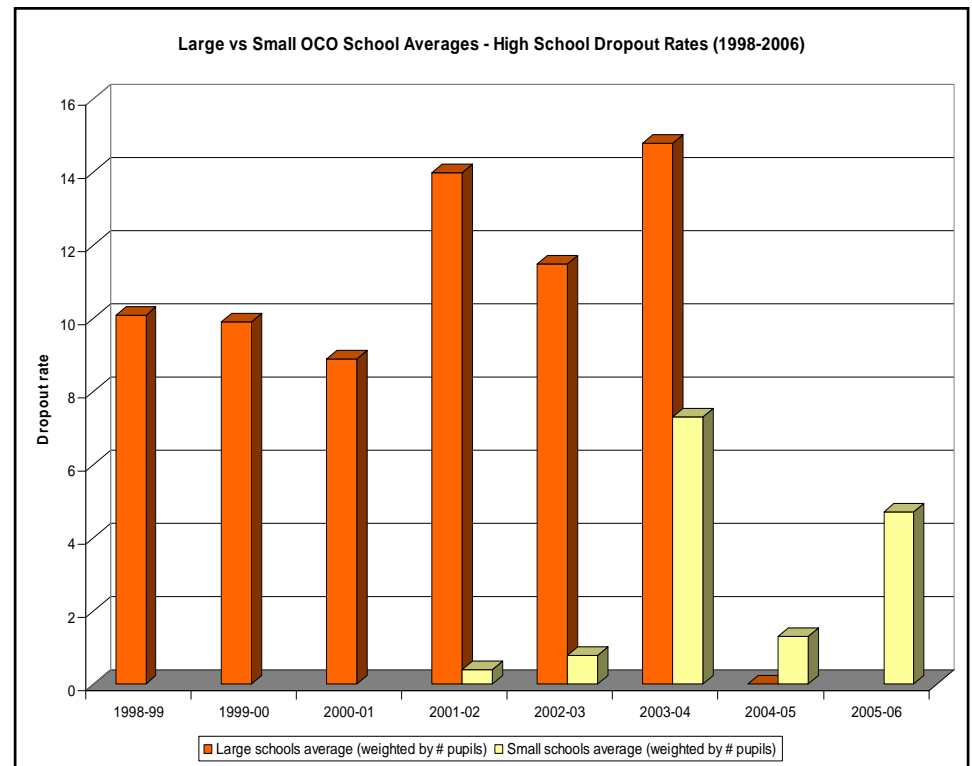
Student outcomes – Low performing students

- Schools implementing Direct Instruction and community engagement from PACT increased the percent of students meeting reading standards from 27% to 49% on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test
- Schools made larger gains than the district and comparison schools in grades 3 and 4
- Particularly successful with lowest scoring students



Student outcomes – high school drop out rates, attendance & aspirations for college

- In Oakland, small schools developed with support from OCO scored 75 to 100 points higher on California Academic Performance Index than the large schools they replaced. Differences were statistically significant for elementary, middle & high schools.
- New small high schools have substantially lower dropout rates than the large high schools they replaced.
- Evidence of improved attendance and college-going aspirations in Philadelphia small schools (Kensington campus).



Why educators listen

- Education officials described organizing groups as strategic and effective
 - Serve as a bridge to underserved communities
 - Frame reforms in terms of district self-interest and community priorities
 - Leverage political pressures and funding opportunities (e.g. NCLB, philanthropic funding)

"I make better decisions on behalf of the entire district because I know a little more about communities of color, about low-income communities that are not immigrant communities. They've helped me understand something I was oriented to wanting to understand but I didn't necessarily have a lot of practical hands-on experience."

-- School board member

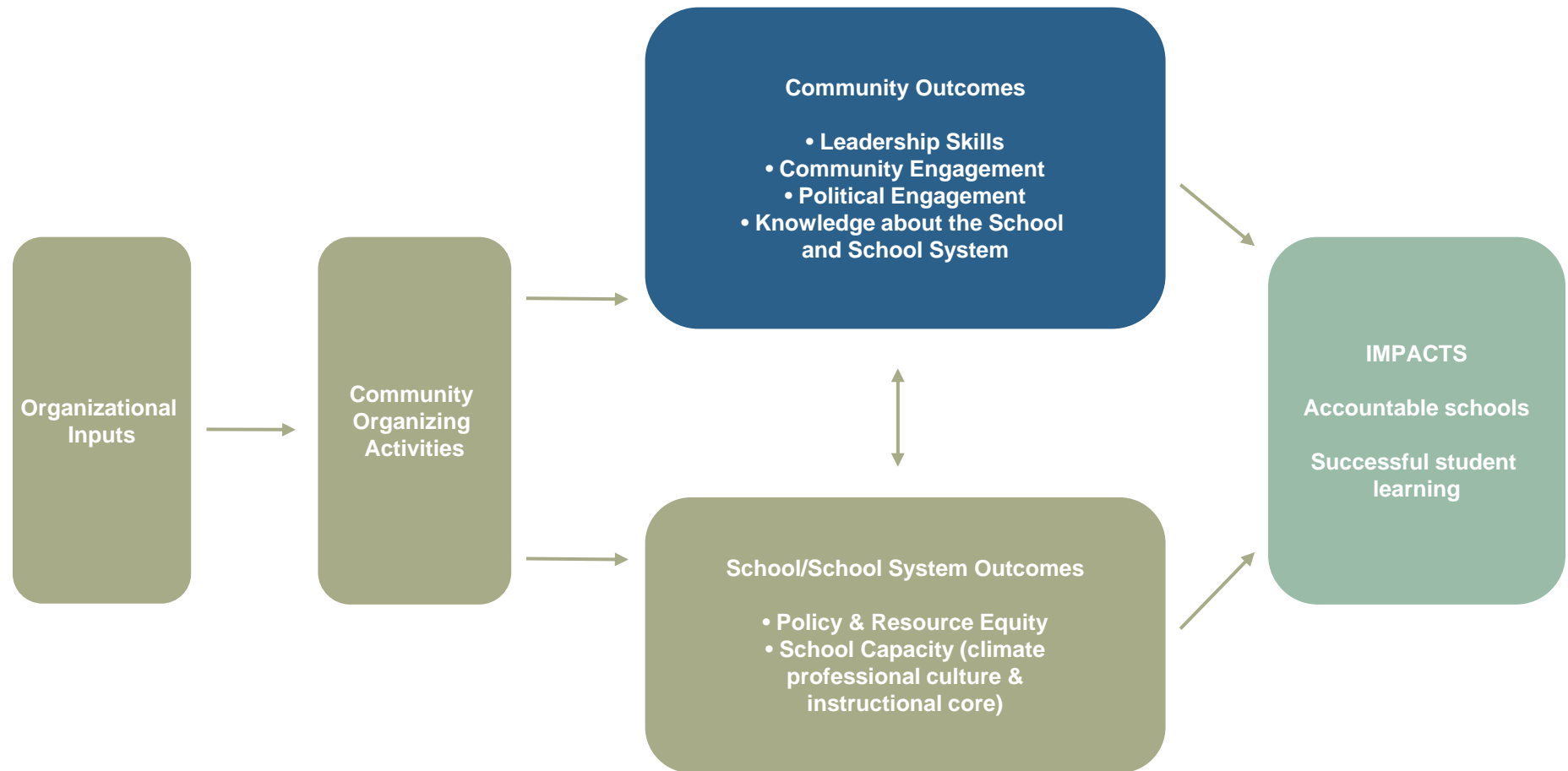
Characteristics of effective strategies

- Target multiple levels of the system (school, district, state)
- Mix policy/resource advocacy *and* school-level organizing to stimulate school and student-level change
- Organizational capacity -- stable core of staff and leaders, as well as access to local or network-based infrastructure support



Impacts on community capacity

How organizing works to transform schools



Data sources

- Stakeholder interviews
 - 160 organizing staff
 - 77 parent and youth leaders
- Observations - 75 observed meetings, strategy sessions, public actions, leader/organizer development sessions
- Document reviews - newsletters, organizational charts, training materials
- Surveys
 - 241 adult member surveys of parents and community members involved in seven groups
 - 124 youth member surveys from youth involved in three groups

Sample demographics

■ Adult respondents:

- 40% Latino, 33% African American, 23% Caucasian
- 21% earned \$10,000-\$24,999
- 77% completed high school; 34% earned college degree or higher
- 43% had children currently attending public school; 33% had children who attended public school in the past

■ Youth respondents:

- 42% Latino, 32% African American, 15% Bi/multiracial
- Average age 17.2; most in 10th or 11th grade
- 42% reported receiving Bs and Cs in school

Overview of findings

- *Because of their involvement in organizing, parents, community members, and youth:*
 - Develop critical leadership skills and feel increasingly confident in their leadership abilities
 - Are more engaged in their communities
 - Are more politically active and have participated in a variety of political activities for the first time
 - Are more knowledgeable about their local schools and school systems
- In addition, adults:
 - Have higher expectations for themselves and their families
 - Are more engaged in their child's schooling
- In addition, young people:
 - Are more motivated about their own schooling (high school and college)

Organizational participation

- Adults tend to be involved longer than youth, but youth have deeper levels of participation
- High level of engagement across membership: 30-50% of adults and 50-85% of youth report that they help:
 - Plan campaign strategy
 - Conduct outreach
 - Make decisions about demands
 - Plan or facilitate meetings

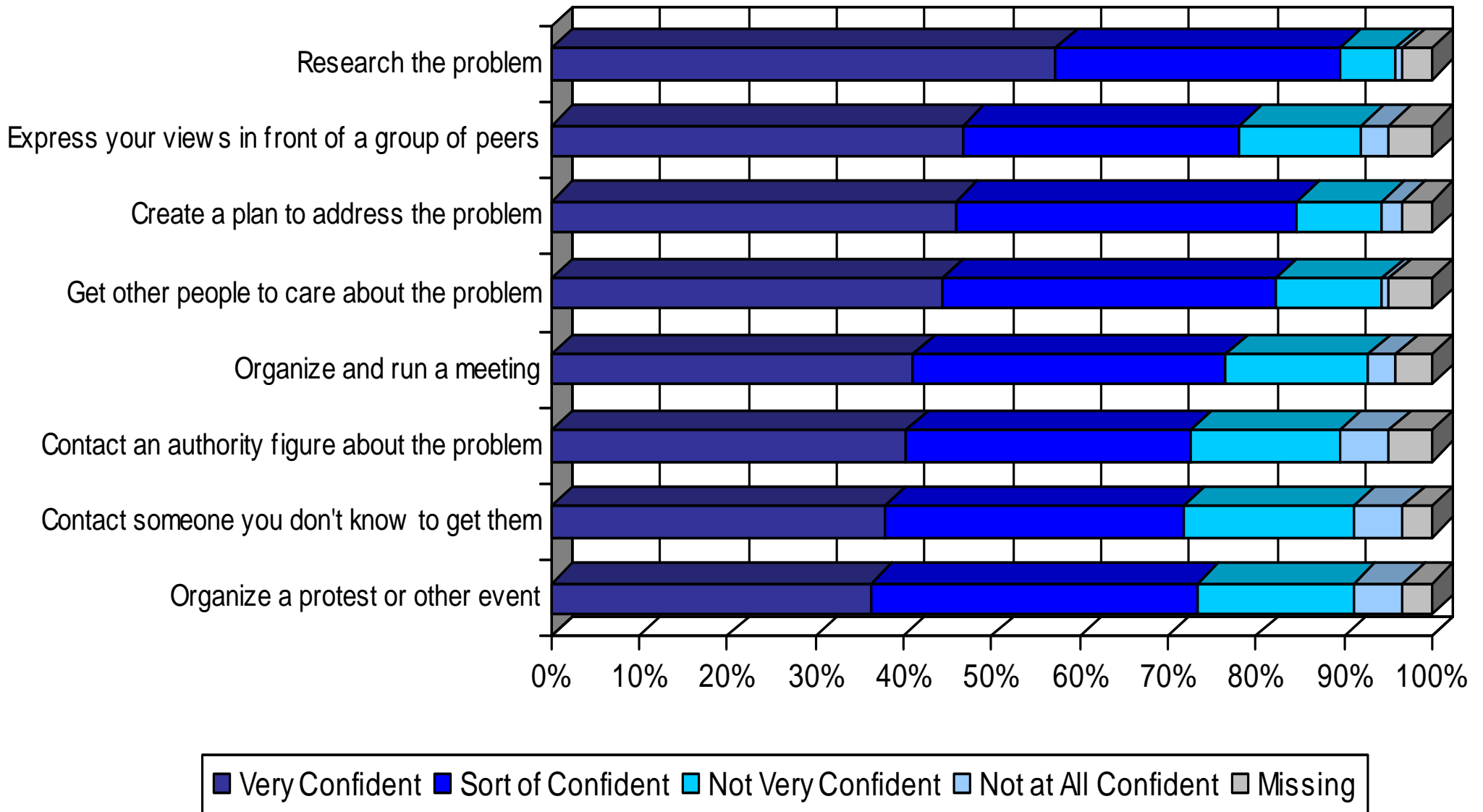
Leadership skills

- Adults and youth reported they learned or improved upon:
 - Public speaking skills
 - Ability to develop strategic, public relationships
 - Ability to conduct outreach

“And I was even able to take those [organizing] skills I had learned ... when I moved to a little town in Pennsylvania and actually worked with an environmental group and was able actually to help them to stop a landfill that was going in ... that's the thing that I like about the organization; there's a constant training and teaching that goes on ...”

-- Adult leader

Youth: Leadership skills



“I tell you, [SBU youth leaders] come up here and have conversations with me ... [and] one of the things that I find I can measure is ... the way that they have conversations with me. I mean, if the kids can sit at a table, have a conversation with me around, this is the research I’ve done, this is the outcome, and this is where we want to go—I mean, that doesn’t come out of the sky ... [SBU has] organized the kids to be good thinkers and to be able to speak to adults and not be afraid to speak to adults.”

-- District administrator

Community engagement

- Adult and youth respondents reported that because of their involvement in organizing:
 - Over 70% know more about how to solve community problems
 - Over 70% are more active on community issues
 - Over 70% have stronger relationships with people in the community
- Community engagement → collective community problem-solving, borne out of a systemic analysis of larger social, economic, and political conditions

“Before [our training], when you ask our youth about what some of the main problems are and what to do to change them, their main solution a lot of times is we just need to get rid of teachers ... and we’ve got to get rid of the principals, because this one is problematic. After the [training], they understand that the issue is systemic, that it’s much larger than the principal. The principal may be a part of it, but it’s a much larger issue, and you have to get to the root of it...”

-- Organizer

Political engagement

Participation for the first time, through the organizing group

Activity	Adults	Youth
Contacting/meeting a public official	47%	63%
Conversations with other parents about school issues	40%	--
Collected signatures for a petition		69%
Attending a rally, protest, or press event	37%	87%

"You know your neighbors, they know you, they know your kids, I know them, I know their kids, but we never really knew kind of what struggles we were really facing. We didn't talk about our hopes and dreams with each other... [when] I had my first house meeting ... we really got down to talking about what needed to be different at school ... as I started talking to my neighbors it was like I'm not the only one having trouble with my teenage kid. I'm not the only one struggling with insurance. I'm not the only one concerned about the gangs. I mean [other] people were too ... And [Austin Interfaith] helped us to really look at [wanting] to do something about it I've known this woman for like 15 years and I never even knew she felt the same way I did. And she's willing to step up and say, yeah we're gonna do something."

-- Parent leader

School and school systems knowledge

Since getting involved in organizing, participants learned:

	Adults	Youth
Who makes the decisions about schools	50%	86%
School policies	45%	88%
How to make changes within schools	42%	84%
How to advocate for my child (parents)	33%	--
My rights as a student (youth)	--	84%

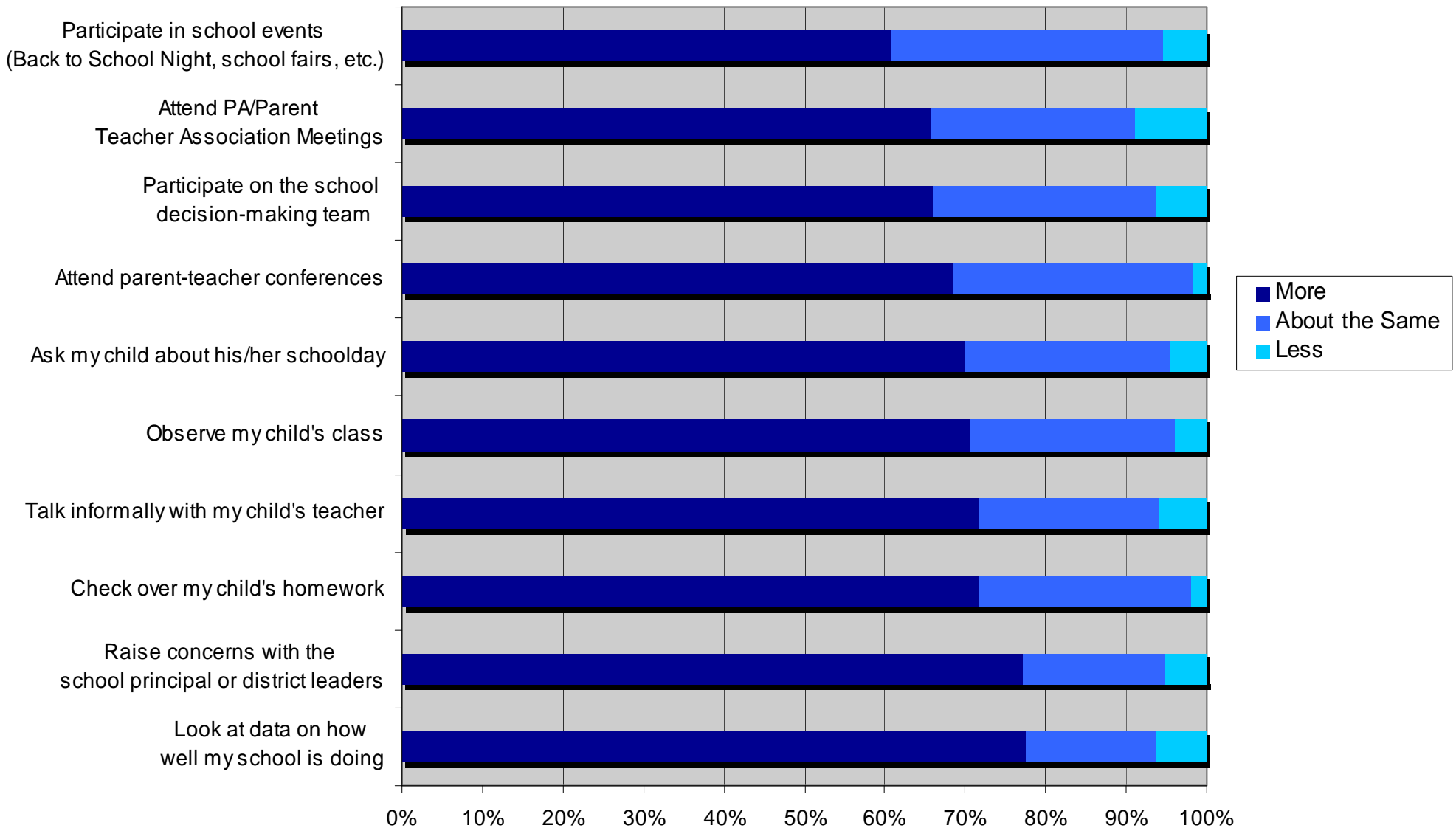
Additional themes: Adults

- Raised expectations of self and family
 - Over 60% of adults reported having higher expectations of themselves and their families

“If I did not get involved in Austin Interfaith, my kids would not go to college. If you cannot see yourself differently then you cannot see anyone else differently ... If I did not have higher expectations for myself, how could I have them for my kids?” - Parent leader

- Increased engagement in child’s schooling
 - Much more likely to look at data on child’s school and raise concerns with school and district administrators

Parent engagement in school



Additional themes: Youth

- Increased school motivation
 - 89% were more motivated to finish high school
 - 87% were more motivated to attend college
 - 55% take harder classes
- High educational aspirations
 - 80% said they expect to pursue a college education
 - 49% said they also expect to complete a graduate or professional degree

Significance of findings

- Creates a platform for community and political engagement
- Builds an informed constituency invested in community problem-solving and action
- Contributes to personal transformation and the development of collective efficacy
- Transforms power relationships to produce accountable schools that promote student success

“We’re all future elected officials, teachers, lawyers, doctors. Many of us are going to become staff at SBU and make it bigger—have it be all around the country ... I can’t say now that I’m always going to keep up this work in this way. But whatever I do in the future, I’m going to change the world. I’m going to affect it. With my history and background, I don’t want to see today’s youth grow up in the way I did. I take everything in this organization personally because of that.”

-- Youth leader

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