



ORGANIZED
COMMUNITIES,
STRONGER SCHOOLS

A Research-Based Workshop Series

Community Organizing to Rethink the Teacher Pipeline

The Grow Your Own Teacher Movement in Chicago

A CASE-STUDY JIGSAW ACTIVITY WITH FACILITATOR'S GUIDE AND GROUP READINGS

Developed by Anne T. Henderson

based on *Rethinking the Teacher Pipeline for an*

Urban Public School System: Chicago ACORN

by Sara McAlister, Kavitha Mediratta, and Seema Shah



Annenberg
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Organized Communities, Stronger Schools

A research-based workshop series

INTRODUCTION to the Workshop Series

This series of four workshops is based on a six-year research study of the impact of community organizing to bring about improvements in local schools by residents in seven low- to moderate-income urban communities. The study – Organized Communities, Stronger Schools – was conducted by Kavitha Mediratta, Seema Shah, and Sara McAlister between 2002 and 2008. The findings were published in seven case studies by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University in 2009, and in a book, *Community Organizing for Stronger Schools: Strategies and Successes*, by the Harvard Education Press in 2009.

The goal of the study was to answer the question: Does the political will generated by community organizing for education reform enhance the capacity of schools to improve student learning? The researchers concluded that it does. They found that effective community organizing

- ◆ stimulates important changes in educational policy, practices, and resource distribution at the system level;
- ◆ strengthens school-community relationships, parent involvement and engagement, and trust in schools;
- ◆ contributes to higher student educational outcomes, including higher attendance, test score performance, high school completion, and college-going aspirations.

The case studies documented how seven communities (Oakland, Los Angeles, Austin, Chicago, Miami, Philadelphia, and the Bronx) mobilized to identify problems, develop solutions, pressure policy-makers and administrators, and contribute important assets to address the challenges their low-performing school systems faced.

The workshops focus on community organizing strategies in four communities. Through a “jigsaw” reading-and-discussion activity, each workshop helps participants understand the organizing efforts of one community, explore the implications those efforts may have on their own community, and identify next steps they want to take. The four workshops are:

- ◆ Oakland – Community Organizing to Transform a School District
- ◆ Los Angeles – Youth and Community Organizing to Improve Curriculum
- ◆ Austin – Community Organizing to Build Partnerships in Schools
- ◆ Chicago – Community Organizing to Rethink the Teacher Pipeline

The full case studies series and the four workshops are available for free download from the Annenberg Institute Web site at <www.annenberginstitute.org/WeDe/Mott.php>.



Community Organizing to Rethink the Teacher Pipeline

The Grow Your Own Teacher Movement in Chicago

FACILITATOR's Guide to the Workshop

In Chicago, Illinois, years of on-the-ground community organizing, coalition-building, and public actions have led to a new teacher pipeline for historically hard-to-staff schools. And school district officials credit community organizing for a positive transformation of the city's public schools. This workshop is designed to help participants understand how the local community organizing group – Chicago ACORN (subsequently working as Action Now) – brought about a dramatic transformation in their city's public schools. In the course of the workshop, participants will

- ◆ get an overview of the organizing effort in Chicago,
- ◆ become familiar with specific components of the effort,
- ◆ construct a composite picture of how Chicago ACORN accomplished the transformation, and
- ◆ consider how Chicago ACORN's work can inform their own work in their local community.

The materials for this workshop were adapted from a case study on community organizing in Chicago, Illinois, *Rethinking the Teacher Pipeline for an Urban Public School System*, part of the research study series on Organized Communities, Stronger Schools, published by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University.

The two-hour workshop consists of four main segments (including time for transitioning):

Welcome and introduction to the workshop	20 minutes
<i>PowerPoint presentation on the Chicago study</i>	
Jigsaw activity	
Understanding a piece of the work (small groups)	40 minutes
<i>Reading and discussing excerpts from the study</i>	
Putting the pieces together (full group)	30 minutes
<i>Reporting out on small-group learnings</i>	
General discussion	20 minutes
<i>Implications for the group's work and next steps</i>	
Comments and closing	10 minutes

IMPORTANT: To be most effective, the full participant group should be at least 10 but not more than 35 people. This will ensure at least 2, but not more than 7, people in each small-group discussion.

Facilitator's Instructions

As the facilitator for this workshop, you will welcome the participants, narrate a PowerPoint presentation that introduces the experiences of Chicago ACORN, provide instructions and materials for the jigsaw exercise (small-group readings and discussions of different excerpts from the Chicago case study, followed by report-outs to the large group to gain a fuller understanding of Chicago ACORN's work), and finally a wrap-up discussion pointing to next steps.

Materials provided for this workshop

- ◆ Facilitator's instructions and workshop agenda
- ◆ A short PowerPoint presentation with background on the research study and an introduction to the Chicago story
- ◆ A handout for participants with
 - background on the study of Chicago ACORN
 - agenda for the workshop
 - discussion questions for the five small-group reading assignments
- ◆ Readings adapted from the full case study for each of the five small groups

Before the workshop

- ◆ Read the full Chicago case study, available online at <www.annenberginstitute.org/WeDe/Mott.php>.
- ◆ Familiarize yourself with all the workshop materials.
- ◆ Make photocopies for participants:
 - enough copies of "Participants' Handout" for all participants
 - enough copies of each small-group reading for the number of participants in each group
- ◆ Review the PowerPoint presentation and adjust the script as needed.
- ◆ Arrange for the necessary equipment to show the PowerPoint (projector, laptop, extension cords, etc.). Note that there is a short, embedded film clip: you may need sound amplification for a larger group.
- ◆ Assemble materials for poster reports: poster paper, markers, easels, etc.
- ◆ If you are not familiar with the jigsaw exercise protocol, you can find information about it at <www.jigsaw.org/overview.htm>. The activity here is an abbreviated version.
- ◆ Make sure there are suitable spaces for five small discussion groups to meet.

Facilitator's Agenda for the Workshop

Total time: 2 hours

Welcome and introduction

20 minutes

- ◆ Welcome participants and introduce yourself. If participants do not know each other, ask them to introduce themselves briefly.
- ◆ Show and narrate the PowerPoint presentation on the community organizing study and the context in Chicago.
- ◆ Distribute the "Participants' Handout" to each participant.

Jigsaw activity

1. Small-group reading and discussion

40 minutes

- ◆ Give the following instructions to full group: "You'll be working in small groups, each group reading a different section of the Chicago study. In your groups, you'll read your section, respond to the questions for your group in the Participants' Handout, and develop a poster report on what you've learned. You'll have about 35 minutes for this activity."
"Please break into five small groups by counting off from one to five."
"Assemble with the others with your number and pick a recorder for your small group to take notes on the group's ideas." [Facilitator: make sure there are at least two people per group.]
- ◆ Hand out copies of small-group readings to each group.
- ◆ After 30 minutes, remind groups to begin completing their posters.
- ◆ After 40 minutes, call the small groups back to the full group.

2. Small-group report-outs to the full group

30 minutes

- ◆ Give the following instructions to full group: "Now we're going to build a complete picture of the Chicago work by having each group report out on what you learned, using your poster report. Going in numerical order, each group will have 5 minutes."

General discussion and next steps

20 minutes

- ◆ Lead a discussion based on the small-group report-outs. (If time is short, skip to the discussion of next steps.)
How did ACORN build power and gain respect and attention for its neighborhoods?
All community organizing groups have an "inside-outside" dilemma. How did ACORN balance demand-side pressure on the school district to perform and be responsive to low-income neighborhoods, while at the same time cultivating allies inside the system?
Why was GYO "a different kind of solution" to the shortage of qualified teachers in low-income neighborhoods?
What is the role of communities and community organizing in school reform, as illustrated by this case study?
- ◆ Allow time for the group to consider its next steps.
What are the implications for your work? What would you like to do with this information?

Comments and closing

10 minutes

- ◆ Invite participant comments on the workshop.
- ◆ Wrap up and adjourn.



Community Organizing to Rethink the Teacher Pipeline

The Grow Your Own Teacher Movement in Chicago

PARTICIPANTS' Handout

Grow your Own was a different kind of solution, especially in our hard-to-staff schools and neighborhoods where people really wanted to stay and work because that's where they lived or committed to working.

— Al Bertani, former chief of professional development, Chicago Public Schools

Without ACORN, I think you would have an isolated, insulated school system that's just moving along, doing what it thinks is best without any checks and balances. . . . We definitely need an organization like that out there to push us and make us do our jobs better.

— A CPS official

Learning from Chicago ACORN

It is not often that school district officials credit community organizing for a positive transformation in public schools. But this is exactly what is happening in several urban areas, including Chicago, Illinois, where years of on-the-ground organizing, coalition-building, and public actions have led to a new teacher pipeline for historically hard-to-staff schools.

This workshop is an opportunity to learn how Chicago ACORN, a grassroots community organizing group of parents and residents, partnered with district officials, leaders from university teacher-preparation programs, the teachers union, and elected officials, to create a statewide Grow Your Own Teachers program with funding from the state legislature. (Note: Since 2008, Action Now has been leading the education and other organizing campaigns begun by Chicago ACORN. An independent community organizing group, Action Now was founded by the board, staff, and members formerly associated with Chicago ACORN.)

After a brief introduction to the work in Chicago, we'll do a "jigsaw" exercise that will enable the group to build a deeper understanding of Chicago ACORN's work. First, five small groups will each read a different excerpt from the research study on Chicago ACORN and discuss a set of questions designed to help you get the most out of your excerpt. Then the full group will reconvene, and each small group will report on its piece of the jigsaw to construct the whole picture and discover what is relevant to your work.

Background on the Workshop

This workshop consists of short readings and activities based on the research report *Rethinking the Teacher Pipeline for an Urban Public School System: Chicago ACORN*, by Sara McAlister, Kavitha Mediratta, and Seema Shah, published by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University in 2009. The

report is one of a series of case studies that followed organizing efforts to improve public schools, led by community residents, in seven low- to moderate-income communities throughout the country. The goal of this six-year research study was to answer the question: Does the political will generated by organizing in the arena of education reform ultimately enhance the capacity of schools to improve student learning? The researchers concluded that it did.

The full case studies on the seven sites – Oakland, Los Angeles, Austin, Chicago, Miami, Philadelphia, and the Bronx – are available for download from the Annenberg Institute Web site at www.annenberginstitute.org/WeDe/Mott.php. The materials for this workshop are adapted from the Chicago case study.

A Vignette on Chicago ACORN

Denise Dixon is no stranger to asking tough questions of public officials. As former president of Chicago ACORN, the Chicago chapter of the national organizing network, she led protests, convened press conferences, testified at council hearings, and was extensively quoted in the press. On issues from living wages and unfair lending to neighborhood violence and community policing, Dixon has no qualms about demanding that politicians respond to her community's needs. Yet for years, Dixon was reluctant to ask her local school about the quality of education her daughter was receiving. "My oldest is twenty-one, went through the public schools. I never once asked her teacher what her qualifications were," Dixon recalled.

Across the country, parents like Denise Dixon increasingly are asking questions about the quality of their schools and the distribution of educational resources in their cities and towns. With the passage of the federal No Child Left Behind Act, a stream of data exposing school-system failings has become available to the public. Many community groups are using these data to demand accountability and reform.

In Chicago, Dixon and other members of ACORN reviewed research on school reform and analyzed their schools' data. These data led ACORN to see teacher turnover as the main obstacle to improving student learning. However, the schools' parent-involvement efforts focused largely on volunteering and fundraising instead of engaging parents on this important issue. Frustrated and determined, Dixon, along with scores of parents, grandparents, and community residents involved with ACORN, decided to take matters into their own hands, placing classified ads and recruiting certified teachers to teach in neighborhood schools.

ACORN executive director Madeline Talbott explained:

Until we started doing this, people did not see teacher quality as an issue for parents. You get that all the time. Educators 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 involvement; we've got work to do. We've got homes to run and jobs to go to.

When the school district refused to release information on teacher credentials, Dixon and the ACORN members were undaunted. They worked with data analysts to conduct their own studies of teacher quality, then took their data to the school board and publicly demanded better teachers. Their vocal campaign

and compelling data caught the attention of policy-makers and the press, catapulting ACORN members into a new role as experts on teacher quality in their neighborhoods. Dixon said:

We were so forward about what we wanted for our children, what we needed, the press picked up on it. And we have virtually become *the* group on education. It was pretty cool to be heard, to actually have a solution to the problem and not be just complaining. We're saying, "This is wrong, and this is how you fix it." It's pretty amazing.

Excerpted from *Rethinking the Teacher Pipeline for an Urban Public School System: Chicago ACORN*, by Sara McAlister, Kavitha Mediratta, and Seema Shah. Providence, RI: Brown University, Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 2009.

Agenda for the Jigsaw Activity

Small-group reading

10–15 minutes

- ◆ Read your group's assigned reading (see handouts) independently and silently.
- ◆ As you are reading your section, highlight some favorite sentences/phrases/ideas.

Small-group analyzing

25–30 minutes

- ◆ Read through the discussion questions for your group number (below).
- ◆ Choose one person to record the group's ideas.
- ◆ As you discuss the questions, ask yourself: What ideas presented in our reading selection would be the most valuable for the larger group to know and understand? How can we communicate these ideas in an interesting way?
- ◆ Design a poster representing the major points or ideas in your section. Use words, pictures, and/or symbols to represent any or all of the major ideas and help others really understand your section.
- ◆ Decide who will report to the full group.

Reporting back to the full group

30 minutes/5 minutes per group

- ◆ Summarize the major concepts and learnings from your section to the entire group, using the poster as a guide.

Small-Group Discussion Questions

Find the questions for your group's assigned reading below.

Group 1: The Chicago Setting, ACORN Organizing, and Uncovering the Problem

- ◆ What were the characteristics of the neighborhoods where ACORN was organizing? How do they contrast with the Chicago school district as a whole?
- ◆ What leverage did sitting on local school councils (LSCs) give to parents and community members?
- ◆ How did ACORN work with and support local members serving on local school councils (LSCs)?
- ◆ What did ACORN members pinpoint as the core problem of teacher recruitment and retention?

Group 2: The Need for a Systemic Response

- ◆ What was the “dirty little secret” about the teaching force in Chicago? What happened when White teachers from the suburbs came to high-poverty schools?
- ◆ What did Arne Duncan say about the problem of teacher recruitment?
- ◆ What were the successful practices of the *Nueva Generación* teacher recruitment program developed by Logan Square Neighborhood Association?
- ◆ What are some positive outcomes identified by the research on new pathways into teaching?

Group 3: Scaling up and Confronting a Challenge

- ◆ What was ACORN's strategy for developing a statewide program? Why was a statewide program needed?
- ◆ What were the major features of the state GYO program?
- ◆ To what did ACORN leaders credit the passage of the GYO legislation?
- ◆ What was Renaissance 2010, and why was it so controversial?
- ◆ How did ACORN head off the potentially damaging effects of Renaissance 2010?

Group 4: Assessing ACORN's Impact

- ◆ What were the key research questions of the study?
- ◆ What were ACORN's major successes?
- ◆ What supports for GYO participants enabled them to succeed in the program?
- ◆ What did ACORN do to earn district leaders' respect, yet retain their credibility with their neighborhood base?
- ◆ How did ACORN guarantee that the GYO program will be administered with continuing community input?

Group 5: Implications and Findings

- ◆ How did the study define school climate? Professional climate?
- ◆ How does high teacher turnover affect professional culture in schools?
- ◆ How does the GYO program re-conceptualize teacher quality? What are the implications for teacher prep programs?
- ◆ What actions and strategies were key to ACORN's success with GYO?



Chicago ACORN — Reading for Group 1

In many ways, public schools in Chicago have vastly improved over the years. But the district has struggled to provide a high-quality education to an overwhelmingly low-income student population, especially in traditionally underserved neighborhoods. One critical problem is that teachers often have little connection to the communities they serve, leading to high turnover and a large number of inexperienced teachers. And despite mandated parent involvement on school-based decision-making councils, many schools involve parents largely in volunteering and fundraising activities rather than participation in school reform efforts such as improving teacher quality.

About Chicago

In 1987, U.S. Secretary of Education William Bennett called Chicago Public Schools (CPS) the nation's worst school system (Associated Press 1987). In the two decades since his pronouncement, the district has seen sweeping changes: a radical decentralization that handed power to locally elected councils of parents and teachers; the advent of mayoral control; an unprecedented investment in curricular reform; and a privately financed initiative to create 100 new small schools. CPS has earned a reputation for innovation and a commitment to reform and is often lauded as an example of an improving urban system.

Chicago still faces daunting challenges. Like many of the nation's largest school systems, 85 percent of its students are low income. During the 2007-2008 school year, twenty-seven CPS students suffered violent deaths, and the graduation rate hovers around 55 percent. These problems are magnified in the neighborhoods where ACORN (and Action Now) members live: Englewood, West Englewood, North Lawndale, and Little Village. Clustered on the West and South sides of Chicago, these neighborhoods are home to mostly Black and Latino working-class and low-income families and as many as 95 percent of students are low income. Compared to 62 percent of students citywide, in 2005 only 52 percent of students in North Lawndale met standards on the state achievement tests.

Chicago ACORN'S Education Organizing

Chicago is the birthplace of community organizing. Ever since Saul Alinsky founded the Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council in 1939, the city has been home to a vibrant array of organizing groups with deep ties to neighborhoods and firsthand knowledge of the issues they face. A 2001 study counted seventeen adult, youth, and intergenerational organizing groups active on education issues (Davenport 2001). Many community organizing groups joined the coalition that pushed successfully for the School Reform Act in 1988. Since then, community organizing groups have been active, vocal players in the world of Chicago school reform.

Excerpted from *Rethinking the Teacher Pipeline for an Urban Public School System: Chicago ACORN*, by Sara McAlister, Kavitha Mediratta, and Seema Shah. Providence, RI: Brown University, Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 2009.

Chicago ACORN has a twenty-five-year history of organizing in Englewood, West Englewood, Little Village, and North Lawndale under the leadership of Madeline Talbott, its founder and head organizer. Beginning in 2000, Talbott led ACORN in a new organizing effort to strengthen its neighborhood schools by improving teacher quality and slowing turnover. Working with other community organizing groups, district officials, university deans, and elected officials, ACORN assembled a statewide coalition to win legislation creating a “grow your own” teacher pipeline program to train people with ties to neighborhood schools to become teachers. This statewide campaign secured passage of the 2004 Grow Your Own Teachers Act and as of 2008 had won \$11 million in successive appropriations to support the program.

In early 2008, Talbott, the staff, and the board left ACORN to start Action Now, a new, unaffiliated organization that is continuing the education work and other campaigns they began while affiliated with ACORN. Though we refer to the group as ACORN, as it was called throughout the period of our study, the work we describe is now being led by Action Now.

The report from which this reading is excerpted shares findings from our six-year study of ACORN’s education organizing. We trace the evolution of ACORN’s teacher-quality campaign and its potential impact on school capacity. Though it will be several years before the Grow Your Own program bears fruit, our research found consistent and compelling evidence that ACORN’s work influenced public officials’ priorities and perceptions of the role of community groups in school reform and led to major changes in how teachers are recruited, trained and placed in low-income schools.

Local School Councils: An Opportunity for Meaningful Parent Involvement in Schools

During the late 1980s, parents, community groups, and business leaders grew increasingly frustrated with persistent labor unrest and widespread educational failure facing CPS. In the fall of 1987, the ninth teacher strike in eighteen years galvanized public anger with the low quality of schools and stifling bureaucracy of the system. A broad coalition emerged to push for reform. In 1988 the coalition won passage of the Chicago School Reform Act in the state legislature, the centerpiece of which was a radical move toward local control.

The law created an elected Local School Council (LSC) consisting of parents, community members, teachers, and principals for each school in the district. Parents were to make up a majority of the LSC. LSCs were granted the authority to hire and fire principals, develop and approve budgets, and shape school improvement priorities.

LSCs provided parents and community members with unprecedented access to schools and opportunities for involvement in schools. For groups like ACORN, LSCs provided an opening

to deepen their involvement in education issues. ACORN executive director Madeline Talbott described the process:

Once we put people on the LSCs, it created much more interest on the part of the membership about what the heck do we do about the schools. We didn't have an answer to that question. We tried out different things over a period of time to try to figure out, how a community organization engages with classroom education.

Chicago schools were notorious for excluding parents and communities from participation beyond volunteering and fundraising. "You had to have an appointment or a reason that was cleared by the administration to even walk into most buildings," recalled Gwen Stewart, a parent leader with ACORN (Russo 2004). After becoming the majority of each school's council, parents and community members were taken more seriously by school leaders and teachers. Seizing the opportunity and supported by local funders, ACORN helped many of its members campaign for spots on LSCs. In the first round of elections, eighty-seven ACORN members were elected to the councils of a number of schools.

Uncovering the Problem: A Shortage of Qualified Teachers

Through its members' participation in LSCs, ACORN began to form relationships with local schools and principals. ACORN approached principals as allies rather than as adversaries, believing that most principals shared their goals and appreciated the political power that organizing groups brought with them. The group proved to be a formidable ally for schools that were seeking resources from the district, particularly funds for facilities repairs. ACORN testified at school board meetings on behalf of local schools and pressed the district to respond to principals' requests.

Beyond advocating for schools' immediate facilities needs, participating on the councils deepened members' interest in the problems facing local schools. ACORN organizers sought ways to expand members' access to education reform expertise and broaden interest in school issues to all ACORN members, not just those serving on LSCs. Working with local school reform groups and drawing on local foundation grants for capacity building, ACORN conducted a series of trainings for LSC members and interested parents in each of its neighborhoods. The training combined an analysis of what was happening inside schools with training in organizing skills. Participants examined demographic and achievement data from their school and compared it to other schools, explored math and reading curricula, and made classroom visits.

Leaders came to see the poor outcomes of their schools as the product of inexperienced and underqualified teachers, since many schools had chronic vacancies and often relied on long-term substitute teachers. A group of about twenty-five parents on the West Side launched a drive to hire highly qualified teachers by placing ads, screening candidates, and setting up interviews with principals. The response was disappointing. Talbott recalled:

It was very hard to get people who sent resumes to come to the West Side for an interview, and many of them did not stay. Because they wanted a job, they went in, and then they left.

Discussion Questions: The Chicago Setting, ACORN Organizing, and Uncovering the Problem

- ◆ What were the characteristics of the neighborhoods where ACORN was organizing? How do they contrast with the Chicago school district as a whole?
- ◆ What leverage did sitting on local school councils (LSCs) give to parents and community members?
- ◆ How did ACORN work with and support local members serving on local school councils (LSCs)?
- ◆ What did ACORN members pinpoint as the core problem of teacher recruitment and retention?



Chicago ACORN — Reading for Group 2

The Need for a Systemic Response

After the inception of Local School Councils (LSCs), ACORN's school-based organizing relied largely on a strategy of recruiting parents into teams focused on the needs of individual schools. As the group delved deeper into teacher recruitment, this strategy began to shift. ACORN leaders realized that the problem of recruiting quality teachers demanded a systemic response. Rather than mobilizing parents and LSC members school by school, in the fall of 2000 ACORN convened a meeting of members from all its neighborhoods to discuss education-organizing priorities. Teacher quality and recruitment emerged as a central problem for each neighborhood. The group devised a strategy of cataloging the teaching staff needs of all neighborhood schools and demanding action from the school board. Their visits to schools revealed that principals were quite concerned about teacher quality but were desperate for teachers and often relied on long-term substitutes to fill vacancies.

In February 2001, Denise Dixon, Gwen Stewart, and other leaders testified at a school board meeting about vacancies in their schools. "We will not settle for one piece of the educational pie," Dixon told the board, pointing out that the district had managed to open new magnet schools fully staffed with certified teachers. During the meeting, CPS's human resources director reported that halfway through the school year, the district had well over a thousand vacancies.

Rosalind Rossi of the *Chicago Sun-Times* reported on the leaders' testimony to the school board and followed up with its own analysis of teacher credentials that confirmed ACORN's claims about the disproportionate shortage of qualified teachers in low-income schools. Arthur Wise, president of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, said in one article:

The dirty little secret is that there are large numbers of unqualified individuals teaching, and they are disproportionately assigned to teach children of color and children from impoverished backgrounds.

The series helped to raise the profile of teacher-quality issues in Chicago, and ACORN leaders were quoted in almost every article.

The Problem: Cultural Mismatches and High Teacher Turnover

ACORN continued to work with district leaders to strengthen teacher recruitment in North Lawndale as well as its other neighborhoods. The 2001 No Child Left Behind Act's requirement that each state formalize teacher certification and provide highly qualified teachers in all classrooms lent important leverage to ACORN's demands. Yet, even as recruitment improved, a consensus was emerging across Chicago that simply attracting better teachers would not solve the problem of keeping them, particu-

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larly in struggling schools. In 2002, the group released a follow-up to its earlier study, this one focusing on the absence of experienced teachers in neighborhood schools (Timmer 2002).

ACORN leaders viewed the retention problem as a cultural and ethnic mismatch between teacher recruits and the schools and communities where they took jobs. Education graduates were increasingly White and suburban. When they came to North Lawndale and similar neighborhoods, “they experienced culture shock when they walked outside the [school] building,” according to ACORN leader Gwen Stewart. Drawing on a strategy developed by organizing groups in California and Texas, leaders designed a program of home visits for new teachers as part of an induction program run by a local foundation. The hope was that getting to know families and students in the neighborhood could help to allay teachers’ discomfort. The visits were well-received by families and teachers alike and were publicized in local and citywide media. But many teachers who participated still left their schools quickly – some within the first week of school. The startling turn-over crystallized the issue for ACORN leaders; a different approach was required.

ACORN’s own investigations confirmed that highly educated White teachers were the first to leave high-poverty schools across Illinois, a pattern that has been described in scholarly research as well. Clearly, the problem lay in the pool of teachers. Talbott explained:

Teacher turnover is the cause of vacancies in otherwise easy-to-fill positions, such as elementary teachers and high school social studies teachers. It only occurs in neighborhoods where no teachers from that very community are being trained to be teachers: low-income schools, especially of color, especially African American. It is not a pipeline problem of too few teachers being trained in a state but, rather, too few teachers being trained who want to work in our schools.

Under Arne Duncan, who took over leadership of the school district in 2001, CPS worked to strengthen professional development and mentoring for new teachers and developed a special set of supports for the “port of entry” schools that teachers left most quickly for more appealing schools and districts. Duncan commented, “We’ve recruited a high number of [high] caliber teachers. But if we don’t understand the importance of the retention side, we’re kidding ourselves” (Williams 2003).

A New Teacher Pipeline Model

ACORN turned to a new teacher-pipeline model developed by one of its organizing allies, the Logan Square Neighborhood Association (LSNA), to remedy the shortage of teachers prepared for local schools. In 2000, LSNA began a partnership with a local university to provide education coursework leading to full bilingual teacher certification to local parents who had volunteered extensively in their children’s schools. The program, called Nueva Generación, offered forgivable loans, English classes, remedial coursework, daycare, and tutoring and used a cohort system in which participants moved through classes together for mutual support. Parents in Nueva

Generación shared their future students' culture, language, and experiences and approached teaching with a commitment to working in local schools.

Research supported the potential of Nueva Generación to produce a stable supply of qualified teachers committed to hard-to-staff schools. The Pathways into Teaching Project, which provided supports to a group of nontraditional candidates similar to the Nueva Generación participants, produced higher completion rates in teacher-preparation programs, and graduates received significantly higher ratings of their skills than new teachers nationally. After three years, 88 percent of graduates were still teaching, far exceeding the national three-year retention rate of 67 percent for new teachers, and the majority remained in hard-to-staff districts.

A similar program in North Carolina for paraprofessionals also showed promising results. These programs, like Nueva Generación, incorporated many best practices for nontraditional adult students, such as cohort systems for mutual support, classes held in community locations, and extensive tutoring and counseling.

Discussion Questions: The Need for a Systemic Response

- ◆ What was the “dirty little secret” about the teaching force in Chicago? What happened when White teachers from the suburbs came to high-poverty schools?
- ◆ What did Arne Duncan say about the problem of teacher recruitment?
- ◆ What were the successful practices of the Nueva Generación teacher recruitment program developed by Logan Square Neighborhood Association?
- ◆ What are some positive outcomes identified by the research on new pathways into teaching?



Chicago ACORN — Reading for Group 3

Scaling Up: The Statewide Grow Your Own Teachers Campaign

ACORN saw in the Nueva Generación program – a partnership between the Logan Square Neighborhood Association (LSNA) and a local university – the basis for a systemic rethinking of the teacher pipeline. As organizers and leaders dug more deeply into the issues of teacher training and teacher turnover, they discovered that schools serving low-income children of color across the state faced the same problem. It was time to develop a statewide approach. Madeline Talbott commented:

I thought we were solving a personal problem that we had in North Lawndale and Englewood, but it's a public issue. Higher education is churning out people who are staying one or two years and no more. If it's a problem everywhere, it means that we need to look for a solution on a much bigger scale.

From their work on LSCs, both LSNA and ACORN had developed strong relationships with two local school reform intermediaries, Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform and Designs for Change. With funding from the Ford Foundation, the four groups convened a teacher-quality coalition called Chicago Learning Campaign (CLC). ACORN advocated for scaling up Nueva Generación into a statewide Grow Your Own Teacher (GYO) program that would establish partnerships between community groups and universities across the state to train residents of high-turnover neighborhoods as teachers. To ensure legitimacy and reliable funding for the effort, the CLC sought legislation establishing program rules and a yearly appropriation.

As seasoned players in the Chicago and Illinois political landscapes, ACORN and its allies in the CLC understood the importance of building coalitions. Passing state legislation would be much easier if all the organizations that would have a hand in carrying out GYO programs were on board from the start.

The CLC reached out to the school district – in particular to an official who had served as principal in an LSNA school – and to local universities, community colleges, unions, and foundations. ACORN and LSNA met with the state legislators who represented their respective neighborhoods, with whom they had long-established relationships, and recruited more organizing groups into the collaboration. With Talbott as the main facilitator, the CLC assembled a broadly representative Grow Your Own task force to draft legislation.

“ACORN was able to recruit all the key stakeholders and to hold very amicable planning sessions. We were able to move rather quickly and get consensus,” recalled senior CPS official

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Amanda Rivera, who represented the district on the task force. University deans, union leaders, legislators, and Nueva Generación participants rallied support and affirmed the need for GYO at a public summit in the state capital in the winter of 2004.

The Grow Your Own Teachers Act passed during the 2004 legislative session, and the governor signed it, authorizing the creation of local consortia of universities, school districts, and community organizations. These consortia would recruit neighborhood residents who had demonstrated a commitment to hard-to-staff schools and support them through teacher preparation programs. Talbott credited the CLC's success to its membership of universities, unions, school districts, and community organizations – the breadth of which demonstrated widespread support for the GYO model. Educators and politicians concurred that the enthusiasm of so many constituencies for GYO was a compelling factor in the legislation's passage and the governor's decision to sign the law. Linda Jamali, a former senior policy advisor for education in the governor's office, recalled:

[ACORN was] very organized in bringing in groups to speak who could offer a variety of perspectives on the legislation that they were proposing . . . and they've reached out to higher education groups and other groups that share the same interests they have.

Despite the enthusiasm for GYO, a state budget crisis meant that the task force had to wait until the following year to press for an appropriation. In the meantime, ACORN and its allies, particularly Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform director Anne Hallett, continued to cultivate support among universities, community groups, and unions in high-turnover districts across the state to ensure support for a sufficient appropriation and encourage broad participation in the program once funded.

In 2005, the legislature approved an initial appropriation of \$1.5 million for planning grants to ten consortia and, since then, has provided additional appropriations of at least \$3 million each year, totaling \$11 million through 2008. As of 2008, eight of the twelve public universities in the state of Illinois participated in GYO, and sixteen consortia across the state were supporting cohorts of future teachers.

Renaissance 2010: The Challenge of Maintaining a Shared Vision

In 2004, as ACORN and its allies were collaborating with CPS to pass the GYO legislation, the district rolled out a controversial plan dubbed Renaissance 2010. Renaissance 2010 aimed to expand school choice and add seats to schools in rapidly growing neighborhoods. It would close nearly 60 failing and under-enrolled schools and replace them with 100 new neighborhood schools, many of them charter schools or “contract schools” run by outside partners freed from contractual regulations.

ACORN's extensive work on affordable housing in the city positioned the group to identify a relationship between the Renaissance 2010 strategy and neighborhood gentrification. ACORN leaders feared that the new schools were conceived mostly to attract and serve wealthier families

moving into rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods and that, despite the district's promises, low-income students would be largely shut out from the improved schools. Talbott explained:

[The city is] trying to improve the schools fast enough that they can attract some people to \$300,000 townhomes that are starting to go up and higher. Nobody wants a lousy school. . . . The people in the community now realize that this is not for them and are up in arms.

Many other organizing groups shared ACORN's concerns and worked together to turn members out to school board meetings and other public events to protest school closings. In addition to concerns about which students would have access to new and revamped schools, community groups argued that the new schools would have appointed advisory boards instead of elected LSCs, thus weakening parent and community participation in neighborhood schools. Some critics saw the plan as an attempt to privatize schools and sideline the teachers union.

ACORN and other organizing groups worked with state legislators and Chicago aldermen to move legislation and city council resolutions opposing parts of the initiative and calling for more community input into school-closing decisions. Though none of these efforts passed, the growing attention to the issue convinced the district to adopt the more transparent decision-making criteria for school closings that ACORN had demanded. These criteria included a provision to prevent the closure of any school that had received students from a shuttered school in the previous year.

Despite ACORN's confrontational stance on Renaissance 2010, the organization maintained an effective collaboration with CPS on GYO. This success stemmed in large part from strong relationships that ACORN staff and leaders had developed with key CPS officials responsible for human resources in the district. The continued collaboration was also facilitated by the coalition structure of the anti-Renaissance 2010 organizing, in which ACORN was only one of many players. This coalition provided important cover for ACORN and CPS to continue working together on teacher quality where they had developed a shared vision and agenda.

Discussion Questions: Scaling up and Confronting a Challenge

- ◆ What was ACORN's strategy for developing a statewide program? Why was a statewide program needed?
- ◆ What were the major features of the state GYO program?
- ◆ To what did ACORN leaders credit the passage of the GYO legislation?
- ◆ What was Renaissance 2010, and why was it so controversial?
- ◆ How did ACORN head off the potentially damaging effects of Renaissance 2010?



Chicago ACORN — Reading for Group 4

Assessing the Impact of ACORN'S Organizing

Our research followed ACORN's campaign for a statewide GYO program, as well as the group's other education organizing campaigns. Our study centered on two questions.

- ◆ What role do educators attribute to ACORN in promoting equity-oriented resource distribution, changing district policies and practices, and increasing community accountability?
- ◆ What are the implications of the GYO campaign for school capacity and student learning in the future?

This reading focuses on the first question.

Findings: Influence on District Capacity

The educators interviewed at the school and district levels universally credited ACORN with focusing the district's attention on the needs of underserved schools. A CPS official with a key role in shaping the Renaissance 2010 initiative summed up ACORN's role:

Without ACORN, I think you would have an isolated, insulated school system that's just moving along, doing what it thinks is best without any checks and balances. . . . We definitely need an organization like that out there to push us and make us do our jobs better.

Policies and resources

ACORN was viewed as an effective advocate for equity in resource distribution within CPS. In its early organizing, ACORN advocated for the needs of schools in its neighborhoods and was credited with helping individual schools to secure funds for facilities improvements under the district's capital budget process. One principal noted that ACORN had helped her secure more than \$6 million in capital improvements and commented:

We went and met with the board and the board president. And, of course, a representative from ACORN was right there speaking with us. That kind of support really makes a difference because ACORN is an organization that's highly respected by the Chicago Public Schools Board of Education.

Through the Grow Your Own Teachers Act, which ACORN played a crucial role in helping to pass, the state of Illinois committed new resources to historically underserved school districts. To qualify for funds, local consortia must document high teacher turnover, a high proportion of

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poor students, or a divergence in the racial makeup of students and teachers. As of 2008, the legislature has appropriated \$11 million in grants to consortia to train teachers in the state's most underserved districts and schools.

Educators believed that ACORN's organizing helped to focus district- and state-level attention on the need for a policy intervention to address a core challenge in urban school reform: teacher quality in low-performing schools. The GYO act marks a significant shift in state policy and practice on recruiting and developing new teachers. In adopting the GYO model, state leaders recognized that the usual recruitment efforts were insufficient for schools struggling to keep teachers.

The law also specified a goal of increasing the racial diversity of the teaching force and acknowledged the importance of recruiting teachers who share a culture and background with their students. In doing so, GYO elevated the concept of deep community ties and dedication to particular students as attributes of quality teaching. Al Bertani, former chief officer for professional development at CPS, explained:

We always viewed that Grow Your Own was a different kind of solution, especially in our hard-to-staff schools and neighborhoods where people really wanted to stay and work because that's where they lived or committed to working.

The legislature and state department of education, as well as the school districts that participate in consortia, not only endorsed the value of such cultural and community expertise, but backed it up by funding the childcare, tutoring, financial aid, developmental classes, and other supports necessary to ensure that individuals with those skills can become teachers.

Accountability to the community

State and district officials reported that ACORN skillfully focused attention on the needs of low-income schools in general and the group's neighborhoods in particular. ACORN's firsthand knowledge of the reality on the ground was important in influencing the district's responses to the problem of teacher quality. ACORN's analysis of local schools' staffing needs revealed the concentration of teacher vacancies in North Lawndale before the district had begun to target teacher recruitment to specific neighborhoods. The district responded by moving one of its strong recruiters to the region encompassing North Lawndale.

Educators inside the district explained that ACORN's willingness to work collaboratively and their political acumen in balancing "inside" and "outside" roles made them a very useful partner. Bertani described the group as:

politically smart enough to position their work to say . . . "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."

ACORN's skill in balancing public pressure for its demands with a willingness to collaborate not only convinced the district to trust the group as a "critical friend," but also created important space within the district administration for inside allies to pursue their reform goals. Bertani said:

There was a very clear message from the beginning, both to ACORN and internally: we were going to figure out a way to be able to work together on GYO. So I think part of it has to do with the skills of navigating and strategizing that ACORN managed.

ACORN also understood the importance of maintaining public pressure for accountability. By testifying at school board meetings, publishing reports exposing the deplorable state of teacher retention, and speaking frequently to the press, leaders increased the pressure on officials to respond to their demands. ACORN was credited with pressing the district to increase transparency and develop a clear process for school closings under the Renaissance 2010 initiative. One district official who played a key role in crafting the policy recalled, "There's no question that we added a lot of process and transparency into this as a result of the issue being brought to our attention from different community groups like ACORN."

Finally, the GYO campaign institutionalized a role for communities and community organizations, akin to ACORN's role vis-à-vis CPS, in the arena of teacher preparation at both the state and local levels. ACORN, LSNA, and several other organizing groups were awarded the contract to administer the GYO program on behalf of the state, creating a mechanism for organizing groups to ensure deep and ongoing community participation in the initiative. Local consortia must include the school district, a university, and a community organizing group, as well as a community college or union in some instances. The law also specified that the community organizations in each consortium have a demonstrated capacity to train, develop, and organize parents and community leaders into a constituency that will hold the school and the school district accountable for achieving high academic standards. These community organizations must also assist in recruiting and selecting teacher candidates and provide support to cohorts of teacher candidates as they move through their coursework.

Discussion Questions: Assessing ACORN's Impact

- ◆ What were the key research questions of the study?
- ◆ What were ACORN's major successes?
- ◆ What supports for GYO participants enabled them to succeed in the program?
- ◆ What did ACORN do to earn district leaders' respect, yet retain their credibility with their neighborhood base?
- ◆ How did ACORN guarantee that the GYO program will be administered with continuing community input?



Chicago ACORN — Reading for Group 5

Assessing the Impact of ACORN'S Organizing

Our research followed ACORN's campaign for a statewide GYO program, as well as the group's other education organizing campaigns. Our study centered on two questions.

- ◆ What role do educators attribute to ACORN in promoting equity-oriented resource distribution, changing district policies and practices, and increasing community accountability?
- ◆ What are the implications of the GYO campaign for school capacity and student learning in the future?

This reading focuses on the second question.

Findings: Implications for School Capacity and Student Learning

Within a period of four years, Chicago ACORN identified and developed a series of strategies to rectify the problem of high teacher turnover in their schools. But it will take several more years for the GYO initiative to produce new teachers and place them in schools. Nonetheless, the growth of the initiative so far has generated new optimism among educators about the potential of GYO to improve teacher retention and increase the capacity of schools to meet the needs of students.

As of November 2007, 545 candidates were participating in sixteen consortia across the state; 1,000 teachers are projected to complete the program by 2016. The majority of candidates are people of color and hold full-time jobs while completing their coursework, often as classroom paraprofessionals.

The study team's framework of school capacity posits that a school's climate and professional culture are central to its effectiveness in educating students. By school climate, we mean ways parents, educators, and students relate to each other and the opportunities for involvement of parents, students, and community members in schools; professional climate refers to the culture of collaboration and collegiality among educators that supports effective instructional practice in schools. In both areas, there is reason to expect positive outcomes over time as the GYO initiative rolls out.

The role of community organizations in selecting teacher candidates suggests the possibility of deeper ties between community constituencies and local schools. The Nueva Generación example suggests that a teaching force with cultural and personal ties to students and parents can facilitate positive relationships and expand parent engagement in schools. Indeed, Amanda Rivera,

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who represented the district on the GYO task force and had worked with LSNA as a principal, noted:

One of the things that we were able to see through [GYO] was that these parents had a connection to that community and a commitment and willingness and a desire to stay in that community. As someone who supervised parent involvement, I could see the kind of relationship that they developed with students, the comfort level and the knowledge of the community, of that school community, that new teachers often lack.

Studies suggest that high teacher turnover is a substantial barrier to developing a culture of collaboration and learning among teachers. The GYO initiative aims for an average retention of 7 years, much higher than the current average of 2.5 years in high-turnover schools. To the extent that GYO increases teacher retention, the program will enable schools to establish strong professional cultures.

GYO also represents a reconceptualization of what teacher quality means. In addition to content knowledge and pedagogic skill, GYO places cultural competency and community commitment at the center of what it means to teach effectively. In doing so, the initiative raises implications for how teachers are recruited, prepared, and supported. GYO requires universities and community colleges to commit to serve populations normally excluded from higher education and to recognize their responsibility to train a diverse corps of teachers prepared to build careers in underserved schools and communities. Eight of the twelve public universities in Illinois are currently members of GYO consortia, providing an opportunity to reshape teacher preparation on a broad scale. GYO simultaneously creates a meaningful role for community constituencies in selecting, supporting, and preparing teachers for their own schools.

Reflections on Findings

Chicago ACORN's work traces an arc from neighborhood organizing and strategic coalition building to cogent data analyses of teacher quality in low-income Chicago neighborhoods. But the story is not finished. As the country struggles to deal with recession, a key challenge will be to ensure continued state funding for GYO teacher candidates as they continue their coursework. Nonetheless, the initiative offers a compelling view of how communities can contribute to pressing problems in urban public schools.

A key factor in the success of the GYO campaign was the importance that ACORN and its allies placed on building coalitions across traditional boundaries. By including all the constituencies required to carry out the model – universities and community colleges, school district officials, unions, and legislators – in the process of writing legislation and working for its passage, ACORN and its allies within the CLC were able to ensure support from all corners. The coalition of diverse interests lined up behind the initiative encouraged legislators to view GYO as a viable strategy for improving teacher quality.

While recognizing the strategic importance of broad coalitions, ACORN and its allies also staked out a central role for communities and community organizations in school reform. In its early work on teacher quality, the group established its expertise in schooling issues by drawing on community members' own experiences and collecting firsthand data from neighborhood schools to confirm their analysis. This diligence put teacher quality on the table as an important public issue while the district's attention was focused elsewhere. With Nueva Generación, LSNA positioned the Logan Square community as an entity capable not only of developing its own solution to a shortage of qualified teachers, but as the source of its own dedicated teaching force.

The GYO victory takes this recognition of the centrality of communities to scale. State legislation provided stable funding and legitimacy. It also opened an opportunity to foster broad involvement in education of organizing groups in cities outside Chicago and to build a new statewide constituency of organized parents, community leaders, and paraprofessionals who can organize to ensure that GYO continues to meet communities' needs.

Finally, the GYO victory also illuminated the benefits of multi-issue organizing in moving a school reform strategy. ACORN's evolution from school-by-school organizing to a neighborhood-wide approach facilitated systematic analysis of the teacher-quality problems leaders were observing in each school and, thus, a systemic strategy. At the same time, ACORN's internal structure of neighborhood chapters and its history of organizing on multiple issues built a host of relationships with political leaders across the city and state that added crucial leverage to its efforts to win support for the GYO initiative.

Discussion Questions: Implications and Findings

- ◆ How did the study define school climate? Professional climate?
- ◆ How does high teacher turnover affect professional culture in schools?
- ◆ How does the GYO program re-conceptualize teacher quality? What are the implications for teacher prep programs?
- ◆ What actions and strategies were key to ACORN's success with GYO?