



# Building Parent Engagement & Leadership:

A National Perspective

Community Involvement Program

Annenberg Institute  
for School Reform  
at Brown University

AERA  
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# 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 Thru Action
NW Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition	Bronx, NY		Sistas & Brothas United

# Sample & Methods

- Site visits to observe meetings and leadership development trainings
- 43 interviews with adult leaders
- 40 educator interviews (district superintendents, district administrators, school board members, principals, teachers)
- Purposive sample – identified interviewees based on role as a target, ally or member
- Thematic analysis of interviews

# Leadership Development

- Leadership development occurs through both formal and informal means
- Formal trainings are provided by both the local organization and the national network
- Key elements of leadership development training include:
  - Understanding concepts of power and self-interest
  - Organizing skills (e.g. planning an action, public speaking)
  - Gaining education-specific knowledge

# Parent Leader Quotes

*And I was totally different in that I was starting to see myself as somebody who had a right to speak. Someone who again can learn that I can be successful...And even though I was still nervous and I would still be shaky every time, maybe for the first three years, [and] as much as I was afraid to do it for those reasons I felt like I wanted to do it cause I was learning and you know this is an opportunity for me to really learn about what's going on, to keep me connected in the community. –Parent leader*

# Parent Leader Quotes

*The leaders...become recognized for being the proponents and being the ones that parents can go to or teachers can go to. Now they come to you and they say, well I need help with this. I'm just like, no wait a minute. Let's talk about how you can resolve this. Let's not talk about how I can resolve this. No the idea is we want you to become part of the solution here. We want you to be the one that is an activist and a leader and a proponent for the change. So that to me is more my role now. I try to do more of instilling that capability...*

*–Parent Leader*

# As a result...

- Not traditional parent involvement
  - Focused on all students, not individuals
  - Independent of the school
  - Moves beyond service and advocacy--organizing develops and mobilizes leaders to advocate for their own self-interest (never do for others what they can do for themselves)

# 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 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, 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*

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