



Annenberg Institute
for School Reform
AT BROWN UNIVERSITY

Press Release

SIX-YEAR STUDY ON COMMUNITY ORGANIZING FINDS POSITIVE IMPACT ON STUDENT ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

March 26, 2008 – New York, NY – Since the emergence of education organizing for school reform in the early 1990s, education organizers, researchers, and foundation supporters have debated the impact of organizing on student educational outcomes.

Now, findings of a pioneering six-year research study by the Community Involvement Program of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University, with support from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, reveal that sophisticated organizing at the grassroots level can indeed make major contributions to improving student achievement.

The study, which quantified, measured, and linked the impacts of community organizing to specific performance indicators, found strong and consistent evidence across multiple data sources that effective community organizing is:

1. Contributing to improved student educational outcomes through higher attendance, test score performance, high school completion, and aspiration to attend college;
2. Building school-community relationships, parent involvement and engagement, and trust in schools that contribute to improved schools; and
3. Stimulating important changes in educational policy, practices, and resource distribution at the system level that expand school capacity and equity in historically underserved communities.

The research findings will be previewed in the document, *Organized Communities, Stronger Schools: A Preview of Research Findings*, at the 2008 American Educational Research Association (AERA) Presidential Session panel discussion entitled “The Impacts of Community Organizing on Public Education Reform.” The panel discussion will focus on the impact of community organizing efforts on school and district reforms, as well as the impact of participation in community organizing efforts on parent and youth leaders. Leading scholars will also discuss the implications of the study’s findings for increasing educational equity, and the relevance of the research for foundation funding of public education reform efforts.

AERA is the national interdisciplinary association for scholars who undertake research in education. The 2008 Annual Meeting is expected to attract close to 16,000 scholars from more than 60 countries.

“We now have evidence that investing in effective grassroots organizing can help strengthen the capacity of schools to improve student achievement,” said Norm Fruchter, director of the Annenberg Institute’s Community Involvement Program.

The study also examined the characteristics of effective community organizing for school reform. The authors argue that effective organizing groups achieve schooling and community impacts through a combination of system-level advocacy and school- or community-based activity. Continuous and consistent parent, youth, and community engagement produced through community organizing both generates and sustains these improvements.

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“This study shows that effective community organizing efforts can transform the relationship between schools and communities and can alter the underlying power dynamics that determine schooling outcomes,” said Kavitha Mediratta, the principal investigator of the study.

Community organizing for school reform is defined by initiatives that build power by mobilizing large numbers of people; focus on accountability, equity, and quality; use direct action tactics to apply pressure on decision-makers; and aim to transform the power relationships that have produced failing schools in low and moderate-income neighborhoods and communities of color. Research suggests that there are currently at least 200 community groups across the country engaged in struggling for better local public schools (Research for Action, 2001; Mediratta and Fruchter, 2001).

The study examined seven urban-based organizations that engage in community organizing for school reform. The groups are: Austin Interfaith (Austin, TX); Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition (Bronx, NY); Chicago ACORN (Chicago, IL); Community Coalition (Los Angeles, CA); People Acting for Community Together (Miami, FL); Oakland Community Organizations (Oakland, CA); and the Eastern Pennsylvania Organizing Project and Youth United for Change (Philadelphia, PA). The rigorous, mixed methods research approach assessed the processes and impacts of organizing efforts over time and included interviews, observational data, surveys, and analysis of school demographic and outcome data.

Organized Communities, Stronger Schools: A Preview of Research Findings is available at <http://www.annenberginstitute.org/Products/Mott.php>. The full study will be released in summer 2008, and will provide an in-depth analysis of the impacts of community organizing and the strategies required to produce these impacts.

The Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University is a national policy-research and reform-support organization that promotes quality education for children in urban communities. The Institute’s Community Involvement Program (www.annenberginstitute.org/CIP) conducts research on the impacts of community organizing, and provides training support, organizing strategy, data analysis, and policy research to support urban communities in their struggle for school improvement.

The Mott Foundation, established in 1926 in Flint, MI, by an automotive pioneer, is a private philanthropy committed to supporting projects that promote a just, equitable, and sustainable society. It supports nonprofit programs throughout the U.S. and, on a limited geographic basis, internationally. Grantmaking is focused in four programs: Civil Society, Environment, Flint Area, and Pathways Out of Poverty. Besides Flint, offices are located in metropolitan Detroit, Johannesburg (South Africa), and London. The Foundation, with year-end assets of approximately \$2.7 billion, made 527 grants totaling \$108.7 million in 2007. For more information, visit www.Mott.org.

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