



New Relationships With Schools

Organizations That
Build Community by
Connecting With Schools

Based on Inquiry and Analysis Conducted by

Collaborative Communications Group

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Credits

Kris Kurtenbach, president of Collaborative Communications Group, directed this project. Jeanne Jehl was the lead writer and Beth Bacon provided additional research and writing.

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COMMUNICATIONS GROUP

Collaborative Communications Group is a strategic communications consulting firm built around the belief that public engagement is essential to the improvement of communities and, particularly, schools. Collaborative Communications Group works in three portfolio areas: defining and analyzing the nature and impact of civic engagement in the context of organization, education and community change; developing tools to increase and improve the practice of engagement and improving the management and communications capacity of organizations that serve as primary initiators or supporters of engagement activities.

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Executive Summary

Collaborative Communications Group examined organizations that undertake work to improve schools as part of broader community improvement efforts. These groups start out working on issues such as housing, community development or civil justice — then take on public education issues when it becomes clear that educational quality is inextricably tied to other community goals. In this study, we asked:

- What new relationships with schools are created by organizations and their constituents as they go about the work of improving their communities?
- In what ways do these organizations advance larger civic, democratic goals with their work on public education issues?
- What factors most influence the community organization to extend its mission to include public schools?

The organizations highlighted in this report act on behalf of the neighborhood, the community or a constituency group. They help residents build the networks, understanding and power to identify and address problems with their schools. They demonstrate that public engagement in public schools can improve education and strengthen democratic participation in communities.

Approaches

Our research employed two approaches: *We looked deeply* at new relationships with schools through the lens of three community organizations, and we *mapped the landscape* of different organizational perspectives.

Looking Deeply

We identified and visited three organizations that serve different constituencies in various parts of the country:

- Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation is a multiservice agency in a predominantly Latino immigrant community in Brooklyn, NY.
- The Local INvestment Commission (LINC) is a communitywide collaborative that works to improve the lives of children and families in Kansas City and Jackson County, MO.
- Southern Echo is a social justice organization that provides capacity building and training in Mississippi.

We tell the stories of these organizations using in-depth case studies that examine the context for their work, catalysts for moving into work with schools, how they name and frame the issues, what behaviors they use to address the issues and what changes are evident as a result of their work.

Mapping the Landscape

After looking at many organizations that are connecting with schools, we identified eight that represent a range of constituencies, goals and approaches — from a mayor who is concerned about his community's future to a statewide advocacy group for youth of color. Several of these organizations are part of larger national networks, such as the Industrial Areas Foundation, Gamaliel and the Pacific Institute for Community Organizations.

To map the landscape, we reviewed literature and contacted key practitioners and analysts at the local, state and national levels. We also spoke with individuals in national networks that support and sustain local organizations that work with schools.

Information about these eight organizations is summarized briefly in the matrices at the end of this report.

Methods

Collaborative Communications conducted this research in fall and winter 2002-03 through on-site and telephone interviews with staff members, community residents and others who know the organizations well. We reviewed materials, reports and videos from the organizations, as well as other documents about community organizing and school reform.

Observations on Building Community by Connecting With Schools

1. Most efforts take place in disinvested communities where previous efforts have not served residents well.
2. An organization's operating principles — the way it translates its beliefs into action — strongly influence the behaviors it employs in connecting with schools.
3. The capacity of the organization — its resources and expertise — also shapes its behaviors and the depth of its impact on the community.
4. Many of these groups carry out community organizing efforts. They employ a wide range of strategies, and the impact of their work differs.
5. These organizations are experienced in the political process.
6. Youth organizing is a growing strategy for changing education while building a cadre of leaders in the community — for the present and the future.
7. Organizations that provide technical expertise — for example, in data and financing — play an especially valuable role in helping communities take on tough issues about the schools.
8. Intermediary organizations, such as LINC and Southern Echo, can increase the effectiveness of neighborhood-based efforts.
9. National organizations, from community organizing networks to university-based research and technical assistance centers to the National League of Cities, are engaged in supporting local efforts and learning from them.

Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation Brooklyn, NY

Driven by the Needs of the Community

Background and Context

Cypress Hills is a predominantly residential community in the northeast corner of Brooklyn, NY. Until the early 1980s, the community was mostly Italian and middle class. When Latino residents first arrived, white flight emptied many businesses along the main commercial streets. Residents were determined to stabilize the community and rebuild its commercial base. For nearly 20 years, the Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation (CHLDC) has functioned as a multiservice organization committed to the revitalization of the community.

The Cypress Hills area is somewhat isolated geographically from other communities in Brooklyn and the rest of the New York metropolitan area. Its population is about 60 percent Latino (mostly South American) and 40 percent African-American and other ethnic groups, with a growing number of Indo-Caribbean families. The community is densely populated, and many families move often. Some stay in the neighborhood until they can afford to move to more spacious housing, while others leave in search of better schools.

Although CHLDC has strong economic-development capacity, it has never been only a bricks-and-mortar organization, according to Michelle Neugebauer, executive director. The organization invests in the community's human infrastructure as well as its physical and economic revitalization. Its first program was an intergenerational initiative that engaged young people in assisting the community's seniors with errands and chores. Current services include housing counseling, tenant advocacy and homeownership counseling; adult education programs and GED preparation and services for youth, including after-school programs in nearly all public elementary and middle schools. A CHLDC subsidiary provides child-care services in the community.

Catalysts

CHLDC is community-driven, with residents' interests and concerns serving as catalysts for action. Currently, CHLDC is engaged in two efforts to improve schools:

- The Cypress Hills Community School (CHCS) is a small, parent-initiated school that began with support from New Visions for Public Schools, an intermediary organization formed to support and sustain the small schools reform effort in New York City.
- Cypress Hills Advocates for Education (CHAFE) is a community organizing group that includes parents and other community residents.

Cypress Hills Community School (CHCS)

A group of immigrant parents led the effort to create CHCS, driven by their experiences that local schools over-identified their children for special education services and were unresponsive to parents' concerns. When New Visions for Public Schools issued a Request for Proposals to form new small schools, the group first attempted to work within the system and revitalize an existing school. But the school's principal resigned, overwhelmed by the prospect of confronting the school district bureaucracy, and left parents without an organizational sponsor. Because they trusted CHLDC and knew it to be responsive to the community's needs and ideas, they asked CHLDC to cosponsor the new school under conditions established by New Visions.

Through the design process and early implementation, CHLDC has supported the community school in multiple ways, especially by providing financing expertise as parents struggled to find a physical home for the school. After persistent advocacy with elected officials, the school succeeded in obtaining a special appropriation from the city council to lease a facility. CHLDC has plans to convert an empty commercial building into a school that will become the center of the community. CHLDC is providing considerable technical expertise in economic development and assistance in fund raising as the school plans for a permanent home.

CHCS currently operates in trailers and several scattered classrooms at an intermediate school on the edge of the community. It provides dual-language (English-Spanish) instruction and works actively to involve parents in every aspect of school operations, from the curriculum to planning the facility. Parents must apply to have their children attend the school, which works to maintain an enrollment balanced between students whose first language is English and those who are primarily Spanish-speaking. Parents and community members form the majority on the school's governance team, and teachers and staff members visit students' homes to strengthen the bonds between families and the school. A parent who has championed the school since its inception serves as its co-director and the parents' "permanent representative" in the school's administration, although the school district does not acknowledge that leadership role. CHLDC also employs a parent coordinator for the school.

Although CHCS serves only about 250 children in grades K-8, it is an important symbol in Cypress Hills. "The community school informs and shows all other schools in the district what is possible," says Neugebauer. The school expects to move into the renovated building, which will serve as a multipurpose center for the community, in 2005.

Cypress Hills Advocates for Education (CHAFE)

The community's other public schools remain overcrowded, underresourced, low-performing and unresponsive to the concerns of parents and residents. In 1998, CHLDC surveyed community residents about their concerns and reported the results to community leaders. A primary concern was that schools in the community were overcrowded, with too many students in each classroom and little or no access to the auditorium or gymnasium. These concerns led CHLDC to organize Cypress Hills Advocates for Education (CHAFE), with the primary goal of relieving overcrowding. A full-time community organizer at CHLDC works with CHAFE, the only organizing effort within CHLDC to have staff support.

Cypress Hills is within Community District 19 of the New York City public school system. Schools in most other parts of the district are not overcrowded, and the administration's proposed response to overcrowding in Cypress Hills was to bus students to a less crowded but failing school in another part of the district. CHAFE opposed the busing plan and petitioned the district to keep the students in their home school. In a victory for CHAFE and the Cypress Hills community, the district added portable classrooms to an existing school, allowing it to reduce class size in kindergarten and grade 1 to an average of 20 students for each teacher, in keeping with recommendations for good practice in the early grades.

Framing and Naming the Issues

Our research into community organizations that take on school issues leads us to observe that an organization's operating principles influence the way it names problems and the practices it uses to address them. A review of the CHLDC approach affirms that the organization is driven by the needs of community residents, focuses on direct services rather than providing capacity building or training, is strongly connected to the community through its governing board, works consistently with elected officials through the political process and builds alliances and coalitions to achieve common goals.

CHLDC's deep connections to the community lead it to take on issues that are important to residents. It functions as a set of discrete programs with its limited funding directed heavily toward services, with few resources remaining for capacity building or administration. In this context, support for education, where the organization does not have a funding stream for direct service, is a major commitment to education as a vehicle for revitalizing the community.

At CHLDC, initiatives function within a program-specific organizational structure; although several program areas include some organizing and client advocacy, education is the only area in which staff support is provided for organizing. In CHLDC, organizing tends to be focused on a specific issue or action by the school district, with limited time and energy directed toward developing capacity and leadership in neighborhood residents.

With community organizing for education reform increasing within New York City and across the state, several coalitions of organizing groups have been established. Cypress Hills is working with the Parent Organizing Consortium (POC), a citywide network of neighborhood-based efforts. Initially, the POC focused on overcrowding issues. More recently, it has sought to improve the quality of teaching and to develop a proposal to replace community school boards as the governance structure for public education in New York City is transformed. CHAFE is an active participant in the POC, although it is much more engaged in work on school facilities than in teacher quality and school governance. It is less active in the statewide Alliance for Quality Education, which includes a broader range of community groups.

Behaviors

CHLDC's operating principles shape the way CHLDC names problems and the behaviors it employs to address them. These principles include:

- Governed and driven by the needs and interests of the community;
- Action-oriented, with a mission to provide direct services;
- Organized programmatically, with engagement of the constituents in each program;
- Engaged in the political process and
- Committed to building coalitions with groups that have similar concerns.

CHCS

The Cypress Hills Community School was organized under the auspices of New Visions for Public Schools, with CHLDC as a partner. This *coalition-building strategy* has held the school together despite the district's resistance to its innovative design and curriculum. The district continues to impose bureaucratic requirements on the school, such as threatening to withhold tenure from the teacher co-director and to terminate the employment of the parent co-director. CHCS survives by keeping a low profile within the district and working very hard to provide a quality program. Results matter: The school ranked first in District 19 in math and fourth in reading in 2002. Still, the effort takes a toll. "It is a struggle to do anything different," the school's parent co-director says.

CHLDC employed its multiservice capacity, including parent organizing, economic-development expertise and political-action tactics to obtain a facility for the community school. Initially, parents pitched a tent in a schoolyard to dramatize the plight of the "homeless school." The district has provided classroom space in different buildings at various times, but there is nothing that resembles a community school facility. Teachers feel the strain and isolation of their "tenant" status at a large middle school. Leadership of Community School District 19 continues to be unresponsive to requests from this community and to the community school's requests for freedom of action.

CHLDC's community development director created a structure for financing the school building with Qualified Zone Administrative Bonds (QZAB), a federal low-interest bonding authority for public facilities, using the school district's leasing income as collateral. When the district rejected that funding mechanism, the organization used old-fashioned political pressure and won a special appropriation for the facility from the city council. The community development director continues to play a key role in working out the financing and overseeing design of a multiple-use facility that will be a true community school, serving young people and adults. He will also work to develop a lease agreement with the school district to ensure the right of CHCS to occupy the building in the years to come. The school district has never entered into this kind of agreement, and CHLDC and CHCS staff members are concerned that the community's interests be protected.

Most of the funding for the new community school facility was obtained through persistent political action far beyond the community school district's control. Parents appealed to the mayor and the city council and finally won a large share of a special appropriation to enable community organizations to provide facilities for public schools.

CHAFE

CHAFE championed residents' cause that young children not be enrolled in schools outside the community and petitioned the school district not to bus fifth graders to a failing school in another part of the district. After the district responded to the short-term challenge with a short-term solution (adding portable classrooms), CHAFE waited patiently for a promised long-term plan to emerge. When, after six months, the district still had not set a target date for developing a long-term plan, CHAFE grew less patient and took a more confrontational approach to force action on a strategy to relieve crowding. Members collected signatures on more than 850 postcards to demand that a long-range plan be made public by January 2003.

On Halloween morning 2002, about a dozen women, most of them mothers and grandmothers, delivered the cards in person to the district office and asked to take them to the superintendent's office. Some CHAFE members dressed for the occasion in Halloween costumes and carried the cards in pumpkin-shaped baskets used for trick-or-treating. After security guards threatened to arrest the women if they tried to enter the building, they turned over the baskets to the guards and demanded that they sign a receipt for them. Several weeks later, the district administration had not acknowledged receipt of the cards.

CHAFE has had more success in gaining access to political power to resolve a recent short-term issue: the school district's obligation to provide timely notification to parents of children who are eligible to receive supplemental services under the No Child Left Behind Act. CHAFE has advocated for these parents, who were not given sufficient time and information to meet the deadline for selecting services and registering their children. CHAFE enlisted the help of the area's congresswoman, Nydia Velazquez, who contacted the school system's chancellor. The deadline was extended — for parents across the entire system.

Changes

CHLDC's work on behalf of quality education for children in Cypress Hills has begun to change the landscape of schooling in the neighborhood. Because of the organization's advocacy and commitment, a number of changes have occurred:

1. *After-school programs are available for nearly every elementary and middle school student in the community.* This is a major accomplishment in a low-income community and a valuable support for the many families in which every adult is employed, with many holding more than one job.
2. *The CHCS provides the community with a vision of what is possible within the public system.* The school provides an innovative, culturally appropriate, high-quality educational experience for 250 children in grades K-8. It also provides a model for parent involvement and leadership development that can have a ripple effect in the broader community.
3. *The CHCS facility has the potential to transform schooling and life in the community.* The renovated facility can really become the heart of the community, honoring residents' home languages and cultures while providing educational opportunities for young people

and adults alike. As the school facility joins other renovated buildings in the community's commercial area, it will contribute to the ongoing physical revitalization of the community.

4. *The school district has improved the educational environment for students by relieving overcrowding in one school without busing students outside their community.* The lowered class size in that school provides an opportunity for quality teaching and higher student achievement. It may also encourage parents to stay in the neighborhood if they feel their children have a quality environment for learning.
5. *Parents have learned the value as well as the limitations of their organizing efforts.* Because the community school district has proved consistently unresponsive to traditional organizing efforts, parents and community members have turned to other tactics, including advocacy with elected officials beyond the community. CHLDC employs traditional collective efforts as one way to engage large numbers of community members in advocating for improvements in the schools.
6. *Residents of Cypress Hills are engaged in advocating for the value of community in public education.* When the CHCS facility is completed, it will be an educational facility in and for the community, including young people and adults. Locating these programs in the multiple-use facility will build *community* while providing *schooling*.

Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation Summary Matrix

	Kind of Group Size Years in Existence	Operating Principles <i>How does the organization translate its beliefs into action?</i>	Catalysts <i>What catalyzes the group to take on school issues?</i>	Problem Naming <i>How does the organization name the problem?</i>	Behaviors <i>What behaviors or practices are used to address the problem?</i>	Changes <i>What has changed in the community as a result of the group's behaviors?</i>
Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation 625 Jamaica Ave. Brooklyn, NY 11208 718-647-2800	Multiservice agency Staff: 15 Approximately 18 years	Committed to neighborhood revitalization Driven by the needs of the residents Provides direct services to residents Seeks political connections and support Builds alliances and coalitions	Residents' concern that their children would be bused out of the neighborhood because of overcrowded schools Residents' concern that schools were unresponsive to parents	Unless schools in our neighborhood improve, we will never be able to revitalize the neighborhood.	Community organizing to influence the local school district Lobbying elected officials for support and funding Using financing and development expertise to lease and develop a school facility	Community members have created and sustained a high-quality, culturally responsive education program with a strong parent voice, despite bureaucratic opposition. Community members have kept children from being bused outside the community. Cypress Hills will have a physical center for the community.

The Local INvestment Commission (LINC) Kansas City, MO

A Center of Strength in the Community

Background and Context

The Local INvestment Commission (LINC) is a citizen-driven community collaborative that works with residents, neighborhood representatives and business, civic and labor leaders to improve the lives of children and families in Kansas City and Jackson County, MO. LINC started in 1992 as a collaborative effort between the residents of Kansas City and the state of Missouri to create a more comprehensive approach to welfare reform; in its early years, LINC developed an innovative welfare-to-work system that served as a model for national welfare-reform efforts.

Through more than 10 years since its inception, LINC has developed as a strong intermediary organization in the community, maintaining a dual focus on system reform and citizen participation. Its stated mission is to “provide leadership and influence to engage the Kansas City community in creating the best system to support and strengthen children, families and individuals, holding that system accountable and changing public attitudes toward the system.”

LINC’s structure differs from that of a typical nonprofit organization: the 36 LINC commissioners include a broad cross-section of business and civic leaders, community and neighborhood representatives and involved citizens. Community voices drive LINC decisions at all levels, with commission members taking an active role in gathering information, reviewing data and developing the organization’s approach. A group of service providers known as the “Professional Cabinet” participates in deliberations of the commission but not in decisionmaking.

Kansas City’s business leaders and Gary Stangler, then Missouri’s director of social services, were instrumental in developing LINC to provide neighborhood-based, citizen-driven delivery of services as an alternative to the traditional systems funded by the state. A broad range of initiatives includes welfare-to-work, training for family child-care providers, child welfare, supports for the aging and school-based health and human services, along with professional development of service providers at the state and community levels.

LINC values its role as an intermediary organization and works collaboratively with other groups that provide direct services. In a community that calls itself “the capital of collaboration,” LINC’s strength sometimes causes concern for other nonprofits. Commissioners and staff work to design the details of each collaborative effort to avoid infringing on areas where other organizations have expertise and a history of involvement.¹

¹ LINC was a semifinalist in the Innovations in American Government Award competition, sponsored by the Harvard University Kennedy School of Government, in 1998 and 1999. In 2000, the National Governors’ Association awarded LINC’s leaders — founder Bert Berkley and chairman Landon Rowland — the Distinguished Service to State Government Award in the private citizen category.

Catalysts

From its inception, LINC has focused on using school and neighborhood sites to deliver accessible and effective services. The organization supported school-based delivery of health services in the Kansas City public schools and worked with state agencies to develop Caring Communities, a results-driven process for children and families that aim to create more effective and accessible programs through local decisionmaking and more flexible financing. Caring Communities engages neighborhood residents to plan and deliver services through links with local schools. LINC works with state agencies to develop funding strategies for Caring Communities, facilitates the planning and development process at local sites and provides professional development for school-based staff in five school districts in Jackson County, including the Kansas City public schools.

For nearly 25 years, the Kansas City district operated under a desegregation order that required many students to be bused to schools outside their neighborhoods. As part of that plan, the district provided before- and after-school programs at most elementary schools. In November 1998, as the desegregation plan was coming to an end, members of the community were concerned about losing the before- and after-school programs. Although the quality of those programs was uneven, low-income working parents depended on them as a safe, positive place for their children.

LINC and the school district convened a task force to develop a plan to continue after-school programs across the district, including their quality, governance and financing. The plan incorporated aspects of the Caring Communities process, including a full-time coordinator and a School Neighborhood Advisory Committee (SNAC) at each site, and used state subsidies for school-age childcare as a financing mechanism. When the task force sought a community agency to operate the programs, no other organization could demonstrate LINC's expertise in financing, professional development and neighborhood services. In May 1999, the LINC commissioners accepted the challenge of opening before- and after-school programs in nearly all of the district's elementary schools — more than 40 — by the beginning of the school year in late August.

Framing and Naming the Issues

Our research into community organizations that take on school issues leads us to observe that an organization's operating principles influence the way it names problems and the practices it uses to address them. LINC describes itself as "nimble": opportunistic rather than strategic, driven by the public will and entrepreneurial. Staffers often refer to LINC's stated guiding principles (see box at right). "When we're in the dark and don't know what to do next," one LINC staffer says, "we look at the guiding principles, and they tell us what to do."

LINC is a collaborative organization that carries out its mission through alliances with others at the local and state levels. It has managed to be well connected politically

Local Investment Commission (LINC) Guiding Principles

- Citizen decisionmaking
- Data and information
- Program planning and development
- Financing and money
- Learning

through changes in state administration and persuaded the governor to reinstate more than \$1 million in welfare-to-work funds for LINC in 2003. “The governor’s office got a lot of calls,” says Gayle Hobbs, LINC’s executive director. The organization values its position as a trusted intermediary in the community and contracts with others to provide direct services. Only in before- and after-school programs does LINC actually employ the coordinators, who serve as intermediaries at the school level to identify and broker for services. “The before- and after-school programs dramatically changed LINC,” says Hobbs. “We doubled the size of the organization between May and August. We have to keep our eye on the ball... to maintain the intermediary role.”

LINC’s expertise in financing and data enhance its work in the community. The financing expertise allowed LINC to devise a plan to keep programs operating across the district. Its data capacity enables it to be accountable to commissioners and the community and adds value to its relationships with other organizations. Without these capacities, the community would have had difficulty in continuing to operate before- and after-school programs at scale across the district.

Behaviors

LINC’s engagement in more than 40 school communities has tested its ability to act as an intermediary and help build community. By connecting with partner organizations in local neighborhoods and across the city and county, LINC demonstrates the power of communitywide intermediary organizations.

Don’t Walk Alone

As desegregation programs ended and children returned to their neighborhood schools, the school district determined that children who lived within a mile of their school had to walk to school. In preceding years, most children had ridden buses to school, and in many neighborhoods the walk was hazardous: Streets and sidewalks needed to be repaired; crosswalks were unpainted; abandoned buildings had not been boarded up and tree branches obscured street signs. LINC and its partners began a citywide drive to make the walk safe, and the city manager shifted \$9.5 million from high-visibility projects to “fast track” repair projects in neighborhoods close to schools.

In many neighborhoods, parents got together to walk their children to school; older residents turned on their porch lights in the early morning darkness. Repairs were completed on time: For the first time, school opened without a single incident of a child being lost, injured or harmed on the walk to and from school.

School-Based, Neighborhood-Driven Services

“The crisis about before- and after-school programs was really an opportunity,” says Tim Decker, a neighborhood coordinator for LINC. The opportunity allowed LINC to expand the principles of Caring Communities throughout the district and engage the resources and talents of community members. At each site, the SNACs assess local needs and plan additional services and supports for children and families. Site coordinators reach out to families and help develop resources to expand assets in the community. In these before- and after-school programs, and especially in the SNACs, parents often become acquainted for the first time, even though they

live in the same neighborhood, because their children previously went to schools outside the area. Parents develop a sense of school and community needs and work to provide solutions. Relationships between schools and the before- and after-school programs are growing, with some schools beginning to merge the district-mandated School Advisory Committee with the SNAC to create a unified parent-community voice. LINC brings coordinators from individual elementary schools together monthly to share their successes and continue the process of building community.

Community Organizing and the Partnership with the Kansas City Church/Community Organization (KCC/CO)

In taking on the before- and after-school programs for the Kansas City schools, LINC seized an opportunity to expand neighborhood participation by creating SNACs at every school. In neighborhoods where community participation was low, LINC worked in partnership with the KCC/CO, a member of the Pacific Institute for Community Organizing (PICO) network. Trained organizers went door-to-door in the areas near the schools to talk with people about their hopes and concerns for life in the community and then brought residents together to form a plan of action to address their most urgent concerns.

In one community, residents' primary concern was not about schools at all. Instead, they complained that the neighborhood was too dark — street lighting was inadequate, and people didn't feel safe outside their homes. When organizers helped residents contact the city's Department of Public Works, they found that lighting improvements had been planned but were deferred. Residents worked with the department to trim trees that obscured existing lights and install new lights, and the neighborhood was brighter.

But more happened than lighting up the neighborhood, according to Warren Adams-Leavitt of the KCC/CO. People who had worked with the Department of Public Works *felt* different: They had held the street-lighting map in their own hands and worked with people in power; they could make change happen. Others in their neighborhood saw them as leaders, and the sense of community grew. "There is a saying in the PICO network," says Adams-Leavitt, about "returning the heroes to the dinner table," reconfirming the parental role and giving children a sense of pride.

Building Community in a Cluster of Schools

Van Horn High School and its surrounding elementary schools are in an area of Independence, MO, that is part of the Kansas City school district. Residents are predominantly lower-income white and see the neighborhood as a "stepchild" of both jurisdictions. For years, it was difficult for residents to get needed services in the area.

As LINC developed the before- and after-school programs, it hired site coordinators, several of them African-American, at each of the elementary schools. The coordinators meet regularly with the Caring Communities coordinator at the high school, and together they share stories of building community:

- When parents at one school were able to obtain new playground equipment for the school, parents from a neighboring school contacted them to find out how they did it.

- One after-school coordinator changed the location where parents came to “sign out” their children at the end of the day so that parents needed to come into the area where activities were conducted. When the parents arrived, staff had an opportunity to greet them and establish relationships with them.
- The programs established a kids’ basketball league with simple rules: You can only play if your parents bring you to the game and stay to watch it, and no one keeps score. If one team runs short on players, a player from the other team will substitute.

Slowly, one step at a time, before- and after-school programs are building community among adults through interactions among children. It is challenging work: When a community organizer conducted one-on-one conversations with parents, he found that parents thought the middle school, which does not have a site coordinator or council, undermined the sense of community. Site coordinators arranged a meeting of principals of all schools in the cluster and worked out ways to begin providing services and supports at the middle school — without additional funding. Coordinators also organized transition programs for students who are moving from elementary to middle school and from middle to high school. The basketball teams now play their games at the middle school so all children — and their parents — will be comfortable there. “Schools in that cluster are becoming the new structures of community,” says Adams-Leavitt.

Bill Rogers, the site coordinator at the high school, is a lifelong community resident who believes the community is on the rise. He cites the opening of a \$4.5 million senior housing project, bringing with it opportunities for community service for kids. “We are focusing on making the school the hub of what is going on in the neighborhoods,” he says. “The whole effort is giving people the resources to use in their neighborhood.” He credits the African-American coordinators in the area with building relationships that overcame formidable barriers of suspicion and disengagement.

Working With the Kansas City Public Schools

The Kansas City schools have suffered over the past quarter-century as many urban districts have, leading many residents to leave the area. The district has had 19 superintendents in 25 years, at least 10 of them in the past five years.

In this environment, LINC has worked to maintain a positive, supportive relationship with the school district. Years ago, LINC and district officials struck verbal agreements for key elements of the relationship to make Caring Communities work: LINC, not the school district, hires the site coordinators, and LINC contracts with other community organizations to provide services on the school site. The SNAC controls the budget for services and supports at each site.

LINC has worked as an ally with the district’s superintendents and provided support when it can. For example, because LINC’s data systems are more advanced than the school district’s, LINC worked to put the district data into a format schools and the central office could use. “It’s about relationships,” said a LINC staff member. “We try to be agile and entrepreneurial.”

Changes

The changes in Kansas City's communities as a result of LINC's work go far beyond the scope of this report. Because the organization is so comprehensive, it brings multiple assets — including connections to power and resources from the state, connections to powerful individuals and institutions in the Kansas City metropolitan area and grassroots support in many communities — to each challenge it approaches. Changes in the community that can be observed through LINC's school-based community building strategy include:

1. *Expanded services and supports are available for children, families and community residents.* The number of children who are enrolled in the federally funded Children's Health Insurance Program in Jackson County, for example, is the highest in the state, and Missouri has the third-highest percentage of children enrolled nationwide. In a more local setting, a Kansas City elementary school in a predominantly Latino neighborhood is opening a dental clinic in the space formerly occupied by the school office. In its second and third years of operation, the clinic will expand to serve students' families and community residents.
2. *Students in Kansas City schools and their families have access to high-quality before- and after-school programs.* LINC has invested in professional development for site coordinators and their staff and is pursuing licensing for many facilities to demonstrate their quality. The availability of these programs is a significant factor in enabling low-income parents to work without worrying about their children's safety.
3. *In many schools, students' academic achievement is increasing.* In the Independence school district, an inner-ring suburban system, for example, schools with school-linked services and supports are ranked among the district's highest-achieving schools, despite having the highest percentages of students receiving free- and reduced-price meals.
4. *In some areas, the opportunity to build personal relationships has overcome racial barriers.* School desegregation in Kansas City has created — or exacerbated — racial tensions in many areas. LINC's school-based coordinators have built relationships across those barriers, erasing stereotypes and easing tensions.
5. *Community building work in neighborhoods has been a catalyst for building a new cadre of parent leaders.* These "informal leaders," without a formal position of power, lead through relationships created in the community through the SNACs. Their leadership is now being felt in other parts of the community.

Observations on LINC's Role in Building Community

Because it is so comprehensive, LINC is able to add value to work across the spectrum of programs that improve results for children and families. The entry point — school-linked, neighborhood-based services — first provides services and supports that enable children to come to school ready to learn. But the engagement of parents and community members in determining *what* services to provide and *how* to provide them makes this a powerful vehicle for building

community. By adding trained organizers to reach out to parents and community members, LINC works intensively to build community around schools in areas where it has long been absent.

LINC engages in multiple partnerships to accomplish its goals and is careful to specify the terms of its partnerships and collaborative efforts so that they can produce the desired results. Its leverage strategies bring additional resources into needy communities.

LINC's considerable technical expertise — in using state funding in locally designed delivery systems and in analyzing and providing data to ensure accountability for outcomes — provides other organizations with infrastructure for innovations in the community.

Combining technical expertise with a commitment to establishing and maintaining relationships has helped LINC work at scale across Kansas City's communities. The comprehensive approach is yielding results — for children, families and the entire community.

Local Investment Commission (LINC) Summary Matrix

	Kind of Group Size Years in Existence	Operating Principles <i>How does the organization translate its beliefs into action?</i>	Catalysts <i>What catalyzes the group to take on school issues?</i>	Problem Naming <i>How does the organization name the problem?</i>	Behaviors <i>What behaviors or practices are used to address the problem?</i>	Changes <i>What has changed in the community as a result of the group's behaviors?</i>
<p>Local Investment Commission (LINC)</p> <p>3100 Broadway, Suite 226 Kansas City, MO 64111 816-889-5050</p>	<p>Communitywide collaborative to improve the lives of children and families</p> <p>Staff: about 75</p> <p>11 years</p>	<p>LINC seeks to infuse all efforts with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ? Citizen Decisionmaking ? Data and Information ? Program Planning and Development ? Financing and Money ? Learning 	<p>The potential loss of before- and after-school programs at the end of a desegregation order created a crisis for low-income working families.</p>	<p>Before- and after-school programs are an opportunity to serve children and their families and increase community decisionmaking.</p>	<p>A full-time coordinator at each before- and after-school site works to develop a School Neighborhood Advisory Committee.</p> <p>Community organizers reach out to disengaged parents.</p> <p>LINC's expertise in financing and management enables the program to operate throughout the district.</p>	<p>Community members have opportunities to identify common concerns and approaches to address them.</p> <p>In some communities, new leaders are emerging.</p> <p>Community members are beginning to come together to address common concerns about schools.</p>

Southern Echo Jackson, MS

Empowering Local Communities

Background and Context

Southern Echo grew out of its founders' work in the civil rights and workers' rights movements. Hollis Watkins and Leroy Johnson knew they needed to create an organization that would develop, prepare and train groups to meet the needs of communities. "[We wanted to] empower as many local community groups as possible," says Johnson. "They would get connected through us."

The mission of Southern Echo is to empower local communities through the development of effective leadership and community organization. Echo describes itself as a "leadership development, education and training organization working to develop new, grassroots leadership in African-American communities in Mississippi and the surrounding region."

The context in which Echo is working is one of deep-seated racism, extreme poverty and a disproportionate number of failing public schools for predominantly poor, African-American children. According to U.S. Census data compiled in fall 2002, Mississippi has the greatest number of poor counties of all the states. In the Delta, which is a predominantly African-American region of the state, the majority of schools are governed by longstanding white power structures; in Drew County, one white man has been on the school board for 35 years.

In the early 1990s, when Watkins and Johnson were looking to start an organization, the pressing issue was redistricting — redrawing political districts based on census data. The founders saw redistricting as a once-in-10-years opportunity that could empower communities to have a greater say in the people they elect to represent them.

Watkins and Johnson used organizing tactics to start Echo. They conducted an initial tour of the state, traveling through 15 counties (mostly in the Mississippi Delta) talking to people about their concerns in one-on-one and small-group conversations that led to larger meetings in communities. They drew on Watkins' contacts from the past — he was involved in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and is known throughout Mississippi as a leader of the civil rights movement — to build relationships in other areas of the state.

The top concerns that came out of their tour were jobs, affordable housing and rebuilding community organizations — all issues that could be addressed through active work in the redistricting process so that more African-Americans could be elected to office. Jobs come into communities through local boards of supervisors, and often, good jobs for minorities were "shut down" by the power structure in the community. For Echo, getting community folks into the redistricting process and "electing accountable people" would be the way to create jobs and get decent housing.

Catalysts

Echo's initial work on redistricting was a natural precursor to a shift into education. During the redistricting work, Echo staff and communities learned about the education system and how it worked. Echo worked to educate communities about how county boards of supervisors and city councils often allocate money to school districts and appoint school board members — and that election of these officials, not just school boards, is essential to gaining greater control of local education systems. Echo taught people how to run successful campaigns for elected office — including the county board of supervisors and school boards. Watkins points to the effect of this new knowledge and skills at the local level: People began to think about running for positions that could affect schools.

In 1992, Echo shifted its attention to public education. Watkins, Johnson and Mike Sayer, another Echo staff member, set out on another tour of the state. This time, they traveled through 20 school districts in eight weeks to listen to what activists, parents, teachers, administrators and public officials were saying about public education. Echo staff heard that the issue of race was the most significant problem facing their school districts.

“We were building a campaign for democracy,” Watkins says of the tour. “To engage communities in the process of democracy, people had to have tools and skills to be able to get engaged.” Out of Echo's work to train communities about public education issues and how to organize around them — and efforts to connect people — several communities across the state began to work on creating equitable educational opportunities for African-American families. In 1996, the Mississippi Education Working Group (MEWG) was formed, bringing 13 communities together to affect public policy on public education at the local and state levels.

Framing and Naming the Issues

Our research into community organizations that take on school issues leads us to observe that an organization's operating principles influence the way it names problems and the practices it uses to address them. (See box at right for the four principles that drive the work of Southern Echo.)

With a focus on *overcoming fear and truth-telling*, Echo fights the longtime isolation of African-American communities and fear that results from “generations of subjugation of terror imposed on African-Americans by the dominant white society” (as described in Echo training materials). Fear becomes the “dam” that keeps work from succeeding, says Johnson. To break down the barriers that cause isolation — and resulting competition — of African-American communities, Echo works to connect people and “transform the understanding” of what it means to work together.

Southern Echo provides *training and technical assistance* as a means of empowering community groups to carry out local work and enabling others to do the same. Johnson describes technical assistance as “on-the-job training” in which Echo staff work alongside the local groups as a

Southern Echo Guiding Principles

- Overcoming fear and truth-telling
- Training and technical assistance
- Fighting racism
- Building accountable organizations

continuation of training workshops. Echo's 1999-2000 report says, "Empowerment of the community requires that people have the information, skills and organization they need to participate effectively in the formation of public policy at every level of government." Echo creates "residential training schools" lasting two days or more, publishes training manuals and delivers hundreds of workshops in communities. By focusing on seeding and training local grassroots groups that determine their own priorities, Echo provides capacity building and leadership development for grassroots efforts throughout Mississippi — and helps to create self-governing structures in communities.

Accountability, which Echo defines as "putting community interest over self-interest," is a common theme in the group's work. Echo has organized residents across legislative districts to encourage them to hold all African-American state legislators accountable, and, at the same time, said to those legislators, "You have to see *all* people (in the state) as your constituents." Echo's 10-year report, released in December 2000, says, "The development of new accountable leadership...depends on the transformation of individuals who will provide leadership or do organizing work, and the transformation of the *culture* of the communities in which they are working."

Echo uses an *intergenerational model of organizing* to involve young community members. Watkins and Johnson's decision to focus efforts on youth organizing came out of lessons from the civil rights movement and other social movements. When young people and adults work together, more progress is made, more energy is created and more changes are sustained. Young people have the least amount of fear and fewer institutional ties. In the civil rights movement, young people had the least amount of things they could be "whitemailed" about, says Johnson, who sums up the reason for Echo's commitment to working with young people: "How can we sustain [our movement] unless we stop treating youth as the future and not part of the present?"

Although Echo works across generations, the group has mostly focused on a single constituency: disenfranchised African-Americans in Mississippi. Echo describes its focus on its constituents in its 10-year report: "We wanted to keep our vision contained so that our work could be understandable to most people and manageable to undertake. As a result, we decided to limit our struggle to empowerment of the African-American community in Mississippi and the South, and ending racism by undoing the domination and control of the black community by the white community."

Behaviors

Statewide Advocacy on Education

As a statewide network of Echo affiliates, the MEWG has evolved into a powerful strategy to cut across traditional isolating barriers of city and county lines and break a culture of fear in communities and among African-American officials. Echo also educates local communities about consent decrees that govern how local school boards are elected or appointed and gives them the skills to work within or challenge these rules.

The statewide group was modeled after Echo's earlier work on redistricting (the Mississippi Redistricting Coalition). The MEWG provides training and technical and legal assistance to

grassroots organizations and facilitates local organizations' ability to pool their resources and talent to impact state education policy. Affiliation with this group gives people credibility in their communities.

Local Organizing: Drew Community Voters League

Echo and its local affiliates shed light on schools' zero tolerance policies and the excessive suspension and expulsion that result from their implementation. Echo staff member Nsombi Lambright explains that where the punishment is "five licks or five days," students end up missing whole weeks of school. According to Lambright, schools have a tendency to start suspending students during test time. "The state department of education has a policy that states only a certain percentage of students are educable," says Lambright. "The easiest thing to do [with the others] is to label them as trouble."

The Drew Community Voters League, one of several organizations in the Mississippi Delta seeded and supported by Southern Echo, worked with the Harvard Civil Rights Project on a four-year process to prepare a 137-page *Indictment Against the Drew Municipal School District*. The indictment, completed in 2001, contains sworn statements from parents and students and data demonstrating evidence of mistreatment of students with special needs, excessive suspension and expulsion rates and extreme discipline measures for rule violations.

The state department of education agreed to come to Drew County to investigate. Investigators found more than 40 violations — but only a few of them reflected the severe treatment documented by the Drew Voters League. After the state investigation, the Drew community was still struggling against the gross violations. But the state has investigated the school system and now has firsthand knowledge of its practices, and the Drew Voters League now has credibility as the group that brought the state in to look at what was happening.

Local Organizing: Citizens for a Better Greenville

Citizens for a Better Greenville, another Echo affiliate in the Delta, got its start with an unsuccessful fight to stop a merger of the two high schools that would track Greenville high school students according to career choices. Community leaders in Greenville attended meetings of the MEWG to meet other community activists and learn about their strategies for addressing similar issues. They also received training from Echo on community organizing around education and redistricting and on running political campaigns. Joyce Harper, head of the Greenville group, describes the group's approach: "We always research the issues so we go in knowing what we're talking about. That gives us credibility." Following the Echo model of local empowerment, Harper was elected to local public office in 2002.

Harper and Betty Petty, head of a neighboring Echo affiliate, the Indianola Parent Student Group, became knowledgeable about the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. They demanded to be part of trainings offered for educators by the state department of education on NCLB and special education. In fall 2002, they were using the NCLB requirement for all Title I schools to develop school-parent compacts as a leverage point for demanding better services for students who were struggling or mistreated in school.

Petty explains the rationale for pushing to participate in training offered to educators: Without common training, she says, “administrators say one thing, and we say another. Now we get the same learning as administrators. We said, ‘Help us understand so all of us can be on the same page.’”

Youth Organizing

The majority of Echo’s youth efforts are targeted at the middle school level. The group asks the most active parents to bring their children to meetings, and Echo staff and local leaders engage young people in the organizing process. For example, youth will be responsible for identifying places or times of fear in the conversation, as well as the person who “hogs” the conversation — by handing “F” and “H” signs to adults after the meeting is over. Young people also are part of planning efforts; they have a say in what they want their community to look like.

Generally young people want to be independent; they want a space for their voice, so most organizations create youth-led components that stand *in addition to* organizational activities for adults. Instead, says Lambright, Echo has been strategic in helping local groups integrate young people into the main work of their organizations.

Collaboration and Confrontation

While Echo talks about coalition building as a strategy to break down fear and to fight racism, the term “collaboration” can connote coalition building with whites — which hasn’t often been entirely effective in achieving Echo’s goals. On working with other interest groups, Lambright says, “Often it is more about partnership than holding people accountable. We have a friendly relationship but don’t get anything done. The community gets left behind.” Echo is extremely strategic and selective in decisions to work with other groups.

The Echo strategy begins by working within the established system or political process as much as possible. But if community members feel that what they have to say is not being heard and honored, Echo will work outside the political process and sometimes use confrontational tactics.

Leslie Burl McLemore, a friend of Watkins from the civil rights movement who is a professor of political science at Jackson State University and a member of the Jackson City Council, has a cool-headed, historical response to the question of whether Echo’s tactics are too confrontational and thus outdated. “Mississippi is the most conservative state and the poorest state in the richest country in the world,” he says. The views about change and who’s pushing for change are grounded in our “history, tradition, leadership and power relationships.”

Two examples illustrate the criteria Echo uses to make decisions about if and how to work with others:

- When the Citizens for Quality Education, a statewide advocacy group for special education, came to Echo for help, the organization responded that it wanted to “share power, be part of the leadership, help develop policy and strategy,” says Johnson.
- When the state moved to cut the number of state legislators in half, Echo showed communities how, if this went into effect, all legislators would come from the 22 largest

towns, essentially eliminating the representation of women and rural constituents. The Mississippi Farm Bureau signed on to oppose the decrease in legislators. “We’ve always had an underground network of white folk. But [our work with them has] had to be around specific things so that they’re in and out and protected,” says Johnson.

Changes

1. *More accountable public officials have been elected.* Echo can show tangible measures of success for the redistricting effort of the early 1990s. In the first election cycle (in 1993) after the start of Southern Echo’s work on redistricting, the number of African-American state legislators jumped from 21 to 42 (out of 174 total legislators). In 1995, the Black Legislative Caucus increased to 45. As a part of Echo’s initial redistricting efforts, people got involved in local elections and in enforcing and revising election rules. In some places, members of Echo affiliate groups have run for local offices and won. As a result of this new involvement, there is new dialogue among officials across county lines on issues of jobs and education — demonstrating that local groups are now taking responsibility for problems they identified when Echo leaders first toured the state. The ability to elect more African-Americans shows the “power of community,” says Johnson.
2. *Local leaders are empowered.* Citizens for a Better Greenville, the Indianola Parent Student Group and other Echo affiliates act both as advocates for parents *and* as training and development organizations for their communities. They intervene when parents need them. “Someone like us needs to open doors for parents,” says Petty. They also develop the capacity of parents and others to intervene. “We educate parents and students about what the law says and what principals and teachers are accountable for, what they’re responsible for,” says Petty. “We have to hold (schools) accountable to the needs and interests of the community.”

Joyce Harper told the story of advocating for a parent of a child who was having difficulty succeeding in school. She used the federal requirement that all Title I schools develop school-parent compacts (an agreement that details responsibilities for both schools and families in helping students to achieve). Harper recounts: “We brought together the counselor, the cluster teachers and the principals and asked, ‘What are you going to do? What have you done [to help the child achieve]?’”

3. *Youth are empowered.* Seeing their children as astute observers and participants in community meetings, adults understand that “my child is not dumb” as they have been told by the schools. “This changes the mind-set of adults about what’s possible among kids,” says Johnson. As well, young people gain a new sense of confidence as a result of their involvement in community organizing.
4. *Education policy is more responsive to the needs of African-American communities.* The Mississippi Education Working Group (MEWG) claims several successes, including:
 - For the first time in Mississippi history, a coalition of grassroots community organizations focused on the improvement of African-American communities is working to affect state education policy in support of local, grassroots priorities.

- On Oct. 25, 2002, the Mississippi state board of education agreed to fully comply with federal requirements for providing services to special education students — for the first time in 35 years. The MEWG worked with Citizens for Quality Education (a statewide group focused on special education issues) to hold hearings across the state and press the state legislature and the state board of education for this agreement. “This is the first time the community came together to force legislators, the state board of education, superintendents, special education administrators and curriculum coordinators to sit down together,” says Johnson.
- The state legislature invited the MEWG’s input on the state’s 2000 accountability law. Parents from across the state came together to prepare proposed amendments to the legislation — in the 36-hour window provided by the state legislature. The amendments advocated for parent and community input into the determination of proficiency standards; development of training for parents by school districts; inclusion of parents and community leaders in the school evaluation teams and inclusion of community-based organizations in the development of school improvement plans.

As a result of work by local Echo affiliates, with assistance of the MEWG or other local groups:

- State education officials conducted a review of the Drew school district’s practices toward special education and low-performing students. This review happened in response to the Drew Community Voters League’s comprehensive study of conditions in the school district.
- The Mississippi state department of education sent a team to the Indianola school district to enforce federal and state laws regarding treatment of and services for students with disabilities.
- The Tunica Board of Supervisors agreed to share casino tax revenues with the Tunica County school district. In 1993, Concerned Citizens of Tunica formed an alliance with the all-African-American school board to direct revenues to the school district, which was used to pay down the district’s debt and improve education for students. In another effort, which was highly controversial among state officials, Concerned Citizens of Tunica, with the help of Southern Echo, fought plans to borrow as much as \$15 million to build a new elementary school near a casino development. The Echo affiliate contended that the school would be attended predominantly by white students. Instead, the school board first borrowed money to renovate and expand existing schools.

What's Ahead

Historian McLemore reflects on what's next for civil rights in Mississippi and the South: "We have to figure out a way to bring as many people along as possible. Everybody — black, white, poor. We tried it so long separately, and it didn't work. We can't see ourselves going in many different directions. We have to focus on the things we have in common."

Echo is expanding its training for grassroots community organizers beyond Mississippi — into Tennessee, Arkansas, Louisiana, South Carolina, Kentucky, Florida, North Carolina and West Virginia. In 2002, Echo held a regional conference on education with nine states and a regional training for 13 states.

"Now, at least we can have dialogue across the railroad tracks.... Organizations like Southern Echo provide a vehicle to have these discussions," says McLemore.

Southern Echo Summary Matrix

	Kind of Group Size Years in Existence	Operating Principles <i>How does the organization translate its beliefs into action?</i>	Catalysts <i>What catalyzes the group to take on school issues?</i>	Problem Naming <i>How does the organization name the problem?</i>	Behaviors <i>What behaviors or practices are used to address the problem?</i>	Changes <i>What has changed in the community as a result of the group's behaviors?</i>
<p>Southern Echo</p> <p>233 E. Hamilton Jackson, MS 39202 601-352-1500</p>	<p>Leadership development, training and technical assistance for social justice</p> <p>Staff: about 15</p> <p>12 years</p>	<p>Four operating principles drive the organization's work:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Overcoming fear and truth- telling 2. Training and technical assistance 3. Fighting racism 4. Building accountable organizations 	<p>A "listening tour" of 20 school districts identified the issue of race as the most significant barrier to equal educational opportunity for African- American students.</p>	<p>African- Americans need skills and tools to become engaged in public education issues.</p>	<p>Organizing a statewide working group on education to cut across traditional isolation of African- American communities</p> <p>Local organizing to overcome excessive suspensions and expulsions</p> <p>Training and technical assistance for community groups</p> <p>Youth organizing</p>	<p>The number of African-American elected officials in Mississippi has increased dramatically.</p> <p>Advocates are available to parents and students to address inequities in the system.</p> <p>Young people are empowered to take leadership roles.</p>

Observations on the Role of Community Organizations That Connect With Schools

Our investigation into the role of community organizations that connect with schools has yielded a rich variety of approaches and activities, with a broad range of impacts on communities. Each organization we studied has followed a path specific to its community, seeking the most effective application of organizational principles and assets to community needs. In reviewing this group of organizations (both those we studied deeply and those we reviewed briefly), we have made some preliminary observations:

1. *Most of these efforts take place in disinvested communities where previous efforts have not served residents well.* The struggle to do things differently — bring people together, engage them in their communities and bring projects to fruition — requires intensive work to overcome cynicism and the effects of racism and poverty. In this context, even small “wins” are significant.
2. *An organization’s operating principles — the way it translates its beliefs into action — strongly influence the behaviors it employs in connecting with schools.* CHLDC, a community development organization, works on developing the school facility as a means of continuing to revitalize the community; as a result, it provides assistance to the school in financing and leasing. Southern Echo is committed to overcoming institutional racism that permeates whole systems, and the organization works to develop local leaders and provide them with information and tools to overcome their isolation.
3. *The capacity of the organization — its resources and expertise — also shapes its behaviors and the depth of its impact on the community.* Because it is so comprehensive, LINC brings a variety of assets to any effort that it undertakes. The community-driven organizational structure, for example, enables it to examine “wicked” problems from a variety of perspectives and helps it bring together the institutional players who can successfully carry out new initiatives. A smaller organization like CHLDC may have a significant but targeted impact in a local community.
4. *Many of these groups carry out community organizing efforts. They employ a wide range of strategies, and the impact of their work differs.* Metropolitan Organizations for People and LINC, in partnership with the Kansas City Church/Community Organization (both affiliates of the PICO network), employ organizing as a strategy for leadership and community building, with individual neighborhoods determining the specific strategies. The Metropolitan Alliance of Congregations in Chicago, an affiliate of the Gamaliel network, has formed a statewide alliance of organizing groups to change the structure of funding for schools in Illinois.
5. *These organizations are experienced in the political process.* Each of the organizations has developed its own approach to the political process: Southern Echo was born in an effort to change electoral districts so that African-Americans could be elected, while

LINC has maintained a collaborative relationship with state elected officials and agencies through changes in administration. CHLDC works to engage city-level and congressional assistance when the local school board is unresponsive to its demands.

6. *Youth organizing is a growing strategy for changing education while building a cadre of leaders in the community — for the present and the future.* Californians for Justice, for example, has built a statewide network of leadership development and engagement for youth of color, most of them immigrants. The group’s efforts have led to changes in at least three large urban school districts. This strategy promises to develop a new generation of leaders in these communities.
7. *Organizations that provide technical expertise — for example, in data and financing — play an especially valuable role in helping communities take on tough issues about the schools.* CHLDC is able to support the long-term work of getting a facility leased and renovated for the community school because of its expertise in financing and leasing. The office of the mayor in Columbus, OH, can be an effective catalyst for school districts’ efforts to close the achievement gap because it makes compelling data accessible in a uniform format that engages staff from all districts in discussion and problem-solving.
8. *Intermediary organizations, such as LINC and Southern Echo, can increase the effectiveness of neighborhood-based efforts.* Southern Echo is expanding its training and technical assistance work and providing information and tools to break down the isolation of disenfranchised local communities. LINC’s strength as an intermediary organization enabled it to make before- and after-school programs — and neighborhood-based services and supports — a reality across the entire school district.
9. *National organizations, from community organizing networks to university-based research and technical assistance centers to the National League of Cities, are engaged in supporting local efforts and learning from them.* These national organizations play a vital role in helping local organizations learn from each other and formulate strategies to match specific challenges. In some ways, Southern Echo provides similar functions on a regional level.

When community organizations connect with schools, they can have a discernible impact on communities in two ways: by gaining a concrete “win,” such as funding for a community school facility, and by increasing leadership and engagement of community residents. Each is important, and they reinforce one another. When community organizations work strategically to improve education, they expand the pool of community residents who understand how to make a difference and are willing to take on the work.

Implications for Further Study

Our inquiry into the work of organizations that build community by working with schools leads us to conclude that these efforts are a growing and viable source of public accountability for schools and of energy and revitalization for communities. We note particularly that low-income communities lose residents and resources when they have poor quality schools and that community organizing efforts can revitalize a community around its schools.

Two aspects of these efforts should receive further attention:

1. *The role of networks in encouraging more of these efforts and disseminating learning across communities.* The National Community-Building Network (NCBN), for example, links local grassroots organizations dedicated to revitalizing their communities. In recent years, NCBN has devoted increasing attention to education in its national meetings, and held an education policy conference for its member organizations in spring 2003. National networks of community organizing groups, including ACORN, PICO, Gamaliel and the Industrial Areas Foundation, also promote organizing around schools.
2. *The role of youth organizing in improving schools and civic engagement.* Youth organizing seems to be on the rise, primarily in the West and among youth of color. Given the nation's problem of low participation by young people in the political process, youth organizing could be an important vehicle for revitalizing communities and improving education.

Mapping the Landscape

An Overview of Eight Organizations Demonstrating New Relationships With Schools

Many types of organizations start out working on broad efforts to build community and then move into working with schools. In a scan of such organizations across the country, we found a variety that had taken this path — from grassroots efforts in a single community to national networks. We surveyed eight such organizations, representing a range of focus areas — from faith-based organizing to social-justice advocacy to municipal leadership — and diverse constituencies. We analyzed these organizations’ relationships with schools through the following lenses:

- **Operating principles:** How does the organization translate its beliefs into action?
- **Catalysts:** What catalyzes the group to take on school issues?
- **Problem naming:** How does the organization name the problem?
- **Behaviors:** What behaviors or practices are used to address the problem?
- **Changes:** What has changed in the community as a result of the group’s behaviors?

A brief analysis of each of the eight organizations is summarized in the matrices that follow.

Types of Groups Doing This Work

We looked at four types of groups and surveyed eight organizations in those groups. Below is a chart showing the relationship between the type of group and the organization surveyed.

Type of Groups	Organizations Surveyed
Statewide groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Californians for Justice, Oakland, CA
Municipal governments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office of the Mayor, Columbus, OH
Local grassroots advocacy groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Coalition for Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment, Los Angeles, CA • MAD DADS, Delray Beach, FL
National networks, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Gamaliel (faith-based community organizing network) ○ PICO (Pacific Institute for Community Organizations) ○ IAF (Industrial Areas Foundation) ○ DART (Direct Action Research and Training Center) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Metropolitan Alliance of Congregations, Chicago, IL • Metropolitan Organizations for People, Denver, CO • Washington Interfaith Network, Washington, DC • Direct Action Research and Training Center, Miami, FL

Californians for Justice Oakland, CA

	Kind of Group Size Years in Existence	Operating Principles <i>How does the organization translate its beliefs into action?</i>	Catalysts <i>What catalyzes the group to take on school issues?</i>	Problem Naming <i>How does the organization name the problem?</i>	Behaviors <i>What behaviors or practices are used to address the problem?</i>	Changes <i>What has changed in the community as a result of the group's behaviors?</i>
<p>Californians for Justice (CFJ) 1611 Telegraph Ave., #317 Oakland, CA 94612 (with branches in San Diego, Long Beach, Fresno and San Jose)</p>	<p>Statewide advocacy organization for social justice, especially for immigrants</p> <p>Staff: 13</p> <p>8 years</p>	<p>Young people (high school, community college and college students) are left out of active participation in most aspects of society.</p> <p>Their energy and experiences can be translated into direct action for social justice.</p>	<p>After several years of working on economic justice issues, CFJ conducted an inclusive strategic planning process, using internal and external data, to determine its focus for the next five years. The planning process determined that schools were the most important leverage point for the group's social justice work.</p>	<p>Education is both a cause and effect of wider social conditions (changing schools alone won't make the difference for people of color, but you can't make the difference unless you change education).</p>	<p>CFJ employs three major strategies (<i>the ABCs</i>) in pursuit of social justice issues:</p> <p>Alliance-building: working with 45 organizations throughout California</p> <p>Base-building: leadership development for young people in each local office</p> <p>Campaigns: advocacy and media strategy by each local group</p>	<p>Participation in CFJ activities and campaigns continues to increase.</p> <p>CFJ recently opened an office in Fresno, expanding opportunities for youth of color to become involved.</p> <p>The Long Beach, San Diego and East San Jose school districts have changed practices as a result of CFJ campaigns.</p>

Office of the Mayor Columbus, OH

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<p>Office of the Mayor, Columbus, OH Mayor's Office of Education City of Columbus 90 W. Broad St., Room 108 Columbus, OH 43215</p>	<p>Municipal government Staff: about 5 1 year</p>	<p>Convene, don't intervene: The mayor's role is to bring people together, identify universal issues and develop ways to tackle them.</p>	<p>Michael B. Coleman is the first Democrat in 20 years to be elected mayor of Columbus.</p> <p>The state designated the Columbus school system a district in "academic emergency."</p>	<p>The Columbus metropolitan area needs to have better-educated citizens to ensure a positive future.</p>	<p>In May 2002, the mayor initiated the first regional "educational summit" to introduce the achievement gap.</p> <p>The mayor's office has worked with an existing communitywide nonprofit organization, the Educational Council, to broaden and deepen participation and focus it on the achievement gap.</p>	<p>The mayor is beginning to work with municipal governments in suburban areas that enroll Columbus students.</p> <p>The area's 16 school districts are beginning to share data and understanding of the problem, as well as promising practices.</p> <p>A public engagement work group is beginning to develop strategies to address the issue.</p>

Community Coalition for Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Los Angeles, CA

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<p>Community Coalition for Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment, Los Angeles, CA 8101 S. Vermont Ave. Los Angeles, CA 90044</p>	<p>Community organizing group</p> <p>Staff: about 35</p> <p>13 years</p>	<p>CCSAPT is devoted to taking a proactive stance against decline in South Central Los Angeles.</p> <p>Youth activism is an important aspect of building a positive community.</p>	<p>Identifying problems that are important to youth: unacceptable physical and academic conditions in the Los Angeles public schools.</p>	<p>The Los Angeles school system is failing to provide an adequate education for young people of color.</p>	<p>Research: surveys of youth in the schools, review of course offerings at schools in different parts of the Los Angeles school district</p> <p>Presenting results of research to the board of education; the organization is considering bringing legal action against the district.</p>	<p>Victories have been small thus far. The school system has lifted the cap on the number of counselors assigned to each high school.</p> <p>Intergenerational organizing seems to be increasing in California and elsewhere. CCSAPT is collaborating with other organizations on statewide campaigns.</p>

MAD DADS *Delray Beach, FL*

	Kind of Group Size Years in Existence	Operating Principles <i>How does the organization translate its beliefs into action?</i>	Catalysts <i>What catalyzes the group to take on school issues?</i>	Problem Naming <i>How does the organization name the problem?</i>	Behaviors <i>What behaviors or practices are used to address the problem?</i>	Changes <i>What has changed in the community as a result of the group's behaviors?</i>
<p>MAD DADS of Greater Delray Beach (FL) 141 S.W. 12th Ave. Delray Beach, FL 33444</p>	<p>Grassroots community building effort</p> <p>Staff: about 11</p> <p>13 years</p>	<p>Community mobilization. A planning process to improve the community identified a top priority: creating a school in the community (students had been bused out for integration).</p>	<p>Community-based and government-funded efforts to improve conditions for youth, including jobs and recreation programs, had failed.</p>	<p>“Our kids are dying in high numbers.” The education system is failing poor African-American children in Delray Beach.</p>	<p>A strategic planning process engaged the community in identifying education as its most critical need.</p> <p>Successful lobbying for support of school construction from the city and the school board</p> <p>Establishing a neighborhood governance structure for the community school</p>	<p>The community is coming together. Crime is less prevalent; people spend time on front porches.</p> <p>More than half the parents of children in the school (now grades K-4) participate in the PTA.</p> <p>Student achievement is slowly improving.</p>

Metropolitan Alliance of Congregations Chicago, IL

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<p>Metropolitan Alliance of Congregations (MAC) 5001 S. Ellis Ave. Chicago, IL 60615 <i>(a member of the Gamaliel Foundation, a faith-based community organizing network)</i></p>	<p>Faith-based organizing group</p> <p>Staff: 7</p> <p>6 years</p>	<p>Through leadership training and direct action, MAC empowers people to take an active role in shaping the future of their communities.</p> <p>Research into problems of school finance convinced MAC that the problems were structural and statewide.</p>	<p>One local school district went bankrupt, and others are in great financial distress.</p> <p>The areas served by MAC have a low tax base, high property taxes and poor schools.</p>	<p>This is an issue of metropolitan growth and equity. It is also an economic development issue — who would come to a community with high taxes and lousy schools?</p>	<p>Forming a statewide alliance of congregations to work in this area</p> <p>Developing a cadre of leaders who are sophisticated about school finance</p>	<p>There are public meetings in congregations to educate and activate citizens about the need for reforming school funding in Illinois.</p> <p>The statewide Alliance held a vigil at the Capitol during Lent.</p>

Metropolitan Organizations for People Denver, CO

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<p>Metropolitan Organizations for People (MOP) 1980 Dahlia St. Denver, CO 80220 <i>(an affiliate of the Pacific Institute for Community Organizations (PICO) network)</i></p>	<p>Faith-based organizing group</p> <p>Staff: 11</p> <p>23 years</p>	<p>The PICO organizing process is usually congregation-based.</p> <p>It follows a model of organizing that includes identifying the problem, research, action and evaluation.</p>	<p>A community coalition formed as part of the Casey Foundation's <i>Making Connections</i> initiative proposed to conduct school-based organizing to engage parents in a group of failing schools in northeast Denver.</p>	<p>Schools are a good venue for empowering and engaging people: A large number of people are involved and assume leadership roles in the community.</p>	<p>The Northeast Denver Parent Organizing in Education (NEDPOE) initiative has conducted organizing campaigns and presented the results of these campaigns in seven schools.</p>	<p>School staff has made changes in response to requests from several campaigns.</p> <p>School and city staffers have confronted a store owner who may be selling cigarettes to minors.</p> <p>Parent leaders from the NEDPOE school-based organizing effort will be on the board of MOP.</p> <p>Parents are taking on broader leadership roles, such as helping run a citywide mayors' forum and participating in a weekend leadership forum.</p>

Washington Interfaith Network Washington, DC

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<p>Washington Interfaith Network Luther Place Memorial Church 1226 Vermont Ave. NW Washington, DC 20005 <i>(an affiliate of the Industrial Areas Foundation)</i></p>	<p>Faith-based organizing group</p> <p>Staff: 2</p> <p>7 years</p>	<p>WIN seeks to build an institution through which people can exercise power.</p>	<p>Early in the organization's work in Washington, it held house meetings where parents came together to discuss concerns. The lack of after-school programs (and other extracurricular options for young people) was an area of major concern. WIN saw an opportunity to create after-school programs and organize parents.</p>	<p>Public schools are large gathering places for low-income people. Along with churches, they are among the few institutions left in some communities. They can be an effective vehicle for organizing parents.</p>	<p>Through organizing, WIN was able to get a commitment from the city for \$20 million for a youth investment fund that would have required matching funding from the community. When the school district funded its own program using TANF funds, WIN got out of the after-school business.</p> <p>WIN organized parents around the shameful state of school facilities and won \$12.5 million in repairs. They held district staff accountable for getting the work done. The facilities director was fired, but the problems remain.</p>	<p>Instability in both parent leadership and public systems leaves WIN without an infrastructure for change.</p>

Direct Action Research and Training Center Miami, FL

	Kind of Group Size Years in Existence	Operating Principles <i>How does the organization translate its beliefs into action?</i>	Catalysts <i>What catalyzes the group to take on school issues?</i>	Problem Naming <i>How does the organization name the problem?</i>	Behaviors <i>What behaviors or practices are used to address the problem?</i>	Changes <i>What has changed in the community as a result of the group's behaviors?</i>
<p>Direct Action Research and Training Center (DART) P.O. Box 370791 Miami, FL 33137-0791</p>	<p>Community organizing group, primarily but not exclusively faith-based, with organizations in six states</p> <p>Staff: 4 full-time, 3 part-time</p> <p>20 years</p>	<p>DART seeks to build local groups so they can build greater justice.</p> <p>DART has an “intensive, intentional” listening process, with training and consulting from the national level.</p> <p>DART builds coalitions with other groups in the community (e.g. business) that share its interests and goals.</p>	<p>In intensive interviews in communities, educational achievement continually emerges as a problem. For 10 years, DART has looked at curriculum.</p>	<p>It’s about the kids learning to read; there should be no excuse for the school system not to teach students, no matter what.</p> <p>Stop blaming the parents.</p>	<p>Through its research, DART identified Direct Instruction (DI) as an effective curriculum for teaching reading. The network advocates for DI in areas where it has organizations. In Florida, a \$7.25 million appropriation from the state supports DI training and implementation. DART is diligent in seeing that districts use the money as intended.</p> <p>Some local organizations also do parent organizing, expand early childhood and reform suspension policies.</p>	<p>Where it is implemented well, DI improves achievement and discipline. Communities have more energy; people take action about something they care about.</p> <p>DI expands the organization’s ally base when results are apparent at the school and system levels.</p>

