Inside Education Organizing: Learning to Work for Educational Change

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ABSTRACT

Inside Education Organizing: Learning to Work for Educational Change

by

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Over the past fifteen years there has been a growing scholarly interest in education issues among community based organizations (CBOs). Education organizing is the mobilization of parents and community members for the purpose of transforming schools and CBOs have already demonstrated their ability to impact both student outcomes and educational policy (Shirley, 1997). The Annenberg Institute found that “successful organizing strategies contributed to increased student attendance, improved standardized test score performance, higher graduation rates and college-going aspirations” (Mediratta, Shah, & McAlister, 2008).

While an increasing number of researchers are exploring this phenomenon, we know little about the experiences of CBOs members who are engaged in this work. Utilizing a qualitative case study approach and a conceptual framework that draws from situated learning, social capital, and networking theory, this study explored the following questions as they relate to the experiences of members in three different CBOs:

• What motivates families to participate in CBOs involved in education organizing?
• How do members learn the work of education organizing? What skills (if any) are acquired as both individuals and as a collective, and how are they developed?

• What impact (both material and personal) does participation have on CBO members’ lives?

Findings from this study revealed that participation in the process of education organizing has the potential to not only transform schools, but the participants themselves. Initial understandings of self-interest evolved to include broader social concerns. Members reported increases in confidence, desire, and ability to fully participate in democratic processes. The findings also indicated that the effectiveness of a CBO is related to its organizational structure, its members’ capacity for learning, the types of issues that members are trying to address, and the strength of their relationships within local civic ecologies. Those groups that were able to operate in diverse networks while developing the necessary technological, political, and cultural knowledge generally met with the most success.
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Introduction
Inside Education Organizing

Finding and retaining good teachers is a challenge for most schools, but in high poverty communities it can be an interminable task. According to data from the National Center for Education Statistics almost a third of new teachers leave the profession within their first three years of teaching. In marginalized communities the rates of attrition are even higher, especially in schools located in the central city, schools where more than half of the students are eligible for free lunches, or where the minority population is greater than 35% (Marvel, Lyter, Pelota, Strizek, & Morton, 2006). Considering that teacher quality is one of the primary predictors of student success (Darling-Hammond, 1999), teacher retention has become an important issue for education policy makers. In response school leaders and researchers have developed solutions focusing on improving salaries, general working conditions, teacher preparation, and the development of mentoring and induction programs during the early years of teaching. However, in Illinois another approach is being used: the “Grow Your Own Teachers” (GYOT) program. GYOT did not originate at the state house, city hall, or in the halls of academia. Rather, it comes from the very neighborhoods that are most impacted by the teacher retention crisis.

After years of growing frustration over the quality of the local public schools, community leaders from the Logan Square Neighborhood Association (LSNA) met with administrators in the Chicago Public Schools to discuss improvement strategies in 2003. They discovered that one of the challenges facing principals was the retention of highly qualified teachers. In response, members of LSNA, working in collaboration with other
community based organizations (CBOs) and Chicago State University helped develop GYOT. The goal of GYOT is to identify, train and employ highly qualified teachers with the desire and commitment to serve as educators in the neighborhoods where they live. To meet this goal schools looked to volunteers and parents who were already living and working in the community. A teacher preparation program was designed that accommodated full time work schedules and integrated coursework that met the specific needs of the local community (for example, an emphasis on working with English Language Learners). In 2004, following extensive lobbying efforts, the Illinois state legislature passed the “Grow Your Own Teachers” Act and recently appropriated a total of 3.5 million dollars for FY09. Today sixteen GYOT programs across Illinois share the goal of placing 1,000 fully qualified teachers in high poverty schools over the next eight years. The program has been featured in U.S. News and World Report and Kansas and Idaho are developing their own versions of GYOT. The work of LSNA is just one example of the innovative policies and reforms being fought for by community based organizations across the country through education organizing.

Definitions of community organizing vary, but generally share an emphasis on the acquisition of power. Marion Orr writes, “the term community organizing refers to the process that engages people, organizations, and communities toward the goals of increased individual and community control, political efficacy, improved quality of life, and social justice… The central feature of community organizing is that it is a process and strategy designed to build power” (Orr, 2007a, p. 2). Other definitions specify participant populations. A report by the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform
states, “Organizing is about building power for people who are powerless and those whose lives are negatively impacted by the decisions of others” (Gold, Simon, & Brown, 2002). Education organizing is the mobilization of parents and community members for the purpose of transforming educational policy. Actions are based on the specific needs of the community and can range from the installation of a stop sign at a busy school intersection to the creation of more equitable funding formulas at the state level.

Over the past fifteen years there has been a growing interest in educational issues among community based organizations. The Institute for Education and Social Policy at NYU reports that the number of community groups working with public schools quadrupled from 1996 to 2001 (Mediratta, Fruchter, & Lewis, 2001), and recent surveys estimate that there are close to 800 groups now involved in education organizing. CBOs engaged with education issues are diverse, both in terms of constituency and organizational models. Faith-based groups, neighborhood associations, and parent groups have all demonstrated interest in the field of education. Some groups are focused on education as a single issue, while others have a broad based agenda. There are groups that operate independently and groups that have an affiliation with national or regional networks such as PICO, ACORN or the IAF (Mediratta & Fruchter, 2001; National Center for Schools and Communities, 2002a). What these groups have in common is a commitment to address local concerns through leadership development and the mobilization of “people power.”

Many CBOs have already had a significant impact on educational policy. The Annenberg Institute recently completed a six year longitudinal study of education
organizing in seven different cities and found that “successful organizing strategies contributed to increased student attendance, improved standardized test score performance, higher graduation rates and college-going aspirations” (Mediratta et al., 2008). In addition, education organizing also influenced policy decisions to increase equity and civic engagement in local communities. The effectiveness of education organizing is attributed to its focus on creating solutions tailored to communities and sense of commitment and reciprocity that accompanies participation in democratic processes (Shirley, 1997).

Of course, education organizing efforts have also faced challenges. Some CBOs lack experience in educational policy making and struggle to make inroads with entrenched school administrators and unions. Occasionally CBOs have benefitted from collaborations with local colleges or universities to help navigate these systems, but the majority of CBOs must learn to decipher complex education research and policy on their own. This is perhaps the greatest challenge facing CBOs, as the National Center for Schools and Communities reports:

Lack of access to appropriate research and information was a problem that appeared with similar frequency. Many organizations reported feeling under-equipped to challenge administrators and teachers on questions of educational management and methodology… Up-to-date research was needed about teaching methods, standards for evaluating students, Title I regulation, best practices in school management and budgeting, and means of raising student performance… In addition, little was known about the strategies, experiences, and success of public education activists in cities beyond state lines (National Center for Schools and Communities, 2002a).

Despite these challenges, education organizing is growing in popularity as a strategy for school reform. Marginalized populations are drawn to an approach that
differs from more traditional forms of “parental involvement.” The traditional family/school dynamic is predominantly focused on the needs of individual children and is largely based on a school oriented agenda. Common examples of involvement include: volunteering in the classroom, participation in parent/teacher conferences, attendance at school sponsored events, providing academic assistance at home, and demonstrating general support for school based initiatives (Epstein, 1995). Families that do not engage in these actions are labeled “uninterested” by educators and risk being ostracized by the school community. Unfortunately, for many of these families, especially immigrants or minorities in urban schools, their non-participation is not a product of disinterest, but rather a result of linguistic, economic, and/or cultural barriers that impede traditional forms of involvement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Lareau, 2000). Most often these families do care and support their children’s education, but perhaps not in a manner readily recognized by educators (Huss-Keeler, 1997; Valdes, 1996). Other families may participate in traditional forms of involvement, but simply feel that they are being limited by approaches that fail to address broader educational concerns (Oakes & Lipton, 2002).

Education organizing provides an intriguing alternative (or supplementary opportunity) to these traditional forms of family involvement by allowing families to become engaged and not just involved with education issues. Dennis Shirley, one of the first scholars to explore the field of education organizing, describes the critical distinction between involvement and engagement as follows:

Parental involvement -- as practiced in most schools and reflected in the research literature -- avoids issues of power and assigns parents a passive role in the maintenance of school culture. Parental engagement designates parents as citizens in the fullest sense-change agents who can transform
This type of empowerment stems from the creation of opportunities independent of schools and school systems (though many CBOs work to develop partnerships with schools and teachers). Contrary to the negative depiction of marginalized families as uninvolved and uninterested, the activist family is deeply engaged and working for change, while simultaneously positing a new model for family, community, and school relationships. As a result, in some communities CBO efforts have met with resistance from teachers, administrators, or other community members who prefer to maintain the power structures of the status quo, but in other places CBOs have been embraced as important contributors to the challenges that face public education.

While an increasing number of researchers are exploring this phenomenon, we know surprisingly little about the actual experiences of participants in CBOs that are engaged with education organizing. The existing literature has focused primarily on the development of organizing models for educational change (Gold et al., 2002; Oakes & Rogers, 2006; Williams, 1989), descriptions of the contextual, organizational, philosophical, and strategic variations that exist among different organizing groups (Mediratta et al., 2001; Moore & Sandler, 2003; Shirley & Evans, 2007), and the influence of organizing on the creation of civic capacity (Dingerson, Brown, & Beam, 2004; Shirley, 1997, 2002; Zachary & olatoye, 2001).

As education organizing continues to grow, there is a need for additional research that examines why individuals choose to become involved, how and what they learn by organizing around education issues, and what benefits they derive from participation.
Furthermore, while the tactics and strategies of community organizing have been well
documented (canvassing, one-on-ones, house meetings, study groups), there is still a need
to consider how these tools must (if at all) be adapted for use in education policy circles.

To address these issues this study employed an ethnographic multi-case study
approach to explore the following questions:

- What motivates families to participate in CBOs involved in education organizing?
- How do members learn the work of education organizing? What skills (if any) are
  acquired as both individuals and as a collective, and how are they developed?
- What impact (both material and personal) does participation have on CBO
  members’ lives?

These questions were shaped and influenced by a conceptual framework that combines
ideas from situated learning, social capital, and networking theory as they interact in a
broader civic ecology. Consideration of these questions will enhance our understanding
of the existing “family involvement” literature, offer alternative models of engagement,
and provide valuable insights regarding the mobilization of historically marginalized
families and communities.

Dissertation Overview

The first chapter presents a review of the research literature on family
involvement and the emerging field of education organizing. The literature on family
involvement was included to provide context for the new types of work that are being
done in CBOs. The next two chapters provide an overview of the theoretical framework
and the research methods that inform this study. In Chapter Four, I present my first case
study, United Interfaith Action, a faith-based organization located in New Bedford, MA
that is just starting to become involved with education issues after many years of working on public safety, health care, immigration, and local economic issues. Chapter Five explores the work of JP-POP, a group of activist women in the Boston neighborhood of Jamaica Plain. The work of this predominantly Latina group is focused on issues of special education and bilingual education in the Boston Public Schools. The final case study, discussed in Chapter Six, involves the parents of Stand for Children in Lexington, MA. Based on their relatively affluent socioeconomic status, Stand for Children represents an atypical population among grassroots movements. Chapter Seven engages in analysis of the similarities and differences that emerged across the various groups and discusses the implications of these findings for both members of CBOs and educators. Finally, Chapter Eight offers suggestions for improving future education organizing efforts and education policymaking-at-large.
At the heart of this study is a consideration of family, school, and community relationships. From Horace Mann’s common schools to the modern comprehensive high school, the dynamics between these three elements are central to understanding evolving purposes of education in American society. Over the years models of family, school, and community relationships have ranged from close knit community control to large centralized bureaucracies. As the population of the United States grows increasingly diverse and our society transitions into a new era of globalization, the variables that impact these relationships are becoming even more complex. Education organizing represents one response to this changing environment. Thus, in order to create a foundation for this study, this chapter provides an overview of both the literature on family involvement and a summary of the existing research on education organizing.

Family Engagement

Family engagement¹ is widely considered to be a strong predictor of a child’s success in school (Henderson & Mapp, 2002), but it is not easy to achieve quality family/school relationships (Epstein & Becker, 1982). While research indicates that families and teachers generally have positive views about one another (Epstein, 1986; Lawson, 2003; Tichenor, 2004), there is also a commonly held belief that parents and

¹ The terminology in the field includes, “family involvement,” “family engagement,” and “parental involvement.” The nuance of each term was alluded to above and in recognition of the distinction drawn by Shirley (1997) and out of respect to the extended families who play an important “parental” role in many children’s lives I am inclined to use “family engagement.” However, for the purposes of the literature review I will use the preferred terminology of each scholar.
teachers are “natural enemies,” destined to come into conflict over their divergent interests (Waller, 1932). This belief is based on the idea that families are primarily concerned with the school experience of their child, while teachers must manage an entire classroom. While the rhetoric of “natural enemies” may overstate this tension, conflict between families and schools is a very real issue that often becomes personal. Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot notes how both parents and teachers bring their own educational histories into their encounters with one another, leading to situations where parents either seek to recreate the positive experiences of their childhood or ameliorate negative memories, while simultaneously frustrating teachers who long for the days when educators were given family support with no questions asked (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003). Other significant challenges are based on differences in gender, race, and class.

Due to these complex dynamics, school and home relationships have become one of the most widely researched subjects in education. Kathy Hoover-Dempsey, a leader in the field, identifies three primary variables that help determine levels of family engagement: role perception, efficacy, and opportunity (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). The following section uses these variables to organize an overview of the research on family engagement. The categories include: research on family and school perceptions of involvement, the impact of family involvement on students, and opportunities for family involvement.

**Family and School Perceptions of Involvement**

The groundbreaking work of Joyce Epstein and her colleagues at Johns Hopkins University has influenced numerous scholars studying family, school, and community
 relationships. Epstein’s work includes a framework of six types of family involvement that support school endeavors: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with community. This typology is widely cited in the literature on family engagement and utilized by many schools as a device for both understand and creating family and school collaborations.

In summary, parenting focuses on being actively engaged in the parent/child relationship outside of school. It includes making sure that children are well taken care of and prepared to learn when they arrive at school. Communication involves frequent and open contact between the family and school. The most common examples are participation in parent/teacher conferences and the exchange of information via school correspondence. Volunteering consists of being actively supportive of the school community by donating time or resources. This would include families coming to the school to run fund raisers (bake sales, raffles, etc.) or reading to the class during story hour. Learning at home involves the reinforcement of academic skills at home and the provision of other educational opportunities. This can range from helping a child with their homework to taking them to local cultural events or educational institutions like the museum. Decision making calls for engagement with school officials regarding policy through participation in the PTA or as a member of the school board. And finally, collaborating with the community, though employed less often, refers to the use of local resources to support and sustain schools (Epstein, 1995).

Not surprisingly, families and schools have competing viewpoints regarding how these types of involvement should be enacted and their respective contributions to a
child’s education (Lawson, 2003). Some critics of the typology contend that the depiction of family/school relationships is too school-centric. In other words, the only types of involvement that “count” are those contributions that coincide with school sanctioned activities or support the general mission of the school (de Carvalho, 2001; Schutz, 2006). Others believe that the expectations in these traditional forms of involvement are primarily based on a model that is oriented toward the desires of white, upper middle-class, suburban families and fail to account for differences in family culture or social class (de Carvalho, 2001).

Disconnects between home and school are most common among immigrant, minority, and working-class families, who frequently feel like outsiders in the educational process (Lareau, 2000). These families often lack the social capital necessary to influence institutional affairs and are further hindered by linguistic, economic, or cultural barriers that engender misunderstandings with teachers and school personnel. Although these issues are present in all schools, they are especially pervasive in urban areas where teachers and administrators often lack the professional knowledge, resources, or desire to meet the needs of all parents (Henig, Hula, Orr, & Pedescleaux, 1999).

Linguistic barriers can be a significant challenge to school and family partnerships. For example, progress reports and other basic school communications are generally produced in English and inaccessible to parents with a limited command of the language. Parents may feel intimidated and embarrassed about approaching school officials for help with interpretation. Instead, parents look to obtain knowledge about schools through family networks, where the information is generally based on a limited
understanding of the ways schools work in the US (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). In other situations children may serve as a cultural broker between parents and teachers, but this can be problematic for two reasons. First, the reversal of roles where students serve as the public face of the family can be difficult for parents who feel that they should be in control of these types of social interactions (Tyack, 1974). And second, children can easily manipulate this arrangement and mislead their parents with regard to school policies or expectations (Valdes, 1996).

Family involvement is also influenced by class status and related economic concerns. Many families must first attend to their most basic needs before they can dedicate time to traditional forms of family involvement like volunteering in the classroom (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). Job flexibility, the number of hours worked, and available networks of childcare all impact a family’s ability to become involved at school (Hansen, 2005; Lareau, 2000). Working class parents who do have the opportunity to interact with the school may feel that teachers and administrators look down upon their views on discipline or behavior (Lareau, 2003). And research suggests that teachers of working class families may have lower expectations for their students (Anyon, 1981, 1997).

Lareau’s ethnographic study of two predominantly white suburban communities (one working class and one upper middle-class) illustrates some of the common misconceptions that exist between working class parents and teachers. Many educators assume that working class families do not value education. However, Lareau found that the majority of the parents in both working class and upper-middle class families felt that
education was very important. The working class parents in her study were just as committed to helping their children earn diplomas. The primary difference between the social classes came in the form of expectations. While working class parents wanted a high school diploma for their children, middle class parents expected their children to earn college degrees (Lareau, 2000). On the other hand, some believe that schools systematically discriminate against working class families by providing different levels of support to parents, resulting in a Pygmalion effect on the students. Yet, in Lareau’s study the two schools had very similar interactions with parents and there were actually more frequent interactions with the working class parents.\(^2\) Instead of these commonly held explanations, Lareau contends that the primary difference in family/school relations is a difference in cultural capital. Working class parents were generally less educated and concerned about issues like being able to help their children with homework. Their educational backgrounds, coupled with their occupational status (they saw teacher as higher status professionals), left many working class parents wondering whether or not they really belonged at the school. Ironically, while the participation of working class parents is often perceived as deficient by teachers, these same parents were generally more supportive and had more respect for the teaching profession than their upper middle class counterparts. Parents who possessed an equal or higher social status than teachers

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\(^2\) While Lareau did not find significant differences in the treatment of parents at the working class and upper-middle class schools, other studies have found some substantial differences in the expectations that teachers have for students based on social class (see Jean Anyon’s 1982 article, “School Class and School Knowledge” in *Curriculum Inquiry, 11*(1), 3-42). It is difficult to imagine that teachers could have varying expectations for students, but that these attitudes would not be carried over to interactions with parents.
were less respectful of teachers’ professional knowledge and felt at ease criticizing teachers and/or administrators for their performance.

Cultural differences are also an important consideration when examining the dynamics of family, school, and community interactions (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). For example, Rebecca Huss-Keeler conducted an ethnographic study of immigrant Pakistani parents in a British primary school and discovered that teachers often interpreted parents’ failure to meet their expectations of involvement as a lack of interest in their children’s education (Huss-Keeler, 1997). The parents in this study were accustomed to the more regimented schools that they attended in Pakistan, a place where the parents were not encouraged to become involved with the schools. In addition, the low status of women in Pakistan reinforced the idea that a woman’s place was in the home and not in public. The British perception of “caring” mothers coming to school to assist with projects or to volunteer was a completely foreign idea to these women. Huss-Keeler surmised that, “the same behavior that would have termed them a ‘good parent’ in Pakistan, that is, staying out of school and helping and supporting their children at home, termed them a ‘not interested parent’ in England” (Huss-Keeler, 1997, p. 179). Unfortunately, teachers who were not aware of these cultural differences had lower expectations for the students whose parents were perceived as being disengaged, and they were less likely to send home school communications or progress reports. Valdes’ ethnographic study of Latino families in the US resulted in similar findings (1996). The linguistic, economic, and cultural differences mentioned in this section each contribute to parents feeling excluded
from the school lives of their children and to the idea that school is an unwelcoming place.

**Family Involvement: Does it Make a Difference?**

There is little debate over the importance of family involvement to a child’s success in school. It seems intuitive that parents with an active interest in their children’s education will have a positive impact on their success; however, research indicates that there are mixed results depending on the type of involvement and the background of the families that are involved (Desimone, 1999; Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008; White, Taylor, & Moss, 1992).

In a meta-analysis of 21 studies conducted by William Jeynes (2003), parental involvement was found to have a positive impact on the academic achievement (GPA, standardized test scores, etc.) of all minority students (African-Americans, Latinos, and Asian-Americans) across all subject areas; although there was some variation between groups (e.g. greater benefits were derived for African-American and Latinos than for Asian-Americans). Other studies have identified significant differences in student achievement based on how parental involvement is enacted. For example, when helping a child with homework, the strict monitoring of progress tends to have a negative effect on achievement, whereas providing direct aid results in more positive outcomes. The effectiveness of involvement strategies can even vary depending upon a child’s developmental stage and background (Patall et al., 2008).

Although generally positive regarding the efficacy of parental involvement, the research in the field is rife with studies that contradict one another in the details of their
findings. There are so many variables and contextual issues at play that it is difficult to find conclusive and generalizable strategies for successful home and school collaborations. While the preponderance of the evidence does support the claim that parental involvement has a positive impact on children’s education, the complexity of the interacting variables should still be considered if we are to understand why some specific techniques seem to work better than others (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994). Certainly one of the most important factors is the type of opportunities that are made available to families.

**Opportunities for Family Involvement**

In recognition of the potential contributions of strong family, school, and community relationships, a growing number of texts are available to educators. These books address general family populations (Sanders, 2006), cross-cultural efforts (Trumball, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2001), and specific minority groups (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Winters, 1993). School personnel are the primary audience for these books, a trend that is consistent with the perception that schools should mediate “family involvement” opportunities. Many school based efforts to foster parent involvement can be effective, but they tend to focus on volunteering, communication, and reinforcement of the school culture at home.

Unfortunately, most teacher education programs do not provide an in-depth examination of the importance of home and school relationships in their curriculum (Chavkin & Williams, 1988; Weiss, Kreider, Lopez, & Chatman, 2005). Pre-service teachers have mixed emotions regarding involvement. Most appreciate the potential
benefits of good family relations (Tichenor, 2004), but perceptions of appropriate forms of involvement are heavily influenced by personal experience and little thought is given to empirically based “best practices” (Graue & Brown, 2003). This reliance on personal biography can be problematic considering the relative homogeneity of teachers in the United States (Gomez, 1994; Johnson, 2005). However, the literature does indicate that teacher education programs can make a difference in the ways that preservice teachers understand and interact with parents (Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Weiss et al., 2005).

Among the more innovative techniques for incorporating family engagement in a teacher preparation curriculum are community based experiences. In this approach new teachers are placed in a community setting prior to their teaching placement so they can become familiar with the broader community (de Acosta, 1996; Murrell, 2001). In these situations teachers have a better appreciation for the backgrounds of their students and how the community might play a role in their classroom.

Veteran teachers may have more experience working with parents, but they still have many of the same concerns as their preservice colleagues. In particular, educators are anxious about interacting with parents who may hold onto more traditional conceptions about “the way schools used be.” Many parents believe that their children should be taught in the manner in which they were taught and some teachers are reluctant to address these nostalgic beliefs (Hargreaves, 2001a). By neglecting to foster more open communication, teachers are left feeling as though they are the targets of blame when students do not live up to their parents’ expectations. In terms of working with marginalized populations, experienced teachers may have greater knowledge of the
obstacles that parents face, but remain unaware of potential community resources (Shunow & Harris, 2000). Teachers who are able to tap into community “funds of knowledge” report better communication with parents and deeper connections with their students (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzales, 1992; Moll & Greenberg, 1990).

Collectively, with limited preparation in teacher education programs and a lack of motivation among veteran teachers, there is a dearth of opportunities in most classrooms for involvement beyond the traditional examples of volunteering or homework help.

Until recently family involvement was an issue that was seen as being limited to individual classrooms and schools. This changed with the passing of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in 2001. NCLB contains several provisions for parental involvement and purports that the engagement of families is a central part of successful school reform (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). John Rogers contends that parent power is managed in NCLB through three distinct narratives: accountability, choice, and involvement. These narratives emphasize the dissemination of data about student progress and school performance, the creation of “exit strategies” for students attending persistently low-performing schools, and the use of parents as monitors of school effectiveness. Each of these narratives is based on a free market rationale that assumes educators will be motivated to improve practice by fear of losing students and funding. They also feed into traditional depictions of parent/teacher relationships by “pitting poor parents against unmotivated educators and a recalcitrant education system” (Rogers, 2006, p. 617). While parental involvement is rightly perceived as a “good thing,” we must also consider the power dynamics that come into play with school or government
sponsored programs that seek to increase participation. Fine openly worries that some programs are thinly veiled attempts to shed responsibility and move public education toward more market based reforms:

Only in retrospect can we see that the slip of parental involvement to service delivery is a lot like the ideological slip that argues that parental involvement will, in and of itself, transform student learning. This assertion, benign and liberal, depoliticizes educational outcomes and exempts district and school policies and practices from accountability (Fine, 1993, p. 691).

Fine contends that real parental involvement must address issues of power, class, race, and gender or they will simply devolve into old patterns of opposition.

The research indicates that family involvement is important, but there are a number of mediating factors that contribute to its overall impact. At the moment the focus remains on school-centric models, but initiatives like education organizing that intend to influence education from outside the school are slowly gaining recognition (Schutz, 2006). In particular, marginalized groups are receiving more attention for agitating against the system. Some of this attention has been negative, but observers point out that “elite” parents have been successfully lobbying school boards and politicians for years (Oakes & Lipton, 2002). The only difference is that their shared social capital with school leaders makes their efforts seem less radical.

As organizing efforts continue to grow, more scholars are recognizing the power of conceptualizing school reform as a social movement (Anyon, 2005; Fullan, 2006). We now turn to the emerging literature in this field. The next section begins with a discussion of the fundamentals of community organizing, moves to an examination of the
existing literature on education organizing, and concludes with a brief outline of the challenges that have already been identified in the field.

**Grassroots and Community Organizing Efforts in Education**

**Background**

Community organizing as a strategy for educational change is a recent development, but one that is garnering increasing interest as indicated by the burgeoning literature on the topic, the organization of national conferences that seek to bring together researchers and activists, and the recent formation of a Special Interest Group dedicated to Youth and Grassroots Organizing by the American Educational Research Association. Education organizing is grounded in the tradition of community organizing, but it is also strongly influenced by the history of labor unions, turn of the century progressivism, the US settlement house movement, the civil rights and farm worker movements of the 1960s, and nonviolent resistance movements.

Saul Alinsky, widely viewed as the father of community organizing, began his work in the “Back of the Yards” neighborhoods of Chicago whose bleak living conditions were made famous with the publication of Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*. It was here that Alinsky would hone his philosophy and develop the foundation for what would eventually become known as community organizing. In 1940 he founded the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) and he aspired to scale up the organization to the national level. He taught people to identify shared “self-interests” in order to facilitate the mobilization of power that was necessary to gain access to the decision making process (Alinsky, 1969). Without financial resources the first community groups gained power with
When numbers weren’t enough the “direct actions” of Alinsky organizations publicly challenged authority figures while demonstrating a certain degree of irreverence for the status quo.

Alinsky became infamous for his strategies of public confrontation pitting the “haves” vs. “have-nots” and the “powerful” vs. the “powerless.” In one example, Alinsky threatened to host a bean dinner for members or his organizing group prior to an annual concert for Rochester’s social elite, adding new meaning to the “wind” section. Theatrical demonstrations like the bean dinner caught the public’s attention, but Alinsky’s risqué tactics served a dual purpose. First, quite simply they were effective. Second, and perhaps more importantly, the irreverent tactics illuminated the absurdity of some of the injustices that people faced. Political machines like Mayor Daley’s in Chicago seemed untouchable, but Alinsky’s attitude asserted that all citizens had the right to participate in government.

The Alinsky legacy continues to inspire contemporary grassroots and community organizations, but the utilization of his techniques varies from group to group. Today’s community organizations develop based on constituency, location, and political context and their continued existence depends on their ability to adapt their strategies to maximize effectiveness. For some groups this has meant a move away from adversarial tactics and an emphasis on the creation of partnership strategies (Sirianni & Friedland, 2001). Today there are a number of different models of community based organizing.

Models of CBOs
Attempts to outline single model of community organizing are inadequate because it is difficult to capture the complexity and nuance of each individual organization. The backgrounds of the organizers, members’ goals, mission orientation, and local civic ecology are just a few of the factors that shape the structure and functioning of a group. In *Democracy in Action*, Smock (2004) provides a systemic overview of some of the dominant community organizing models. Smock’s typology includes: power-based, community-building, civic, women-centered, and transformative models, but she is quick to point out that, “the five models operate more as ideal types than perfect reflections of reality” (Smock, 2004, p. 11). While other texts present up to twenty different variations of community based organizations, most of these groups can be defined using some combination of Smock’s models (Rubin & Rubin, 2008).

The power-based model closely follows classic Alinsky style organizing. It perceives politics as negotiation among competing interests for the allocation of goods and resources. Recognizing that low and moderate income populations lack the financial and political capital to fully participate in the public sphere, an emphasis is placed on the mobilization of “people power” to ensure a more equitable distribution of goods. Frequently this approach requires some degree of public confrontation or conflict as a demonstration of the organization’s “numbers” power. The end goal is for organizations to become respected participants in public policy discussions.

In the community-building model the focus is oriented toward increasing internal civic capacity. Organizations that follow this model seek to increase their ability to address social issue with the development of local assets through networking and
coalition building inside the community. Similar to the “Iron Rule” of organizing, which states that organizers should never do anything community members can do for themselves, the guiding principle here is that neighborhoods can develop the capacity to engage and solve problems on their own without relying on outside resources. This does not mean that the organization is insular, as their definition of the community includes a wide variety of stakeholders including: churches, local businesses, nonprofits, and neighborhood associations. Followers of this model believe that because of the diversity that exists within their coalitions they can make a legitimate claim on representing the voice of the people.

The civic model frames neighborhood problems as a byproduct of the breakdown of social control. This belief is similar to Jane Jacob’s assertion that the fundamental problem facing communities is isolation (Jacobs, 1961). The civic model seeks to increase social cohesion and local accountability by strengthening relationships among neighbors. The primary means for accomplishing goals in the civic model is the utilization of traditional government channels, but with an increased level of accountability. Members of a civic model organization identify neighborhood issues and then make sure that they are addressed by applying pressure to the proper authorities or government officials.

A women-centered model emphasizes leadership development among women in order to move traditionally private or domestic problems into the public sphere. The needs of the family are perceived as crucial to the cohesion of the community and thus the emphasis of the work in these groups is focused on child care, parenting, housing,
family-safety and education. Drawing on a long tradition of women’s communal support networks, these groups attempt to create a safe space where women can gather to develop leadership skills and provide support to one another.

Finally, the transformative model is similar to the power-model, but questions the efficacy of the existing political system and seeks to challenge and overturn the status quo. In other words, the political system itself is the core problem facing communities. Organizers who utilize this approach contend that a fundamental restructuring of “dominant political, social, and economic institutions is required” before a group can begin to effectively address local issues (Smock, 2004).

Smock’s typology provides a useful overview of the various models of community organizing, but as she readily acknowledges, most CBOs cannot be compartmentalized into a single category. Despite some fundamental philosophical differences among community organizations there are still a number of common elements that most CBOs share. For example, the emphasis on creating power through relationship building is a core value that is shared by all of the organizing models. A basic representation of a community organizing approach is presented in Figure 1.1.
Figure 1:1 Model of Community Organizing Process

The model demonstrates that organizing is not a linear process. Contrary to more traditional organizations that follow a strict step-by-step process, community organizations are in a constant state of assessment and reflection as they seek to understand and adapt organizational goals and activities to the needs of members and the realities of the local civic ecology. As Alinsky noted in *Rules for Radicals*, "the community organizer...must constantly examine life, including his own, to get some idea of what it is all about, and he must challenge and test his own findings. Irreverence, essential to questioning, is a requisite. Curiosity becomes compulsive. His most frequent word is 'why'" (Alinsky, 1971, p. 11)? Thus a dynamic model emerges in which there is a perpetual cycle of information gathering, action, and reflection.

The work of community organizing is grounded in relationships so listening to the concerns of community members is fundamental to most CBOs. A common technique is for CBOs to distribute surveys at participant institutions (e.g. places of worship, tenant organizations, etc.) or by going door to door in the neighborhood. Some organizations
prefer to move immediately to more intimate one-to-one meetings where members sit down and converse at length with individual community members. Through these assessments the concerns of the community are identified and the first attempts at mobilization begin. Members of the community are called together to share their concerns and begin to formulate a plan to address these issues. This often involves a “power analysis” in which key stakeholders, allies, and potential opponents are identified. Once a plan is in place responsibilities are delegated among participants and may include research, lobbying, recruitment, or action coordination. The plan or action is implemented and regardless of the outcome followed by some form of evaluation or reflection. This is considered to be an invaluable part of the process and allows the organization to learn and grow from its experiences.

**The Emergence of Education Organizing**

With this basic structure of organizing in mind, we now turn to the emergence of education organizing as a means for school reform. Educational change is notoriously difficult to achieve and the negotiation of education issues generally involves the participation of multiple stakeholders: school administrators, teachers, policymakers, community and business leaders, parents, and occasionally students. Their respective levels of involvement are contingent upon the dynamic power relationships existing in local ecologies (Cabello & Burstein, 1995; Cuban & Usdan, 2003; Henig et al., 1999; Sarason, 1995). Traditionally, race, ethnicity, class, and gender have played important roles in determining the balance of power in these relationships, and as a result
marginalized populations are often excluded from the political process (Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Stone, Henig, Jones, & Pierannuzi, 2001).

In particular teachers are portrayed as being reluctant to alter their classroom practices and many veterans have learned to “wait out” trendy, but fleeting reforms that trickle down to individual classrooms (Gitlin & Margonis, 1995; Tyack & Tobin, 1994). Only recently have scholars and policy makers begun to recognize the ineffectiveness of overly generalized reforms that fail to take into account the myriad social issues that influence a school’s success (Anyon, 2005). Even when this complexity is recognized it becomes difficult to create change in what Stone and colleagues refer to as “high reverberation” policy subsystems:

High-reverberation subsystems are characterized by frequent reshuffling of mobilized stakeholders, multiple and strongly-felt competing value and belief systems, deeply held stakes by both educators (the professional providers of education) and parents (the consumers), and ambiguous boundaries, making the prospects for establishing a new equilibrium more problematic than is normally the case. Although educators, parents and local public officials are relatively constant actors in the decision arena, other actors – the media, courts, business, religious organizations, federal and state government – ebb and flow in their involvement (Stone et al., 2001, p. 49).

In such a volatile environment community organizing offers an alternative model with the flexibility necessary to respond to multiple stakeholders.

Community organizing has historically focused on housing, employment, and poverty related issues. It was not until the 1980s that education became a part of the organizing agenda (Zachary & Olatoye, 2001). While the issues addressed by education organizing are specific to each group’s needs and necessarily related to their environments, there are some topics that seem to be pressing concerns for numerous
organizations. Based on interviews with leaders in fifty-two organizing groups conducted by the National Center for Schools and Communities, the top four education priorities of CBOs were: afterschool and enrichment opportunities, issues of accountability and parent involvement, broadening the role of the school in the community, and equity issues (National Center for Schools and Communities, 2002b). Broader issues like vouchers and charter schools ranked last in the data. This is not surprising given the emphasis that organizers place on creating personal, easily identifiable, and winnable issues. As Shirley suggests, the focus on immediate and concrete concerns offers participants the opportunity to experience empowerment and build the necessary confidence for addressing future issues (Shirley, 1997).

Organizing groups that engage with education issues vary in size, from small neighborhood associations to organizations affiliated with large state, regional, and national networks. Groups may be geographically, politically, or congregationally based and can be structured to address multiple issues or education exclusively. It is a common misconception that education organizing efforts are the sole province of parents. While they do represent a critical constituency, the participation of other stakeholders is a widespread phenomena (National Center for Schools and Communities, 2002a). Membership may be all inclusive or focus on youth, adults, or specific minority groups (Mediratta et al., 2001).

Given the diversity of education organizing objectives and strategies, there have been several attempts to produce models of education organizing. The Cross City Campaign’s (CCC) report, the 2002 Indicators Project on Education Organizing,
attempted to document the impact of community organizing on school reform. The CCC recognized that the impact of community organizing could not be measured through traditional means and in response to this challenge developed eight indicator areas: leadership development, community power, social capital, public accountability, school/community connection, equity, high quality instruction and curriculum, and positive school climate. The indicator areas were created from the results of a telephone survey conducted with nineteen different community organizing groups. They were also informed by the researchers’ review of existing literature on school improvement and community development. The indicators were further refined based on interviews with organizers and other community stakeholders (Gold et al., 2002).

The indicator area of leadership development is primarily concerned with the acquisition of knowledge and skills for the community that will enable them to produce creative new agendas for school improvement. This increase in knowledge also influences the area of community power. The authors define community power as a community’s ability to influence policy for the benefit of the local schools and neighborhoods. An increase in this type of influence can often be attributed to growing networks of mutual obligation, referred to by the authors as social capital, which often emerge in the community as a result of organizing efforts. Public accountability is another important indicator and in educational organizing it is based on the assumption that public schools are the responsibility of the entire community. Education as a collective responsibility is also represented in the indicator school/community connections. This examines how communities can become resources for schools and
vice versa. Finally, the indicator areas of *equity, high quality instruction and curriculum*, and *positive school climate* all attempt to measure school improvement from multiple perspectives, addressing issues regarding access, safety, and quality. Implicit in each of these indicator areas is the importance of community engagement and the empowerment of people who have traditionally been marginalized.

After completing a careful analysis of five case study sites, the authors examined the relationships between the indicator areas and improved schooling, the results culminated in the development of a theory of change for education organizing. This theory is illustrated in Fig. 1.2, but its complexity demands some further explanation.

**Figure 1.2 Theory of Change: Relationship of Community Capacity Building and School Improvement (Gold et al., 2002)**

Community organizing is represented in the lower left box on the model. The indicator areas of *leadership development, social capital, and community power* all work interactively and support one another during the organizing process. As the community
grows in knowledge and forges new relationships it can build *public accountability* with public officials to support school improvement. Public accountability is a crucial element of the process, but it should not be solely understood as a mandate for public officials. Community organizing attempts to build collaborative public accountability that requires a commitment from all of the stakeholders including: teachers, students, parents, administrators, and other community members. This expanded conception of public accountability helps advance the areas of *equity* and *school/community connections* and in turn influences the *curriculum* and *school climate*.

The authors argue that school improvement is closely linked to the creation of a positive school climate and high quality curriculum and instruction. Together these two indicators are linked to increased student achievement in the research literature (Gold et al., 2002). Thus effective community organizing efforts increase civic capacity and lead to more public accountability, which in turn can improve schools. With improved schools we create a more capable citizenry which strengthens community capacity.

Case studies on community organizing provide concrete examples of the various elements of the CCC model. In Shirley’s exploration of Texas IAF’s work in education he found that social capital played an important role in the success of CBOs (Shirley, 1997, 2002). The most effective groups were those who were able to forge partnerships with schools or align themselves with education experts. Shirley cites a number of examples where CBO members encountered significant resistance for school employees,

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but efforts on the behalf of the members to understand the perspective of the educators went a long way towards building mutual trust. This is what Putnam refers to as “bridging” social capital where an individual or group builds a relationship outside of their immediate spheres of influence (Putnam, 2000, pp. 22-24). These extended ties help provide access to information that might not otherwise be available and serve as the foundation for future collaborations.

The work of Oakes and Rogers (2006) emphasizes the creation of knowledge for school improvement, but extends the CCC model by raising the possibility of the mutual benefits experienced by both community organizations and professional educators. Drawing on the work of John Dewey, they propose a model of participatory social inquiry and grassroots organizing. Dewey advocated for reform that included the active participation of those most affected by inequality, access to knowledge and its construction, awareness of politics and adoption of a critical stance, and the development of shared objectives for change (Oakes & Rogers, 2006). According to Oakes and Rogers, the knowledge of the community coupled with the research based knowledge of the academy can create “new meanings and understandings about core educational ideas” (2006, p. 18). These new understandings do not privilege one perspective over another and instead emphasize the important contributions derived from collaboration.

While more community groups are seeking to create and incorporate research into their advocacy activities (Renee, 2006), the partnerships that support such endeavors can be difficult to build and sustain. In Howard Baum’s case study about a university – community partnership between the University of Maryland and activists in the city of
Baltimore it became evident to Baum (who was a participant in the endeavor) that large scale success would require greater resources (both money and time) along with new policies that addressed other social issues facing low-income families and impacting the education of children (Baum, 2003).

Overall reports about the impact of education organizing have been positive. Results are measured by “victories” and organizing efforts have led to improved school facilities, increased funding, resource materials for both students and teachers, and improved communication with school staff (Mediratta et al., 2001). Though difficult to measure, it can also be argued that the increased levels of social capital in previously marginalized communities are positive outcomes. As education organizing efforts continue to address specific issues of curriculum and pedagogy it will be important to see if there is a correlation with improving student achievement (National Center for Schools and Communities, 2002b). This is an essential question in our current culture of accountability and standardized tests. As mentioned above, Shirley reported some preliminary findings from his study of twenty-two Texas IAF Alliance schools on the Texas Assessment of Academic Standards (TAAS), but the results were mixed with half of the schools scoring above the state average and half of them scoring below (1997).

More concrete evidence regarding the link between education organizing and student achievement was released in 2008. The Annenberg Institute for School Reform conducted a six year longitudinal study with seven CBOs from across the country serving as case studies. The researchers found that community organizing had a positive impact on both student outcomes and the life of the community more broadly. Both youth and
adult community members reported higher levels of civic engagement as a result of their participation in organizing activities (Mediratta et al., 2008).

An examination of the challenges that face education organizing efforts is an important, yet underdeveloped area of the literature. Among the challenges that organizations face is the negotiation of relationships with school personnel, obtaining and utilizing high quality information to assist reform efforts, and sustainability in the face of poor funding and transient membership. Addressing these challenges will be a necessary step as community organizers seek to increase their capacity to influence school reform issues.

Conflict was central to the Alinsky organizing model and so it is not a surprise that the work of education organizing has not been welcomed in all corners. Although not a major part of his work, Shirley chronicled the hesitancy of some teachers in one Texas community where the faculty felt especially threatened by emerging community alliances:

For the teachers, social capitalization between the school and the community represented a distraction from their specifically academic mission and represented what might be termed a ‘hidden cost’ of social capital… the teachers questioned the role of the school administration in promoting the collaboration with Valley Interfaith, which they felt intruded on their professional expertise and autonomy in elaborating educational strategies for their students. The community-based organization was construed by teachers to represent an additional demand that was more reflective of administrative directives than their own sense of professional empowerment (Shirley, 2002, p. 95).

The reluctance exhibited by some of the Texas teachers is not surprising in light of the research that has been conducted on teacher attitudes and school culture. In the example above the teachers’ sense of autonomy was challenged because the reforms were imposed
from outside forces. This was perceived as being particularly threatening in a culture where teachers have traditionally valued their autonomy in the classroom (Little, 1990; Sarason, 1971). This sort of isolation makes it very difficult for teachers to embrace reforms that require them to work in collaboration with others. Considering the autonomous nature of teachers’ work it comes as no surprise that they might be reluctant to work closely with community organizers (Lortie, 1975). Resistance among educators may be exacerbated by the utilization of adversarial tactics by some organizing groups (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

Even when collaboration is desired outside forces can undermine efforts. This is what happened to a number of the IAF Alliance Schools in Texas. With the passage of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in 2002, schools were called upon to rededicate themselves to standardized test preparations, or risk losing both funding and control. While CBOs in cities like Miami and Chicago were able to use the NCLB legislation as a tool to lobby for greater access to schools, the partnerships that were already formed in Texas suffered as teachers felt compelled to teach to the test (Shirley & Evans, 2007).

Gitlin and Margonis (1995) have proposed that not all teacher resistance to change is the result of mere stubbornness. Rather, they contend that education reformers should take teacher resistance seriously for the valuable critiques and insights that teachers may be able to offer. Teachers are usually the ones who are called upon to enact reforms at the classroom level and their hesitancy to participate in a particular reform may be rooted in practical experience. Perhaps it is in the best interest of both
community organizers and educators to reconsider their relationships and attempt to effect change through collaboration.

The knowledge that educators could contribute to organizing efforts might help to alleviate an additional challenge identified by the National Center for Schools and Communities (NCSC). According to the NCSC, many organizing groups struggled to access and interpret school performance data. Furthermore, the navigation of complex bureaucratic school systems was identified as a significant barrier by many groups (2002a). Many CBOs work in relative isolation and do not belong to larger networks that may be able to provide insight on these issues. Even those groups that are affiliated with national organizations frequently fail to communicate and take advantage of the experiences and knowledge of other organizers (Beam, 2003).

Finally, sustainability is an issue in many organizing campaigns. “People can drop out after a period of activism because they are ‘burned out,’ because they are unhappy with the organization, or because their own problem has been addressed… for all of these reasons it is necessary to recruit new members to replace those who are gone” (Mondros & Wilson, 1994, p. 39). This is a very real challenge in the world of education organizing where members may lose interest in education issues as their children “age out” of the education system. Financial considerations are another issue impacting the long term health of a CBO. Money for organizing efforts is primarily based on dues and the availability of grants. A reduction in these income streams effects training capacity and may weaken a group, sometimes to the point of collapse.
Despite these challenges, education organizing has become an intriguing alternative to traditional forms of parental involvement. In particular, it empowers traditionally marginalized populations to play a more active role in their children’s education. Early research suggests that education organizing has a positive impact on both student outcomes and the broader community, yet there is still much to learn about these organizations. Additional research on the inner workings of CBOs engaged with education issues may prove valuable to both community leaders and professional educators alike.
Chapter Two  
Theoretical Framework  
Conceptualizing Participation and Learning in Education Organizing

The previous chapter discussed how education organizing has emerged as a viable alternative to traditional forms of family involvement and provided an overview of the most recent research findings from this burgeoning field. Using this overview of education organizing as a foundation, I now turn to the theoretical framework that guides this study. It begins with a consideration of identity formation, inspired by research on social movements and drawing extensively from the fields of sociology and social psychology. I next incorporate a broader understanding of the place of CBOs, as learning organizations, in society at large. This micro to macro methodology is based on the assumption that fully understanding the experiences of individuals requires a holistic approach that considers both individual interactions and the social contexts in which they take place (Cooley, 1902; Goffman, 1959; Mead, 1934/1962). As Stryker notes, “A satisfactory theoretical framework must bridge social structure and person, must be able to move from the level of the person to that of large-scale social structure and back again…” There must exist a conceptual framework facilitating movement across the levels of organization and person (Stryker, 1980, p. 53). This is what I attempt to accomplish by bringing together the concepts of situated learning, social capital, and network learning theory. These three closely related, yet distinct concepts help to support an exploration of CBO member activity in the broader ecology of civic life. Collectively these theories provide a theoretical framework that guides data collection, analysis and interpretation of this research.
The theoretical assumptions of researchers from the field of social movements are a helpful starting point for examining CBOs and their participants. Tilly (2004) defined a social movement as a collective challenge to the status quo carried out by “ordinary people” and resulting in political victories such as the right to vote, school desegregation, or some other form of legal change. Central to this definition, and what separates social movements from other types of social conflict, is the emphasis on challenging and transforming the dominant culture, in particular its assumptions and organizational norms (Melucci, 1988; Touraine, 1985). Common examples of social movements include the Civil Rights, Women’s, and labor movements. Some scholars draw distinctions between traditional social movements and the movements that emerged in the mid-1960s (environmental movements, pacifist movements, etc.), citing a shift toward a postmodern context and a theoretical move away from Marxist roots (and the accompanying focus on the working class). Referred to as New Social Movements (NSMs), these efforts are defined by their existence in a postindustrial economy and their tendency to emphasize non-materialistic issues. However, critics contend that the differences between traditional social movements and NSMs are less significant than depicted (Pichardo, 1997). Regardless all social movements seek to make power visible and challenge normative social structures, a trait that is often shared with CBOs.

CBOs frequently play an important role in social movements by providing a motivated base for collective action. Yet, the work of a CBO differs from a social movement in that the concrete political objectives identified by members may or may not result in the transformation of broader social structures. For example, a neighborhood
organization may conduct an action to prevent zoning for a liquor store or some other unwanted business. There may be a broader social justice issue at stake if the same low-income neighborhoods are continually targeted to serve as the location for less desirable businesses, but if the group determines that the most effective means for stopping construction is to work through traditional government channels, they will utilize this strategy because the primary motivation remains the immediate needs of the organization members. The broader issue may be tabled and addressed at a later time or it may never become a priority issue for the group.

At the same time, there is an element of what Freire (1970) referred to as “conscientization” embedded in the leadership development of CBO members. This means that there is “consciousness raising” among participants as they learn about the structures that reinforce social inequities as it relates to an issue that they are facing (Polletta, 2002). It is this dual focus on both pragmatic strategy and broader social issues that provides members with the potential to generate transformative policy solutions. It also makes CBO members valuable contributors to social movements. Indeed, the emphasis on power, relationship building, leadership development and resource management are all commonalities that make research on social movements an appropriate model for an investigation of CBOs. Analysis of both CBOs and social movements requires a framework that rejects traditional structuralist models and acknowledges the role of human agency in organizational construction.

Conceptually, symbolic interactionism has served as one important theoretical base for thinking about identity issues in social movements. Like many sociological
concepts defining symbolic interactionism is a source of academic debate. Some general tenets of the approach include the idea that human interaction (with people or things) is based on ascribed meaning, these meanings are the result of everyday social interactions, and they exist in a constant state of interpretation, interaction, and reassessment (Blumer, 1969). Defining the self as a dynamic entity shaped through social interactions helps us to understand human action as a product of both individual agency and social context.

Goffman uses a “dramaturgical approach,” a theater based analogy, to illustrate this dynamic. According to Goffman the self is a product of the interaction between an actor and his or her audience. When an individual (or actor) is in the presence of others (the audience) he or she infuses activity with signs intended to confirm the role that they are trying to portray. This performance includes the elements of appearance and manner. Appearance helps indicate the performer’s social status, while manner creates an expectation of the type of performance the audience will observe. For example, a school principal might wear a business suit in order to assert their status as an authority figure and possess a rather brusque manner. We generally expect appearance and manner to be consistent, so if this same principal indulges a desire to wear Hawaiian shirts to work, the people who he or she encounters may be confused by any attempt to be a tough disciplinarian (Goffman, 1959).

The audience plays an equally important role in this dynamic as they can choose to either accept or reject the performance. It is the reaction of the audience that helps to shape both current and future performances. This dynamic is central to understanding the experiences of CBO participants because it provides insight into the process of role
development. As the research on social movements indicate, “The social self of a
movement adherent is made up of several social identities that are, in part, shaped as they
are acted out, but also that correspond to institutional and organizational roles that
proscribe normative behaviors” (Johnston, Larana, & Gusfield, 1994, p. 12). What
follows is a description of three interrelated concepts: situated learning theory, social
capital and network learning. All acknowledge the duality of agency and structure and
each highlights a different aspect of social relationships that have been described in
previous research on education organizing, thus providing a framework for examining the
experiences of individual members more closely.

**Situated Learning Theory**

Alinsky believed that the primary motivation for participation in community
organizations was self-interest, yet this perspective does not explain how successful
CBOs remain sustainable over prolonged periods of time. If Alinsky’s assertion was
correct than there would be no reason for members to maintain their involvement
following the acquisition of a specific skill or the accomplishment of an action.
Contemporary organizers recognize the importance of self-interest, but understand that
the social bonds forged in a CBO elicit a commitment to the general welfare of the group.
For this reason we begin with a consideration of situated learning theory which accounts
for the acquisition of skills, while simultaneously acknowledging the changes that take
place in the interpersonal relationships that support the learning process.

In particular two aspects of situated learning, the idea of “communities of
practice” and the relationship between practice and identity, are useful for this study.
Communities of practice include any type of social community where learning through participation takes place, an idea that is not limited to formal organizations. In fact, a formal organization often consists of several smaller communities of practice. A large interfaith CBO such as the IAF in Texas is a community of practice. Yet, each member congregation is also a community of practice and within these congregations even more communities may exist. It is the attention to these smaller groups that sets situated learning apart from more traditional organizational research.

Lave and Wenger draw their “communities of practice” examples from the world of work and include a variety of groups, such as tailors from Liberia, Yucatec Mayan midwives, and supermarket butchers in the United States. In each of these cases, the community reproduces itself through the development and participation of new members, a process that Lave and Wenger refer to as legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Legitimate peripheral participation is not simply ritualized hazing or some sort of training regimen, but an ongoing process that transforms both the individual and his or her community of practice. Lave and Wenger state that, “Viewing learning as legitimate peripheral participation means that learning is not merely a condition for membership, but is itself an evolving form of membership. We conceive of identities as long-term, living relations between persons and their place and participation in communities of practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 53). This perspective on the impact that social interaction has on both individual and group identities is consistent with what researchers of social movements have observed. Social movement scholars note that collective identity “is built through shared definitions of the situation by its members, and
it is a result of a process of negotiation and ‘laborious adjustment’ of different elements
relating to the ends and means of collective action and its relation to the environment. By
this process of interaction, negotiation, and conflict over the definition of the situation,
and the movement’s reference frame, members construct the collective ‘we’” (Johnston et
al., 1994, p. 15). Thus, this study seeks to incorporate a more holistic view of member
participation that accounts for both shifts in identity and the impact that participants have
on their communities of practice.

The interdependent relationship between practice and identity described by Lave
and Wenger challenges many traditional learning theories. Rather than serving as mere
knowledge recipients, members become active participants in the creation of knowledge.
Wenger details the implications of this approach for individuals, communities and
organizations:

- For **individuals**, it means that learning is an issue of engaging in and contributing
to the practices of their communities.

- For **communities**, it means that learning is an issue of refining their practice and
ensuring new generations of members.

- For **organizations**, it means that learning is an issue of sustaining the
interconnected communities of practice through which an organization knows
what is knows and thus becomes effective and valuable as an organization
(Wenger, 1998, pp. 7-8).

Social learning as described by Wenger is a complex practice that involves the interplay
between the components of meaning, practice, community, and identity. **Meaning** is the
way in which individuals or social groups make sense of the world and it evolves as
actors share lived experiences. **Practice** is a consideration of our everyday actions and
how they relate to various opportunities and social norms. The idea of **community** serves
as a way to define the social configurations that we encounter and participate in on a daily basis. It provides a framework for understanding the development of the social expectations that guide our actions. Finally, identity is a way of understanding who we are as individuals and how we are in an constant state of “becoming” as our values and perspectives are shaped through our experiences. The interconnectedness of these components is shown in Wenger’s diagram of social learning (Figure 2.1):

![Figure 2.1 Components of a social theory of learning: an initial inventory (Wenger, 1998, p. 5)](image)

For this study the implications of this definition of learning are substantial. Rather than focusing on member development as an indoctrination process that relies on knowledge transmission through training materials and exercises, this study will instead look closely at the social interactions that occur in CBOs. What experiences do participants bring into
the CBOs and how do these shape their interpretations of group activities? How might these experiences and interactions contribute to the development of a collective group identity? What are the subtle forms of learning that take place beyond the formal training sessions? By including the role of human agency, these and similar questions will provide a more nuanced examination of the development of the political tools, techniques, and organizational structures deemed necessary by CBOs for full participation in civil society.

We now turn to an exploration of how the political tools created by CBOs are put into action to generate power by considering the interactions that take place among multiple communities of practice. Previous studies on education organizing have utilized the concept of social capital to explore similar questions, and the theory will also prove useful here.

Social Capital

The concept of social capital garnered widespread attention in popular culture following the publication of Robert Putnam’s *Bowling Alone*. The title of the book is derived from Putnam’s observation that “more Americans are bowling than ever before, but league bowling has plummeted in the last ten to fifteen years. Between 1980 and 1993 the total number of bowlers in America increased by 10 percent, while league bowling decreased by more than 40 percent” (Putnam, 2000, p. 112). Putnam claims that the decline in league bowling is symptomatic of a wider trend of declining social participation, a significant change for a society where civic associations have historically played a major role in promoting active democratic participation (Skocpol, 2003;
Tocqueville, 1835/2003). The decline in participation is seen as problematic because it reduces the collective knowledge that drives democratic decision making and diminishes an individual’s sense of commitment to the broader community.

Social capital is the term that is used to describe the value of these social networks. Like other forms of capital (physical, financial, human), social capital is a resource that can be utilized to accomplish objectives, yet its value is also the most difficult to quantify. The tangible benefits derived from other forms of capital are relatively straightforward, but social capital is far more difficult to measure because it is based on human relationships. With at least two parties involved, the value of social capital can ebb and flow as the dynamics of the relationship change. Social capital is also susceptible to shifts in sociopolitical context. If a political party earns a majority voice in a government the value of the social capital derived from relationships with individuals in that party may increase, while social capital with members of opposition parties may be diminished. The value of social capital also depends on the type of issue that is being engaged. As Coleman explains, “A given form of social capital that is valuable in facilitating certain actions may be useless or even harmful for others” (Coleman, 1988, p. 98). Having strong networks with school officials may benefit a group that is seeking curricular change, but these relationships have little value if the group wants to address healthcare.
As a sociological concept, social capital has been widely used in fields like political science, education, and economics. Portes attributes its popularity among academics as being twofold. “First, the concept focuses attention on the positive consequences of sociability while putting aside its less attractive features. Second, it places those positive consequences in the framework of a broader discussion of capital and calls attention to how such nonmonetary forms can be important sources of power and influence, like the size of one’s stock holdings or bank account” (Portes, 2000, p. 44). The emphasis on social bonds and nonmonetary forms of power make social capital an appealing construct for examining the work of CBOs. Implicit in Portes’ statement is a critique that many scholars fail to include or entertain some of the less desirable aspects of social capital, a concern that will be discussed later in this chapter.

How exactly does social capital work? Lin identifies four elements of social capital that help produce desired outcomes: information, influence, social credentials, and reinforcement (Lin, 1999). First, social capital aids both the development and spread of information. Social relationships enable individuals to gather information that might otherwise reside outside of their immediate spheres of influence. Connections forged through national organizing groups like PICO might help a CBO discover a new campaign strategy or more current research on a specific issue. Putnam contends that this dynamic allows citizens to resolve collective problems more easily (Putnam, 2000).

Second, depending on the context, certain relationships can carry a degree of influence.

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that can be used to obtain resources or strengthen a position. CBOs that forge relationships with elected officials or other community organizations can leverage these relationships to advocate for change. Third, some relationships provide an implicit “credential” that helps legitimize their actions. A parent group with ties to a local university may have more success lobbying a school board because they are assumed to have a higher level of expertise based on their social relationships. Furthermore, the school board might be more inclined to work with the CBO if they feel that they might enjoy the benefits of a positive relationship with that same university in the future. Fourth, social relationships can help to affirm an individual’s identity by providing recognition and a degree of emotional support that comes from being a member of a social group. There is a level of mutual trust and a sense of reciprocity that is built up over time through shared experiences for both individuals and groups. Collectively these elements provide a unique type of power based on social relationships. It is the focus on the power of social relationships that makes social capital such a valuable concept for this study. Understanding the experiences of CBO participants will require an examination of the relationships that are formed both within the organizations and with external agencies or stakeholders.

Unfortunately, there are also drawbacks to social capital and many of these negative consequences are glossed over by researchers enamored with the romance of “people power.” This has been a challenge in the emerging field of research on education and youth organizing. Affection for the promise of education organizing, a heavy reliance on descriptive evaluations over empirically based research, and
excessively entangled partnerships between university researchers, foundations, schools, and community leaders have limited rigorous critical examination of the field.

Portes identifies four negative consequences of social capital: exclusion of outsiders, excessive claims on group members, restrictions on individual freedoms, and downward leveling of norms (Portes, 2000). High levels of social capital are the result of strong relational bonds, but these same bonds can be used to exclude others. In some cases part of an organization or society’s power is derived from its ability to limit access to those who adhere to desired cultural or social norms. There are countless examples of social exclusion based on race, class, gender, religion, and sexuality. Expectations of reciprocity inherent in social capital can also become burdensome for individual members. Less productive members may become “free-riders” leeching off of the efforts of other group members and limiting overall productivity and/or effectiveness. In some close knit communities the bonds can be so strong that the pressure to conform to social norms becomes overwhelming, resulting in diminished personal freedom and privacy. Putnam illustrates this point with the example of a community deciding to ban certain books from the public library (Putnam, 2000). Finally, Portes cites several studies that found evidence of a downward leveling of norms in communities where solidarity was based on shared experiences of adversity with mainstream society. Community members who seek to participate in or benefit from mainstream society may be ostracized for “selling out.” In the education literature John Ogbu’s research has identified similar situations among some minority groups, a phenomenon that he refers to as the “burden of acting white” (Ogbu, 1995).
Putnam acknowledges that scholars and social observers need to be wary of overgeneralizing the benefits of social capital or depicting it as a panacea for social ills. Social capital like any other source of capital is basically a resource used to achieve ends. The social value of these ends is subject to interpretation. However, Putnam also contends that despite the potential abuses of social capital, the core elements of trust and reciprocity increase participation in democratic problem solving. He also asserts that in most cases the correlation between high levels of social capital and tolerance are relatively high. The data from *Bowling Alone* reveals that states with high levels of social capital also exhibited high levels of tolerance for civil liberties and more equitable income distributions (Putnam, 2000, pp. 350-363). Still the concerns raised by Portes are important and for that reason this study will use network theory to closely examine how social capital is produced through the internal and external social relationships of CBOs.

**Network Theory**

Network theory calls for a close examination of the ties that link members of groups, corporations, or organizations. Ties can be based on connections like: kinship (family), affiliation (belonging to the same club), geography (neighborhood), individual evaluation (friendship), or resource procurement (business). Network theory seeks to

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5 The study of social networks has a long history in the social sciences and organizational management fields. Perhaps the most effective research method for exploring networks is social network analysis (SNA). While this study borrows many of the terms and concepts from SNA, it does not employ an SNA methodology. The focus on the experiences of individual members separate from their network interactions required a more qualitative approach. For more information about SNA see Wasserman, S., & Faust, K. (Eds.). (1994). *Social network analysis: Methods and applications*. Cambridge: UK Cambridge University Press or Freeman, L.C. (2004). *The development of social network analysis: A study in the sociology of science*. Vancouver: BC, Empirical Press.
identify patterns in these ties to understand how people or organizations behave based on the opportunities and constraints that a network provides (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). It can be applied to both individuals and groups which makes it particularly valuable for this study. The inclusion of networking theory is also important as we move toward what Castells refers to as a “network society.” He writes, “communication networks transcend boundaries, the network society is global, it is based on global networks” (Castells & Cardoso, 2006, p. 4). While many CBOs remain geographically limited and socially homogeneous, there are increasing examples of local campaigns diversifying and scaling up to the state, national, or even global level. The proliferation of technology has aided this process in justice movements (Renee, 2006) and the rise of popular networking sites like Myspace, LinkedIn, and Facebook have created a foundation for future on-line collaborations.

Network analysis focuses on properties like density, multiplexity, strength and centrality. Density refers to the degree of connectedness in a network, in other words, the number of active relationships between network members in proportion to the number of potential ties that could be formed. In a high density network each network member is
independently connected with the other members (Fig 2.2).

![Figure 2.2 Models of High and Low Density Networks](image)

**Figure 2.2 Models of High and Low Density Networks**

High density networks have the potential to share more information because they do not require members to serve as intermediaries, but they can also become bogged down with information or slowed by the time required for communication. A low density network has fewer direct connections, but may be more efficient as members are not overwhelmed with excessive amounts of information.

*Multiplexity* refers to the basis of the social relationships in a network. In a multiplex network members are simultaneously linked through a number of different factors (family, geography, employment) creating more cohesion (Boissevain, 1974; Downes, 1998, pp. 118-119), but at the same time increasing the pressure for conformity to social norms. In contrast, *uniplex* relationships have only one relational tie between members making it more difficult to build trust over time or maintain commitments. This is similar to the distinction that Putnam draws between bonding and bridging forms of social capital. Groups with strong bonding social capital (homogeneous) are close knit.
and may have high levels or trust, but without bridging (heterogeneous) social capital, their power to influence broader society will be limited (Putnam, 2000).

The multi/uniplex characteristic is closely related to considerations of the strength of ties. The duration of a relationship and the frequency of transactions between members are properties that help determine tie strength. Relationships with a close family member or colleague frequently constitute a strong tie, while weaker ties might be formed with acquaintances. Multiplex/uniplex and strong/weak designations do not necessarily correlate with network value or efficiency. In fact, in many cases uniplex or weaker ties prove more valuable because they provide access to information that is not readily available through an individual or organizations’ immediate relationships (Granovetter, 1973). Often informal networks are more capable of rapidly adapting to new challenges because they are less likely to become mired in formal bureaucratic processes.

Finally, a centralized network consists or a single or limited number of actors or organizations acting as hubs for connections with other members. In a decentralized network there is little variation in the number or links that each member posses (see Fig. 2.3). Centralized networks have the potential to spread information in a more uniform manner, but a breakdown at the hub can incapacitate the entire network. A decentralized network may have more autonomy and flexibility in facing new challenges, but network
standardization becomes more difficult to achieve.

These relational characteristics are important for understanding how information is transmitted in networks, but they should not be interpreted as being either “good” or “bad.” The success of a network is contingent on many factors, including levels of expertise, selected goals and context. For example, a CBO with high levels of density and multiplexity may be able to withstand a significant campaign setback because of their social cohesion and commitment to one another, while a loosely coupled CBO might lose the motivation to continue on and lose membership. At the same time, a network with numerous weak ties might be more capable of quickly meeting a wide variety of challenges because of their flexibility, while the dense and multiplex CBO may have limited access to resources outside of their immediate network. Thus, for this study it
will be important to examine both the way the network is structured and the context in which it attempts to achieve its goals.

Once the types of relationships in a network are established, it is important to consider some of the social phenomena that may occur. Several useful concepts in networking theory have emerged such as network holes and bowties that further illuminate the functioning of a network. A network hole is an area where one would expect to find a relationship, but none exists. In a school network we would expect to see a relationship between the principal and the faculty. If no such relationship exists it will be important to ask “why” and consider the impact that this gap has on the network. Bowties are situations where a number of individuals are relying on a single network member and not one another. Recognition of this trend may help to explain why a network seems unresponsive to certain types of issues. By using network theory we can better understand both the internal workings of a CBO and their place in the broader civic ecology of a city.

Together the concepts of situated learning, social capital, and network theory provide a dynamic conceptual framework for understanding the experiences of CBO members. Each concept helps support our understanding of the other. Just as network theory provides a means for the closer examination of the development of social capital, situated learning can help provide insight for understanding how CBO members learn the art of networking. Finally, in an attempt to contextualize these concepts and recognize the factors that influence the social interactions they examine, I turn to the field of
developmental psychology and draw insights from Urie Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory.

**Ecological Systems Theory**

In the field of biology the term ecology refers to the study of the relationship and interactions between organisms and their environments. With the publication of *The Ecology of Human Development* in 1979 Bronfenbrenner applied this concept to child development and broke down the barriers that existed between many fields in the social sciences. While researchers would continue to focus on specific units of analysis, they now had a way of contextualizing these units and examining their relationships to the broader environment. At the time it was a radical new way of understanding the development of humans.

To help explain his theory Bronfenbrenner used a visual representation to depict the interaction between various systems. The model consists of a series of nested concentric circles, each representing one of four different social systems. At the center of the model resides the child, whose immediate interactions with friends, family, neighbors and schools constitute the *microsystem*. The next level, referred to as the *mesosystem*, represents the interactions that occur between the various elements of the microsystem. For example, the school and community exert influence on one another and in turn impact the development of the individual child. The next level is the *exosystem*, which consist of organizations that have a more indirect influence on the child, achieved through interactions with the various elements of the microsystem. Thus, local policy makers (who the child probably does not come into direct contact with) may impact a
child’s life by voting to fund a new neighborhood playground. The broadest level of influence, the *macrosystem*, refers to the cultural context that permeates the other systems, for example a nation’s political orientation (democracy, oligarchy, monarchy, etc.) will have repercussions for all of the other elements in the system. Later, Bronfenbrenner would add the *chronosystem* to represent transitions in the environment over time.

While EST was initially used to study child development, numerous scholars have drawn from the theory to focus on other elements of society. This includes the study of social movements. Bronfenbrenner’s model is helpful in this field because it includes a focus on the area between policy development (macrolevel) and implementation (microlevel) (Staggenborg, 2002). The daily work of a CBO: researching, networking, lobbying, and agitating exists in the mesosystem of a civic ecology. Clarence Stone and colleagues recognize the importance of the work at this mesolevel in their description of civic capacity:

Civic capacity, as we conceive it, shares some elements with the conception of social capital that has recently become so prominent through the work of Robert Putnam and others. In Putnam's treatment, social capital comes about as people learn to work with one another, practice reciprocity, and develop trust. Civic capacity, like social capital, can depend upon informal relationships and shared understanding over time. But civic capacity also involves a more public and collective mediation among disparate interests and an integral relationship to formal institutions of governance. These elements make civic capacity a potentially more powerful force, but they also make it more problematic to generate and sustain (Stone et al., 2001, p. 27)

For this study I have adapted Bronfenbrenner’s model to focus on the work of CBOs as they attempt to build the civic capacity that is required to participate in education policy
dialogues (see Fig. 2.5). The two part model begins with the recognition that the CBO is shaped by the contributions of its individual members (Fig. 2.4).

![Fig. 2.4 Model of Individual Member’s Relationship to Mesosystem]

At the center of the model is an individual member. His or her understanding of self is the combination of a number of different roles or identities (examples in the diagram include parent, CBO member, professional, and church member). All of these identities are a part of the individual and shaped by past experiences and social interactions taking place within the microsystem. These identities also interact with one another; so that one’s professional identity may influence their perception of what it means to be a CBO member. Surrounding the individual are various communities of practice of which the individual may or may not have direct interaction. As independent entities these social
organizations (and others not listed) interact with one another at the mesolevel and impact the life of the individual.

In this study, the participants at the center of the model are also members of a CBO that is addressing education issues in the community. Through interacting with multiple members of the CBOs I will be able to gather information about their collective identity as an organization and the network activities that they take part in within the broader ecology of the mesosystem. While using the CBO as the primary unit of analysis, it is essential to start with the individual members since it is their participation that makes up the CBO “community of practice”.

The second part of the model (Figure 2.5) focuses on the intergroup relationships in the mesosystem, so that we can understand the impact of the broader local ecology on the day to day activities of a CBO. It is important to remember the place of the organizations in the model is dependent upon the observer’s point of view. For example, from an individual school’s perspective the administrative offices exist within the mesosystem since there is direct contact between the two. However, from a church’s perspective the administrative offices of the school system might reside in the exosystem since their interactions are most likely indirect.
Fig. 2.5 Locating CBOs in Ecological Systems Theory
This model will help guide the study by serving as a tool for organizing the networking that takes place as CBOs attempt to build the capital that is necessary to achieve their goals.

**Summary of Theoretical Framework**

In seeking to understand the experiences of individuals participating in education organizing this study utilizes concepts from situated learning, social capital, and network theory. Each of these theories is understood to be operating in a broader civic ecology where individual actors both shape and are shaped by the environment. Based on the contributions of these theories and prior studies of education organizing, the diagrams in figures 2.4 and 2.5 represent a depiction of CBO member activity that will help guide this research. During the process of data collection, organization, and analysis I will seek to be mindful of the elements of the model and how they interact. In the next chapter, I will go into significant detail regarding the research design and methods that I employed to investigate the guiding questions of this study.
The purpose of this study is to gain insight on the experiences of families who participate in CBOs and examine how they develop the capacity to work on education issues. In particular, what are their motivations for participation? How do members learn to work on education issues? What do they value or find challenging about these experiences? Finally, what personal and material benefits do they derive? Previous case studies have provided a foundation for investigating these questions and this study seeks to build on this work by examining the experiences of participants across the multiple levels. As a result, a qualitative approach was deemed most appropriate for this study allowing the researcher to explore not only the “what” of education organizing, but also the “how” and “why.”

In the first chapter various models of community organizing were discussed including advocacy, power based, faith based, and civic based models. To strengthen our understanding of the phenomenon of education organizing while simultaneously acknowledging the unique variations of CBO models, an ethnographic multi-case study approach was used. The use of multiple case studies is intended to provide greater insight on the research questions by analyzing a broad sample of experiences across organizational models. According to some critics a drawback of this approach (and qualitative research in general) is that the findings will not be generalizable (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Myers, 2000). However, Erickson argues that concrete universals can be found by “studying a specific case in great detail and then comparing it with other cases in equally great detail” (Erickson, 1986, p. 130). The use of multiple case studies will help identify
both emerging general trends and characteristics that are unique to individual groups. Still, the limitations of qualitative research have been considered in relationship to any general claims and findings still need to be contextualized as they apply to the field of education organizing at large. The emphasis for this study is placed on providing thick description and systematic data analysis to generate meaningful inferences about each case and the phenomenon of education organizing more broadly.

**Role of the Researcher**

In this study the role of the researcher can best be described as one of “peripheral membership” (Adler & Adler, 1994, p. 380). The peripheral membership role is one in which the observer interacts closely enough with the participants to gain an insider’s identity, but without becoming an actual member of the core group. When observing organizing activities I attempted to limit any potential distraction that my presence might cause. Commonly referred to as “reactivity,” the presence of a researcher may cause participants to act differently (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). This could either have a negative impact on the work of the participants or taint the observational data. In an effort to be less obtrusive some social scientists have attempted to conduct covert observations, but for most of the observations in this study such a level of anonymity was not possible. Moreover, this “stealth” approach raises serious ethical questions.

In seeking to reconcile this dilemma I let the community and context of each observation influence my level of interaction. During meetings with public officials or at large events, my participation was very limited. Given the importance that is placed on member participation by CBOs, it was important that I too follow the “Iron Rule” of
organizing and refrain from imposing my voice at these public functions. However, at more informal gatherings or at large rallies I often engaged in conversation with attendees. Minor contributions were made when my participation was requested (for example in small group activities), but comments were kept brief and I tried to redirect the discussion back to the community.

Prior to the start of this study I had assumed that because community organizing emphasizes the development of power by people, my opinions would rarely be solicited. However, on some occasions I was viewed as a resource because it was assumed that I had some level of expertise on educational issues. As I struggled to navigate this dynamic with each group, I came to realize two things. First, when my opinion was solicited I was simply one resource among many for the CBOs. The contributions that I made were not valued over and above the contributions of others because the gathering of varied opinions and voices was a part of the research and planning process. Second, frequently the collective knowledge of the group far surpassed my own knowledge about an issue. In some cases members had been collecting research on issues for years and their awareness of the local social and political context made their information much more valuable than anything that I was able to contribute.

The Case Studies

The unit of analysis for this study is the CBO, but it is approached from both the micro (individual) and macro (ecological) level. The theoretical framework in the previous chapter outlined how understanding the functioning of a community of practice requires an examination of the interactions between individual members. The decision to
focus on either the individual or the group as the sole unit of analysis could lead to gaps in understanding (Roche, 1999). For example, a focus on the individual might make it challenging to examine the broader impact of their actions and a focus on the group makes internal dynamics difficult to understand. By taking a more holistic approach I was able to collect data that provides information about both the experiences of individual members and their community of practices more generally.

Case study selection was based on representation and access. Each of the three cases represents a model of grassroots organizing and two of the three cases represent typical participant populations (Schofield, 1990). The three case study sites are: United Interfaith Action (New Bedford, MA), Jamaica Plain Parent Organizing Group (Boston, MA), and Stand for Children (Lexington, MA). All three case sites are located in the state of Massachusetts, a decision in part based on convenience, but one that also facilitated cross-case analysis, with each CBO operating under some shared governmental circumstances. For example, the school districts in each site all had to address the same standardized tests (MCAS) and state curricular frameworks. They were also governed by the same set of laws and impacted by the same policies, such as the state funding formula. At the same time the three communities differ in size, demographics, history, and their economic situations. The relationships between the state and community had substantial differences. The following is a brief description of the case study sites. Each will be discussed in much greater detail in their respective chapters.

*United Interfaith Action*
United Interfaith Action is a faith based organization, affiliated with the national organization People Improving Communities through Organizing (PICO). Based in the southeastern Massachusetts cities of New Bedford and Fall River, UIA consists of twenty religious institutions. The membership of UIA is ethnically diverse and the majority of the members come from working class backgrounds. Since 1996 UIA has been agitating in New Bedford around issues like community safety, immigration, economic development, and after-school programming for youth. As a faith based organization UIA represents the model of community organizing that originally addressed education issues (see Shirley, 1997, 2002 or Warren, 2001). However, UIA is new to the field of education organizing and during the data collection period its members were still in the process of learning how to navigate local school politics.

_Jamaica Plain Parent Organizing Project (JP-POP)_

The Jamaica Plain Parent Organizing Project is part of City Life/Vida Urbana (CLVU), a neighborhood organization founded in 1973 with a primary emphasis on tenant rights and housing issues. The membership of JP-POP primarily consists of low-income, Spanish speaking parents in the Jamaica Plain neighborhood of Boston. The group’s affiliation with the multi-issue CLVU and connections with the city-wide Boston Parent Organizing Network (BPON) expand internal capacity and provide additional network resources to assist in the pursuit of organizational goals. Lucia Santana, a CLVU staff member, currently serves as lead organizer for JP-POP. Since 2002, JP-POP has organized actions in support of bilingual education, the creation of parent coordinator positions, special education policy, and school budget increases. In a 2005 campaign JP-
POP worked closely with the fledgling teen organization JP Bilingual Students United (JP-BSU) in support of educational rights for non-English speaking students. As a research site, JP-POP represents a classic neighborhood organizing group that seeks to rally and organize community members to address local education issues.

*Stand for Children, Lexington, Massachusetts*

The third organization is best described as a grassroots advocacy group and was selected because its membership represents a class of individuals (predominantly white, middle to upper-middle class) who are just starting to utilize community organizing tactics (Abramson, 1992). Stand for Children is a national organization with an official presence in four states (Massachusetts, Oregon, Washington, and Tennessee), which utilizes grassroots strategies to lobby on the behalf of children. This study focuses on the Lexington chapter of Stand for Children, the first of its kind in Massachusetts with a membership of close to 200. Despite being a relative newcomer on the local scene, the chapter already boasts a number of local victories, including successful override campaigns in 2004 and 2007, and the district wide adoption of the Environmental Protection Agency’s “Tools for Schools” maintenance program to ensure indoor air quality. While middle class populations have been an important part of grassroots peace and environmental movements (Rose, 2000), membership in education reform has been limited. This phenomenon is perhaps explained by high levels of involvement in traditional family engagement activities and general satisfaction with high performing schools in affluent neighborhoods. However, middle class interest in grassroots
strategies is starting to grow as families seek more effective models for impacting education.

Participants

Participants were identified as I developed relationships with members of each organization. Because the parental involvement literature is used to help frame this study participants were sought who either had children in the public schools or children who were recent graduates. Four formal interviews were held (one in Lexington and three in New Bedford) with members who did not have children. These were conducted to obtain additional background information about the organizations or specific actions. The purposive sampling techniques described by Stake were utilized to help select the participants at each research site:

The researcher discusses these characteristics (attributes of interest) with informants, gets recommendations, visits several homes, and gets attribute data. The choices are made, assuring variety, but not necessarily representativeness, without strong argument for typicality, again weighted by considerations of access and even by hospitality, for the time is short and perhaps too little can be learned from inhospitable participants (Stake, 2002, pp., p. 447)

In each case study the community organizer played a significant role in providing access to the organization’s activities and helping set up individual interviews. However, the participants themselves were also helpful resources, contributing suggestions for people to interview and creating a snowball sample of organization members.

Data Collection

Data collection took place over a period of two years (May 2006 to May 2008) with the frequency of data collection and researcher immersion being highly dependent
upon the activities and direct actions planned by each individual organizing group. While all of the CBOs met with some regularity they were also reactive to important community issues and during these times there were more meetings and observations. Data collection included interviews, observation of various organizing activities, and gathering documentation.

*Interviews*

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with organizing leaders and members. Organizing leaders include both professional organizers and members holding internal leadership positions. Interviews with the organizers were focused on obtaining background information about the history of each specific organization. The professional organizers provided insight regarding the overarching mission and the philosophy behind the organizing groups, while the membership provided information about recruitment, local context, and specific neighborhood challenges. The majority of the interviews were conducted with CBO members and focused on their experiences and perceptions as they related to the guiding research questions. Table 3.1 provides details regarding the number of interviews that were completed with each organization, as well as estimates of the total number of members and the number of individuals that each group was capable of turning out for an action.
Table 3.1: Interviews and Estimated Number of Total Members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Interviews with Organizers</th>
<th>Interviews with CBO Members</th>
<th>Total # of Core Members</th>
<th>Estimated # of Total Members</th>
<th>Estimated Turnout Potential for Large Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United Interfaith Action</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12-15</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JP-POP</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10-12</td>
<td>50-60</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stand for Children</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10-12</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In CBOs there are a number of different roles and levels of involvement for members. IAF/Austin Interfaith uses three different categories to describe their leadership roles: primary, secondary, and tertiary. The primary leaders help to guide strategy and are generally well versed in the organizational mission and trainings. The secondary leaders are the face of the campaign. They are often the members who meet with public officials and are responsible for different elements of a campaign. Tertiary members are those individuals who are responsible for generating turnout and actively participating in rallies or public functions. These leadership “positions” are shared by organization members who frequently switch roles (Shirley, 1997; Simon, Gold, & Brown, 2002, p. 13). Although the terminology may be different, the majority of CBOs have similar internal roles, including the organizations in this study.

In most CBOs there is a core group of individuals responsible for the day-to-day operations of the organization. Other members are active on a regular basis, but may not hold leadership positions except on specific occasions. Finally some people only turn out to support major actions. The participants in this study come from the first two categories: CBO leaders and active members. This is an important point because it
means that the findings from the interviews should not be generalized as representative of all of the people who attend an organizing event.

Individual interviews generally lasted from 45 minutes to one hour. An interview protocol was used (see Appendix A), that was open ended and conversations flowed naturally. Additional informal conversations were held with roughly ten to twelve members from each of the groups during actions. Notes on these conversations were recorded in the field notes and coded with the observational data. It should also be noted that some of the interviews with the JP-POP organization were conducted in Spanish. While I have some conversational skills in Spanish, formal interviews were conducted with the assistance of a mutually agreed upon translator. The translator was referred to me by the JP-POP community and she was familiar with many of the participants. An agreement of confidentiality was obtained in order to ensure the anonymity of the participants.

Observations

Throughout the course of the study a substantial amount of time was spent conducting observations of various organizing activities. In total over 30 observations were conducted and spanned in scope from one-on-one meetings to rallies with over one thousand attendees (see Appendices B, C, and D). The observations focused on personal interactions, group dynamics, and the general enactment of organizing activities. Field notes were recorded during every observation and were often linked with specific documents. For example, observations of a training session might include how
participants engaged with a training manual, which would also become a part of the data set under documentation.

A challenge that emerged during the observation process was trying to be mindful as to how my analysis of initial CBO events might influence what I recorded in subsequent events and how I interpreted various interactions. Since I was working with three separate groups it was difficult to compartmentalize what I observed in one group and not transfer my observations to the others. Ultimately I continued my analysis by writing reflections and recording new ideas, but I refrained from coding the data until all of the observations were complete. While there was still some overlapping influence, this approach helped me to focus on each individual observation.

_Documents_

Documents related to the CBOs were also an important source of data. These included both internal artifacts (used among organization members) and materials that were meant for public consumption. Among the internal items were logistical and training materials (e.g. meeting agendas, manuals, minutes of meetings, e-mails, listserves, working outlines of upcoming events, and testimonial scripts). These items were often created by CBO members and simultaneously provided insights on both process and outcomes. Public materials included websites, brochures, and other organizational literature. These materials were important because they represented both the end products of group decision making and the public face of the organization. Additional sources of documentation were generated outside of the CBOs. These
included newspaper clippings, training materials from outside organizations, and video of events or actions.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was an iterative process that began during data collection and was continued through the completion of this study. Merriam describes this process as, “making sense out of data… consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read—it is the process of making meaning” (Merriam, 1998, p. 178). Ideas about possible categories and themes were identified and included in field notes and memos. Categories describe specific segments of the data and themes help conceptualize more subtle observations that emerge “from deep familiarity with the data” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 282). Based on these ideas additional literature was reviewed, shaping both future data collection and analysis.

After the interviews were transcribed, data from the cases was examined in two distinct stages. In the first stage each case was addressed separately. Interviews, observation notes, and documentation were compiled and underwent multiple rounds of coding. The data was triangulated and coded to identify dominant themes and construct a “holistic understanding” of each case (Mathison, 1988). The coding process and identification of themes involved synthesizing the data into manageable elements. Initial rounds of analysis resulted in over thirty codes, but these were gradually narrowed down as categories collapsed into one another. It is important to note that while the case studies were completed separately, the analysis of each successive case was influenced
by previous analytical activities. The qualitative software program NVivo was used to help manage the data and organize the coding process.

The second stage involved cross-case analysis. I identified processes, events, and experiences that occurred across the cases and sought to understand some of the subtle differences between the organizations based on their unique contexts. Equally important was the identification of the themes or categories that were not shared by all three cases. These differences were also considered in light of contextual differences. As Miles and Huberman note, “cross case analysis is tricky. Simply summarizing superficially across some themes or main variables by itself tells us little. We have to look carefully at the complex configuration of processes within each case, understand the local dynamics, before we can begin to see patterning of variables that that transcend particular cases” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 205).

Data analysis in both stages included a blend of emic (insider) and etic (outsider) perspectives. When possible I tried to use the language of the participants to describe their activity. If this was not an option I would attempt to solicit feedback from organization members. For example, after observing the role veteran CBO members play in assisting new members I began to explore the theme of mentoring. This term was not used by the participants, so I was uncertain if this was an accurate description. I brought my ideas to the participants who confirmed my trepidation about the use of the word. They acknowledged the value of veteran member experience, but felt that “modeling” was a better term because it did not carry the same connotations of a power imbalance. On other occasions I was more confident in the use of terminology that was not used by
the participants. In particular, I frequently used terms from the literature on leadership and learning. On these occasions I attempted to be explicit about the deductive reasoning that informed the use of these terms and participants still had indirect input through the process of general member checking.

In presenting the findings the focus was primarily on the experiences or ideas that were shared by the participants. Included were themes or codes that were identified by more than half of the participants and which were supported by data derived from observations and/or documents. Important contrasts in perceptions among the group and outlier data that offered important insights are also included, but the rationale for their inclusion is stated in the text.

Validity and Reliability

Establishing the validity and reliability of data collection and analysis procedures is an important element of scientific inquiry. It provides readers and practitioners with the confidence that a study has been rigorously conducted and that the conclusions are accurate (Merriam, 1998). In qualitative research one must provide readers with sufficient detail about the study and how conclusions were reached. In essence a researcher must be clear about the assumptions and criteria that guided decision making throughout the research process (Firestone, 1987). The triangulation of the data and the informal member checks already discussed help enhance this study’s internal validity. In addition, more formal member checking, the cross-case methodology, and peer consultation have also played an important role in this research.
In the final stages of the research, drafts of the case studies were sent to participants from each CBO. While questions about the effectiveness of “member checking” have been raised, especially with regard to the complexity of relationships between researchers and participants, this approach can provide further insight into areas of value and increase validity. Just as interviews and observations are situated in a specific context and influenced by a number of environmental factors, so too are formal presentations of research findings. Hence any feedback must be understood as the subjective product of actively engaged practitioners. As Emerson and Pollner note:

> Insistence that the account is a non-evaluative or objective description, and despite requests to respond to it in a disinterested or objective manner, members may find it difficult, if not perverse, to do so. In a variety of ways, members can envision how supposedly “neutral” accounts may be put to uses with profound practical and organizational consequences. (Emerson & Pollner, 1988, pp., p. 193)

Despite these complications, if the dialogue is constructed in a manner that does not simply solicit some fictitious imprimatur of the findings, but rather creates further conversation about generative themes, member checking can lead to greater understanding, increased validity (Emerson & Pollner, 1988), and increased knowledge for both researchers and participants (Lather, 1986; Savage, 1988).

The multiple case studies allow the exploration of the research questions across some of the structural and philosophical variations that exist between “communities of practice” in the field of education organizing. As noted, findings are first presented in individual case studies. This provides the opportunity for more “thick description” and helped the researcher avoid glossing over the uniqueness and complexities of each case (Stake, 2002, pp., p. 444). Next, cross-case analysis helped enhance the validity of the
findings by including consideration of some of the common themes that arise in the cases. “By looking at a range of similar and contrasting cases, we can understand a single-case finding, grounding it by specifying how and where and, if possible, why it carries on as it does. We can strengthen the precision, the validity, and the stability of findings” (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Finally, preliminary findings were shared with both scholars and organizers familiar with the field, but not directly associated with the study. The insights of more experienced individuals both confirmed and challenged my observations and analysis.

**Researcher Bias and Ethical Issues for Consideration**

In any research project ethical issues must be considered throughout the process of data collection, analysis, and the presentation of findings. Among the dilemmas that must be attended to in this study are the power dynamics in the researcher/participant relationship, maintenance of confidentiality for participants in a public organization, and the dissemination of findings. This section will detail the measures that will be taken to ensure the privacy and protection of the participants from harm.

Consideration of differences in race, class, gender, and/or ethnicity between a researcher and participants is important in qualitative research. In what is essentially a social relationship, a researcher must be cognizant of the power dynamics that are at play. As a white male researcher (and as a general rule for any researcher) it is imperative to continuously reflect on one’s actions to ensure that the participants are given voice, while at the same time maintaining an inquisitive and critical stance (Lubienski, 2003). One potential concern in the case study genre is that the presentation of the findings will be
overgeneralized and attributed to a broader class of individual based on race or ethnicity. The researcher hopes to avoid such occurrences by emphasizing “situated learning” as part of the conceptual framework for data analysis. This approach is consistent with the cultural-historical theory which, “leads (one) to expect regularities in the ways cultural communities organize their lives as well as variations in the ways individual members of groups participate and conceptualize the means and ends of their communities’ activities” (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003, pp., p. 12). The inclusion of the “member checking” panel is another element of this study that increased validity and contributed to the creation of trustworthiness and credibility with participants (Seidman, 1991).

The work of community organizers takes place in the public sphere and there is little desire for anonymity. The real names of the organizations and members are used in every study cited in the review of the literature for this proposal. Increasingly, organizations are even taking on the role of co-investigators and members are working with researchers to identify and investigate local issues (Oakes & Rogers, 2006). This is particularly beneficial since the work of university based researchers and organizers can offer insight into both CBO praxis and create political capital that can be used when applying for funding from philanthropic organizations. The organizations that are participating in this study have agreed to be identified and this raised several issues that needed to be addressed.

While the majority of the studies in the literature review focused almost exclusively on the work of community organizing, this study examines both the internal and external functioning of the group. Individual members may be named when the
context for the organizing activities, yet it is important to note that for the findings of this study, the focus was on identifying general trends in the experiences of the participants. Indeed, participants were reassured that what proves significant in such qualitative research is not what one individual says or does; rather, the power of such research resides in being able to draw on prominent trends. No individual participant was directly linked to a quote without his or her permission. If someone said something controversial, risky, or potentially inflammatory, such a remark was not part of the writing. For example, if for some reason a participant did not care for the lead organizer that was of little interest unless a number of others shared this point of view. In such a situation, it was much easier to maintain the confidentiality of the source of any particular comment or idea simply by the fact that this point of view was shared by a numerous individuals.

Finally, dissemination of the findings is an essential part of the research endeavor. In naming the organizations it is possible that a group might have concerns that they have been depicted in a negative light and worry about the consequences of having this information shared publicly. The entire project was set up so that these groups had the opportunity to provide feedback and to ensure that their perspective was represented. The participants could request the removal of any part of the research that they considered inaccurate, offensive, or potentially threatening.

In any research endeavor the benefits must outweigh the risks involved. A number of steps were taken to protect the participants in this study. The findings from these case studies will help inform not only the practices of grassroots efforts, but also
offer valuable information to various school personnel, administrators, researchers and teacher educators.
On a bitterly cold New England winter night, the streets surrounding Our Lady of the Assumption (OLOA) parish in New Bedford are silent with the exception of the occasional passing car. One of the few signs of life is the soft glow of light being emitted from the windows of the parish center. Inside, twelve members of United Interfaith Action are sharing a reflection on a passage from the book of Isaiah. The bright yellow walls of the center are covered with the artwork of children from the parish religious education program, the topics a blend of faith and family. One bulletin board matches baptismal photos with more current pictures of parish youth. Several of the adults seated around the table share surnames with the young artists and a display of family trees confirms the connections. The members take turns reading verses and begin a discussion of the passage. One woman contributes:

Chapter 65, Verse 18-19, ‘Instead, there shall always be rejoicing and happiness in what I create; For I create New Bedford to be a joy and its people to be a delight. I will rejoice over New Bedford and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and crying will be heard in it no more.’ I replaced Jerusalem with New Bedford because this passage made me think of the work that we are doing to rebuild our community and how we too are trying to create a brighter future.

It is a passage that acknowledges past sufferings, but emphasizes salvation and a new future. By the nodding of heads it is apparent that it resonates with the group and for the parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles gathered around the table on this particular evening the passage has special significance. New Bedford had enjoyed a brief reprieve from the violence that has plagued the city for many years, but just one week earlier 15
year old Edwin “Gio” Medina was murdered at a New Year’s Eve party in a home just
down the street from the parish. Two of the women at the table, whose lives have also
been touched by violence, were friends of the boy’s family and they somberly shook their
heads as they discussed impending plans for the funeral services.

UIA has worked tirelessly on a variety of community issues and the death of Gio
is a sad reminder of the work that remains. On this particular night there are several new
members in attendance and they too come armed with stories of heartache and frustration,
but there is also a sense of optimism in the room. Most have spent their entire lives in
New Bedford and they are committed to the city’s renewal. The member congregations
have worked together to give voice to the concerns of the community. Over the years
they have managed to win a series of victories related to job training, youth issues, public
safety, and health care. Tonight they have gathered to lay the foundation for a new fight
over education and jobs, one that they believe can help stem the tide of violence and
provide hope for a future in which the citizens of New Bedford can rejoice.

Beginnings: United Interfaith Action

UIA is an interfaith coalition of twenty congregations across the cities of New
Bedford and Fall River. Separated by roughly ten miles, they share a number of the same
social issues that tend to plague post-industrial cities in the United States. UIA was
founded in 1996 with the assistance of Lewis Finfer, a community organizer active in
Massachusetts politics since the seventies. Finfer worked as the organizer for the
Organizing and Leadership Training Center (OLTC), a federation of faith based CBOs in
Massachusetts. Over the past fifteen years OLTC developed relationships with the
Industrial Areas Foundation (a key ally in the development of the state’s best known
CBO, Greater Boston Interfaith Organization) and now operates as an affiliate of the national group PICO.\textsuperscript{6} In 2005, OLTC officially changed its name to Massachusetts Communities Action Network (MCAN) to reflect its continued expansion and its work on statewide issues. MCAN now serves as a resource for faith based CBOs across the state and organizes regional leadership training sessions for organizers and local leaders.

When Finfer first came to the New Bedford/Fall River area he made immediate inroads with several of the local clergy. As a result UIA experienced rapid early growth as local ministers encouraged the participation of their congregations. Initially the majority of the member organizations were Catholic churches (UIA has grown more religiously diverse over the years) and these parishes had long served as touchstones in the community. As Jack Livramento, a long-time UIA leader commented, “It made the whole recruitment process easier. There is trust in institutions that have a historic commitment to the community.” In particular, many of the parishes in the area serve specific ethnic populations, offering services in native languages and celebrating unique cultural traditions. In some ways UIA has helped solidify relationships between churches and rekindle parish life among the Catholic parishes. While some parishes collaborated on religious retreats or came together for shared rituals like the “stations of the cross,” few had the capacity to play a large role in community affairs outside of their immediate neighborhood. It was a challenge that has been exacerbated by the exodus of middle

\textsuperscript{6} Founded in 1972 by Father John Bauman, a Jesuit Priest, the organization was originally known as the Pacific Institute for Community Organization worked as a regional training institute to help support neighborhood organizations in California. The rebranding of the group as “PICO” reflects the expansion of the organization into a national network.
class families from the city and dwindling parish populations. While levels of involvement vary by parish, UIA is still capable of turning out 700 to 1,000 people for major actions.

The first long term organizer with UIA was Ray Gagne. With his assistance UIA obtained political clout in the community and successfully worked to achieve expanded support for after school programs, increased access to adult education, and longer library hours. In addition, UIA began to advocate with other CBOs for grants and increased state funding to address community concerns. Gagne left to begin work with another CBO based in nearby Rhode Island and for two years there was a significant drop-off in participation as UIA was without a full-time organizer. Paul Graham was hired roughly three years ago and has helped rekindle interest in the organization. In the spring of 2008 UIA began to actively look for a second organizer to work with Graham in Fall River. Dawn Nardi was hired in the summer of 2008, but Graham has since moved on to pursue opportunities closer to his home in the Mid-West.

Today UIA and its relationship with other affiliates can be understood as a series of nested organizations (Fig. 4.1). Each participating congregation has a core group of individuals who conduct one-on-ones and assess parish concerns. This core group is also responsible for keeping their congregations informed of the activities of UIA and for mobilizing members to participate in larger actions. At least once a month leaders from these congregational groups gather to share their concerns with other parishes in either New Bedford or Fall River. When shared concerns are identified by both New Bedford and Fall River congregations, representatives from both cities come together, but they
may also operate as individual entities on specific community concerns.

Figure 4.1 UIA Network Model
UIA has a number of leaders who also participate in monthly regional and statewide meetings sponsored by MCAN. These meetings serve as a form of networking where leaders share ideas, but they may also work together to address broader concerns at the state level. For example, MCAN advocated at the state level for the Shannon Grant which seeks to address gang violence in the state. Finally, MCAN is a regional affiliate of the national organization PICO. UIA recently sent one member to PICO training and would like to send more individuals in the future, but direct interaction at the national level has been limited. This model demonstrates how expanding social networks allow
members to forge alliances that can address important social issues at the local, regional, state, and national levels.

UIA is a broad based organization and works on a wide variety of issues. Youth and education issues are important, but they are not the sole priorities of the group. In fact, UIA and other affiliates within MCAN generally have limited experience working directly with schools. Two notable exceptions are the Pioneer Valley Project (Springfield, MA), who under the direction of organizer Fred Rose have started to organize with the local teachers’ union and school officials to start a home visit program\(^7\) and Worcester Interfaith, who with organizer Frank Kartheiser, have fought to maintain funding for community schools.\(^8\) UIA has worked on a number of youth related issues in the past, but only recently have their actions brought them within direct contact of the New Bedford Public Schools. Thus, UIA serves as an interesting case study of a multi-issue organization that is learning how to navigate the politics of educational change.

**UIA Action Issues**

As a broad based organization, UIA has addressed a number of pertinent issues in the community. Key early victories included the procurement of funding for after school programs and extended hours at the local public libraries. Public safety has also been a primary concern and UIA has worked closely with current mayor Scott Lang and his

\(^7\) The teacher home visit program is based on the work of PICO affiliate Sacramento Area Congregations Together. The program proved to be so popular that the Nell-Soto Home Visit legislation was passed in 1999 to fund expansion into more than 600 schools across the state of California.

\(^8\) Community schools remain open after hours and are available for use by the local community. They idea behind this proposal is to provides after school opportunities for both youth and adults and to make the schools a central “hub” for the community-at-large.
predecessor Fred Kalisz to implement community policing and funding for Street Outreach Workers to curb gang violence. Other initiatives include a summer jobs program, funding for adult basic education, and a campaign to support health care reform in Massachusetts. As the focus of this dissertation is on education organizing, observations and research have focused on recent efforts to introduce a conflict resolution curriculum into the New Bedford public schools and the launch of a youth and jobs campaign that addresses the drop-out rate and access to higher education.

The City of New Bedford

New Bedford is located in southeast Massachusetts on Buzzards Bay and is home to just under 100,000 residents. It is a working class community with a median household income of $27,569, significantly lower than the state average of $50,502. Ethnically, the city is extremely diverse with 50% of the population claiming Portuguese descent (primarily from the Azores and Mederia Island), 20% White non-Hispanic, 15% Latino, 5% African-American, 5% Cape Verdian and 5% Other. Much of this diversity is attributed to the influx of immigrants seeking jobs in the booming whaling industry during the mid-1800s. Prior to the discovery of petroleum New Bedford was known as the capital of the whaling industry in the United States. Reminders of New Bedford’s nautical past are scattered throughout the city. Statues dedicated to “whalers” are found in local parks, whaling murals are prominently featured in City Hall, the public library, at the offices of the New Bedford Public Schools, and of course the New Bedford Whaling Museum is a regional tourist attraction. The waterfront remains an important part of the local economy where fishing and textile manufacturing are two of the largest industries in
the area. In recent years legislation restricting over fishing has had a significant impact on the fishing business and many of the local textile factories have either closed or relocated. In January 2007, the Greater New Bedford area had the highest unemployment rate in Massachusetts (despite an increase of 1,200 total jobs) at 9.4% (Fraga, 2007). Residents lament the general loss of jobs and the difficulties that the city has in attracting new industry.

Geographically New Bedford covers twenty square miles and is divided into the North, West and South sides of the city. Longtime residents describe the community as being extremely territorial and conflict over turf is the impetus for much of the violent crime in the area. As one participant described:

Everything is about territory down here and that is something that really upsets me. When we were growing up it was the same thing, the West End, the South End, the North End, but it was never to the point that it is today. I mean if a guy in the West End liked a girl and so did a guy in the South End, they might fight, but fistfight and afterward everyone would be friends. But now I talk to people and even cousins who don’t talk to one another because one lives in the West End and one lives in the South End. That’s really sad because family is family.

There are eleven gangs operating in the city, five of the eleven are associated with national groups and the other six are organized at the neighborhood level. Two of these neighborhood gangs, the United Front Projects (UFP) and Monte Park, are recognized by residents as being responsible for the majority of the violence in the city. While gangs have a significant impact on community life New Bedford Police estimate that there are only 272 active gang members in the city, a relatively small portion of the city’s youth (Shannon CSI, 2008). However, a tight knit neighborhood culture and fear of retribution have hindered police efforts to combat violent crime in the area. New Bedford’s “code of
“silence” has been held up as an example of the “Stop Snitching” phenomena on the popular television show *America’s Most Wanted*. In the murder of Gio Medina referenced at the beginning of this chapter it took police seven weeks to arrest and charge a suspect despite the presence of over forty witnesses at the party. Yet, despite facing a number of significant social issues many of the residents are committed to the betterment of the community and the city boasts a number of popular cultural events that reflect its diversity.

**New Bedford Public Schools**

The New Bedford public schools (NBPS) currently serve 13,000 students in 27 schools. According to data from the 2007-2008 academic year, the NBPS student population is 12.3% African-American, 26.2% Hispanic, 52.9% White, 1% Asian, and 7.6% Other (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2008). The four year graduation rate is 58.2% (53.5% for African-American students and 48.8% for Hispanic students) and the official dropout rate is 21.3%. Of those students who do graduate the majority (57%) go on to attend four or two year public colleges. Only 15% of graduates plan to attend private institutions of higher education, significantly lower than the state average of 33%. Other glaring differences between New Bedford and the rest of the state include a 14.5 out-of-school suspension rate (compared with the state average of 5.8) and 66% of the students in the district are categorized as low-income (compared with the state average of 28.9%).

In terms of academic performance, students in New Bedford have performed less well than their peers across the state. In 2006, 398 students at New Bedford High School
took the SAT, earning mean scores of 456 in critical reading, 476 in math, and 450 in writing (the state average was 513 in critical reading, 524 in math, and 510 in writing) (Boston Globe, 2006). Under NCLB, New Bedford is in “corrective action” for both English Language Arts and Mathematics. Essentially this indicates the New Bedford schools continuously underperform. The district has demonstrated some recent improvements, especially in math where several subgroups have recently made AYP, but success in ELA remains a significant problem. Results from the 10th grade MCAS, which students need to pass in order to graduate, reveal that 54% of students on the ELA and 58% of the students in math, either needed improvement or were failing. The figures go up to 65% and 70% respectively when examining the performance of low-income youth. Obviously there are some significant challenges being faced by the New Bedford schools and this has drawn the attention of UIA.

**Action Issues for UIA**

**Conflict Resolution Education**

In May of 2006 a beloved member of the New Bedford community was murdered. Bernadette “Bunny” DePina was a lector at the tight knit Our Lady of the Assumption parish and volunteered at the county prison in nearby Dartmouth. DePina’s death came as a shock to the entire community because it appeared to be the result of a retaliatory hit by the United Front gang. Just days earlier DePina’s son, who was associated with the Monte Park gang, had been charged with the murder of Justin Barry. County Sheriff Thomas Hodgson was quoted in a *Boston Globe* article stating, “There’s nothing in my mind to suggest that it (DePina’s murder) would be anything other than a form of retaliation. I had told some of my staff that the expectation would be there’s
going to be retaliation, not ever thinking that it would be the mother. This raises it to a whole new level” (Smalley & Ellement, 2006). While UIA was already working to reduce violence in the community, this tragedy spurred a redoubling of efforts. Initially community members took to the streets participating in marches and vigils that demanded an end to gang violence, and soon plans were forged by UIA for an accountability meeting with local officials.

UIA’s efforts culminated in an October 2006 action at Our Lady Guadalupe Parish at St. James, which was attended by over 600 people. The action featured the testimony of local community members and the presence of local officials including Mayor Scott Lang, Chief of Police Ron Teachman, and Deputy Superintendent Ronald Souza, who was representing Superintendent Michael Longo. UIA demanded an increase in summer jobs for teens, more transparency by the local police, a commitment to community policing, and the integration of a comprehensive conflict resolution program in the public schools. The group was convinced that the best way to combat violence in the community was to reach the children at an early age before they become caught up in street life. With regard to this last issue, Mayor Lang and Dr. Souza each promised $50,000 dollars from their respective budgets to fund a violence prevention curriculum. The meeting was widely considered a success and UIA began operating under the assumption that the promised funds would be made available for the following academic year. UIA began to research CRE programs in the region and even arranged for a trip to Providence with New Bedford school officials. While impressed with the success of
Conflict Resolution Education in Providence, UIA’s primary desire was simply the adoption of a consistent and comprehensive curriculum for NBPS.

At the beginning of the next school year UIA began to reach out to NBPS, but they found that it was extremely difficult to connect with Longo. Over the summer Longo had announced his intention to retire at the end of the following year and a search for a new superintendent had begun in earnest. Throughout the fall of 2007 UIA members repeatedly attempted to meet with Longo, but each time meetings were pushed back or cancelled. By the time UIA leaders met with Mayor Lang in early January, fifteen months had passed since the initial promise of funding and Longo had cancelled meetings on six different occasions. Mayor Lang, who works hard to foster positive relationships with the community, was visibly surprised to learn about the numerous canceled meetings. Since that discovery Deputy Superintendent Souza has served point for the NBPS regarding this issue. At the January meeting Mayor Lang repeated his promise for funding and said that UIA should allow him to find the money in the school budget, since it is “almost a sure thing.” Three weeks later the money had still not been set aside, but UIA and the NBPS had started moving forward on the creation of a panel to oversee the implementation of a more comprehensive violence prevention curriculum. In February, the two sides met and determined a course of action that would include a comprehensive analysis of the effectiveness of the programs that are already in place and initial plans for the piloting of CRE in three local schools. In addition, two members of the school committee, Dr. John Fletcher and Ms. Marlene Pollock were in attendance, and they were very supportive of the initiative. Despite setbacks that have delayed action
for almost two years, UIA members remain hopeful that the pilot program will be in place for the 2008-2009 academic year and that the hiring of a new superintendent will create a more responsive school administration.9

UIA Kick-Off Action on Jobs & Education

In early January of 2008, Graham conducted one-on-ones with UIA members on the issues of jobs and education. In the middle of the table he placed a rolled up diploma and a traditional black steel lunch pail. “What do these symbols mean to you? What do they mean to our community?” he prompted. The old lunch box evoked memories of parents and grandparents struggling to support their families and frustration over the lack of current opportunities in the New Bedford area. In the large discussion that followed it was clear that the two issues were interrelated and the key to the rejuvenation of the community.

In the following weeks the Local Parish Committees conducted one-on-ones in their congregations and discovered that there was real concern over the high drop-out rate in NBPS and the lack of access to higher education. Much of the frustration centered on the effectiveness of guidance counseling at New Bedford High. All of the participants with a child in high school or with a child who recently attended high school commented on what they felt was an epidemic of low expectations. Two representative comments were:

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9 The city of New Bedford hired Dr. Portia S. Bonner to serve as its next superintendent starting in 2008-09. UIA has already been able to forge a more collaborative relationship with the new superintendent who attended a UIA community meeting with 175 parents and community members on November 3rd, 2008, listening to community concerns and fielding questions.
I still don’t see that they push the minority students in New Bedford to go to college. I really, really don’t. And if you look at the dropout rate and you look at the demographics, you can see which children are failing out.

and

In the high school, I find my biggest complaint is that the guidance counselors don’t do enough to show the kids the tools that they need to go on and to further their education. They pass these kids off and say that they are not going to make it. They don’t show them there is money available for scholarships that they can apply for. I do not feel that they do enough to help these kids find their way into college. If you are not a parent who knows enough or who is capable of helping that child yourself, then the kids get lost and frustrated. They might get in, but they don’t get any money and they end up dropping out.

As conversations continued over the next few weeks the interrelated nature of jobs and education became more evident. UIA members spoke of the necessity of good jobs to help motivate students to stay in school. One member, herself the victim of a textile plant closing, felt great compassion for the youth of New Bedford. She said, “I see the kids on the streets and it pains me to see them standing on the corner doing nothing, but knowing that there are no jobs in New Bedford. I worked in a mill for 35 years and I thought I was going to retire there, but it shut down and there is just no industry coming in to take its place. There is no incentive for our youth to stay here, none at all. We want to educate them, but where are the jobs? Everything is related to one another.” Concerns like these motivated plans for a kick-off action to address education and jobs in the community.

It was determined that the action would serve a tripartite purpose. First, UIA hoped to take advantage of a gathering of 150 to 200 citizens and utilize the meeting to “pin” the support of local representatives for three of UIA’s legislative priorities regarding youth. Second, the meeting would serve as a kick-off/recruitment event for
future actions and help to rekindle interest among members who were currently inactive. Third, through the use of small group meetings, the members hoped to learn more about the concerns of the community surrounding youth and jobs. When the commitment to this event was being finalized a twist was suggested and embraced by the members. The decision was made to actively recruit youth to the event, a first in the history of UIA.

Over the course of next three weeks UIA members recruited youth and adults from the local parishes and meticulously planned every detail of the event. As a group, UIA members carefully selected every word of the program and constructed a timeline and strategies to help them accomplish their goals. Most individuals who would be giving testimony worked with both Graham and veteran UIA group members to shape their message. Finally, there were a series of “practices,” including a full rehearsal with members going on stage and practicing transitions. While the event was highly scripted, Graham sought to encourage some flexibility by posing a number of potential issues that might arise in a public meeting. “What will we do if someone becomes disruptive? How will we tactfully remove the legislators if they want to join the small groups? What strategies can we use to encourage youth to talk in our small groups?” As Graham raised these questions the group brainstormed appropriate responses and individuals volunteered for specific event responsibilities. Throughout the preparation process the parishes were asked to report in on the progress of their recruitment efforts and encouraged to call and remind people who made commitments to attend the night before.

On the night of the action a slow stream of attendees entered the gym to find a classic community organizing “staged confrontation.” Bright blue UIA banners were
strung across the stage and a table for the event co-chairs was placed on the left. A podium and microphone were in the middle of the stage and to the right was a row of three chairs for the local representatives. In the weeks leading up to the event there was concern over whether or not UIA would be able to recruit enough youth to attend the event, but as the chairs began to fill the youth outnumbered adults by a ratio of roughly three to one. In an effort to bolster numbers, students from YouthBuild, an alternative education program, were asked to attend and now it appeared that their attendance was required by YouthBuild leaders as they congregated in the back rows of the gymnasium.

As final preparations took place a legislative aide arrived to represent Rep. Stephen Canessa, but when the clock struck seven Rep. Robert Koczera and Senator Mark Montigny had not arrived. While the absence of legislators as a possible contingency had actually been discussed in planning meetings it was clear that UIA leaders were surprised and disappointed by their absence. In addition, turnout was much lower than had been anticipated and since the youth had filled the back rows it created a visual effect the emphasized the divide between youth and adults. A chasm of empty chairs spanned between the YouthBuild students and the older parish members in the front. Despite weeks of practice and a tradition of successfully staging these types of actions, the event got off to a rocky start. The enthusiasm of the parish role call that had been emphasized during the rehearsal was absent as participants seemed reluctant to shout out the name of their congregation and potentially draw attention to their low levels of participation. As the meeting transitioned to the legislative “pin,” the two chairs reserved for the representatives remained empty on the stage. In some respects the highly
scripted nature of the event now hindered the group leaders as they plowed through their lines thanking the representatives for their support, while the empty chairs loomed behind them. In rehearsal the group had discussed mocking the reps if they were absent by sarcastically pointing to the empty seats, but it was evident now that some of the UIA leaders were simply trying to get through the event.

Thankfully, the presence of several veteran UIA members and the powerful testimony by a young man from the community helped get the meeting back on track. As this youth discussed the difficulties that he had faced in school and the consequences that it had on his life, the chattering in the back of the gym ceased. Both adults and youth listened in rapt attention and affirmed his testimony with the occasional “amen” or “that’s right.” When the meeting broke out into small groups several lively conversations took place and any residual hesitancy about the involvement of youth was washed away. The next twenty minutes passed quickly as the different generations of New Bedfordites exchanged stories of their shared struggle.

In the aftermath of the event reaction was mixed. As UIA leaders gathered in the small school chapel to evaluate the evening they expressed frustration over the lack of turnout. There was disappointment and anger toward both local officials and community members who had committed to attend. With regard to the representatives a course of action was quickly determined and members committed to both writing and calling the offices of the statehouse to make their displeasure known. Plans were also made to write about the missing representatives in a letter to the editor for the *New Bedford Standard-Times*. However, addressing missing parish members was a trickier prospect for UIA
leaders. On the one hand they felt frustrated and wanted to call and berate people for not attending, but on the other hand the missing individuals still held potential as future members and many of them were friends. Reaction to those who had committed to attend would be determined on a case-by-case basis with the emphasis on relationship building for the future.

Overall, many members were energized by the inroads that were made with the youth of the community. The teens who initially seemed so alien and intimidating as they sat in the back of the gymnasium at the start of the event, appreciated the opportunity to voice their concerns in small groups and shared many insightful stories and opinions. Many of the struggling youth were quick to shoulder the blame and take responsibility for their own academic failings, but at the same time they were also able to illuminate a number of significant issues that impacted their educational experiences. The youth expressed frustration with the behavior of their peers in the classroom and lamented their teachers’ lack of classroom management skills. Others talked about how difficult it was to hold a book discussion in a crowded English classroom. Sadly, many talked about feeling unsupported, both at school and in the home. For these kids, their friends on the streets were their most reliable support group. To this end, the kick-off meeting was a success as UIA was exposed to some of the critical issues that the youth of New Bedford faced and a starting point was created for further conversations about how to improve the NBPS. In the UIA meetings that followed the action, a number of youth have attended and been active participants. However, most of these youth were already
pursuing alternative education opportunities, so their primary interest was in jobs and the economy and not in education.

New to the field of education organizing, UIA learned a number of important lessons from the kick-off meeting, the inclusion of a youth presence in their monthly planning meetings, and their experiences working with school committee members and other NBPS officials. Together these lessons helped shape the next major action on education issues in New Bedford. Indeed, the influx of youth seemed to generate more enthusiasm and creativity for the next event and increased interactions with school officials helped UIA members develop a concrete list of objectives and a means to present them in a manner that would appeal to local political and school officials.

The May event focused on the theme of “Hope in Youth,” and recruitment efforts were redoubled following the unsatisfactory turnout at the kick-off meeting. This time UIA recruiters were quick to remind potential attendees of the message that their absence would send to the youth of New Bedford. One leader commented, “It was really important to us to get a good turn out and I think people responded because we were better organized and had a better idea of what we were asking for.” This time UIA also managed to better incorporate the contributions of the local youth. With over 500 people in attendance the crowd was far more integrated generationally and the presence of translators ensured that everyone was able to fully participate. Building on the successful testimony of youth at the prior meeting, more young voices were included in the program and the evening even featured a dramatic interpretation of the New Bedford dropout rate. Ten students stood in a row at the front of the stage and one by one five of the students
stepped back as a peer read off various drop-out statistics from the city. Mayor Lang had previously commented that New Bedford’s dropout rate was not dissimilar from comparable districts, but the boos from the crowd made it clear that the community was not satisfied if even one student was prevented from achieving their full potential.

UIA members had discovered in meetings over the past spring that many school officials were wary of collaboration and interpreted questions or challenges as criticisms. Of course, there was often cause to be critical of NBPS, but such an approach does not foster an atmosphere for effective collaboration. Members understood that officials were frustrated by traditionally low levels of parental involvement in the city. In planning for the May event, UIA leaders determined that in addition to holding community leaders accountable, they needed to demonstrate their own commitment to the children of New Bedford. They came up with a “Community Education Compact” that they would ask the mayor and school committee members to publically sign as symbol of their commitment to working toward improving New Bedford schools. The compact included the following goals:

- Bring the graduation rate up 18 percent and increase college attendance by graduates by 25 percent in five years.
- Improve parent-school relationships.
- Develop a strategy for paying for the improvements.
- Create a plan of accountability.

In return, UIA called on its own membership to renew their commitment to the youth of New Bedford. Representatives from Big Sister/Big Brother and other youth oriented
organizations were present and set up tables where UIA members could sign up to volunteer. The UIA community was making it clear that they were willing to do their part and they expected a similar commitment from their public officials. The night was a success and both UIA members and city officials were enthusiastic about the future of New Bedford’s schools.

**Becoming a UIA Member**

Throughout the tenure of UIA’s presence in New Bedford, membership numbers have been sporadic. While a core group of leaders have been with the organization since its inception, others join for shorter periods of time or only to work on specific actions. While capable of turning out 1,000 people for a major action, day to day participation fluctuates from 15 to 25 individuals. Current members continue to actively recruit, and leadership development is an important part of the work, but it has been difficult. In particular, it has been hard to recruit young adults and people with younger children. As one mother with older children remarked, “I think that people with younger children tend to shy away because they are so busy with sports after school or homework or whatever it might be. It is not UIA keeping them away, but them not joining us.” Also problematic is that with dwindling participation in churches more generally there is simply a smaller pool of people in the parish communities. It is not surprising that many of the new UIA members are coming from the local evangelical churches and not from the Catholic parishes. For those who do join, participation in UIA is motivated by a number of different factors including personal relationships, the faith-based nature of the
organization, and the occurrence of significant events that disrupt daily life in the community and call attention to specific needs.

*Personal Relationships and Self-Interest*

As in many CBOs, personal relationships play a key role in both recruitment and membership maintenance. Many members are initially introduced to the organization either through friends or by their congregation leader. Building stronger relationships is a key element of UIA’s work and meetings generally involve time for one-on-ones so that members can get to know one another better. These relationships prove to be important in terms of keeping individuals involved who might otherwise hesitate or depart at the conclusion of an action. For example, one new member said that she was initially reluctant to join because she felt that UIA “seemed like it might be a little out of (her) league.” But her friends continued to gently pressure her to attend and learn more about the process of organizing and what she could contribute.

Because of the role of friendships in bringing people to UIA, some members described initially feeling disconnected with the issues, but as they were encouraged to reflect and share stories they often came to realize that the organization did serve their own interests. For example, one participant initially attended because he was asked to participate by his parish priest, but some of the issues began to resonate with him as he thought about the experiences of his own children in the New Bedford schools. When asked why he volunteered to participate in a research group for CRE he responded, “My daughter in junior high school was involved in a fight and I really felt bad for her. The aggressor wanted to fight her and my daughter didn’t want to fight, so all of the kids were
circling around her and calling her a “baby,” so that kinda stuck with me. If you were to ask for one single event, that one caused me to raise my hand.” Another new member who was brought into UIA through connections with friends eventually ended up testifying at a meeting with Mayor Lang about the bullying that her daughter had witnessed and endured at a local middle school. While relationships may initiate involvement it is clear that for the majority of the members who remain active in UIA, self-interest helps to sustain participation.

**Faith Based Community**

The faith based orientation of UIA also plays an important role in recruitment. The majority of the leaders in UIA play some sort of leadership role in their respective religious communities. This shared faith perspective was cited by participants as a major part of the appeal of the organization. In a diverse community where territory and neighborhood lines are starkly drawn, faith provides a common ground for collaboration and it is a central part of most meetings and actions. As one participant said, “I think that everyone who comes into UIA, well, we are all faith based people so hopefully we can all do our work in accordance with our faith and leave those other issues at the door. Put them on the table and let God handle them… we are just working together for the common good of the community.” Faith provides an important commonality that serves as the foundation for relationship building. Another member commented, “It was so helpful and it was that sort of a feeling where even though you just met, you felt like you knew each other for years and years and years…. There was a familiarity with one another.” Non-denominational prayer and scripture reflections are a common occurrence.
and religion is intertwined throughout the organizing process with the exception of meetings with public officials in their offices.

Galvanizing Community Events

Finally, membership and participation ebbed and flowed based on significant events that impacted the community, such as the DePina murder which sparked the campaign for Conflict Resolution Education. Significant events in the community tend to motivate participation surges and generally resulted in the initiation and development of new leaders. Many new members cited the immigration raid in March of 2006 as a galvanizing moment. New Bedford made national headlines when an army of immigration officers (estimates range from 300 to 500 officers) surrounded and stormed the Michael Bianco, Inc. leather factory. The factory was primarily staffed by illegal immigrants from El Salvador and Guatemala and the raid resulted in the detainment of 361 workers. In the aftermath of the raid, it became apparent that numerous children had been separated from their parents who had been sent to Fort Devens in Texas for processing and potential deportation. UIA members were immediately on the scene and helped coordinate services (in collaboration with other CBOs) from the basement of Our Lady of Guadalupe church. The immediate interests were to serve the families of the immigrants, but later in the spring a rally with over 1,000 attendees voiced a call for immigrant rights.

For life-long New Bedford residents these types of events sparked their passion for the community. It made individuals angry and sad that the community that they grew up in was starting to crumble. One mother of three remarked, “I think of the
neighborhood when I was growing up and the kids laugh at me, but I could walk to my girlfriend’s house at 11:00 at night and never have to worry about any one following me or trying to pick me up. Now when I come and park in front of the house, I look around before I get out of the car, because you just don’t know anymore.” Another participant whose family was a victim of violent crime said, “I felt so strongly about how much hurt that is and no other family should have to suffer like that. No matter what people are doing on the street, no one deserves that. No families deserve that. There has to be a way to stop that.” She became involved in UIA to address the violence in the community, but her perspective has evolved over time as she gained experience and learned more about the social issues impacting the community. Now she says, “I ended up working on a lot of other issues because you come to find out that there are a lot of reasons that go into why violence happens. For example, education or a lack of it. They (kids) might be struggling in school and end up on the street.” Anger was certainly a motivating factor for many members, but it is not the complete story. As Wood describes in his analysis of PICO, “The term ‘cold anger,’ often applied to faith-based organizing, accurately captures this process with one caveat: at the end of the day, when an issue has been won, even cold anger gives way among participants to a cathartic joy expressed in celebratory post-action events” (Wood, 2002, p. 193). Moreover, this outpouring of emotions is grounded is a deeply held passion for the community and its future, so victories are even sweeter and more meaningful.

**Participation and Learning in UIA**
After joining UIA, members are integrated into the process of planning, researching, and organizing around issues. While opportunities for formal training do exist, the majority of the learning is more experiential and informal. Central to this model is the relationship building that is a part of all of UIA’s activities. The veteran members also play an important role by serving as models for the newly initiated. In terms of planning and researching actions UIA is very collaborative and all of the members, regardless of their levels of experience, actively contribute their ideas. Networking allows UIA to access information outside of the city and region, and finally evaluation plays a critical role in helping to improve organizational practices.

**Relationship Building**

Relationship building is continually emphasized within UIA. To strengthen internal relationships each meeting sets aside time for one-on-ones. This is the source of UIA’s power and it is essential that time is spent developing these connections. The one-on-ones are generally focused on a specific guiding question, but these are loose guidelines and the conversations frequently meander off topic. There is usually a mix of veterans and people who are new to the group and the veterans make it a point to sit and converse with those who are less familiar with the group’s activities. The pairing of veterans and new members is a common practice at many of UIA’s activities and actions. The veterans also serve as models and help instill confidence at public events. They have the experience to step in and provide assistance if an event seems to be going in the wrong direction. For example, during one accountability meeting a public official refused to adhere to the “yes” or “no” questioning format and a veteran member stepped
in and insisted that the official provide an answer. This built-in “back-up system” helps to ensure that events run smoothly and allows Graham to comfortably embrace the Iron Rule of letting members “do for themselves.” However, one potential drawback to this approach was expressed by a relatively new member of UIA:

If you are not a full-fledged member then it becomes difficult to raise your voice. Sometimes I am on the sidelines watching because number one, I don’t know the subject matter as well and number two, I haven’t been to the meetings long enough to fully grasp the discussion and add my input. I think the older members of the group are well versed in the issues and have a full voice, I think it (UIA) probably takes up most of their time.

Despite these concerns most UIA activities include efforts to increase participation among new members and most appreciated that multiple levels of involvement that were available.

Even though veterans had a deep familiarity with planning procedures and the steps that are necessary for organizing a successful action, they still participate fully in rehearsals and other preparations that might otherwise seem mundane. They are the first ones to say that it is essential to be well prepared and they model this attitude with meticulous attention to detail in their work. Supplementing the support of the veteran members is Graham. While the bulk of the work takes place in large groups he spends much of his week following up with members to ensure that everyone is well prepared and on the same page. One member described his assistance thusly, “Depending what is going on there are a lot of little side meetings. If you are doing a speaking role you might not only attend the planning meeting, but you will also have another meeting with Paul to help you hash out what you are going to say.” It is clear that he spends extra time working with new members to make sure they are comfortable with their roles. This is
an effective strategy as it allows new members to build confidence away from the larger (and potentially more intimidating group) and it allows Graham to continue to strengthen his relationships with these individuals.

**Collaborative Learning**

Through the support of Graham and UIA veterans, new members are immediately put into action and expected to contribute. This is a part of the learning process that helps new members feel like they are making an immediate contribution. In “selling” the work of the UIA, members emphasize how important it is for people to participate in actions and experience firsthand how they can make a difference. The youth and jobs kick-off meeting ended with a plea for participation:

> I hope that tonight we each met three new people. These new public relationships that we build with each other are what give us power. We are building our vision for what we want for our city and for our families. But a vision is not enough! We need proposals and strategies that can address our issues and make this city stronger. Our next steps are to research what can be done on these issues. Once we develop our proposal, we need not 200 people, but 800, 900, 1000 people to move our ambitious agenda. Our power comes from us: organized people! So stand up! Stand up and make your commitment to a better community!

Contrary to other professional advocacy organizations that solicit monetary donations, UIA emphasizes a donation of time and talents.

The call for broad participation is not simply high minded rhetoric because the collective experiences of UIA members helps create more effective actions. For example, a debate emerged during the planning for the “Youth and Education” action held in February of 2007. It was a new challenge, in that UIA had not held any previous actions that included the direct involvement of youth. As a part of the action, UIA
wanted to host some small group “one-to-ones” but they were uncertain about what role the youth should play. Some felt strongly that it would be difficult to get the youth to participate if adults were present and proposed that the groups be segregated based on age. There would still be an UIA facilitator, but he or she would simply help to direct the conversation. Others felt that this sort of separation was symbolic of one of the fundamental stereotypes held by youth, that adults are out of touch and that they don’t really listen to kids. This debate continued over a period of four weeks as different members weighed in on the pros and cons of both sides. Finally, it was determined that the youth and adults would mix together, but the facilitators were trained with specific strategies to engage the youth in conversation if they were reluctant to participate. This type of collective decision making was common and it was employed on everything from major organizational decisions to the approval of the sign-up card format.

_Distributed Leadership_

When UIA runs a meeting or prepares for an action there is always a distribution of roles. In addition to providing an atmosphere of inclusion and community, this approach also allows members to focus on their specific contributions and helps them feel more confident. One gentlemen talked about the variety of roles that were available to people in one of the major actions, “Ya know everyone gets a small piece, which is kind of nice, because then you don’t feel so overwhelmed.” This is important to new members who are unsure of whether or not that will be able to contribute to UIA. One recent member discussed how she gradually turned into a UIA leader through a series of roles that increased her responsibility:
One week led to another week and now I am going to this meeting and that action and all of a sudden I am attending meetings with the mayor. I thought I had no clue. Paul (the organizer) was so good about holding your hand with that, it was just like you show up at the meeting and you didn’t have to have a whole lot more knowledge.

When pushed further on this, it became evident that this individual actually did have more knowledge than she initially thought and discovered that her voice was important. She continued, “Now I sit in a place realizing all of the contributions that I was able to bring to the table. They came from my experiences and kind of brought me to a place where I was able to step into the shoes of a UIA leader.” This member and other UIA leaders appear to benefit from this gradual initiation and the idea that they are part of a collective effort for change.

Network Learning

Similar to the learning that took place through internal collaborative work described above, UIA members networked with people outside the organization. At the individual level members who were assigned to research teams spent time on the telephone or computer communicating with other CBOs about programs that they implemented. One veteran member discussed her approach to research, “I may read something. I talk to people to see if anybody knows anything about it. I go on the internet a lot because many organizations put a lot of great information out there.” An example of this type of network research was demonstrated in the search for information about conflict resolution curricula that brought UIA into contact with a program in Providence and eventually led to a site visit. UIA members also networked with other CBOs from around the state. In particular, their participation in the MCAN and PICO organizations provided a wealth of additional opportunities. Networking with MCAN has the added advantage of utilizing organizations that are operating in the same state.
context and whose strategies at the state level are tailor made for implementation. One veteran leader excitedly described the monthly regional meeting:

Listening… watching… a lot of listening, have you been to the regional meeting in Brockton? PICO and MCAN members are there and we meet in Brockton. To hear the different actions that people are working on. But with all the different groups there. They talk to you and they tell you what they are doing in their groups and all the ideas flow and you sit there and say, “hey, we could pick up on that” or “that sounds like something that we could do.” It is really a great learning experience.

Other forms of networking took place at the national level. At the present time only one UIA member has attended a national training, but it was a powerful experience for this woman and UIA hopes to send more leaders in the future. At the national stage the sheer size of the event is intimidating, but she described how she grew more comfortable as she realized that this was the same work that she had been doing on a bigger scale:

At first I was a little uncomfortable at the training, but I realized that this is what I have been doing over the past six months, interactive lessons and role plays and things. So it wasn’t so unfamiliar and scary. Now, I feel like I can go back and be an instrumental leader in the LOC and now I can not only bring enthusiasm, but now I can educate other LOC members and the congregation about what this all means for us on the local level and why is it so important that we buy into UIA and the national level.

Again, the key is the sharing of knowledge, reinforcing the importance of relationship building for UIA.

Evaluation

Finally, evaluation creates an opportunity for UIA members to share their thoughts about the effectiveness of their activities and to determine new courses of action. It also allows the group to process and try to make sense of a lot of information. This seemed particularly helpful following meetings with public officials where there are
so many details to consider and it is sometimes difficult to interpret what exactly was
being proposed. One veteran member remarked:

It (evaluation) is really helpful because you get a broader view of
everything that went on. You don’t just have one person’s opinion, the
organizer doesn’t stand up and say, “while I thought this and this and this
and this is what we are going to do.” It gives everybody a chance to
express themselves and gives you a broader view. I may have missed
something, or something might have gone over my head, I might have
been distracted for a moment, but now it is brought to my attention and I
can really think about it for a moment.

Part of the evaluation is centered on processing the interaction or event that just took
place, but it is also used to assess personal performances regardless of an individual’s
role. “We have an evaluation after everything because that’s what helps us to keep our
focus,” stated one leader “Maybe I shouldn’t have done this or this, or we can do this
better next time. The evaluation is really important and I walk away with something
every time.”

Another form of ongoing evaluation includes feedback that is given during
preparation for events. Feedback is intended to be purely constructive and great pains are
taken to tactfully deliver any criticism (although, recipients gave the impression of being
highly receptive). When I raised the possibility that the feedback might be overly
positive a participant replied, “If you really listen to what people are saying it can help
you and sometimes it can be just as valuable to get positive feedback. It lets you know
that people are listening. You know how sometimes when you are talking you wonder if
people are actually listening? Well, here you know that people are listening, which is
what you want.” Evaluations are taken very seriously and members help to keep one
another focused. When the conversation starts to meander, the members take the
initiative to get it back on track, as I observed one participant comment, “C’mon, were not the PTA, let’s not spend our time debating pink or blue frosting for the cupcakes!” In all seriousness, they remain focused because evaluations are perceived as being essential to the success of the group. As one veteran summarized, “Only by improving UIA internally and improving our actions can we really improve the accomplishment of our goals externally. So that in itself is a main part of the evaluation. It makes us focus and say what did we do, what didn’t we do, and should do the next time. It helps us to move on and become more powerful.”

Learning Challenges for UIA

As UIA lobbied for CRE and launched its youth and jobs action two primary organizational and learning challenges arose. First, UIA lacked experience in working with youth at both at the organizational and individual level, leading to a number of internal debates regarding the most effective approach. Second, while the UIA had previously organized around a number of education related issues, it had never worked on an issue that would directly impact the day-to-day operations of the schools. As a result UIA and the NBPS experienced an organizational disconnect and struggled to communicate.

Primary membership in UIA skews heavily toward individuals who are over the age of fifty, many of whom have children who have been out of schools for many years. In general there was a lack of experience with youth and as previously discussed members expressed concern over how best to involve the youth of the community. UIA members are not alone, nationally there are a number of different models of youth
organizing and each has its advocates. Some efforts include youth as a “subdivision” of the “parent” organization, others integrate youth as full members, and of course there are numerous examples of autonomous organizations that are organized for and by youth.

Within UIA there were a variety of stances on the involvement of youth. In fact, initially youth were not even going to be a part of the kick-off action. It was Dorothy Lopes, a member of OLOA and former teacher who suggested that if UIA wanted to address youth issues (in particular they were concerned about the drop-out rates), then they needed to include the voices of youth from the community. As plans moved forward regarding the inclusion of youth it was clear that different members had strong opinions about their role. Many were excited about potentially expanding the reach of UIA, but others were concerned that the input of the youth might sidetrack the advances that had already been made. One member commented, “As someone who is very involved in UIA, I was feeling a bit betrayed. We did all of this work and now we are just supposed to sit there and listen to the kids. Kids are not the only ones who make up the community.” Others found it difficult to imagine themselves connecting with youth at the action. During one meeting a member suggested that UIA might be better served by inviting Valerie Amarala, a New Bedford native who had recently competed in the Miss America pageant, as a speaker, “I just think that a young person like her would be a good role model for the youth and someone that they could relate to.” Graham responded, “But what about you Mary? You are a good role model, too. Plus, you’re here.” Mary nodded her assent, but it was clear that she remained unconvinced.

\[10 A pseudonym\]
The youth of the community did turn out for the kick-off action and despite some setbacks their presence was considered a success. Most UIA leaders also felt that they had learned a great deal and they would be better prepared for the next time:

This was the first time that we worked with the youth, and I think that next time we might be able to do it a little better. We now know that we can get them to the meetings, but I think that we need to spend some time with them and go over what is going on. I think maybe that we need to be a little more organized, but overall I was very, very happy with the turnout of the youth.

Several of the youth at the kick-off meeting expressed their interest in continuing to work with UIA and they are slowly becoming an important part of the organizational membership.

UIA and the New Bedford Public Schools

While UIA has successfully worked with a wide variety of social institutions on various issues in the community, engagement with NBPS has proven to be challenge. Over the past two years the organization has been taking a “crash course” on the intricacies of education policy and at times it has been frustrating. Currently UIA is working to build the internal capacity that is necessary to work effectively with NBPS. Unfortunately, obstacles to effective collaboration between CBOs and school systems are not unusual. Both Shirley (2002) and Baum (2003) describe some of the challenges that community groups encounter. These include pressures that are placed on administrators and educators to narrowly focus on instruction, a trend driven by the emphasis on standardized test scores (in an atmosphere of intense scrutiny), budget limitations that severely constrict a schools ability to respond to immediate needs, a fear among teachers that community involvement may endanger professional autonomy, and a general lack of
trust between communities and schools. The reality is that all of these concerns are legitimate, but CBOs contend that they should at least be afforded the opportunity to respond to these issues and collaborate to forge solutions.

In New Bedford part of the challenge is a history of disengagement between the parents and schools. One UIA member recalled her efforts in the mid 1990s to form a PTO at her son’s elementary school:

Parents in the community aren’t verbal enough. We actually tried to get a PTO going there (at her son’s elementary school), but it just didn’t work out. I was so disgusted. It was hard to get them, it was always the same four or five people who would show up, even though we would send flyers home and make phone calls. It was so discouraging and finally it just fell apart, you can’t have a PTO with just four or five parents.

While in some ways this quote legitimizes teacher concerns, it also speaks to the commitment that does exist within the community and to the possibility of collaboration with some families. Several members were concerned about the risk of stereotyping in the schools and worried about their children or families were being “labeled.” As one mother noted, low expectations can be a two-way street:

It doesn’t matter who you are, parent, teacher, or administrator, once you start making generalizations, that opens up the door for a lot of mistrust. Are there parents who are not holding up their end of the bargain in raising children? Yes! But, does that mean that it is always the parents fault? No. Are there some teachers that are overwhelmed or maybe undertrained, that need something? Yes. Does this mean that they are all bad teachers? No.

Part of the work that faces UIA is the need to build trust with the school system. While on the surface NBPS was been receptive to the idea of working with UIA, their actions send a different message.
For example, the sharp dichotomy in perspectives between UIA and the NBPS regarding CRE was evident in several of their interactions. Perhaps most glaring is how readily Superintendent Longo dismissed UIA’s efforts by failing to attend the initial community action and his subsequent cancellation of scheduled meetings. When a meeting was finally scheduled with the mayor, deputy superintendent, and police chief, one of the UIA members gave testimony regarding a large-scale disciplinary action that had occurred the previous day to illustrate the need for Conflict Resolution Education. A group of four students were going from room to room in the high school searching for another student who they believed was involved in the murder of Gio Medina. A large group of twenty-five to thirty students were following as they searched the classrooms. Police were called to the scene, four students were arrested, and a number of others received detentions or suspensions. Upon hearing this description at the UIA meeting, the public officials became defensive, refuted a number of the fine details from UIA’s testimony, and attempted to downplay the severity of the incident warning that the community needs to be careful about perpetuating rumors. Essentially, the interaction quickly turned into an “us” versus “them” dynamic, yet the concerns of UIA were representative of the community-at-large. An article in the Standard-Times that very day noted that “Mr. Longo said that his own home telephone, which is listed in the directory, has been ringing steadily and that he was up late Thursday addressing parents’ concerns (Urbon, 2008).” While there were some inaccuracies in the testimony of the UIA member, the point remained that New Bedford could benefit from increased attention to conflict resolution.
Even when progress was made and UIA began to work collaboratively with NBPS, there remained a disconnect with terminology and modes of practice. In an effort to expedite the launching of the pilot CRE program Deputy Superintendent Souza sent UIA’s proposal as a word document to all of the principals in New Bedford. Three schools responded, which was excellent news, but as an organization based on relationships, UIA was frustrated that they were not able to make more connections and spend time talking with principals about their needs and what they are looking for in a program. The UIA members were confident that they could have garnered even more support if they could have presented the proposal to the schools. Ironically, members of the NBPS continually warned UIA that schools would be resistant to any top-down reforms, but they themselves used a top-down approach to disseminate information about the proposal.

The challenges of school reform implementation were constantly being communicated to the members of UIA. According to education research, the issues raised by the administrators were legitimate and commonplace, but UIA members grew frustrated with the depiction of the principals and their schools as tiny insular kingdoms. In one evaluation following a meeting between UIA and NBPS, a group leader grew exasperated and exclaimed, “That’s ridiculous! The schools do not belong to the principals! They belong to the community! Show me a school that doesn’t want to get onboard and we will have a hundred people picketing on the sidewalk the next day!” Of course, she was only half serious. In truth the UIA members were more frustrated with what they saw as the unilateral action of the NBPS. They wanted to hear the concerns of
the school leaders because they wanted to make sure that whatever curriculum was
implemented would be sustainable and effective. They felt that they weren’t advocating
for some superfluous elective, but for a program that might help curb the violence that
was shattering their community.

In truth, the culture of UIA is far less confrontational that what is observed in
other “Alinsky style” CBOs around the country. Still, some public officials did not care
for aggressive actions like the public accountability meetings. “It's a tremendously
challenging and extremely frustrating situation for elected officials,” remarked former
Mayor Kalisz. "They ask questions and request, or should I say demand, a 'yes' or 'no'
answer without any explanation" (Apuzzo, 2000). But from UIA’s perspective there are
other venues in which public officials can explain their positions and they feel that for the
most part they are setting up situations that can be politically beneficial for both sides. In
fact, they go to great lengths to coordinate with officials prior to these events:

it makes them look good. It’s not like we don’t… well, for example, if we
have invited the mayor he knows what questions we are going to ask, so
it’s not like a surprise. We don’t like to put them on the spot, like “can we
have $50,000 dollars?” and they don’t have any context, so we want to
make sure that they have the proper background. They know what we are
going to ask and they should be prepared.

From the perspective of UIA members they are simply trying to improve the schools and
community, but they have grown frustrated with the many obstacles that they have
encountered, “Why is it that we can’t make them see that if they get a program in there
that works… and you can’t know if it works until you initiate it, it will make everybody’s
job easier,” one member said, “The teachers, the students, everybody. We can’t
understand why it is such a struggle.” UIA members realize that they don’t fully
understand the day-to-day operations of the school system, but they simply want a chance to build a mutually beneficial relationship and increase organizational trust.

**Beyond the Issues: Ancillary Benefits**

Finally, for the members of UIA there are a number of ancillary benefits that resulted from participation. First, a sense of empowerment and personal growth was present among many of the participants. Second, some members described becoming more engaged civically and increased awareness or engagement in local and national politics. Third and last, a renewed commitment to the community was observed.

**Personal Empowerment**

For participants who had been members for six months or more, the opportunity to participate in UIA activities provided a strong sense of empowerment and personal growth. When asked about their role in various public actions, three of the participants commented that they never could have imagined participation at these types of events prior to their involvement with UIA. The collaborative nature of the learning and organization helped instill confidence in their ability to make an impact on the community. When I commented to one participant about how confident she seemed at a recent action she replied, “Oh no, my stomach was turning somersaults. I am a lector at church and before I get up there my stomach is growling and my heart is beating like crazy. My girlfriends laugh at me and say, ‘well, you don’t look nervous.’ But trust me I am. I pray quite a bit in the mornings before I go to church. They laugh at me, but I generally prefer to be behind the scenes. I couldn’t do it without the support and encouragement of my friends.” There was also a deep sense of satisfaction in knowing
that one’s contributions were making a difference. Regarding her first visit to a regional MCAN meeting in Brockton one participant recalled, “there was a wealth of knowledge and experience that I brought to the table that I was unaware I possessed. I was surprised that my ideas were powerful and became essential to the proposal. I was getting respect from the other participants. There was a gentleman and I remember he came up to me, looked me dead in the eye, shook my hand, and said ‘I like the way you think.’” For some participants this was the first time that they felt that they were making a substantive difference in the community. UIA provided a platform that not only gave them voice, but created a venue in which they had access to the channels of power. Another newly minted UIA member enthusiastically described being a part of the change process:

   Just being in a position to realize that change is happening and to be a part of it is huge. I mean, I have a lot of hope that things will turnaround for the better, but just to have a contribution that is a part of why the change is happening, that’s huge. Having the opportunity to meet with leaders in the community who I’ve never sat across the table from? That’s huge… and they are actually listening to what I have to say!

Despite the difficult and oftentimes frustrating nature of organizing most members felt empowered and this excitement spilled over into other parts of the community.

*Increased Civic Engagement*

Almost all of the participants felt that they had become more civically engaged as a result of working with UIA. In particular they felt more comfortable attending public meetings and they believed that UIA had equipped them with the tools to analyze political discourse at a deeper level.

   I listen to politics now, more than I ever have before. I am more aware. I listen now. I listened to political debates before, but now I *really* listen… I find that I am more open and I can look at things with a more critical
eye. Now I can take in information and chew it up a bit. I look at things more deeply now… deeper that I ever looked before.

Members remarked that they felt “smarter,” that they were “better prepared,” and that they felt like their voice “mattered.” For some, this was the first time they had become involved in local politics. One UIA leader stated:

I feel like I am in the midst of something bigger than me and I have been in the city for 44 years and for most of my life I haven’t bothered with the politics because I always saw this “good old boys” way of doing things and it wasn’t about the individual, it wasn’t about the people, it was about those who held the power and playing games. I just never wanted any part of that. I mean I voted, but other than that I didn’t get involved.

The knowledge that they could make an impact served as motivation to become more involved and aware of other local political issues and elections.

*Renewed Sense of Commitment to the Community*

Finally, many people felt a renewed sense of hope for the community through their participation in UIA. With the loss of jobs and the constant threat of violence on the streets many residents had grown frustrated and skeptical about New Bedford’s future prospects. However, the success of UIA, even in small actions, symbolized possibility for the city and it demonstrated that New Bedford was still capable of overcoming social division. The emphasis on relationships within UIA lets individuals know that that they are not alone in their struggle to create a better future. Members spoke of the familiar nature of the organization, as one member phrased it, “UIA is like big, big family, my husband always says, ‘You are always out with those UIA people!’ but I feel like this is a way that I can help.” Others emphasized how the wanted to help their own families and the entire community. A grandmother explained, “I want him (her grandson) to have all
the opportunities that he can and the rest of the kids here should also have all have the same opportunities. Education is important and I don’t want any kids to be passed off. I want them to be able to supply kids with what they need, so they can make it through school and graduate and go on to college and get what they need out of the community.”

UIA was perceived as a means to meet both individual and collective needs.

**Conclusion**

The work of UIA provides a compelling case study of the organizational learning that must take place in order for a CBO to build the capacity to successfully participate in education policy making. It demonstrates that even organizations with extensive political experience in other areas may struggle to infiltrate the networks that are responsible for shaping the mission of public schools. While UIA members continue to build relationships with schools, the strategy to demonstrate their own commitment to the youth of New Bedford as a means to build trust with the school system is extremely innovative and time will tell if this strategy will pay dividends.

It will also be important to assess the impact that the hiring of a new superintendent has on UIA’s future school collaborations. Dr. Bonner has already demonstrated a commitment to increased parental involvement, and it will be interesting to see how her relationship evolves with UIA’s non-traditional approaches. Overall, it is clear that UIA has established a welcoming community of practice that will continue to evolve as it navigates the political systems of New Bedford, but work remains as the group continues to engage in the complex process of education policy development.
For most of the 20th century, the Haffenreffer Brewery was a landmark in the Jamaica Plain neighborhood of Boston. At its peak the bold smell of hops saturated the air around the brewery as up to 250 employees, mostly German immigrants, churned out barrels of beer. According to legend, members of the Boston Red Sox, including Babe Ruth, were frequent visitors to the brewery after home games for the samples of free beer that poured from a tap located on the side of the building. While the emergence of national brewing giants would eventually lead to the demise of the Haffenreffer brewery, the site continues to play an important role in the lives of local immigrant families. In 1964 the brewery closed down and rapidly fell into disrepair. Twenty years later, the Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Development Corporation (JP-NDC) purchased the site for redevelopment. Today the Boston Brewing Company (makers of Samuel Adams) is the most well known tenant, but the Brewery also hosts a number of successful small businesses and non-profits (McConville, 2006). The Brewery stands as a testament to the resilience of a diverse community that has weathered significant economic ups and downs.

Among the non-profits that call the Brewery home is City Life/Vida Urbana (CLVU), a CBO founded in 1973 by political activists who were heavily influenced by the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. In the 1970s, Jamaica Plain was suffering from disinvestment and the heightened tensions surrounding school desegregation and the Boston busing crisis. The organization gained recognition through their successful
efforts to block widespread evictions and attempts to unify support for local
desegregation efforts. Over the decades, housing and tenant rights have continued to be
important issues for CLVU, but they have also evolved as an organization in order to
serve the needs of the community. Today, in addition to the Tenant Organizing Program,
CLVU also directs programs for first time home buyers, healthy families, Latino
leadership programs, and the subject of this study, a parent organizing project.

**Beginnings: Jamaica Plain-Parent Organizing Project**

In 2002, the Jamaica Plain Parent Organizing Project (JP-POP) was formed as a
subsidiary of CLVU with a primary focus on education, in particular, the needs of
bilingual learners and children with special needs. JP-POP is also one of 36 member
organizations that make up the Boston Parent Organizing Network (BPON). Established
in 1999, BPON’s primary role is to help facilitate the sharing of information, ideas, and
strategies among members. In addition to providing structure and support, they also offer
some grant funding and JP-POP is one of the major recipients.

Although membership in JP-POP is open to anyone, participants are primarily
low-income, Spanish speaking women representing the Boston neighborhoods of Jamaica
Plain, Roslindale, Hyde Park, South Boston, Roxbury, and Dorchester. Annual
membership dues of thirty dollars are paid directly to CLVU. Due to Boston’s current
student assignment plan, the children of the JP-POP members do not necessarily attend
neighborhood schools together. In fact, most travel to other neighborhoods in the city.
Therefore, parents living in separate parts of the city may have children in the same
school, while the children of next door neighbors may be spread across the city.
Traditionally this has been an obstacle for education organizing efforts in Boston and contributes to the geographic diversity of JP-POP’s membership.

JP-POP networks with other parent and advocacy groups in the city, but the core constituency remains Latino women. In part, this is because membership growth relies heavily on word-of-mouth, so members are more likely to invite people from inside their own social circles. Membership is also drawn from referrals by other CLVU programs like “Latinos Comprando Casa,” where most of the attendees are Spanish speakers. JP-POP recognizes its relative lack of diversity and is actively trying to increase the heterogeneity of its membership by warmly welcoming visitors. To assist non-Spanish speakers, translators are commonly provided, even for small monthly meetings that only draw a handful of participants. Most members also have children with moderate to severe special needs. The group has developed an expertise in this area and several parents first became aware of JP-POP through recommendations from other parents or even teachers who are concerned about special education services.

JP-POP has organized actions in support of bilingual education, the creation of Family Community Outreach Coordinator (FCOCs) positions, and against changes perceived to be detrimental to special education policy and school budget cuts. A list of specific issues that JP-POP works for can be found on their website. These issues include:

- Negative labeling of students with special needs that undermines efforts to build on strengths;
- The need to overhaul the BPS Individual Education Plan process for children with special needs to include real parent input at all steps of the process;
• A lack of appropriate professional development and certification for all those working with children with special needs;
• The need for appropriate translation and interpretation services for parents in all forms of communication with the school system;
• A lack of a comprehensive parent handbook translated into all languages and explicating all available BPS programs and services;
• Other barriers to consistent communication with classroom teachers;
• An ill-conceived suspension policy and unproductive disciplinary procedures for children with special needs;
• The need for guaranteed seats for all special education students in after school and summer programs; and,
• The need for onsite psychologists for every 5 schools (CLVU, 2007).

Lucia Santana, a CLVU staff member, serves as the full-time organizer for JP-POP.

Santana came to the U.S. from Puerto Rico when she was eighteen years old. With three children and the equivalent of a ninth grade education, she initially felt disconnected from her new community in the US. However, after coming into contact with CLVU in 1999 and joining the Latino Leadership Program (LLP), she realized that she could play an important role in her community. She began taking English lessons and participated in different leadership development opportunities offered through CLVU and other community organizations. Over time she emerged as a community leader and joined JP-POP, first as a member, and then as lead organizer. Lucia now has six children, all of whom have attended or are still attending Boston Public Schools. Lucia’s background has helped make her an accessible and experienced resource for the members of JP-POP.\(^{11}\) The development of Santana into a community leader also provides an excellent

\(^{11}\) For more information on City Life and Lucia Santana see the website: http://www.clvu.org/about. Additional information about Ms. Santana was obtained through a personal interview, January 17\(^{th}\), 2007.
example of the organizational structure of JP-POP, demonstrating how all of the members are in a continuous process of leadership development.

**Action Issues for JP-POP**

JP-POP addresses education issues as they emerge in the community. In general, the primary challenges are the interrelated topics of language, special needs, and access to power. Bilingual education was the focus of the first major action for JP-POP and helped set the tone for its future efforts. Special education was quickly identified as area of high need in the community and the group developed a reputation in this area. Finally, access to power is a common goal among all CBOs and of particular importance for marginalized families seeking to access the bureaucratic structures of a large urban school system. The following section provides a brief overview of the status of education in the Boston Public School system and a description of three organizing foci: bilingual education in 2002, continuous work in the area of special education, and a 2007 campaign for the funding of additional Family Community Outreach Coordinator Positions.

**Boston Public School System**

With few exceptions, all of the JP-POP members have children in the Boston Public Schools (BPS). The BPS system is one of the largest in the country, serving 56,388 students from Pre-K to the twelfth grade. In the 2000 census the racial breakdown of the population of the city of Boston was 54% White, 25% Black or African American, 14% Hispanic or Latino, and 8% Asian (US Census, 2000). The demographics of the BPS student population are significantly different. According to
data from the 2006-2007 school year, 13.5% of students in BPS are White, 40.9% African American, 35.2% Hispanic, and 8.5% Asian (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2007a). This discrepancy is sometimes attributed to the large college and young professional population in Boston (the majority of whom are White and childless), but White flight from the urban schools is also a contributing factor, with many parents opting for the multitude of private education options in and around the city (Lankford & Wyckoff, 2001).

In recognition of overall performance and their efforts to close the achievement gap, BPS was the 2006 recipient of the prestigious $1 million dollar Broad Prize for Urban Education. Furthermore, the ten year tenure of former Superintendent Thomas Payzant (1995-2006) is widely considered a successful example of long term school reform and the benefits of strong superintendent/mayoral relationship (Reville, 2007). Yet, despite these accolades the BPS system does not enjoy a strong reputation in the state of Massachusetts. The dropout rate between grades nine and twelve is 10% in comparison with the state average of 3.3% and only 59.1% of students graduate in four years (the state average is 79.9%). Of those who do graduate 42% will move on to a public or private four year college and an additional 13% will enroll at a two year college. A recent study by the Boston Foundation reveals that while 7 of 10 BPS students may get into college, many lack the preparation to succeed. For example, of the 101 BPS students who enrolled in Roxbury Community College in 2000, only 6 percent had earned a diploma by 2007 ("In college, but only marginally ", 2008 ).
In terms or academic performance there is an abundance of data to take into account. The Composite Performance Index (CPI) is a useful tool for assessing the progress being made by school systems toward Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). The CPI measures the extent to which students are progressing toward the goal of proficiency. It is a 100 point index that combines the scores of students who take both the standard and alternative versions of the MCAS. Scores correspond to one of the six performance rating categories below (MDOE, 2006):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Rating</th>
<th>CPI Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very High</td>
<td>90-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>80-89.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>70-79.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>60-69.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Low</td>
<td>40-50.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critically Low</td>
<td>0-39.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Across the sixteen general grade and subject areas (not disaggregated), BPS had CPIs ranging from 44.1 (8th grade Science and Technology) to 79.5 (8th grade English and Language Arts). Six areas earned a “moderate” rating, five areas earned a “low” rating, and five areas earned a “very low” rating. Of course CPI targets are meant to increase until 2014, so a low rating does not necessarily mean that schools are not improving. However, in the case of BPS an examination of all 2007 AYP subgroups (across all
grades) in both Math and English Language reveals that the district failed to meet AYP in 10 of 14 categories.\(^{12}\) Finally, on average the district has higher rates of absence, out-of-school suspension, and retention than the rest of the state. There is a slightly higher percentage of special education students (19.7\% v. 16.9\%) and significantly higher percentages of students designated limited English proficiency 18.3\% v. 5\%) or low income (72.7\% v. 28.9\%).

**Bilingual Education**

Many of the parents in JP-POP do not speak English and bilingual education is a primary concern for the group. In fact, bilingual education was the first major action issue. In 2002 Ron Unz and his group “English for the Children” came to Massachusetts promoting legislation for English-only immersion programs. Unz had already managed successful campaigns in California (Proposition 227 in 1998), Arizona (Proposition 203 in 1999), and while working in Massachusetts, simultaneously supported legislation in Colorado (Brisk, 2005).\(^{13}\) Santana, who was a group member at the time, recalled “We did a big campaign and mobilized the people, the parents, the community. We went to Lawrence (a city north of Boston) to talk on the radio. We went to the TV. We went to the news. We were able to mobilize 400 people in Boston.” She also recalled being surprised at the need to organize other members of the Latino community, but it soon became clear that the wording of the issue was somewhat misleading. One portion of the ballot Question 2 read:

\(^{12}\) The White and Asian subgroups met AYP in both Math and ELA.

\(^{13}\) Proposition 31, which was narrowly defeated by a margin of 54\% to 46\% in 2002.
WHAT YOUR VOTE WILL DO:
A YES VOTE would require that, with limited exceptions, all public school children must be taught English by being taught all subjects in English and being placed in English language classrooms.
A NO VOTE would make no changes in English language education in public schools (Galvin, 2002).

Five years later Santana still grows angry thinking about the campaign, “The language of Question 2 was so confusing. ‘Do you want your child to learn English?’ Everyone, I mean everyone, wants their child to learn English! That is why JP-POP seeks to educate. We educated the people in Boston and in Boston they voted “no.” Indeed, while 70% of Massachusetts voters decided to endorse Question 2, the neighborhoods targeted by JP-POP voted “No.”

The campaign also highlighted some of the subtle anti-immigrant sentiments that JP-POP members face. The primary motivation for the statewide campaign against the ballot initiative was not the quality of the education being provided to the state’s immigrant population, but rather the protection of the personal interests of teachers and administrators. The ballot question included language that allows parents or guardians to bring litigation against state employees. The proposition stated that, “Any school employee, school committee member or other elected official or administrator who willfully and repeatedly refused to implement the proposed law could be personally ordered to pay such fees, costs, and damages; could not be reimbursed for that payment by any public or private party; and could not be elected to a school committee or employed in the public schools for 5 years (Galvin, 2002).” Thus, the rally cry of the “No” campaign was not “Immigrant rights!” but “Don’t Sue the Teachers!” Only the unanimous opinion of the state Legislature’s Joint Committee on Education, Arts and
Humanities recognized the ballot question as bad pedagogical policy and detrimental to the status of immigrants in the Bay State.

The elimination of bilingual education would have an immediate impact on the lives of JP-POP members. They were expecting to lose the bilingual education classes that many of their children attended, but they had not anticipated that this legislation would also have an impact on their children with special needs. Santana describes her interpretation of the aftermath:

The special education department was not supposed to be affected by the ballot question, but that is not what happened. Right now the bilingual legislation is also affecting students with special needs because there are not enough bilingual teachers. They (the school district) are breaking the law because they are not providing the bilingual services that the students with special needs need. Children with IEPs that say they should get bilingual services are not receiving them.

While frustration over the final outcome persists, the increased voter turnout and local win was JP-POP’s first major success and provided a psychic victory that encouraged continued participation.

Special Education

Providing a quality education for students with special needs is a challenge for many school districts and BPS is no exception. According to the twenty indicators outlined in the Massachusetts States Performance Plan (MA SPP) for 2005-2010, the city is lagging well behind the rest of the state. The graduation rate for students with IEPs is only 36.2%, far short of the state target 61.6%. The dropout rate (12.3%) and full inclusion rates of students with IEPs (30.1%) are also well below established state targets. While the district does perform well in some areas, like the development of IEPs
in Early Childhood, it is evident that there is still much work to be done in the area of special education (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2006).

As a result of these challenges, JP-POP has developed a series of trainings to help support community members who have children with special needs. Many of the trainings are organized and done in concert with other professional organizations. For example, the introduction to advocacy training (essentially a primer on parental rights) is conducted with the “EdLaw project,” a group of lawyers working to ensure student rights and equitable education in the city of Boston. Members of JP-POP quickly use the information that they obtain and “translate” it into a user friendly format that is accessible to all. With the vast size of the BPS system and the range of challenges that special education poses, JP-POP spends a significant amount of time collecting information and keeping up with district policies. While serving as an information clearinghouse is not a typical “action” for a CBO it does help keep JP-POP members involved in the system and allows them to mobilize quickly around emerging issues.

In addition to addressing these broader concerns, JP-POP also provides individual support to families. A key lesson from the advocacy training sessions was that families have the right to bring whoever they want to their child’s IEP meetings. This led to a unique practice in which group members attend IEP meetings with other JP-POP members. Frequently, their presence is simply for the purpose of emotional support, but members occasionally contribute with a question or comment and they always take the time to debrief after the meeting to discuss their impressions and next steps. Regardless of the level of involvement,
the presence of the other members is always appreciated. As one new member remarked:

It’s emotional because I’m talking about my child and I get very upset. My whole thing is, ‘Okay, why are you (the school) not trying to give her everything that she needs? Why are you trying to take things from her? You know what I mean? If she needs it and that’s what your job is, why not give it to her?’ It’s emotional for me. It’s like a power struggle but these people are supposed to be here to help her so it is nice to have the support of the others.

This practice has lead to some situations in which community members will occasionally outnumber the teachers and administrators in the room, causing a significant shift in the traditional power dynamics of what might otherwise be a daunting situation for many marginalized parents. Following an IEP meeting the JP-POP members will often meet to go over the details of the conversation, plan next steps, and provide support to participating family members.

*Family Community Outreach Coordinators*

One of the most recent achievements for JP-POP was the implementation and funding of Family Community Outreach Coordinators (FCOC) in BPS schools. The bulk of the most recent FCOC campaign activity started in February of 2007 when then Superintendent Michael Contompasis and the Boston School Committee (BSC) held a series of public hearings to solicit testimony regarding the allocation of funds for the district’s 2008 operating budget, estimated at $782 million dollars. Thanks to the efforts of the CBOs, the primary focus of these public forums quickly became the $440,000 (roughly .05% of the total budget) designated for the hiring of eight additional FCOCs. While this may seem like an insignificant amount of money relative to the rest of the
budget, JP-POP members had witnessed firsthand the positive impact that FCOCs were making in local schools and they were determined to get increased funding for the initiative.

For years, BPON activists had sought to improve relationships between Boston’s public schools and the children, youth, parents, and communities that they are intended to serve. The development of the FCOC initiative was the result of many years of hard work and collaboration between multiple CBOs and the Department of Family and Community Engagement. In particular, former deputy superintendent Karen Mapp was an important ally within the administration, helping to create a somewhat unique alliance with both internal and external supporters of the new position. In 2005, BPS initiated the FCOC Pilot Initiative, creating the new school based position with the goal of increasing family and community engagement in the district. Several BPS schools already employed parent liaisons, but these positions lacked district-level support. They were usually funded by outside philanthropies and the liaisons’ designated responsibilities varied from school to school. The newly proposed FCOC position came with central office funding and provided more direction, focusing on three primary goals:

- the creation of a school environment that is consistently welcoming to families;
- the empowerment of parents to serve as leaders in their children’s schools and increased opportunities for the development of families’ capacities to support learning; and
- outreach and relationship building with an emphasis on increasing trust and respect between schools and families.

The FCOC position was designed to formally facilitate the process of family-school-community collaborations, while still allowing for the creativity and flexibility required to meet the needs at each individual school. The joint campaign was hard fought
and as a result of a tenacious and well-organized advocacy campaign, former
Superintendent Thomas Payzant and the BSC agreed to support the new initiative.14

During the initial pilot year in 2005-06, seventy-three schools applied for FCOC
casting funding and fifteen positions were filled, serving a total of seventeen schools (two of the
FCOCs held part-time positions at two schools). Following positive feedback on the
FCOCs and in recognition of the difficulties inherent in serving two school communities,
additional funding was supplied in 2006-07 to hire two more FCOCs, so that each school
had their own full-time position.

Early evaluations of the initiative indicate that the FCOCs are accomplishing their
goals and families in particular are grateful for their presence.15 Hence, BPON and the
CBOs have continued to agitate for increased support of this initiative. During this most
recent campaign, several of the CBOs sent members to testify at the hearings, including
one Spanish speaking mother, who choked with emotion, testified through an interpreter,
“I used to be scared to attend my child’s school. Because I do not speak English, I did
not feel like I belonged, but now because of the FCOC at my daughter’s school, I now
feel like I am a part of the community. All of the families in the Boston Public Schools
deserve this opportunity.”

14 For a full account of the development of the FCOC initiative see Chapter 9, “Family
and Community Engagement in the Boston Public Schools” by Abby R. Weiss and Helen
Westmoreland in A decade of urban school reform: Persistence and progress in the
Boston public schools. Paul Reville, S. P. with Coggins, C. (eds.) Cambridge, MA:
15 See the preliminary report to the Boston Public School Committee, Constantino, S.
(March 15, 2006). Evaluation of the family and community outreach coordinators pilot
initiative in the Boston Public Schools.
The odds against the parent and community activists were daunting. Boston had slowly been climbing out of an economic recession, and many staff positions had been slashed a few years earlier that had never been fully restored. Yet as a result of this grassroots advocacy work, the BSC agreed to fund new FCOC slots. During the final budget meeting, Interim Superintendent Contampasis commented on the decision to increase funding: “We have had the benefit of three public hearings on the budget. I am grateful to those parents, teachers and other members of the community who took the time to attend the hearings and provide testimony. The one consistent theme that we heard throughout these hearings was the effectiveness of and the need for additional Family and Community Outreach Coordinators.” The parent and community activists were elated. According to one CBO member, “This was our most important victory to date. This will benefit all of the children in the community.”

**Becoming a member of JP-POP**

The majority of JP-POP members became involved through some combination of the following four factors. First, many were referred to the group through their social networks including friends, family, and professionals. Second, JP-POP has earned a reputation as a quality resource for the families of students with special needs and this draws in a number of members. Third, several parents expressed a desire to become more involved in their children’s education, but faced obstacles grounded in cultural and linguistic differences. Finally, some members had unpleasant encounters with the BPS system and were concerned about the well-being of their children which motivated them to find a way to advocate for their children.
Personal Referrals

The social networks of existing members are the foundation of JP-POPs recruitment. Most of the members were initially introduced to the organization through friends or family, but invitations are not limited to a closed social circle. The personal invitations that members received are remembered with gratitude and established members work to extend invitations to individuals who they meet with similar needs. This frequently happens at other education workshops, but also occurs at church, the community health clinic, the grocery store or even the laundry mat.

What motivates these individuals to strike up conversations and expand their social networks in an era when people are supposedly becoming more insular? Many want to share the relief that they felt when they learned that others were facing similar situations. One parent described meeting a neighborhood woman while waiting in the health clinic, “she really felt overwhelmed and I let her know what steps she should take (to get services) and I let her know that with time it is going to get better. I know how she feels. I feel like we can help her so I am trying to get her to go to the JP-POP meetings.” Others are so excited and relieved to learn about the rights that they never knew they had, they are eager to share this valuable information with others. The most frequent JP-POP pitch is, “You have to learn your rights!” followed by “You need to learn to advocate for your children.”

Reputation as a Quality Resource

In addition to the referrals that were made through friends, families and acquaintances, some of the members discovered JP-POP through their children’s teachers
or other school administrators. According to two participants, their children’s teachers specifically told them that as parents of a child with special needs it was important to learn about their rights and that they should “check out” JP-POP. This is a particularly interesting occurrence considering that JP-POP occasionally finds itself in opposition to schools and educators. Santana believes that these referrals are based on the fact that many schools are overwhelmed and despite having occasional differences of opinion they see JP-POP as reliable source of information and assistance for families. While a CBO would generally prefer that government agencies not use them as a “service provider,” JP-POP sees this as a positive sign that there are increasing levels of trust within the schools.

JP-POP hosts a number of “training sessions” where families can come and learn about their rights as parents. Members talk about how accessible these trainings are in comparison with the interactions that they have in BPS. Many parents are veterans of trainings provided by BPS and other social service agencies; as a result three of the participants recalled having some reservations about JP-POP, thinking that it would simply be more of the same. However, their skepticism quickly subsided when they discovered how useful and empowering the information was. As one mother remarked, “Before this I was working with another agency, it was private and they do the things for you as an advocate, but they don’t provide us with the tools. You see a person in the workshops (at JP-POP) and she provides us with the tools to do things for ourselves.” Members not only learn about important resources, but they are empowered to help their children.
The collective approach to understanding resources and policy issues lends credibility to the information that is received. One parent who had become exasperated with the bureaucracy of the school system was reinvigorated to face her child’s challenges after joining JP-POP. She explained, “Having other parents talk about their kids, to be honest with you, I feel renewed by the end of the meeting. They give a good orientation, help you with what you need step-by-step. It is good because you get to learn and dialogue with one another. You learn so much about the services that you can get for your children at school.”

Desire for Increased Parental Involvement

Many of the JP-POP members said that they wanted to be more involved with their children’s schools, but they were uncertain about how they could help. In particular, immigrant parents were uncertain of the school’s expectations and expressed surprise when they learned that in America a “good parent” is a frequent visitor. As one mother from the Dominican Republic said, “at home there was very little interaction with the school, because the teacher and parents trusted one another. A teacher at home (in the Dominican) is like another mother.” These types of attitudes are consistent with the research literature regarding many Hispanic immigrant families (Valdes, 1996).

Even when parents had a better idea of what was expected from them, many continued to face linguistic barriers. For Spanish speaking parents, access to school events, conferences, and meetings is severely limited. This is especially problematic at schools where there was not a large Hispanic population because it is less likely that someone can serve as an impromptu translator. One mother described her determination
to demonstrate her commitment to her children’s education despite being unable to communicate effectively:

I have tried to get involved, and they say that they will get an interpreter, but when I show up at meetings there isn’t any interpretation available. It was only because I went in and asked for a school calendar that I learned about various meetings. I rarely get invitations to school events. Sometimes, even when I know that they will not have interpreters available, I still go to the meetings just so that they know that there are people who are willing to be present.

Observations of community and BPS sponsored events confirmed the marked contrast in the participation of JP-POP members based on the availability of translation. In January 2007, a community forum was held at the Freedom House in Roxbury. The event was supposed to be an introduction to recently hired Superintendent Manuel J. Rivera. However, days before the event Rivera rescinded his acceptance of the post, leaving the city of Boston in a difficult position. Despite Rivera’s absence, the forum moved forward with Interim Superintendent Contampasis, Mayor Menino, and several city councilpersons in attendance. Among the standing room only crowd were members of JP-POP, proudly wearing BPON buttons (BPON was one of the organizers of the event). Translation was provided and Spanish speaking attendees could wear headphones to listen to a simulcast of the event. JP-POP members were active participants in the event and several made their way up to the microphone during the question and answer period to demand the continued participation of the community in the superintendent search process.

Several months later there was no translation provided at a special education conference focused on the transition of children from special education services to
adulthood. JP-POP members were also in attendance at this event and one mother had specifically remarked on her excitement about this topic, which featured an engaging speaker, Keith Jones. Without a translator the members of JP-POP sat huddled in one corner of the Timilty Middle School gymnasium. One of the mothers, who possesses strong English comprehension skills, would occasionally whisper translations to the others during pauses in the talk. As the rest of the audience was drawn in and laughed with the energetic keynote speaker, JP-POP members strained to listen and understand. As one of the attendees later explained, “It is very difficult because you have to focus so much on trying to understand the speaker. This makes it harder to listen to what they are actually trying to say. You end up missing a lot.”

Concern for their Children
The final factor for many participants was feelings of concern for their children’s well being. During both formal and informal conversations, members shared instances where they felt that their child had been treated unjustly in the system. In fact, most could point to a specific event that motivated them to seek out additional help. These experiences ranged from learning about supplementary services that were not being

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16 The event was co-sponsored by the NAACP, Boston Public Schools, and URBAN Pride, INC. It should be noted that registration form did ask attendees if any accommodations were required including: sign language, translation, or child care. Sign translation was provided on the day of the event and in speaking to several of the JP-POP members they told me that they were late registrants, perhaps revealing why no translation was available. The experiences described here are used to represent the difficulties inherent in attending events without translation and should not be interpreted as an indictment of the efforts of the event organizers.

17 Mr. Jones spoke about his experiences as a former student in the BPS system and his transition to adulthood. He currently works as CEO of Soultochin’ experiences, an organization dedicated to raising awareness about inclusions and the empowerment of persons with disabilities.
offered to their children to an instance where a parent was blamed for her child’s black eye. There was very little trust among families that the school system would do what is best for the children without some prodding. In fact, some participants believed that they were intentionally left uniformed. One mother expressed her frustration at learning about the lack of bus monitors (something required by her son’s IEP) second hand:

> The schools don’t always inform the parents of their rights. And my husband and I are very involved, you can go and ask the principal and she will say, “Oh, they are always here, they are good parents.” But the school still didn’t tell me about the bus issue, I had to find out from the old lady who was riding with my son. I couldn’t believe it! If this can happen to me, I have to wonder about the parents who have to go to work or who can’t be at the school all the time.

While the members of JP-POP can all cite individual struggles to obtain adequate services for their children with special needs, it is important to note that these same parents were also quick to identify and commend the efforts of those teachers, aides, and administrators who offered their support and expertise. Despite having many concerns about certain individuals and frustrations with the system, all of the parents appreciated the difficulties that teachers faced and voiced their appreciation.

**Participation in JP-POP**

JP-POP has developed several practices that maximize their efficiency in organizing activities. Network learning, internal collaboration, distributed leadership, and evaluation all play an important role in JP-POP’s overall capacity to influence education issues.

*Network Learning*
Research and learning is central to the work of JP-POP. Part of this work is the development of organizational skills necessary for advocacy campaigns. BPON, CLVU, and other CBOs modeled or provided many of the tools and strategies necessary to wage large scale campaigns like the one that was used to advocate for the FCOCs. JP-POP members learned to prepare and deliver public testimony, how to lobby politicians with phone calls or letters, and how to mobilize their friends and neighbors. Members were also very eager to learn about legal and pedagogical topics related to special education. The legal issues are important because they provide families with a better idea of what their rights are within the school system and the pedagogical information is helpful for understanding what techniques may be most beneficial for their children. For immigrant families this technical information is especially helpful. “I am not from this country so I don’t know about the laws or all of the rights that the children have, so they (JP-POP) helped me to learn about this,” remarked one mother from Puerto Rico, “they are very clear with their explanations.”

Half of the participants conducted research using the internet, but a more common means for acquiring knowledge was participation in various networks. Workshops sponsored by JP-POP or other non-profit/social service agencies were highly valued resources. At JP-POP sponsored workshops the members selected topics and made all of the arrangements. When workshops were hosted by other organizations, attending members were responsible for collecting materials and sharing the pertinent information with other JP-POP members at the next meeting. While initial exposure to the material at
these events was important, much of the learning took place afterwards when the members gathered together to analyze and digest the information.

**Collaborative Learning**

The knowledge obtained through trainings was frequently saved and adapted for future actions and utilized as a shared resource. Over the years JP-POP has developed a small library of resource binders with titles ranging from “What to look for in your child’s IEP” to “Transitioning your Special Needs Child to Adulthood.” These binders are grounded in the social knowledge of the community which makes them even more valuable. In the development of these materials two levels of translation occur. One is a literal linguistic translation and the other is a translation from technical professional language to something more practical. In some ways the translation from English to Spanish is less important than the translation that occurs from “eduspeak” to layman’s terms. The veteran members often take the lead in the dissemination of this information. The contributions of the more experienced members help to clear up any lingering misunderstandings following workshops or presentations. As one veteran JP-POP member observed:

The learning process is hard. At the workshop last weekend you could tell that it was confusing. For example, some of the parents heard that they could request one-to-one services. They were thinking that this would be like a personal tutor, but that is not the case. One-to-one is really intended for students with severe special needs or multiple handicaps. Even in these cases it is not necessarily what is good for every student. It is important to make sure that everyone understands.

The group works together to make sure that they understand the information in a manner that will allow them to use it for the benefit of their children.
There are many other examples of collaborative learning within the organization. For example, information about events and opportunities at various schools is passed between members. Because the participants’ children are scattered throughout the schools JP-POP has close tabs on what occurs throughout the district. Several of the participants also had relationships with people that they trusted within the BPS system. These relationships were highly valued and provided “insider access” to information. As one member said, “I have a lot of resources in the community and I have a lot inside the Boston Public Schools. I have my people too. I have my connections inside the Boston Public Schools and they help me to be successful.” There was tremendous appreciation for those insiders who were willing to recommend that members seek out a particular resource or even seek legal counsel. This was perceived as a sign that this individual had the true interests of the child in mind and it speaks to the value of informal networks.

This local knowledge proved to be particularly helpful for navigating a vast bureaucratic system like BPS where it can often be difficult to make contact with administrators. In one workshop the guest speaker was listing the names of some individuals to contact at BPS. As one name appeared on the dry erase board, a JP-POP member in the audience said, “Oh, she never answers her phone. She is almost impossible to get a hold of.” Another parent sitting across the room said, “Yes, but you can call Carol18 who is in the office next door. Ask her to poke her head into the office and tell her to pick up the phone before you call.” This type of information was acquired through experience and shared freely among the parents.

18 A pseudonym.
Distributed Leadership

There are ample opportunities for individuals to share their personal expertise and even newcomers are called upon to contribute immediately. One participant described her first meeting with JP-POP:

Participant: And I was just sitting there and Lucia kind of put me on the spot because she wanted me to talk about DMR (Department of Mental Retardation) and how to get them to come down and get some services or whatever for our kids. Explain the processes and why we’re not receiving certain things.

Researcher: So you’re already contributing to the group in your first meeting?

Participant: Yeah. Not by will but pushed into it (laughing). I guess in an organizer relationship they are supposed to push you into things, but yeah. They were telling me about their kids. And we talked about what’s wrong with my daughter. How can we have DMR come down and explain their services? They asked me to write a letter to DMR. I did and gave it to Lucia and we planned the next meeting basically.

This experience is typical of the monthly JP-POP membership meeting. While there is always a set agenda and the group is cognizant of time, meetings are structured so that everyone has an opportunity to participate. The structure of JP-POP closely resembles the distributed leadership model described by Spillane (2006). In this model, leadership is shared among multiple stakeholders, but it is not a simple matter of delegation. Rather leadership is enacted among the members through their interactions with one another and depends upon evolving situations. From a distributed perspective, “Leadership is a system of practice made up of a collection of interacting component parts in relationships of interdependence in which the group has distinct properties over and above the individuals who make it up” (Spillane, 2006, p. 16). The meetings are focused and can
occasionally become tedious as consensus is sought for even the most minor details. A democratic process guides each meeting as participants discuss and vote on what issues they want to address, dates for future functions, and delegation of responsibilities.\textsuperscript{19} According to several veteran members this model has emerged over time through the encouragement of Santana and previous organizers.

\textit{Evaluation}

Evaluations are a critical part of organizing work for the members of JP-POP. Following every meeting or workshop the members would take a moment to think about event and what new questions or ideas might have emerged. The evaluation was particularly important when information at an event was conveyed in English. While the presence of an interpreter was helpful, the participants still found that it was useful to touch base with one another and make sure that they all understood the same message.

The evaluations that followed IEP meeting are an excellent example of this dynamic and they were cited by two of the participants. “After the meeting we talk to one another and discuss ‘next steps.’ It is important because we want to be sure that we can follow up on the information that we receive and you need to keep moving forward if you want to get anything done.”

\textit{Learning Challenges in JP-POP}

As an organization seeking to address education policy, the challenges that faced JP-POP were similar to many of the same obstacles identified in research on Latino

\textsuperscript{19} According to Spillane, democratic leadership is generally distributed, but distributed leadership is not necessarily democratic. However, the JP-POP model is both “distributed” and “democratic.”
parental involvement (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004). Many of these issues have already been addressed in this case study. Language barriers, knowledge of school culture, and time constraints frequently hindered JP-POP’s efforts. Most challenging, but an issue that JP-POP is seeking to address was an overreliance on organizer Lucia Santana. Santana garners a tremendous amount of respect and trust among the members, but occasionally the group relies on her too heavily. In every single interview the participants mentioned how important Santana is to the group.

Both Santana and JP-POP members are cognizant of this challenge and try to make sure that responsibilities are shared. In particular, Santana works tirelessly to support internal leadership development. Yet, it remains an issue for two reasons. First, Santana is fluent in both English and Spanish and is sometimes called upon to serve as a translator/representative. This occasionally makes her a de facto public representative for JP-POP, a situation that most organizers try to avoid. To meet this challenge the group tries to hire and utilize their own translator or submit written statements that are read on the behalf of the group whenever possible. Second, Santana was a member of the group before she became the lead organizer. While it is not uncommon for organizers to emerge from the ranks of a CBO, it does require the individual to mindful of this transition. Aware of the policy in other organizations that requires organizers to move to a new city after a predetermined number of years, Santana has already contemplated how she can transition back to a membership role and allow new leaders to take control. All of the members want to ensure that JP-POP will continue to be a vibrant and sustainable organization when Santana eventually decides to move on to another opportunity.
Beyond the Issues: Ancillary Benefits of Participation in Grassroots Organizing

Aside from achieving victories in the areas bilingual education, special education and home and school relationships JP-POP members also exhibited and described a number of other benefits related to their participation. Among the key themes to emerge were increased confidence, relationship building with educators, expanding social networks, and increased motivation for more social activism and self-improvement.

Personal Empowerment

As previously mentioned, a number of participants felt intimidated in their dealings with schools. Linguistic barriers and cultural disconnects were the primary basis for this fear. One of the benefits of participation was an increase in confidence that allowed participants to overcome these issues. This confidence was created in a number of different ways. Members became accustomed to public speaking on a small scale through participation in the monthly meetings or at training sessions. The culture of support that the rest of the group provided helped even those who were reluctant to participate at this level. Preparation was another key element to building confidence. Members were well prepared in advance of meetings and they kept focused on the agenda, regardless of whether they were in front of the school board or dealing with an IEP. Even when linguistic barriers continued to persist, the members felt much more confident because they knew what to expect in different situations. The knowledge that they gained regarding their personal rights was also an important factor. It enabled parents to assert themselves with educators, as one mother recalled:

I used to be afraid to go to the school and I wouldn’t talk to anyone at the school. But now that I know what my rights are, I realize that I need to
speak up to advocate for my son. Before I was afraid, but not anymore. A few weeks ago I was at a meeting with my son’s teacher and he (the teacher) called him (her son) a liar. I felt really insulted and after the meeting I sent my son out of the room and told the teacher how I felt. I said that his language was setting a poor example for my son who is trying to become less aggressive. The teacher acknowledged this and he actually apologized. I never would have done something like that prior to joining JP-POP. I would have been too afraid. I really feel empowered to speak up.

While JP-POP members are still deeply respectful of their children’s teachers, they feel empowered to voice their opinion in a manner that many white, middle-class parents simply take for granted (Lareau, 2003).

*Relationship Building with Educators*

Related to this growing confidence and increased participation at school was the development of stronger relationships with teachers. According to the participants, teachers and administrators admired the commitment of JP-POP members and perceived them as “good parents” because of their participation. At the same time, increased participation created more opportunities for conflict, especially in the area of special education resource allocation. Perhaps this dichotomy speaks to the fundamental conflict of parental involvement, where parents are depicted as being overly concerned with the situations of their own children and educators must be responsible for the well-being of all children. Not surprisingly JP-POP activities that focused on broader issues like the funding of FCOCs or bilingual education were more likely to be embraced by educators while efforts to win specific services for individual children were met with more resistance.
Many members of JP-POP expressed gratitude for the hard work of their children’s teachers, but there was also a desire for increased collaboration. If progress is to be made in this area it will likely require a significant cultural shift for both parents and teachers. One veteran member explained:

They (teachers) feel I’m trying to make them accountable to teach. They feel like they are under attack. We aren’t attacking. I know she will be accountable if she has the proper resources. And we will fight for that resource. If she worked together with me, I can give her what she needs. Like for example, if a teacher needs a computer program to help a child and I know she can do a better job to teach that child if she got this. I need to fight for the child. They need to understand me that I don’t want to fight with the teacher. I go and fight against the system. The system needs to provide what the child and the teacher needs in the classroom.

Perhaps something that will help facilitate the strengthening of these relationships in the future is the recognition that most JP-POP members are advocating for the benefit of all of the students in the school system and not simply out of self-interest for their own child.

*Expanding Social Networks*

Many individuals were brought into JP-POP through friends and family and their social networks grew as they met and worked with other group members. While some personal friendships did develop the majority of the new relationships are more aptly described as collegial. Members were friendly and often knew the intimate details of one another’s lives, but these relationships did not continue outside of JP-POP events. Relationships with other JP-POP members were professional and goal oriented. Still, many members were extremely proud of the cohesiveness of the group, “Because we are all different, live in different places. I can say that I know them and some of them are friendly… maybe I am not socializing with them, but as a group we are so together.”
There was a significant amount of diversity within the group that might not be appreciated at first glance. While on the surface the networks forged in JP-POP might appear to be representative of “bonding” forms of social capital (homogenous and inward looking), there are a number of more subtle social networks and it is clear that some important “bridging” social capital is also being formed (Gittell & Vidal, 1998). As Putnam notes, “bonding and bridging are not “either-or” categories into which social networks can be neatly divided, but “more or less” dimensions along which we can compare different forms of social capital” (Putnam, 2000, p. 23). For example, the children of JP-POP members might be broadly categorized as Latino or Hispanic by the school system, but the ethnic origins of the members are important aspects of their identities and personal networks. Members come from the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and Mexico and there are many important differences, including the traditions that they honor and how they understand the role of school. For example, one Dominican mother described very maternal relationships between students and teachers back home, while another Mexican mother detailed a much more formal dynamic in which the schools and families had very little interaction. Perhaps even more important were members’ identities based on their children’s specific special needs. Parents whose children shared a specific disability had a bond based on their shared experiences and the likelihood that they might run across one another at other “disability specific” conferences or events. The development of multiple weak ties into other social networks helped JP-POP increase its overall efficiency when addressing new challenges. It was widely believed that the individual diversity of the group members helped to create a
stronger whole and hence a future organizational goal is to recruit more heavily outside of the Hispanic/Latino populations.

Desire for Social Action and Self-Improvement
The experience of being empowered to work in the community also spilled over into other areas of JP-POP members’ lives. For some members participation created a desire for further social networking or motivation to accomplish more personal goals. One mother described her desire to create an informal neighborhood group. “I have been thinking about this for a long time. I would love to get a group of women together on a weekly basis for coffee or something. I think that if we only had the chance to sit down and talk to one another we could start to come up with solutions for a lot of the problems that we are facing.” When these desires were expressed, the activities that were described generally included an element of social support. No one discussed joining a political campaign or some sort of advocacy group that did not specifically address the immediate needs of the community. The familial/communal element seemed to be at the center of the appeal for social action.

Others were motivated to pursue more individual goals. Leadership development is an important part of the group’s work and three participants mentioned how they would like to continue to grow in this area. Improving English language skills was a common personal goal that would help to enable access to power.

I have been here a long time, but JP-POP has helped motivate me to go back to school and learn English. I want to do that for my children, I don’t want them to have to rely so much on others. I want them to become independent and I want the satisfaction of knowing that I am the one who is able to help them out. In September I am going back to school to get my G.E.D. and to learn English. I actually worked at a daycare for four
years before I had my daughter. I saw that my children needed me, children need their parents.

Success begets success and the experience of working collaboratively to identify and achieve a goal opened a world of possibilities for many group members. As one mother phrased it, “I want to write on a big sign, ‘Not everything falls from heaven.’ You have to go out and get the help that you need, you have to look for help and today I feel much better. If you work hard for it you are going to get things done.”

Conclusion

JP-POP is an example of a neighborhood based, single issue CBO that has continually developed its internal and external resources until it has become a legitimate player in the educational politics of the BPS system. The mayor, superintendent, and school committee members have come to expect the presence of JP-POP members at open meetings and they know that they are dealing with a group that is dedicated to the success of all children. The members of JP-POP face many of the challenges that limit family participation in schools; however, they have discovered that as a collective unit they can overcome these obstacles. JP-POP plans to continue advocating for all students and is now looking to provide more ESL opportunities for its own members. One of the major challenges for JP-POP is the heavy reliance upon English speaking members of the group. With so many members eager to participate in school politics they are frequently called upon to serve as translators, so they are looking to increase their English speaking membership. This dedication to organizational growth indicates that JP-POP will continue to play a role in education policy making in Boston and the support that they
have already received from school insiders demonstrates that they are providing a new model for more effective family/school collaborations.
On June 1st, 1996 over 200,000 people gathered in Washington, D.C. for the “Stand for Children” rally, organized by Marian Wright Edelman and the Children’s Defense Fund. This historic march was the largest rally for children’s causes in American history and included guest speakers such as academic Cornell West, comedian and entertainer Rosie O’Donnell, and then president of the National Council of Negro Women, Dr. Dorothy Height. Edelman led a march of 10,000 children and adults across the Arlington Memorial Bridge to join the rally, where under the shadow of the Lincoln memorial she proclaimed, “If we don’t stand up for children, then we don’t stand for much” ("Stand for Children rally draws thousands to nation's capital - Washington, DC," 1996).

Helping with the organization of this epic event was one of Edelman’s sons, Jonah. Already involved in a number of volunteer and direct service activities related to education, it was his participation in the rally that inspired Edelman to found the advocacy organization “Stand for Children.” The initial work of the organization was conducted in Oregon under Edelman’s leadership and new chapters were soon developed in Tennessee, Massachusetts and Washington (Stand for Children, 2007a). According to the 2006 Annual Report, “Since 1999, Stand for Children members have won 75 victories at the state and local levels that have helped over 2.6 million children by leveraging more than $1.3 billion for schools and other programs that equip children to succeed” (Stand for Children, 2007b).
The core mission of the organization is the empowerment and training of average citizens, so they can effectively mobilize and advocate for children at the local and state level. Stand for Children is a “bottom up” organization, in that, each community determines the issues that it would like to address, develops its own plan of action, and actively works toward viable solutions. Stand for Children supports each community with the services of a professional organizer. The organizer helps to provide training, guidance, research assistance, acts as a liaison to the state and national organization and attempts to follow the “Iron Rule” of organizing by enabling chapters to achieve their goals through their own efforts.

Structurally, each chapter consists of a strategy team that is responsible for decision-making, leadership development, and recruitment. The strategy team is lead by chapter officers, including a chair or co-chairs, membership coordinator, and secretary-treasurer. An internally democratic organization, officers are chosen by ballot with full-membership participation or if there is only one candidate, through a majority vote among the strategy team. Additional officer positions may be developed based on the needs of the individual chapter. The rest of the strategy team is made up of team leaders potentially representing a variety of different constituencies (e.g. congregations, schools-based teams, neighborhood teams). Again, the needs of the individual chapter drive the organization of the teams.

Each chapter is also a part of a state network that collectively seeks to impact broader issues affecting all children across the state (see Fig. 6.1). Participation in state level issues is not mandatory, but the majority of the chapters do choose to participate.
This provides an opportunity to address more complex issues involving a greater number of potential stakeholders. By networking with other chapters, local communities increase their power at both the state and local level (through increased name recognition, coalition building, and by forging new connections with decision makers). The issue selection criteria for both the state and local level are the same. All issues should reflect deeply held concerns of the membership. This is determined by polling 50% of the members. Of those polled, at least 80% must approve of an issue. Issues should be “winnable” with an identifiable course of action that the organization can take and a strong possibility for success. Like all community organizations, Stand for Children seeks to avoid engaging in futile efforts that will only demoralize membership and decrease organizational sustainability.

The state offices of Stand for Children also supply a significant amount of support to the local chapters. They serve as a centralized home for the chapter organizers and provide a space for communication about various community needs. The state office includes staff members who are dedicated to policy and organizational development, and provide a connection to the larger national organization. Most of the statewide actions, rallies, trainings, and issue specific e-mail communications in Massachusetts are also coordinated through the central office.
The national organization, which is based in Portland, Oregon, provides affiliated communities with ongoing training and technical support. Examples include: leadership conferences where experts and chapter members can share effective strategies, training materials and handouts that can be used by each chapter, databases for organizing and managing membership, newsletters, and a chapter specific page on the Stand for Children website. In return, chapters help recruit new members who will commit to becoming sustaining or annual members (with minimum fees ranging from $5 to $25 dollars), keep local press clippings for the national office, and simply operating in a manner that is consistent with the mission of Stand for Children.

Within the Stand for Children organization, there are a variety of ways in which one can be a participant. In the 2006-2008 Strategic Plan, Stand for Children laid out a
“Pyramid of Involvement” to represent the different roles that people may have within the organization and correlating levels of involvement (see Fig. 6.2). At the top of the pyramid are the officers or team leaders. Ideally, each leader represents ten voting members. In a given chapter or team, there will be roughly the same number of voting and non-voting members. According to National Organizing Director Meg Ansara, “Essentially, voting members are "active members" they keep their email address up to date, are hopefully connected to another member or a "Team Coordinator" and they take regular action at least three times a year. Their active status also means that when it comes time to vote on an issue - both local and state - they can vote. Non-voting members are "non-active" or checkbook members who support the mission, but don't take regular action and therefore don't vote on issues.”

The reason for the distinction is based on Stands for Children’s early experiences in Oregon. Initial attempts to grow membership through door-to-door canvassing were successful, but they found that when it came time to vote on issues, the less engaged
members were basically being counted as “no” votes through their abstention. This new model provides a way for members to be involved on a limited basis without adversely impacting chapter or team procedures.

In a similar manner, Stand for Children has created a niche for “e-activists.” These individuals are not affiliated with a specific community, but are in solidarity with the mission and purpose of Stand for Children. Periodically, Stand for Children will send out an “action alert” calling on members and “e-activists” to make their voices heard. Participation might include sending a letter or e-mail to a local politician, attending a rally, or making a phone call to one’s state representative. “E-activists” are not dues paying members, but they do allow Stand for Children to mobilize a broader support base for issues.20 E-mail communication is an invaluable tool for connecting the Stand for Children members and it is particularly helpful for raising awareness about issues at the state and national level. Finally, small donors who do not provide e-mail addresses are considered participants in Stand for Children efforts, but they are the least likely to participate beyond their monetary contributions. While there are multiple levels of participation, Stand for Children is constantly involved in leadership development and members, non-voting members, and “e-activists” are provided with regular opportunities to increase their activity within the organization. This continual outreach for member participation and input sets Stand for Children apart from other professional advocacy organizations like the Sierra Club whose policies are primarily shaped by organization staff (Skerry, 1997; Skocpol, 2003).

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20 The use of “e-activists” was a major part of Stand for Children’s 2008 campaign against the repeal of the state income tax.
Beginnings: Lexington Stand for Children

Stand for Children initially came to Lexington (and therefore Massachusetts) as a result of a connection between Jonah Edelman and Roger Brown, co-founder of the childcare company “Great Horizons” and current president of the Berklee College of Music. Brown was a supporter of Stand for Children and he introduced Edelman to Jonathan and Jeannie Lavine who are involved in a number of philanthropic endeavors. The Lavine’s are residents of Lexington, Massachusetts and as they learned more about Stand for Children they decided that it was an organization not only worthy of their financial support, but one that also held great potential for their own community.

Stand for Children was already considering expansion into Massachusetts and it was searching for a community where it could make some inroads. Due to complicated state funding schemes, Lexington was constantly embroiled in battles over school resources. In 2003, the town lost a $5 million dollar tax override that resulted in the elimination of programs and faculty for the Lexington Public Schools. The Lavines recognized that despite all of the financial and intellectual capital available in their community, it lacked an organized and unified voice to support public education. Soon they were making efforts to start the first chapter of Stand in Lexington. Jeannie Lavine recalled:

(Stand for Children) seemed like an organization that was able to get things done. And Massachusetts, and Lexington specifically, needs to get some things done. Lexington just seemed like a great place to introduce it because we had this motivated base of people, so I was literally running around making calls and showing this list of past Stand victories to friends and people at school. I said, “This is an organization that does things. It’s not in Massachusetts but it’s coming and wouldn’t it be great if we were the lucky town that gets to be first?”
In late 2003, Meg Ansara, a veteran of several political campaigns and a Massachusetts native, was hired to establish Stand for Children in the Bay State, with the first chapter slotted for Lexington. Ansara served as the first organizer for Lexington, helping form their chapter and develop their initial actions. As other communities in Massachusetts started to form Stand for Children chapters and teams, Ansara became the state director and a new organizer was hired to serve the Lexington community. As of 2008, Leslie Nicholson now serves as the state director in Massachusetts and Ansara is the National Organizing Director. Since coming to Massachusetts, Stand for Children has expanded its presence to include chapters in Arlington, Lowell, Newton, Gloucester, Lexington Norfolk, Plymouth, Temple Israel (Boston), Norfolk/Plainville/Wrentham, Winchester, Worcester, and Winthrop. In addition, informal relationships have been forged with numerous other communities and organizations across the state.

Initially, the presence of Stand for Children in Lexington was an anomaly for both the community and for the national organization. Stand for Children was accustomed to operating in urban locales in Tennessee and Oregon. Lexington was their first suburban effort and it represented an unfamiliar constituency of primarily white, affluent females. When Ansara would talk to other organizers around the country about her work, “they were just stunned, but what’s funny is that in Massachusetts, since we started in the suburbs, we frequently get people who ask if this model can work in the cities!” Stand for Children did need to adapt to meet the cultural needs of the community, but this negotiation is something that must occur wherever organizing takes place. First and foremost, an organizing group represents the community that it serves.
In Lexington, the community had a number of volunteer and political organizations, but most townspeople were unfamiliar with this new brand of grassroots advocacy.\(^{21}\) There were also a number of community members who had been actively working against the tax overrides who expressed concern that Stand for Children was basically a “hired gun” lobbying group brought in to pass ballot issues. Despite these initial challenges, as of the fall of 2008, Lexington Stand for Children has grown from 20 individuals to a total membership of close to 200. Guiding the work of Lexington Stand for Children is a strategy team consisting of two co-chairs, a membership coordinator, a secretary-treasurer, two representatives to the Massachusetts Leadership Network (the group that addresses concerns at the state level), and eight team coordinators.

**Action Issues for Lexington Stand for Children**

Since its inception, the members of the Lexington team have addressed two primary issues at the local level and participated in one general issue at the state level.\(^{22}\) At the local level members have worked on three override campaigns to increase school funding in 2004, 2006, and 2007. In addition to the overrides, the group also worked on an Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) campaign in 2005-2006. Closely related to their work on local funding issues, members have also participated in several state level actions that are all focused on reforming education finance policy in the state of Massachusetts.

**The Town of Lexington**

\(^{21}\) This has since changed with election of both Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick and President Barack Obama, who both relied heavily on the development of grassroots organizations to support their campaigns.  
\(^{22}\) Stand for Children actively campaigned in 2008 against a ballot question that would repeal the state income tax, but there was no data collection regarding this campaign.
The community of Lexington is located ten miles northwest of the city of Boston and is perhaps best known for its place in history as the location of some of the first shots fired during the American Revolution. In homage to this legacy, the “Minuteman” serves as the mascot for the local athletic teams. According to the 2000 census, Lexington has a total population of roughly 30,000 and in terms of overall demographics it is a relatively homogeneous community. 86.1% of residents reported their ethnicity to the 2000 census as White, 1.1% Black or African-American, 10.9% Asian, and 1.4% Hispanic or Latino. The student population is somewhat more diverse than the community-at-large. While this is due, in part, to busing programs like METCO, it is also a result of a town that has experienced growing diversity among its young families. During the 2006-2007 academic year the Lexington Public Schools served, 6,266 students, of whom, 68.8% were White, 4.1% Black or African-American, 21.4% Asian, and 3.7% Hispanic or Latino (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2007b).

Lexington is considered an affluent community and boasts a median family income of $111,899, almost double the state median of $61,664 (US Census, 2000). In 2005 the average single-family home in Lexington sold for $691,500 and the average single-family tax bill was $7,246. In 2006 the average sale price dipped slightly to

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23 METCO is a grant program funded in Massachusetts that permits students in certain cities to attend public schools in other communities that have agreed to participate. The program is intended to expand educational opportunities for students in the Boston Public Schools while simultaneously increasing diversity in the suburbs. There are currently 33 participating school districts in the Boston metro area serving roughly 3,300 students.
$680,000, while the tax bill increased to $7,744 (Town of Lexington, 2006). Only 3.7% of LPS students are considered low income in comparison with 28.9% of the state.

Education is strongly valued in the community and 42% of the adult population over the age of 25 has earned an advanced degree beyond the bachelor’s (US Census, 2000). The Lexington Public Schools (LPS) also enjoy a reputation as one of the strongest systems in the state. 92.5% of Lexington High School students graduate and 91% of the graduates move on to attend 4 year universities (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2007b). On the SAT exam, out of the 336 secondary schools in Massachusetts, Lexington ranked 5th in critical reading, 5th in math, and 4th in writing (Boston Globe, 2007).

Proposition 2 ½ Tax Override

Many Stand for Children members and other citizens in Lexington cite the school system as one of the most attractive aspects of the community. During informal conversations at “Apple Fest 2006,” an annual kick-off event for Lexington Stand for Children, several attendees commented that the high quality of the schools was the primary factor in their decision to move to the town. Of course, high quality education comes at a cost, and as in many communities, the public schools in Lexington are the biggest expenditure in the town budget. For example, in 2006 roughly $72 million dollars of the town’s $126 million dollar budget were allocated to the public schools (Town of Lexington, 2006). Still, faced with pressure from the community to remain competitive with other districts and the rising costs of health care benefits for faculty and administrators, the public school system found itself facing a budget shortfall. Over the
years Lexington, like many other affluent towns, has opted for tax overrides to secure the additional funds necessary to pay for these expenditures.

Enacted in 1980, Massachusetts General Law Ch. 59§21C, more commonly known as Proposition 2 ½, allows cities or towns to increase tax revenues to meet the cost of municipal expenses. Each year a new levy limit for each town or city is set by the Department of Revenue. The levy is based on an automatic 2.5% increase from the previous years’ levy, any “new growth” which might include fluctuations in property value or the creation of new subdivisions, and any overrides that were passed during the previous year. Local officials can determine how much of the levy limit they want to use although most communities spend up to the limit. There are certain circumstances in which cities and towns can exceed the levy limit, but the levy must not exceed “2.5% of the community’s full and fair cash value (Massachusetts Department of Revenue, 2005).” This maximum limit is known as the levy ceiling.

One way in which Proposition 2 ½ allows communities to tax in excess of their levy limit is to pass an override. Community politicians (selectmen, town or city council people) must first vote to place an override question on the ballot. The override question must specify how the funds will be spent and include a dollar amount. In order to pass, the majority of the electorate must approve the override. If the ballot question is approved, then the new levy amount becomes the base for calculating future levy limits. This means that overrides are a permanent addition to the tax levy limit (Massachusetts Department of Revenue, 2005).
In the 1990s and early 2000s, tax overrides in Lexington to support the public schools were passed with little opposition. Levies totaling almost $5 million dollars were successfully passed in 1990, 1995, and 2000. Then soaring housing prices, coupled with a growing population of citizens over the age of 60, led to the town’s first override defeat in 2003. It was at this point that Lexington Stand for Children was formed.\(^\text{24}\) During initial meetings and at Stand’s first kick-off event it became clear that many citizens in Lexington were concerned about the override. This made initial attempts at recruitment far easier as Stand for Children was able to build membership from both individuals who were interested in general children’s issues and advocates for the override campaign. The selection of the 2004 override campaign as Lexington’s first local action became an obvious choice. Ansara remarked, “It was pretty clear that they had not run a strong campaign (in 2003) and this was an opportunity to really impact the kids. People wanted the help. People were interested. Not everyone. There was quite a bit of resistance too. ‘Who are you?’ ‘Do have a National agenda?’ Things of that nature. But it was pretty clear that by running a more sophisticated campaign that you could win. They just hadn’t run a strong campaign.” Ansara’s memory of the first campaign speaks to both the desire that was present among proponents of the override and some of the resistance that was created by opponents, resistance that Stand for Children members have continued to face over the years.

\(^{24}\) Stand for Children was already making plans to work in the state of Massachusetts. While the situation in Lexington in 2003/2004 provided an opportunity to begin work in the state, the organization did not come specifically because of the override, nor was it sought out for the expressed purpose of working on the override campaign.
In 2004, Lexington Stand for Children continued to grow and train new members. Members were grateful for the expertise and practical campaign knowledge that Ansara was able to impart and soon Stand for Children was playing a significant role in the “YES for Lexington” campaign for the 2004 override. Members canvassed neighborhoods, conducted polling, and waged a “get out the vote” campaign. Their efforts paid dividends and the town approved the 2004 override, worth $4,224,340 dollars. Another override was proposed in 2006, and again Stand for Children members offered their assistance. In fact, the majority of the people in charge of the “Yes” campaign were Stand for Children members and dozens of others were on hand to volunteer. The 2006 campaign became quite contentious in the community as override opponents conducted a more vigorous campaign and both sides were active and present at community meetings. Among the items at stake in the two ballot questions was funding for teachers and staff positions, programs for elementary Spanish and high school German, a reduction of the elementary school class size, and money for teacher training. Over 53% of the eligible voters in Lexington cast their ballots and the “Yes” campaign suffered a narrow defeat by less than 200 votes.

Stand for Children members were devastated by the election results, feeling both emotionally and physically drained after working long hours over the span of many months. However, they quickly bolstered membership morale and prepared for another override in 2007. Again, Stand for Children played a critical role in the “YES for Lexington” campaign and reached out to 10,000 voters through public forums, canvassing, and phone banking. This time they won a $4.2 million dollar levy, with
$3.27 million dedicated to the town’s public schools. The win helped maintain
endangered faculty and librarian positions, kept student-to-teacher ratios steady, and
restored some for the previously lost language, art, and science classes.

The override campaigns have dominated the early work of Lexington Stand for
Children. While some members worry that the organization will simply become known
as “that override group,” others feel that school funding is the most pressing issue that the
community faces. Still there are other issues that members are concerned about that must
be left off the table during the override campaigns. Bearing witness to this cyclical battle
has motivated some members to become more involved in Stands’ statewide initiatives
that seek to reform broader funding policies.

*Indoor Air Quality (IAQ)*

In addition to working on the overrides, Lexington Stand for Children also
engaged in a 2005 action to encourage the adoption of the Environmental Protection
Agency’s (EPA), Tools for Schools program. Essentially the program helps teachers and
administrators learn how to assess the air quality of their schools and classrooms, and
provide no-cost or low cost solutions for common problems. The action involved a great
deal of research and collaboration with the Lexington Superintendent and school
committee. In January 2006, Tools for Schools was officially adopted by the Lexington
public school system and the EPA now cites the community as a model.

In retrospect, many members commented that the IAQ was an important victory,
not only for the benefits that it will bring to future generations of children in Lexington,
but also for the lessons that were learned by the organization. However, while the issue
did receive approval through a formal vote, there was limited involvement on the behalf of the membership. This was problematic because, as one member noted, “one of Stand’s central tenants is that you work on issues that are broadly and deeply felt and there is some question as to whether or not that particular issue, even though it’s fabulous and almost everyone would agree it’s fantastic and the people who led the charge did a masterful job… but they didn’t get as many people working with them because it wasn’t an issue that was as broadly and deeply felt as getting an override passed.” Indeed, the efforts of the leaders were widely appreciated, but the IAQ campaign left some of the members feeling disengaged with the work of the Lexington chapter and concerned that similar efforts in the future might hinder the growth of the organization. According to another team leader, “A lot of people just said, call me when you move on to the next action because that is so not sexy to me. On the other hand we pulled in a lot of families with asthmatic kids. They’re like, yes, here’s something I can wrap my hands around. So it’s not always going to be perfect for everybody at any time.” Issue selection is a delicate challenge that the Lexington chapter has not been forced to face because of the dominance of the override issue, but one that they will need to address in the future.

Statewide Education Funding Reform

Starting in 2005, as more local communities started chapters and teams, Stand for Children has begun to spend more time organizing at the state level. While a combination of local and state level organizing has always been a part of Stand’s organizational mission in Massachusetts, it has also seemed like a natural progression from the work that has occurred at the local level. Representatives from each of Stand
for Children’s local chapters and teams, collectively known as the Massachusetts Leader Network (MLN), come together on a monthly basis to discuss the development of the organization’s state-wide work. Many of the communities struggled with funding issues and it became clear that this was a broad based concern that could unite the membership. Frustrated by the relentless grind of going after overrides and in recognition that this approach was not a sustainable long term solution, Lexington members were quick to support the state-wide effort.

In 1993 the case *McDuffy v. Secretary* came before the Massachusetts Supreme Court, which ruled that the state constitution required the Commonwealth to provide more equitable schooling for all students. Motivated largely by the *McDuffy* ruling, the Massachusetts Education Reform Act (MERA) of 1993 was soon passed by the state legislature. MERA required a number of significant reforms including: the introduction of standardized testing (MCAS), the development of charter schools, and most importantly, a reconfiguration of the funding formulas used to support public education. Part of the reform effort was the development of the Chapter 70 funding formula that calculates how much money goes to each community in Massachusetts to support public education. The formula is complicated, based primarily on property values and average resident incomes, and many towns complain that they are shortchanged by the current process.

Since 2006, Stand for Children chapters and other communities around the state have rallied in front of the state house on Beacon Hill to call for both immediate funding increases through Chapter 70 and a general reform of education funding practices. The
rallies are raucous affairs and include guest speakers representing various stakeholders in public education. High school students, school board members, teacher union presidents, school administrators, and in 2007 Governor Deval Patrick have all appeared at the podium. Of course, Stand for Children members are also present, both on stage and in the crowd. In 2007, roughly 2,000 people attended the rally, representing the 85 communities from around the state. While the advocacy work of Stand for Children cannot be directly linked to funding increases by the state legislature in 2006 and 2007, it is certain that state politicians have taken notice. During the rallies, state representatives (easily recognized by their suits and American flag lapel pins) can be seen standing on the periphery of the crowd listening to the public testimonies. When they returned to their offices, many found Stand for Children members waiting for them so they could give personal testimonies regarding their children’s schools. Even new Stand for Children members are able to act as advocates, as veteran members organized a staging area in the state house basement to prepare members for encounters with their local politicians. In 2007 a total of 400 Stand for Children members visited 48 representatives on the day of the rally (Stand for Children, 2007a).

Following up on the call of funding reform, Stand for Children has since supported the creation of Senate Bill 291 which requests a “contract with an objective, independent consultant to conduct a professional assessment to ascertain the resources and the costs of the resources needed to provide all students in Massachusetts with the opportunity for a high quality education to enable them to reach their potential as set forth in the Education Reform Act of 1993.” Written into the bill is a requirement that
the outside consultant “interview and consult with representatives of educational professions and other groups involved in issues of educational policy and finance, including… Stand for Children. ("Senate, No. 291," 2007).” Stand for Children is the only grassroots organization listed in the bill and was present to provide testimony at the Education Committee Hearings on September 12, 2007.

Paul Hernandez, a Stand for Children member from Worcester, was present to encourage the committee to move forward with the bill. Hernandez stated, “We need to find better ways, better mandates and smarter spending to shape our education budget. Our schools are evolving, students and teachers are evolving, yet the way we formulate how money will be raised and spent in our schools has remained the same.” Five months later, Trisha Perez Kennealy, a former Lexington chapter leader, reinforced Hernandez’s message at another hearing and addressed the developing concerns of the representatives, “We are also asking you to allocate at least $150,000 for an education adequacy study… we all know the foundation formula is woefully out-of-date. How can a formula derived in the early 90’s possibly satisfy the educational needs of the students in Massachusetts in 2008? Solve the problem now. We understand some of your colleagues are worried that the costing-out study will result in significant sticker shock but this study is needed to identify best practices as well as plausible cost efficiencies. Without this study, we’re all just improvising policy.” As state budgets are increasingly impacted by the current recession and citizens struggle to pay rising property tax bills the members of Stand for Children continue to fight for funding reform so that all children can receive a high quality education.
Becoming a Stand for Children Member

In seeking to determine why people decided to become members of Lexington Stand for Children, a combination of three key factors emerged. First, individuals were asked to join by someone else in their social network. Second, they were motivated by self-interest, both broadly and narrowly defined. And third, they became convinced that Stand for Children was an effective means to address issues of personal concern. Participants appreciated the tools and guidance that they were provided, and the impact that they could make on the community.

Personal Invitations

At a basic level, the vast majority of Stand for Children members were simply asked to join the organization. While kick-off meetings and events like “Apple Fest” are open to the public and intended to help cultivate new members, the use of social networking seemed to be far more effective and the preferred method of membership development among Stand for Children. Individuals who were personally invited felt “flattered” and “honored” that friends felt they could contribute to the group. In turn, newly initiated Stand for Children members would often work to recruit their friends. Invitations based on preexisting relationships were often specifically targeted to the desires or needs of the individual. For example, a Stand for Children member might cite a course or extracurricular activity from their friend’s school that was lost due to a failed override. The participants in this study also felt that their friends were generally more receptive to their invitations out of some feeling of commitment to the friendship and because of they recognized how passionate they were about the organization. Several
members discussed how they helped convince tentative individuals who were initially wary of Stand’s *modus operandi*, “I saw some friends of mine running out of the back of the room, but I grabbed them at the doors, and said, ‘Listen, I know that some of this sounds strange, but give it a chance. This is a group that can really do some good work.’” The trust inherent in the personal relationships was essential for getting Stand for Children off the ground in Lexington. In particular, it was helpful for combating some of the misconceptions that existed regarding this unfamiliar group. As one member recalled:

I was a little leery of it before I went to the kick-off meeting because I had heard that it was this group from somewhere else and it just sounded weird. And I had heard it might be a little cult-like, and it had some base in religion. But I went and I realized what the real deal was. The only base it had in religion is that it used religious organizations for people to network. So there was a group from my temple and there was a group from First Parish Church, but it (Stand for Children) wasn’t the church or the temple. It was just a group of people who knew other people and now they were connected through this organization.

While personal relationships were often central to bringing people to the organization, it was the work of Stand for Children that kept individuals coming back.

*Evolving toward Self-Interest, Rightly Understood*

In the aftermath of the failed 2003 override many parents felt the impact from the budget cuts that had to be made. Parents were concerned about general issues like class size and teacher quality, but the loss of a child’s favorite teacher or a beloved art class had an even bigger impact and served as a powerful motivator to learn more about Stand for Children. One member remarked, “there was this whole kind of conflict that has developed around people who want more money for the schools and people who don’t. But nobody else was stepping up to the plate. So it seemed like Stand for Children was
the organization to do it and I got involved.” Others also remembered feeling heightened levels of concern about the issues facing the community, but they were unsure about how to proceed. One of Stand’s first members talked about how she became convinced of the organization’s value, “We were all sort of feeling desperate. And I wanted to get organized, but I didn’t know how to run a meeting. You know some of the granular elements of process that I didn’t expect or know. And actually Stand for Children was pretty processed oriented when they first showed up because that’s what they really brought to the party.” Members concerned about their children’s schooling believed that this was a group that could help them meet their immediate needs.

As members became more involved at the local level, many began to expand their conceptions of self-interest and became interested in working at the state level. Leadership training and the state house rallies brought together members from diverse communities around the state, leading one member to realize, “Frankly, we’re pretty darn lucky here in Lexington. It’s not to say we don’t always want better for ourselves and our kids and it’s not to say that it’s perfect but I think we also have a responsibility not just to our own kids but to the kids across the state. Really a rising tide raises all ships. If we can work for a better educational system and better funding for the educational system across the state it would just be better for everyone.” Even members who choose not to become involved at the state level have come to recognize the broader implications of the work that they are doing. A mother of two young girls stated, “I think right now I have probably just put blinders on my eyes, more focused on my local community here, but I realize that it’s at the state where you can have the greatest impact on the spending for
education… That’s where it’s at, but I don’t have the energy right now to look beyond right where I am in the community. Some day I will but not now.”

These sentiments are in stark contrast to the perception of the prototypical suburban soccer mom described in the media. In the spring of 2008 the Boston Globe ran a series of articles describing the efforts of “override moms.” These women were described as “politically powerful suburban women who lobby for property tax increases to pay for teachers, new schools, and better classroom gear for their school-aged children. Think soccer moms, with an activist bent” (Noonan, 2008 ). The women depicted in the article were portrayed as self-centered, aggressive mommies who put the interest of their children ahead of the rest of the community. The article quoted Barbara Anderson, executive director of Citizens for Limited Taxation, who stated, “These are people who have the spare time to do this. They are obsessed with what they want for their kids, which is a private school experience that they don’t have to pay for themselves” (Noonan, 2008 ). Perhaps this was true in some communities, but the majority of the parents who were active in Stand for Children had developed what Tocqueville refers to as self interest, rightly understood. He wrote, “American moralists do not claim that one must sacrifice oneself for one’s fellows because it is a fine thing to do but they are bold enough to say that such sacrifices are as necessary to the man who makes them as to those gaining from them” (Tocqueville, 1835/2003, p. 610). The members of Stand for Children were committed to override campaigns as a part of their larger strategy for school reform and the perception of the “override mom” would become another challenge that they would have to overcome.
While self-interest is a primary motivator for participation, Lexington members were careful about committing themselves to the organization before they knew that their efforts would be rewarded. All of the participants described themselves as being extremely busy with work, volunteering, and commitments to their children’s other activities. Depending on their perspective, Stand for Children provided either an extension or an alternative means for supporting their children. All of the members who were interviewed described participation in traditional forms of school involvement, with the majority of their efforts focused on children in the elementary grades. Their levels of participation were primarily determined by the opportunities offered through each school, in particular the desires of the individual teacher, and in accordance with the resources that each parent felt that they could contribute. These resources included time, financial support, and in some cases expertise. Common examples of parental involvement described by the participants were membership in the PTA, volunteering in the classroom, helping with homework, serving as a room parent, and of course, participation in the ubiquitous “bake sale.” Consistent with existing research on middle class participation in school activities, involvement is largely taken for granted. It is simply expected that parents will be actively involved in their children’s schools. Participants described their activities as being “ordinary” and “just the typical way that a stay-at-home parent would help out in the classroom, at least once a month.”

The majority of the participants saw their participation in Stand for Children as an extension of, or alternative to their parental involvement activities at school. They
frequently drew comparisons between the work that they did as members of the PTA and their work for Stand for Children. While the PTA has been an ally in the “YES for Lexington” campaigns, some expressed frustration with the limited vision of the PTA and their reluctance to engage with the “bigger issues.” This was often attributed to a lack of interest or feelings of intimidation:

I used to do more (with the PTA) but I think there’s a lot of people that feel comfortable accessing community activity at that (the school) level and there are not so many people that are interested in going to the state level.

I just noticed that a lot of people when my girls were in school, elementary school, if you, there are a lot of parents that feel comfortable pitching in at the PTA level but as you kind of moved out from the bake sale and organizing the school fair and let’s raise money for the playground there were people that got a little more intimidated I think by what they thought they should know before they could go and lobby at the state house.

This caused some participants to scale back on with their participation in PTA activities because they felt that their time could be used more effectively doing grassroots advocacy work. This decision did not indicate that they were less committed to the schools or represent negative attitudes about the more traditional forms of involvement. Rather, it represented their attempts to prioritize and maximize their efforts. As one participant explained, “I’m not going to do a bake sale. I need to be out holding signs. But they are absolutely equivalent. And my kids know that now because I actually split my time. Not evenly, but I split my time between putting time into Stand for Children and making sure I get time in the classroom with the kids to assist.” Others regretted that their previous levels of involvement were limited to the classroom level:

Quite honestly for having done PTA work and classroom involvement work for a while and then watching the schools deteriorate after the loss of
the override, I sort of poo-pooed that kind of work and said, “Oh, my god, I can’t believe I’ve been putting my time in there when I should have been really watching the shop because look what’s happening.” It was an irrational reaction perhaps but it was my reaction. I thought, “Oh, my god, I’ve got to get involved in political advocacy because Rome is burning!

Time management was a concern for all of the participants and it plays an important role in many of the decisions at the local chapter level. For example, the recruitment/information event “Apple Fest” was scheduled on a Sunday afternoon, in an effort to avoid conflicts with work schedules, holidays, athletics, lessons, and the other events that occupy the time of middle and upper middle class families. In addition, the planning committee worked hard to make the event “family friendly” so that it would be an attractive event. The festivities were held at “The Depot,” a popular space for events located in Lexington Center. They included high quality entertainment like musician Ben Rudnik, a Parent’s Choice award winning performer. There were games and prizes for the children, but also present were information tables where people could learn about some of the issues and the work of Stand for Children.

Time was also respected at an internal level. All strategy team meetings included an agenda and the organizer worked hard to make sure that they stayed on schedule. Planning sessions and strategy meetings were friendly, but they were also serious and professional. Members who were interested in socializing did so before or after the meetings. This was important to the members because their primary concern was getting results. As one member stated, “It would have turned me off fast if I felt like it was junior league-y, if it was a lot of social and a little action. I definitely wanted to see
Another described the appeal of Stand for Children by saying:

A big piece of it for a lot of us who are busy doing other things, is you need to see some results, some payoff pretty fast… we also don’t want to be involved in anything that feels like needless busy work, meetings for meeting’s sake… It is just unnecessary and nobody in town wants to be involved in wasted motion. So that’s part of our accelerated society type of thing where we’ve all got too much to do. So when we do get involved now it has to really look like it’s a directed action.

On occasion this did lead to some minor internal conflict, as members were resistant to some of the details of organizing work. The organizers provided training in some of the minutiae of grassroots activism, such as, “how to make phone calls” or “writing letters to your representatives.” Occasionally this was perceived as a waste of time. Members wanted to know why they were being asked to do something so it became important for organizers to be explicit about the rationale behind their activities. As a participant explained, “You have to have the felt need. People will make phone calls if they feel it’s necessary. People will write letters if they understand that it will make a difference, if it is critical. But if you have the process devoid of the need, that’s when you run into hesitancy.” However, even members who were critical of such activities acknowledged that they were valuable for newer members with less campaign experience. “And that was a really interesting lesson for me. Because I may get it at this place where I’m at, but there are all these other people here that maybe it’s their first time that they’ve never stepped out for anything like this.” They also came to appreciate how practicing these skills and passing them on was a part of the larger mission of Stand for Children as it related to leadership development.
Participation in Lexington Stand for Children

Individuals who join Stand for Children, realize that grassroots organizing is less about a cookie cutter, step-by-step process, and more about participation in a active learning community. The primary learning activities and strategies included a basic orientation to education policy, networking, collaborative planning, distributed leadership, and evaluation.

Orientation to Education Policy

Many members joined Stand for Children looking to gain knowledge about the process of education policy development. “I was hoping that Stand would do a couple of things,” said one member, “I wanted it to help educate me about broader issues and how to make a real difference. I wanted to learn how to get organized because it was very apparent to me that we all needed to get organized.” The organizational framework that Stand for Children provides and the emphasis on process is extremely helpful when seeking to navigate complex “high reverberation” systems in education (Stone et al., 2001). Several of the members used the analogy of receiving a political roadmap:

It was mapped out start to finish before we even started. That’s so grounding it’s like, oh, okay, I see how you get from A to Z and then we just did it step by step by step. Because having a political campaign is all about unexpected things that throw you off and stuff and it’s all the more reason that you need to be super grounded and super organized and methodical because things are going to happen every day that you can’t anticipate but they don’t throw you as much when you’re really solid in what your goals are. What’s our goal? What’s our goal? She (the organizer) was constantly pushing the goal and how do you get there.

In recognizing the value of knowing some of the basics, the strategy team decided early on that one of their key goals was to educate people about the political process. They
spent time diagramming the town and how it functions, and discovered that too often it was assumed that constituents already possessed this knowledge, when in reality most of the members had never even attended a town or school committee meeting. Sharing public information became a critical part of Stand’s work and this approach was included in the recent override campaign, when Stand for Children helped outline the budget and override process for voters.

Network Learning

In general, specific organizing strategies or techniques were disseminated through the organizers at chapter meetings and at an annual Statewide Summit, where members can take workshops on “Public Speaking,” “Lobbying,” “Hosting a House Meeting,” “Working with the Media,” or numerous other helpful topics. Stand for Children organizers with a particular expertise lead the workshops and they are frequently joined by a veteran Stand for Children member who assists by providing practical examples of the skills in action. Ideally these tools are brought back to each individual’s respective chapter and shared with the rest of the community. In practice, these workshops are also venues for network learning as communities from across the state share knowledge based on their experiences. Stand for Children members spend their breaks between workshops huddled around tables talking strategy and sharing ideas with one another. While the organizers might initially be perceived as the primary sources of technical information, other Stand for Children members played an important role in helping support and educate the larger organization through their own expertise.

Collaborative Learning
Many of the Stand for Children members originally knew one another through the “mom” or “dad” network. Their children may go to school together or play on the same soccer team, but they do not always know about one another’s professional lives or experiences:

I met people I knew in other ways but I certainly know them better now. That’s been fun, that whole friendship piece is nice. And just learning what people’s skills are. I mean, you can be working on an op-ed piece for Stand and discover that Mary writes for NPR. Those are her commentaries that are getting read or she’s reading them on the radio. Everybody has got this great drawer filled with lots of degrees and unused skills, then they hit the mommy track. So it’s fun to discover that people can do, who they are, what they were in their previous life.

The sharing of skill sets “definitely promotes learning from one another.” It is especially helpful since many people hold unfamiliar roles within Stand. For example, one participant described being elected as membership coordinator, “Well, I had never done anything like that, but you look around the table and see that someone has worked in PR or marketing and they are willing to help you out.” This mutual sharing of knowledge is beneficial for developing a broader skill set for political advocacy.

The social knowledge that comes from the community can be very helpful in terms of learning how to adapt organizing techniques in order to make them more effective in a specific context. This is a gradual process that involves a good deal or negotiation as participants critically engage to determine what is possible in a particular community. In Lexington, many of the members were initially put off by some of the elements of organizing that are more commonly found in congregationally based groups or in urban areas. For example, when Ansara sought to organize the very first kick-off meeting she intended to incorporate some of these techniques. As one member recalled:
It’s kind of this big group stuff. I was like, that is not happening here Meg. Do not make us clap. She wanted people to sing for the kick off and there were a couple hundred people there. Nobody’s going to sing. If I can get the school committee there and people from town government you better not make them sing. So take that off. She needed to be educated a little bit when she came that we were a bunch of uptight white people that would have nothing to do with that. It was way too much exposure for people like us.

The singing was out, but Ansara did not back down when it came to some of the fundamental principles of organizing. She explains:

Every community says, ‘We’re different.’ And each community is different, but there are some things that ring true. And so things like the voter ID work took some convincing. Just getting people to embrace the setting of a goal. You know, here’s how many votes we need to win, asking people to vote, how they’re going to vote. There’s resistance. There’s resistance around going door to door -- and actually door-to-door work in Lexington is hard because the houses are so far apart -- we did polling. There’s a lot of resistance.

The result of these negotiations is an organization that appreciates cultural needs, but at the same time challenges itself to expand perceptions of what’s possible in the community.

**Distributed Leadership**

Leadership development and learning is also a fundamental part of Stand for Children’s mission and it is important that members of the local chapter feel empowered to make a difference. Even new members are given real responsibility, but they are also provided with the necessary support to help them accomplish their objectives. One member recalled her initial reaction when the organizer asked her to be in charge of the field campaign for one of the overrides:

I said, I can’t do it, she’s like, yes, yes you can. You can do it. You don’t know you can do it, but you can. I’m going to teach you how to do it.
And by the end of that campaign I felt as if I had done it because I was, she trained us all. She very methodically taught us the, the steps but we were doing them so it wasn’t as if we took a class and then we went off, it was learn as you go.

Learning how to influence policy is a process and one that cannot be accomplished alone. Members learn the value of every role, regardless of how much responsibility it entails. They are all important for the overall success of the campaign.

While some individuals are thrust into leadership positions, others evolve into their positions, slowly scaling up with more and more responsibility. Regardless, the end result is the same, an active and engaged member who is able to articulate their goals and work for change. This process is made more effective by making sure that no single individual has too much responsibility. This approach is especially appreciated among individuals who are already feeling overwhelmed with work, family and community commitments, but who struggle to say “no.”

However, the distributed leadership model is not done for purely altruistic reasons; rather it also creates a more competent and powerful organization. It is also central to maintaining the democratic principles of the organization. “It’s hard to delegate,” said one participant, “sometimes it’s a lot easier to just do things yourself than it is to help somebody else or find somebody else to do it. But in addition to being a way to make things better for our children, one of the goals of the organization is to train people as leaders, community leaders.” All of the participants agreed that in the long run this approach makes for a stronger organization.

_Evaluation_

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Finally, evaluation plays a critical role in helping to plan for future actions. Following the disappointing results of a Proposition 2 ½ override in 2006, Stand for Children spent an entire meeting breaking down the previous campaign. Through this process they were able to identify several areas for improvement and these changes were implemented in the next campaign. For example, they felt that one of the most significant challenges that they faced was making sure that the community was receiving accurate information. In Lexington there was a lot of activity via on-line message boards and criticisms regarding everything from how funding was being spent by schools to the financial backing of Stand for Children itself were common. The following year the Stand for Children group produced a “Fact or Fiction?” brochure to help address some of these claims and won the override campaign in 2007.

Learning Challenges for Stand for Children

Lexington was described by many members as a political town, yet Stand for Children faced some significant challenges in motivating people to become more active participants. Many members are reluctant to move beyond the “check-book” level of participation. Time is one significant factor, but there is also a deeper level of resistance to participation. Perhaps due to the contentious nature of the override campaigns, some individuals are hesitant to be labeled as “political” in the town, while others worried that they lacked the necessary skills to be politically effective.

Even among active members, some found it difficult to be overtly political. For example, during recruiting most leaders preferred to utilize social networking instead of “cold calling,” but it can create awkward situations by introducing a political element into
relationships. Several participants commented on this tension, “I have to say that was hard. I had to learn how to actually get them (her friends) to join, meaning to put their money down and join as a member. But I didn’t have any problem telling them that I was involved in this and encouraging them to at least find out about it.” In response to this challenge team leaders commonly used more gentle persuasion. They would place their friends on the e-mail list and send them the updates so they can see what Stand for Children is doing, with the hope that they will eventually be motivated to join. As one participant explained:

It’s intimidating to stick your neck out and be identified with a cause in a small town. People are going to know where you stand. And also I think it’s hard to ask for something. People don’t want to hear “no,” they’re afraid. What if they don’t let me into their office? What if they say, ‘we don’t want to talk to you?’ What if they say “no?” I mean that’s just human nature, you’re afraid of what’s going to happen.

Stand for Children members talked about the desire to “fit in” to the community and the inherent risks involved in joining any group. They value their individual identities and participation in a group causes them to lose a small degree of control over how they are perceived. One participant commented, “If a person from Stand does something, now I’m a Stand person. I mean, I’m known to people as being a Stand person. So if one of the strategy team members did something I don’t agree with then people will hold me responsible as well.”

Others felt that Lexington is an intimidating community to become involved in because it is so political. Therefore people are hesitant to commit to a stance before they know every single detail about an issue. One participant described this phenomenon in detail:
There are a lot of people like that who don’t want to put a sign because they feel like they need to know everything -- I always tell people, you can understand an issue, don’t think you need to know the personal history of this candidate or everything they’ve ever achieved or every misstep they’ve ever made before you can put a sign up. There is that little fear of, maybe that’s part of being the type of community we are, too many dissertation defenses in peoples’ past. They got kicked around the block because they didn’t know a detail and they feel like they should.

Of course, there are also people who feel completely comfortable in the political sphere. “If I was worried about having disagreements with people in this town, then I wouldn’t have any friends!” exclaimed one group leader. Other participants observed that intimidation occurred primarily at the state level and that, “we have less fear of local politicians in Lexington than you might find in other communities.” Less of, “That attitude, where people say, ‘My God, there’s school committee!’ and they’re trembling. I don’t think we have as much of that. I would say probably a disproportionate number of people that feel perfectly comfortable standing up and saying, ‘Guess what? I have a PhD in child development and that’s the wrong approach to take!’”

As a result of these mixed perspectives on the culture of Lexington, efforts are made to ensure that people are comfortable with what they are asked to do. Stand for Children is able to offer a wide range of tools ranging from very basic phone call scripts, letter writing templates, and other forms of support to ensure that people do not feel overwhelmed to more advanced training regarding the nuances of the Massachusetts tax system. As an organization, they also try balance recognition of the special skills and expertise that each individual brings to the chapter, but simultaneously they try not to assume that individuals have too much knowledge about the political process. As a Stand for Children leader remarked, “To most people it (organizing work) doesn’t come
instinctively to them at all. And also there are parts of all this work that are intimidating whether you’re a college graduate or you didn’t go to high school. The state house can be hugely intimidating and so are elective officials even in your own town. So that transcends economic strata I would think.” They try to offer a safe environment to practice organizing skills so that all members can feel confident in their advocacy work.

**Beyond the Issues: Ancillary Benefits of Participation in Grassroots Organizing**

As in the other case studies the members of Stand for Children experienced ancillary benefits as a result of their participation. Specific examples from the Lexington chapter include feelings of personal empowerment, expanding social networks, and increased civic involvement.

*Personal Empowerment*

As mentioned above, many members are initially hesitant to participate in political actions. They may feel that they have little to contribute and that they lack the sophistication or pedigree to fully participate in civic activities. Participation in Stand for Children helps individuals feel confident that they can have a voice in local policy. “I really feel like Stand got me to see that I *can* talk to people, say things that make sense and that people might agree with. I remember my first couple meetings I was amazed that I would say something and people would say, that’s a good point. I just thought, well, I don’t know what I’m talking about, but *I do*. I’ve learned through Stand that I do know what I’m talking about.” Feelings of personal achievement are coupled with a sense of belonging that comes from participation in a broad social movement:

I think any time when you’re standing on the steps of the state house and you’re at a rally and you’re cheering you feel, you feel that feeling. You
feel the will of the people. You get that sense of satisfaction that you get from grassroots working. The state work is appealing because not only is it where the decisions are really being made but it kind of makes the state smaller. It kind of brings it down and makes you realize this isn’t so far away from us. This is involves my kids. So it’s hugely satisfying that way and it kind of brings it home.

The knowledge that one is affiliated with others also helps those who might feel intimidated by powerful individuals. “Being a Stand member makes it a lot easier to make that call and say, whether it’s to the superintendent of schools or the chair of the board of selectmen or the chair of the school committee, and just feel comfortable calling. When you say who it is, they know who you are, they might even know you personally, and they know you’re involved with Stand.”

In addition to feelings of self-efficacy, participants felt that their actions were also important because they were serving as role models for their own children. Many recalled accompanying their own parents to vote and they wanted to pass on this sense of civic engagement to their own children. If they were going to tell their children to stand up for what they believe in, then it was important to these parents that they also “walk the walk.”

You do it for yourself but you do it for your kids, too. I mean, I have a mother-in-law who gives me a lot of grief about, “all those things you’re doing, you’re so busy.” The girl scouts she can identify with, but “that town meeting nonsense!” So, I’ve always said to her, “It’s so important for my daughters to see this, just like when they were young and you took them down to the soup kitchen with you to make lunch at St. John the Evangelist.

And participants receive positive feedback from their kids as a result. One said, “My fifth grader, too, he wouldn’t admit anything too positive about me now but he talks
about how he knows that I’m important because of the work that I do and it’s cool. I do like that they see that they’re not helpless in their world.”

Expanding Social Networks

The networking that takes place in Stand for Children helps to create social capital that is useful for influencing public policy, but the relationships that are forged are also satisfying on a personal level. Clearly there is a correlation between the quality of the relationships that are forged and an individual’s commitment to the group. As one member explained, “The meetings were fun. The people are so bright and passionate and committed to what they’re doing and really knowledgeable about the town or whatever area of expertise they draw from. It was always interesting going to the meetings and people respected each other.” It also provided individuals an opportunity to expand their social circles beyond their immediate spheres of school, work, or religion and the experience was valued even if a close bond was not created:

That’s what I love about it. It cuts across boundaries. I have met more people I never would’ve met. And not only that, I have worked in a very ‘professional feeling’ way as a member, as a volunteer, with people who I never would’ve chosen to work with, who were really tough to work with. I’m sure they thought I was tough to work with. But I hugely value that part of it. You learn from everybody and whether it’s, oh, wow, we became friends or wow, you know what, I would not want to be in an office with her but she taught me a lot. There’s definitely that kind of feeling.

The truth is I got involved for the override, but I stayed in it because I liked how now I know people from all across town, from all the other elementary schools. I feel like I’m involved in this big network now because of Stand.

In some respects this outcome is surprising considering how some members feel that people in the community are afraid to become involved because they don’t want to risk
their existing relationships. Rather most members experienced a expansion or evolution of these ties.

Increased Civic Engagement

Finally, and this was observed on a more limited basis, some members indicated that they became more involved in other civic groups as a result of their positive experiences with Stand for Children. One member who was recently elected to town meeting said, “I would not be nearly as vocal or involved if it weren’t for Stand for Children. A whole bunch of us together ran for town meeting last year and I might have done that at some point, but I certainly wouldn’t have done it this soon if I hadn’t been involved in Stand for children.” Other members were able to successfully transfer and apply some of the skills that they learned to other organizations or causes dealing with homelessness, the arts, and the environment.

Conclusion

Lexington Stand for Children is a unique case because it represents a population that is assumed to have ready access to power. While the social, human, and financial capital that these affluent families posses is helpful for addressing specific local issues, it is clear that broader social policy cannot be changed without some level of coalition building. Despite having more traditional forms of power than other CBOs, the members of Stand for Children still encountered many of the same struggles that faced UIA and JP-POP. They too were confused my complex political systems and susceptible to intimidation by political leaders.
The evolution that many participants experienced in their understandings of self-interest, feelings of personal empowerment, and renewed commitment to civic participation are all outcomes linked to active participation in the processes that make up grassroots organizing. At the moment Stand for Children stands apart from other professional advocacy groups where organizational leaders control the agenda. However, it will be interesting to see how they manage this grassroots orientation as they continue to scale-up as an organization and potentially pursue education issues at the national level. If they are able to maintain their local roots Stand for Children has the potential to become a model for the next generation of advocacy organizations in the United States.
Chapter Seven
Findings and Discussion
Learning to Work for Educational Change

The case studies described over the last three chapters provide a small sample of the types of CBOs and that are coordinating education campaigns. Operating in very unique sociopolitical ecologies with diverse member populations and concerns, this study reveals that there are a number of important similarities and differences across the three groups. This chapter includes a discussion of the themes that emerged from the case studies as they relate to the research questions that guided this study.

Motivation for Participation

In all three groups the majority of the members were drawn to their respective organizations through personal relationships, self-interest, or a combination of the two. Examining the motivations for participation in CBOs helps us to understand why families might select alternative forms of parental involvement. This information can also provide insight on organizational norms and the rationale behind strategic decision making in CBOs.

Personal Relationships

The majority of the participants stated that they were asked to join their CBO by another member, but the basis of the relationships between members varied among the groups. In UIA initial connections were based on family or religious bonds. JP-POP members had multiple intersecting ties such as shared experiences as Spanish speaking immigrants and parents of children with special needs. Relationships in Stand for Children were grounded in friendships or connections through shared social activities.
between members’ children (athletics, music classes, and other extra-curricular activities). Based on these different relationships the CBOs demonstrated strengths and weaknesses that are consistent with the research from networking theory.

Relationships in UIA included a mixture of strong and weak ties. UIA consists of roughly twenty churches and inside each of these religious communities many of the members have known each other for decades. Members of the same parish exhibited strong bonds and their close-knit relationships created a solid foundation for UIA activities. The three parishes with the strongest internal bonds could always be counted on to participate in and/or lead UIA events. Weaker links existed between members from different religious communities. The majority of the churches in UIA are Catholic, but there is little interaction outside of UIA activities. Many of the Catholic churches in New Bedford serve specific ethnic populations and all are territorial, so the bonds are not as strong as an outside observer might think. Other nondenominational religious communities and Protestant churches are also members in UIA. Despite dogmatic differences there is an overarching faith perspective that contributed to overall group unity. UIA members were often leaders within their own religious communities and this helped create a bond as they understood one another to be individuals with deep faith. Scripture played a significant role in almost every activity and all events were opened and closed with prayer.

While networks with strong ties have higher levels of social cohesion and trust, they can also limit personal autonomy and become exclusionary. This did not seem to be an issue for UIA. Observations frequently included situations in which new members
were present and there was always an effort on the behalf of the lead organizer and veteran members to make sure that people were welcomed and given the opportunity to participate. The demographics of the group were representative of the city as a whole and UIA is in the process of reaching out to increase membership in the Hispanic community. According to one Hispanic leader, the real obstacles to full participation in UIA are language barriers, busy work schedules, and fear among illegal immigrants that participation in public events could lead to their discovery and deportation. Efforts are being made to provide more translation at events and UIA was one of the first groups on the scene following the New Bedford immigration raids in 2007, but this continues to be an area for growth. Of course, by witnessing UIA activities and interviewing active participants the sample was limited to those who were already included so the possibility of more exclusionary activity does remain.

In UIA strong internal bonds help create a foundation for organization activities, but there is a balance of weak ties that encourages professionalism and growth. The strong ties are useful when the group is faced with adversity, as was the case when the initial education community meeting had poor attendance and the local politicians failed to show. The core UIA members who had the strongest bonds could have vented their frustrations knowing that they would simply reevaluate their strategy and approach in the coming weeks. However, recognizing the presence of new members and realizing that the frustrations of more loosely affiliated members could lead to their disengagement, the veteran members helped lead a cathartic evaluation, which allowed the group to express their concerns in a structured manner and develop an immediate response. This balance
of strong and weak ties fosters a broader sense of commitment for the group as a whole and enables outreach into the community.

Strong bonds were also present in JP-POP, but included high levels of multiplexity. This means there were a number of overlapping connections between members. Multiplex networks run the risk of becoming exclusionary or inadvertently limiting access to resources outside of the immediate network, yet in JP-POP subtle diversity in the multiplex relationships actually generated more collective knowledge for the group. For example, one of the central bonds among members concerned their experiences as parents of students with special needs. They could relate to one another over the shared struggles of fighting for their children’s rights, navigating the bureaucracy of the BPS system, and the general worries that accompany raising a child with special needs. At the same time each member’s experience was in part shaped by the specific needs of their child. A child with Autism had different needs than a child with Downs Syndrome and this brought the parents into contact with different parts of the school system, social services or non-profit organizations. While sharing a bond, the individual experiences differed enough to expand the collective knowledge of the group by creating weak links to a variety of different external organizations. Similar subtle differences in neighborhoods, ethnicity, and religious background helped members increase JP-POPs capacity to access resources from a broader network in the community.

In networks with weaker ties or uniplex relationships it can be easier to quickly generate solutions to new problems, but it is more difficult to sustain commitment over time (Krackhardt & Hanson, 1993). This claim is consistent with observations of Stand
for Children, where members primarily had weak ties. As a group Stand for Children demonstrated an amazing capacity for quickly generating and mobilizing resources. In particular members’ experiences as professionals or their knowledge of others with specific skills was a great asset. Advertising for the Apple Fest recruitment event was advised by an individual with a marketing background, a neighbor who is a psychologist offered insight on a new curriculum, and an accountant helped the group interpret the intricacies of the state funding formula.

However, the number of connections and skill sets that were available to the group could also be problematic. One of the organizers working with Stand for Children felt that such high levels of individual expertise occasionally hindered efforts to foster collaborative action. In their professional lives Stand for Children members were accustomed to working unilaterally where it was perceived as being more efficient to take on sole responsibility for a task. Organizers and veteran members had to continually emphasize the importance of the organizing process and the benefits that were derived from collective action to new members. These members grew to understand how their individual skills could be complemented by the contributions of others and found that they were able to reciprocate and help shape organizational practice even when they were operating outside of their own areas of expertise.

A potential drawback for an organization with weak ties is that long-term sustainability is more difficult to achieve. Although the majority of Stand for Children members expressed their desire to remain committed to the chapter and the larger state agenda, they acknowledged the challenges that might present themselves if the local
chapter ever shifted its focus away from school finance. Core leaders expressed concern that they were becoming known in town as the “override” group when their mission was much broader.

At the same time they were reluctant to diversify, for two reasons. First, they felt that the funding crisis was the most pressing challenge facing the schools. They viewed other issues like special education services or closing the achievement gap as being linked to the town’s finances and believed they could have the greatest impact by continuing their work on the school budget. Second, when Stand for Children became involved with the Indoor Air Quality issue in 2006 they discovered that it was much more difficult to mobilize members without broader appeal. While the IAQ issue was a success, the actions that were taken to achieve Stand’s goals were limited to the work of only a few individuals. Many leaders saw this example as a harbinger of the motivational struggles that Stand for Children might face if it shifted its focus in the future.

Regardless of the basis of relationships in a CBO, continued participation in education organizing is based on the feeling that members are making a difference and that they are working toward a common goal with like-minded individuals. Success creates momentum, and the victories that the CBOs won for their communities motivated future participation. This is why organizers like to identify winnable victories or celebrate small successes even when their end goals are not yet achieved. The JP-POP parents did not win their first campaign (the state ballot question that eliminated bilingual education), but the knowledge that they had a substantial impact on voters in the areas of the city where they campaigned was enough to keep them interested in participating in
the next campaign. When the members of CBOs did emerge victorious there was a real sense of camaraderie and personal satisfaction that they had contributed to something bigger than themselves. Regardless of the basis of their initial relationships new bonds were created as a collective identity was forged through participation in education organizing.

**Self-Interest**

Collective action cannot take place until individuals demonstrate their willingness to act and transform their ‘private troubles into public problems (Mills, 1963)’. For members of all three CBOs self-interest was a driving force for participation, but the individual needs that produced these interests were the result of very different situations. UIA members with children wanted to ensure their kids’ had safe and productive learning environments, but even members without children understood the broader social benefits of having a strong school system. JP-POP’s immediate concerns were focused on bilingual and special education services and they were also seeking a way to become more involved in their children’s education. Stand for Children members wanted their children to continue to receive the highest quality education possible and desired the capability to effectively impact public policy. Despite coming to education organizing from very different perspectives, each organization’s work evolved in recognition of the complexity of education policy and the relationship between their self-interests and broader social concerns.

In New Bedford violence brought education to the forefront of UIA’s organizing agenda. Through recognition of the interrelatedness of social issues in a community,
UIA’s attempts to address violence evolved from an emphasis on direct solutions like community policing to more indirect approaches like conflict resolution education. As UIA became involved with the schools and listened to the challenges that were being raised by members with children, the multifaceted problems facing students in the NBPS became clear. The inclusion of youth in UIA meetings and their testimony only reinforced the importance of education as it relates to other social issues. As Jean Anyon notes, “How can a successfully reformed urban school benefit a low-income student of color whose graduation will not lead to a job on which to make a living because there are not enough such jobs, and will not lead to the resources for college completion” (Anyon, 2005, p. 3)? UIA remains committed to community policing and the implementation of a conflict resolution curriculum, but they now recognize how low expectations for students and a grim outlook on opportunities for employment or higher education impact the youth of New Bedford.

The self-interests of members of JP-POP were also multidimensional. Initially most members were interested in obtaining services for their children from BPS, but related to this concern were more general issues of access and power for parents or guardians. Consistent with the literature on family involvement for Latino families, many JP-POP members felt excluded from their children’s schools because of cultural, economic, or linguistic challenges (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004).

JP-POP is unique among grassroots organizations in that it provides direct support to members who need help advocating for their individual children. Most CBO organizers identify shared self-interests and a focus on an individual child would be too
narrow, but in JP-POP this approach serves a dual function. It helps an individual member meet an immediate need creating loyalty to the organization, and at the same time members have the opportunity to practice and cultivate many of the organizing skills they developed through various trainings. Members described IEP meetings with other JP-POP members as empowering experiences, where they were able to put their advocacy skills into practice. As members gained experience and confidence in dealing with their own child they were able to provide support to other members in similar situations. The realization that they were not alone in their struggles helped forge a collective identity, and there was a desire to reach out to others who might still be struggling. As JP-POP members became more aware of their rights they came to recognize some of the broader challenges that faced all children in the BPS. This was part of the motivation behind their commitment to the campaign for FCOCs. They wanted to ensure that other families were not excluded from participation in their children’s education.

In contrast with the situations in New Bedford and Boston, Lexington has one of the most highly acclaimed school systems in the state and many residents with young families moved to the town specifically for the quality of their public schools. Furthermore, Stand for Children members are predominantly well educated, white, upper middle class individuals who feel welcome at their children’s schools and are actively involved in traditional parent involvement activities. This is not the typical population of a grassroots organizing group; yet Stand for Children members share the desire to improve (or maintain) their children’s education opportunities. The majority of Stand for
Children members had experienced firsthand the painful effects of reduced funding on their children’s education. As foreign language classes were eliminated and class sizes increased, frustrated parents sought ways to become more engaged with both the schools and the broader community. It was evident that Stand for Children was meeting a real need.

Stand for Children is generally perceived as an ally of the Lexington school system and it has worked closely with school administrators and teachers to obtain additional funding. In contrast with other CBOs engaged in education organizing, the challenge for Stand for Children was convincing the broader community about the importance of education to the town. Members of the override opposition believed that an unfair burden was being placed on tax payers without children or seniors who are unable to afford the increasing property taxes in the town that they helped build. Some opponents also felt that the management of the school system was inefficient and that the funding detailed in the override (like money for the debate team) went above and beyond what could be reasonably expected of the community. The tension within the town was palpable and debates took place at town meetings, in the editorial pages of the local newspaper, and in online message boards. For many Lexington residents Stand for Children members were exactly like the selfish “override moms” described in the Boston Globe.

Selfishness is a common charge leveled by opponents of single issue advocacy groups and the organizing tradition of first identifying “self-interests” makes this a difficult label to shake. In one examination of cross-class coalition building in the
environmental and peace movements, Fred Rose quoted one government observer’s ideas about the challenges inherent in single issue advocacy: “It isn’t the environmentalists goal to take jobs away, nor is it industry’s or labor’s goal to destroy ecosystems. They’re by-products of their primary agenda, which is the problem of single issue politics; you’re not responsible for the by-products of your agenda. It’s someone else’s problem” (Rose, 2000, p. 48). The fear is that advocacy on a single issue creates a narrow focus and a denial for the broader social environment, but in strategy meetings the members of Stand for Children were cognizant of the concerns of the rest of the community. In particular, many of the members expressed a willingness to support an override that would fund a senior center in the community. However, they are also quick to point out that high tax bills are a product of high property values. Lexington citizens will eventually benefit if they sell their homes, and that high home value is in part derived from the excellent reputation of the school system.

Members of Stand for Children know that they are fortunate to have high quality schools and that there are a number of cities and towns in the state that could never muster the public support to pass an override. Communities like New Bedford or Worcester struggle to provide their schools with the most basic necessities and Stand for Children members would never have become aware of these challenges if it wasn’t for the work that was being done at the state level. Recognition of the challenges that are being faced by residents in their own town and in cities around the Commonwealth is what has motivated members to pursue broader actions targeted at overhauling the way in which schools are funded by the state.
Individuals choose to participate in education organizing efforts for a variety of different personal reasons. Thus, there is incredible diversity in the issues that are addressed, but one common thread is that traditional forms of family involvement provided inadequate solutions. Implementing a new element to the curriculum (UIA), the creation of a new position in the school system (JP-POP), and advocating in the community for increased funding and legislative reforms (Stand for Children) are all issues that cannot be addressed through forums like the PTA. Education organizing provides an alternative means for participation in education policy-making that empowers individuals outside of the schools. This does not mean that schools and families have to become adversaries, but rather raises the possibility for collaborations that draw on the resources and insights of diverse stakeholders to create innovative solutions to complex problems. In particular, it seems that the CBO model creates opportunities for families to expand their thinking about education issues from narrow concerns regarding their own children to a Tocquevillesque sense of self-interest rightly understood (Fig. 7.1).

In each of the case studies participants initial involvement was centered on narrowly defined self-interests (obtaining special education services for a child, trying to ensure a safe neighborhood, preventing the elimination of foreign language classes), but through their participation in CBO activities and as they became exposed to the interrelatedness of social policies, there was a shift in thinking toward policy solutions that would benefit the community-at-large. Perhaps recognition of this shift will encourage more educators to see community members as potential allies and not as
Participation and Learning in Grassroots Organizing

The planning and action strategies employed by CBOs were strikingly similar across the three cases. Members of each group participated in traditional organizing activities involving research, planning, and evaluation. Specific activities included one-on-ones, house meetings, and training opportunities adapted to the needs of each community. In seeking a deeper understanding of education organizing this study explored the skills that were acquired and the developmental process. The findings illuminate what types of knowledge are most valuable for education organizing members and the practices that are used to acquire this information.
What Types of Knowledge are Valuable to CBOs addressing Education Issues?

Part of the process of learning to work for school reform is the determination of what information a group needs in order to become a successful and effective stakeholder. This is an area where the differences between the case studies are readily apparent, as each group focused on fulfilling its own specific knowledge needs. In the literature on education change three perspectives have dominated the field over the past several decades: technological, political, and cultural (House, 1981; House & McQuillan, 1998). These perspectives shape how school reforms efforts are understood and which procedural elements are emphasized. The most successful reform efforts take a holistic view and draw from all three perspectives, but many reformers continue to doggedly pursue more narrow approaches (Fullan, 2001; Hargreaves, 2003; House & McQuillan, 1998).

The technological perspective focuses primarily on production and outcomes in schools. Here the central idea is that school improvement is achieved through the research, development, and diffusion of best practices. House traces this perspective back to the Soviet’s launching of Sputnik and the resulting National Defense Education Act (1958); however, this approach has dominated the field of education since the rise of social efficiency and Fordist models in the early 20th century. Technological perspectives continue to influence policy debates today, as schools are asked to implement generalized curricula grounded in “scientifically based research.” A technological perspective understands school improvement as a matter of finding, perfecting, and implementing the right technique.
The political perspective shifts away from the emphasis on specific strategies and instead looks toward negotiation and conflict among social groups as the basis for change. It understands the interactions between multiple stakeholders as central to the shaping and implementation of education policy. Issues related to power and the balancing of competing interests become central to the creation of effective reforms. Here learning to navigate the formal and informal change processes are an essential part of creating an effective and sustainable reform.

Finally, the cultural perspective emphasizes the social norms of different communities of practice. Implied is the recognition that schools reformers must consider the impact and reception of new policies by various communities. House uses an example of a curricular modification created in academia to demonstrate this phenomenon. He writes, “an innovation may be developed by a group of university scholars, and the innovation will reflect the norms and values of that culture. As it is disseminated to teachers, it enters a new culture with significantly different norms and values. It will be interpreted differently when used in the new culture (House, 1981, p. 24).” In order for a reform to be successful there must be a consideration of the culture where it is intended to be used. Reforms that fail to take into account the needs of their target communities are less likely to be adopted and implemented (Fullan, 2001; Lortie, 1975; Sergiovanni, 2000).

To successfully participate in the field of education policymaking a CBO must acquire some combination of technical, political, and cultural knowledge. Essentially, technical knowledge is the specialized information that is the domain of professionals,
political knowledge is the information needed to negotiate and collaborate with diverse stakeholders, and cultural knowledge is an awareness of the local environment, providing insight on how various approaches will be received. Together this blend of skills and information creates what management studies refer to as “actionable knowledge” (Adams & Flynn, 2005). This is knowledge that can be utilized to help CBOs reach their goals.

As learning organizations UIA, JP-POP, and Stand for Children evolved as they came in contact with new information. Each exhibited a need to develop knowledge related to the three perspectives, but the areas of emphasis differed between the groups. Using the technological, political, and cultural perspectives as a framework, one can identify areas of strength and areas for growth in each organization as it related to their campaigns.

UIA

When this study was conducted members of UIA had over ten years of organizing experience in the city of New Bedford. They had established cordial relationships with the majority of the local politicians and with various social service agencies. They had achieved several political victories and earned the respect of key political players in the area. However, UIA had never worked directly with a school system and its work was often complicated by deficiencies in technological, political, and cultural knowledge as it related to NBPS. Opponents were able to use a combination of these perspectives to block UIA’s efforts or at least complicate the process.

The challenges facing UIA originated with a legacy of disengagement between the schools and New Bedford families. While there are almost certainly economic and cultural factors that influenced the creation of this situation, UIA members admitted that
many families did not engage in traditional forms of involvement and they expressed their own frustrations at the lack of engagement that they observed in the community. This created a situation in which the culture of the school system was foreign to many of the community members. When UIA began to campaign for the conflict resolution curriculum it did not have strong relationships inside the school system and there was little to no understanding of the way NBPS worked or its internal challenges.

In November of 2006, UIA was able to obtain a commitment for the funding of the conflict resolution curriculum from the mayor and deputy superintendent during an accountability meeting attended by over eight hundred citizens. These were key leaders in the city and this format was how UIA had accomplished many of its previous goals, but over time it became apparent to UIA that they were largely unaware of the political and technical process for curriculum selection and implementation. As UIA members continued to push for the conflict resolution education they learned more about the immense pressures that school leaders and teachers were under as a result of the demands of high-stakes testing and No Child Left Behind. Teachers in New Bedford were already feeling overwhelmed and any additions to the curriculum, especially additions that were being imposed from the district level were sure to be met with opposition. With few ties to the local schools UIA struggled to understand these delays and quickly became frustrated with the layers of bureaucracy that they encountered.

UIA’s understanding of the process for curricular change was further convoluted through exchanges with various city and district officials. UIA was assured that the funding for the conflict resolution curriculum could be easily acquired by the mayor, but
it never became directly involved in the school board’s budget meetings or learned how the school system’s resources were being allocated. In the end the curriculum went almost two years without funding. Members were also told by administrators that they would not be able to implement any sort of change across the district because each school’s principal had final say over curricular decisions. This was a claim that seemed difficult to believe since UIA members were simultaneously told about the mandated curricula that all of the teachers in the district were required to cover. Finally, when UIA members brought their own research on effective conflict resolution to the table they were subtly intimidated by administrators using technical language and education jargon.

Three years later UIA is still working toward implementation of the curriculum, but its approach has changed as they are now taking their case directly to the schools and trying to discover how they can better support this reform. What is interesting about this example is that UIA has proven itself as an effective organizing group on a number of different policy issues and is a respected political force in the city. The members’ experience speaks to the unique challenges of education organizing and the need for developing more effective strategies for collaborating with schools without forfeiting the valuable contributions that they can make to the education policymaking process as outside agitators.

**JP-POP**

Over the past ten years JP-POP has developed a niche working with the BPS on the issues of bilingualism and special education. With this narrow agenda (at least in comparison to more broad based groups) its members have developed relationships and
strategies that include technological, political, and cultural perspectives on education, enabling them to effectively communicate with multiple stakeholders. From a technological perspective the collective knowledge of JP-POP is extensive and veteran members are well versed with regard to both their rights as parents and the effectiveness of instructional strategies for students with diverse needs. This knowledge base has been created over time and was achieved primarily through outreach to other non-profits or social service agencies.

The political knowledge of the group is also an important asset. The group has forged connections with local politicians, key school administrators, principals, and teacher leaders. Occasionally the group has conflicting interests with one or more of these connections, but the relationships are cordial and JP-POP has emerged as a respected played in the community. In fact, JP-POP is occasionally used as an external resource by BPS teachers when they notice families struggling to obtain services. According to Santana, JP-POP has received several referrals that originated with concerned classroom teachers. Notably absent in these connections are relationships with local universities, but this it is not a necessary component for navigating education policy circles in the city of Boston.

Perhaps the biggest challenge for JP-POP members has been in the area of cultural knowledge. Most of the members are immigrants to the United States and unfamiliar with the practices of American schools, so acquiring knowledge of school culture has been crucial. However, while having a better understanding of school culture has increased JP-POP’s capacity for access and influence in school practices, it has also
made starker the exclusion of their own cultures from the educational lives of their children. Frustration has changed into anger as schools continue to fail to provide adequate services for the families of immigrant youth. This is part of the motivation behind the advocacy for the FCOC position, which seeks to embed in each school a culture that fosters trust and support between families and schools.

Stand for Children

Finally, coming from predominantly well-educated, white, upper-middle class backgrounds, the members of Stand for Children were very comfortable with the LPS culture and most played a significant role in their children’s schools through traditional forms of parental involvement. There was little concern over specific pedagogical strategies employed by the schools, potentially a byproduct of the close relationships that many families enjoyed with teachers and school administrators, or perhaps a reflection of a curriculum that is culturally oriented toward the needs of a white, middle class demographic. For the most part, there was a symbiotic relationship between the school system and Stand for Children which is consistent with the levels of power that are attributed to affluent parents in the research literature. This study revealed that the more difficult challenges for this demographic were broader education policies like school funding, which impact the entire community.

As issues were removed from the school building and brought into policy circles, most Stand for Children members were less comfortable with their role as “engaged parents” and felt less capable of making an impact. While keeping in mind that these case studies represent a small sample, it is interesting to note that on broader education
issues and when dealing with the bureaucracy of a school system, families from all ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds were frustrated, confused, and occasionally intimidated by the process. Family involvement literature has depicted the clear advantages enjoyed by individuals and groups that share cultural capital with dominant social institutions. It certainly is true that Stand for Children members had few problems accessing and influencing schools at the local level and their social status also assisted efforts to access legislators and officials at the state level, but there remained a significant learning curve with regard to the navigation of complex government bureaucracies. Hence, for Stand for Children members gathering knowledge on the political perspective was critical for their efforts to increase civic capacity.

In education reform it is necessary to effectively communicate with various stakeholders. After all, “to the extent that people share a common language, this facilitates their ability to gain access to people and their information. To the extent that their language and codes are different, this keeps people apart and restricts this access” (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998, p. 253). Thus, learning the language of power in the field of education is an essential part of creating viable policy solutions. Effective activists are fluent in the technological, political, and cultural perspectives that shape policy and the case studies demonstrate that CBOs can help develop this knowledge, enabling fuller participation in education policy debates. However, part of community organizing is also the empowerment of community members and their development as community leaders. While adapting the language of education policy can help facilitate communication between stakeholders, this approach should not be interpreted as assimilation to the status
quo. Rather becoming adept in the language of education policy strengthens what Cornell West refers to as the “prophetic voice”. By understanding the perspectives that guide education reform CBOs can construct actions that resonate with educators while simultaneously including the much needed perspective of the community. When working in collaboration with educators this approach creates the possibility for the development of more tailored and effective policies.

**How Does CBO Learning Occur?**

The organizational culture of the CBOs in this study, and in the field of grassroots and community organizing more generally, closely reflect a contemporary version of participatory democracy.\(^{25}\) The term “participatory democracy” stems from an organizational strategy popularized in the ‘60s by activist groups like the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). By definition any form of democracy relies on the participation of people, but this approach emphasized broad based involvement in organizational decision making. Critics of the 1960s version of this strategy believed that the time required for the inclusion of all voices coupled with the desire to reach consensus inhibited a group’s ability to quickly respond to emerging political challenges. However, more recent iterations of participatory democracy have largely addressed these concerns and the potential for increased solidarity, innovation, and member development continues to appeal to activists (Polletta, 2002). Many CBOs utilize variations of participatory

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\(^{25}\) For an in-depth analysis of the development of participatory democracy from the 1960s to present see Polletta F. (2002). *Freedom is an endless meeting: Democracy in American social movement*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
democracy, but in contrast to earlier versions of the strategy there is no longer a demand for absolute consensus. Rather the emphasis is on consensus through the identification of common ground. Polletta offers a more nuanced perspective in her description of CBOs:

Underpinning this scenario… is a view of people’s individual interests as clear and fixed and of collective agendas as a kind of Venn diagram of intersecting interests. Group interests are brokered from individual ones. The alternative, however, is that both individual and common interests may emerge from discussion and deliberation – not through a process of negotiation (which assumes that interests are fixed) but through a process of self- and collective discovery. Decisionmaking on this model… is aimed not only at matching means to ends but also at scrutinizing and redefining ends. (Polletta, 2002, p. 186)

She notes that organizers might not embrace this description for two reasons. First, it could be interpreted that people may not know their personal interests and second, this approach may not be expeditious. However, based on my observations in the case studies from this research, the idea that interests evolve through participation in the organizing process is an accurate depiction. In terms of how this evolution takes place, the data from this study indicates that embedded in the process of participatory democracy are the interrelated elements of collaborative learning and planning, veteran contributions, distributed leadership, networking, and evaluation. It is these elements that are at the heart of individual and organizational learning in CBOs.

**Collaborative Learning and Planning**

Collaborative learning and planning was a key aspect of the decision making process in the CBOs. In each case study the members engaged in spirited debate to help determine the group’s next move and this often involved collecting and sharing information from individual members. The information sources included: opinions based
on personal experiences, data collected through surveys, networking with other CBOs, academic books or articles, participation in trainings sponsored by other organizations, and the popular internet search engine “google”.

There were several occasions where differences of opinion created tension among the CBO members. During these conflicts the groups used established organizational norms to help facilitate communication. For example, there were mixed feelings about the selection of Indoor Air Quality as an action item for Stand for Children, but the Lexington chapter adhered to organizational procedures and a requisite two-thirds vote helped decide the issue. UIA did not have any formal rules but relied instead on a steadfast commitment to giving all members a voice in the process. This was a part of the organizational culture that according to veteran members had developed over time. As members debated the merits and challenges of having youth participate in a large action meeting they pushed one another to clarify the rationale behind their positions. Although there were obviously some disappointed participants when the final decision was made to include the youth, all of the members still supported the larger mission and came to the action. This is consistent with Poletta’s finding that an inclusive process helps cultivate higher levels of solidarity and commitment to both the organization and its agenda. She writes, “The process of decisionmaking makes for a greater acceptance of the differences that coexist with shared purposes. In fact, consensus often aims not to arrive at a position or policy agreed to unanimously in all its particulars but to delineate a range of individual positions that are consistent with the group position” (Polletta, 2002).
Collaborative learning was also an effective means for identifying the information that the groups did not have or understand. This phenomenon was frequently observed during group discussions around action issues. Examples include UIA members working to understand the intricacies of the school suspension rates published by NBPS and JP-POP members learning about the process of children “aging out” of the education system and obtaining adult services. When missing information was identified group members volunteered to find the answers and report back to the group. This type of shared responsibility and group learning helped CBO members become better informed on the issues and more capable advocates for their positions.

**Veteran Support**

Veteran members play a critical role in the development of new members and thus organizational learning, but their influence is more subtle than overt. The presence of veterans in organizing activities provides a model for participation and their experiences in past campaigns are important resources. For example, prior to large actions UIA conducts a series of “walk-throughs” where members practice their testimony, choreograph movements on stage, and entertain possible contingencies that they might arise at the event. These “walk-throughs” were not popular activities among new members who felt awkward speaking to the dozen individuals who were present in the cavernous church basement. However, veteran members embraced the opportunity, were the first to volunteer, and following their talks solicited the feedback of the group. They often asked for very specific advice such as, “Do you think that I should include the part about my parents wanting to provide me with opportunities that they didn’t have, or
does that seem off topic?” Watching the veterans participate in this type of formation seemed to give confidence to the new members to go up on stage.

Afterward, I asked one of the veterans if she was intentionally modeling organizing practices for the benefit of the new members and she laughed, “No, not at all. I just have found that it is really valuable to get some feedback. Sometimes things sound better in your head, so it is good to have other people listen and tell me if I am making sense!” At the same time, when veteran members demonstrate reluctance to participate in an activity this can present a challenge for the organizer. When the veteran leaders of Stand for Children expressed their reluctance to practice campaign calls, the rest of the group aligned with these leaders and the activity was never pursued. Thus, it is incumbent upon the organizer to provide clear rationale for group activities.

Based on their experiences veteran leaders can also serve as important resources, providing practical information that helps facilitate the organizing process. Knowledge of the best way to contact public officials or the best times to recruit people for events comes with practice and this information is shared with new members. At the same time, veteran leaders who are steeped in organizing practices may also recognize the potential contributions of new members and try to draw them into conversations or debates. In the case studies for this dissertation the veteran presence was largely congenial and inclusive, but other research indicates that it is not uncommon for CBOs to develop a culture that becomes insular as the strong bonds of the veteran membership exclude participation from new members. Polletta observes that this culture often emerges as a matter of efficiency:
Such bonds, in turn, made for decision making that was relatively expeditious. Participant’s knowledge of each other’s skills and preferences, along with their mutual trust, discouraged standoffs and stalemates. Friends tended to see one person’s strengths as a bonus for the group and another’s weaknesses as of only trivial importance. Difference was the source of mutual enrichment, not of inequality (Polletta, 2002, p. 207).

However, out of all of the interviews in this study (10 individuals had less than a year’s worth of experience in their CBO) there was only one participant who expressed feeling intimidated or reluctant to participate because of the actions of veteran members. Overall, the presence of more experienced members provided stability and models of inquiry that made a substantial contribution to organizational learning.

_Distributed Leadership_

The development of leadership capacity has long been a part of organizing practice. In fact, after the accomplishment of organizational objectives, the empowerment of members of the community is the second most important priority for CBOs. As a result there was a sentiment among the organizers and members that “on the job training” was essential for learning the work of organizing. Leadership development increases both individual confidence and overall organizational capacity.

Leadership development occurring in CBOs is related to what organizational literature refers to as “distributed leadership” (Spillane, 2006). In this model leadership responsibility does not fall on one individual or require a rank or title. As Spillane and colleagues note in their description of the model as it applies to schools, “(a) distributed perspective on leadership is grounded in activity rather than in position or role… considering both the large-scale organizational tasks (macro functions) as well as the day-
to-day work (micro tasks) that are essential for an understanding of school leadership practice” (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001, p. 24). In each of the case studies members were quickly pressed into action and their responsibilities were scaled up over time. The duties they were asked to fulfill were not insignificant and frequently involved overarching macro leadership. Providing public testimony was a common “first assignment” among the CBOs, an activity that encouraged an individual to share their personal experiences, but one that simultaneously carried some responsibility as they would be speaking for both themselves and the collective group.

While a distributed model contributes to the development of individuals, it also serves a practical purpose by splitting responsibilities. Managing a CBO campaign takes a significant amount of time and members must learn to rely on one another because it is simply not possible for one individual to manage all of the tasks that must be accomplished in addition to their other family and employment responsibilities. Allen and Cherry describe the successful development of this model as the creation of “leader-full” organizations:

Leadership in organic systems (such as a network) is not the kind of leadership that one person can do. It is leadership that requires many people – a ‘leader-full’ organization. In a network, one person cannot control the system, nor can one person fully understand it. Therefore models of collaborative, shared or multi-level leadership become more important and critical. Developing the capacities of others becomes essential in building a ‘leader-full’ organization (Allen & Cherrey, 2002).

The sharing of responsibilities fosters the inclusion of more diverse perspectives and creates the opportunity for the development of innovative solutions to problems. The distributed leadership model observed across the three case studies was critical to the
internal development of the organization as a group that was capable of acquiring knowledge from diverse perspectives and flexible enough to respond to different situations.

Networking

Both internal and external relationship building is a central tenant of community organizing and the CBOs in this study benefitted from participation in networks with multiple stakeholders. Through network activities members were able to both acquire new knowledge and cultivate relationships that might be useful during future actions or negotiations. Examples of networking included reaching out to individuals like the mayor, or forging connections with other organizations working on education issues. Relationships with education “insiders” were particularly valuable because they provided first-hand information about the school system, offered legitimacy in the eyes of other educators, and served as a point of access to formal and informal institutional networks. In each of the case studies, CBO members found allies working within the system who were able to help facilitate relationship building and foster new connections. UIA used relationships with a handful of New Bedford principals and school board members to try to reach out to other education leaders in the district. In JP-POP, the FCOC pilot program never would have gotten off the ground without the support of an insider presence like former Deputy Superintendent Karen Mapp. And Stand for Children member Vito LaMura is the president the Lexington Education Association (the town teaching union), an invaluable resource for understanding the perspective of local educators.
The value of having ties with education insiders is consistent with Amy Binder’s findings in her study of the campaigns for the inclusion of Afrocentrism and creationism in the curriculum (Binder, 2002). Binder found that education outsiders (who she refers to as “challengers”) met with more success when they were able to establish “insider resonance.” That is, if the agenda of the challengers’ meshed with the perspectives of the insider’s than they were more likely to receive support for their actions. However, Binder’s study also revealed that there is an important distinction that needs to be made between political and institutional insiders in an education system.

The supporters of both Afrocentrism and creationism were able to build relationships with political insiders or place people into positions of political power with relative ease. An outsider might assume that these political forces would have substantial transformative power in an education system, yet Binder found that it was more important to generate support from the institutional insiders (educators or administrators) if one wanted to achieve sustainable change. Institutional insiders had more direct control over reform implementation and were less susceptible to the types of pressure that outsiders were capable of generating. This is consistent with the literature on educational change that recognizes the important role of teacher buy-in for success (Fullan, 2001; Gitlin & Margonis, 1995).

This finding has important implications for the work of CBOs in the field of education. A key tool for organizers is the “power analysis” where the group identifies the central stakeholders, assesses the power of each one, and determines if it will be possible to work with this individual or group. In order to effectively negotiate it is
necessary to have a power base (financial, numerical, etc.) and the power of a CBO is primarily derived from the possibility of creating consequences for public officials.

Some of Alinky’s most famous (or infamous) actions were the ones that never actually took place. The “shit-in” where activists threatened to occupy every bathroom stall in Chicago’s O’Hare airport for twenty-four hours, or the Bean Dinner before the Rochester orchestra’s concert are organizing legends, but they were ideas that were never implemented. Rather it was the possibility that these consequences could happen that made Alinky’s groups so powerful. As Stinchcombe notes:

> It appears as if most exercises of power by mobilized collectivities do not consist of actually changing the rewards and punishments of a public official, but instead of giving them the notion that their rewards and punishments might change if they do not behave. Demonstrations, popular organizations, riots, and even revolutionary crowds rarely actually hurt anybody, or collect enough money to run an automobile factory for a day, or deliver a given number of votes on election day, etc. Instead, they give the office holder the notion that perhaps this might happen unless some action is taken. Since this can have the desired effect (either give in or repress the movement), the exercise of popular power turns out to be a matter of ‘virtual movements,’ or ‘potential power’ (Stinchcombe, 1989, p. 127).

This approach is effective with political officials, but less so with entrenched school bureaucracies where officials are not publically elected and may not perceive their role as being in direct service to the community. The struggle for recognition of the professional status of education may contribute to attitudes that are resistant to the inputs of outsiders. This helps to explain the struggles that were encountered by UIA members in their efforts to implement conflict resolution education into the curriculum. They acquired the support of Mayor Lang and the chief-of-police, individuals who they had successfully worked with in the past, and they eventually garnered the support of the school board, but
achieving their goal would ultimately depend on the buy-in of the individual principals and teachers.

Binder’s call for a more nuanced examination of “insider” status is an important point for organizing groups to consider. In particular, the field of education raises some significant challenges as the authority of various “insiders” shifts depending on the type of issue that is being addressed. In Binder’s case studies the institutional figures had more power, but this was contingent on the type of issue that was being addressed. As a direct service issue (curricular implementation and delivery), the primary responsibility resided with the teachers and principals. However, there are other education issues where institutional insiders have less power. If one thinks about education issues on a continuum (see Fig. 7.2), with one end representing direct services and the other broader social policies, one finds that there is a correlation with the levels of authority possessed by institutional and political insiders.

A broader issue like the reform of the education funding formula undertaken by Stand for Children requires networking with political insiders. In this situation the average classroom teacher (institutional insider) will have very little to contribute to the campaign. Other issues like bilingual education that include both direct service and social policy implications require collaboration with both institutional and political insiders. Effective CBOs must learn to conduct their power analysis of education issues based on these complicated dynamics in order to be successful.
Evaluation

Finally, based on observations, evaluation was determined to be an important part of the CBO learning process. However, this finding only emerged in the interview data when participants were asked direct questions about its role. This may be a result of how the questions were worded or how the participants were framing the concept of learning. Once the topic was breached participants spoke about the value of evaluation as a means to improve organizational practice. Across all of the case studies some form of an evaluation was conducted following every group activity, even the basic weekly meeting.
While there is not enough data to fully support this claim, it often seemed as though the evaluation process had become somewhat routinized. Members often seemed impatient and to be going through the motions during the evaluation. However, the exceptions to this observation were the evaluations following large scale activities like a community meeting, rally, or large training session. The primary difference seems to be the desire to make meaning of the new information that it is introduced at these types of events.

Collectively the case studies demonstrate that CBOs are learning organizations that are continually working to expand their capacity in order to impact education policy (Senge, 1990). The groups employ a variety of different learning strategies that are focused on both organizing techniques and obtaining information specific to education issues. Central to the learning in these groups is the focus on the agency of each CBO member. This is part of what helps CBOs generate innovative solutions targeted to the needs of their specific communities. Polletta observes that this approach helps CBOs avoid tired and ineffective practices: “In an organization whose members refuse the notion that political creativity is restricted to those with formal credentials, people can bring diverse skills and insights to bear on determining the best course of action” (Polletta, 2002, p. 210). While recognition of the empowerment of CBO members is important, this should not be interpreted as a dismissal of the potential contributions of more formal “professional knowledge.” Rather the most effective solutions seem to couple both the contributions of the local community and education professionals.

Finally, it is important to note that many of the learning practices described in the case studies are grounded in relationship building. In seeking to understand how members’
self-interests evolve through participation in education organizing, it would seem that the emphasis on relationships throughout the process is a key factor. It is through our interactions with one another that we come to realize our common desires. In a time when most people are becoming more socially isolated (Skocpol, 2003), participation in a CBO provides an opportunity to learn about the concerns of other citizens.

**Ancillary Benefits of Education Organizing**

This study also considered the ancillary benefits that occur through participation in education organizing. In our current era of accountability, there is a keen interest in the tangible outcomes (e.g. higher test scores, safety statistics) of grassroots and community organizing. This has been an important starting place for assessing the contributions of a nascent field; however, it is also important to consider other potential outcomes that might have an impact on education or the broader community. These outcomes are less easily measured, but may also lead to positive outcomes for both schools and communities. The ancillary benefits cited by the participants were a sense of personal empowerment, expanding social networks, and increased civic engagement. While these three themes could be found across the case studies, there were still some significant differences among the groups.

**Personal Empowerment**

In each of the groups there was a strong theme of personal empowerment. Participation in CBOs gave members confidence and a sense of accomplishment. New Bedford is a city with a history of cronyism, so for UIA members the opportunity to meet with civic leaders and to have their concerns taken seriously was significant. Even when
faced with difficulties, the fact that they were a part of the conversation felt rewarding for many new members. However, the “just happy to be here” attitude wore off as members demonstrated their comfort in talking policy with local officials. CBO members now expect they will be engaged in civic discourse. When they felt that they were not being properly respected (as was the case during interactions with some members of the NBPS), the UIA members were shocked. They had taken ownership of their seats at the table and were not accustomed to legitimizing their presence.

For the families in JP-POP the sense of personal empowerment was mentioned in every single interview. The members of this group had experienced marginalization in a number of different ways (as working class, immigrant, non-English speaking women), and finding a means to become more civicly engaged carried special significance. JP-POP members felt empowered to go to their children’s schools and advocate. This is important when we consider the extensive research chronicling the barriers that traditionally reduce Hispanic family involvement (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001; Valdes, 1996).

One of the most popular trainings in JP-POP was a course on advocacy where new members learned about their rights as parents in the schools. As a part of the session lawyers from Ed Law, a non-profit legal advocacy group in Boston, would review the rights of parents. Members talked extensively about the importance of this training, often citing how “their lawyers” had provided them with the tools they needed to help their children. Lawyers were perceived as being only available to the wealthy, so having one as a resource was very meaningful. In contrast to Audre Lorde’s quote “The master’s
tools will never dismantle the master’s house (Lorde, 1984, p. 110),” JP-POP members were eager to gain access to the tools that they had previously been denied. A “tool” can be used in many ways and CBOs are adept at utilizing them in a manner that best suits their needs (Shirley & Evans, 2007). For example, it was at the trainings that JP-POP members learned that they could have someone accompany them to their child’s IEP meeting. This kernel of information eventually turned into the practice of large groups of JP-POP members advocating for children during the IEP process. What started as a “master’s tool” was transformed by the CBO into an exemplar of solidarity and innovation.

Personal empowerment was also cited as a benefit by the members of Stand for Children. This was significant because the assumption is that this demographic is inherently empowered. The financial, human, and social capital available to the members of this group did provide them with many social advantages, yet they too expressed feelings of frustration when it came to dealing with high level bureaucracies or when they wanted to influence broader policy. The following two quotes are strikingly similar. The first comes from a member of Stand for Children who had an Ivy League education and the second is from a member of UIA who had earned her GED in her mid-twenties:

I really feel like Stand got me to see that I can talk to people, say things that make sense and that people might agree with. I remember my first couple meetings I was amazed that I would say something and people would say, that’s a good point. I just thought, well, I don’t know what I’m talking about, but I do. I’ve learned through Stand that I do know what I’m talking about.

and
there was a wealth of knowledge and experience that I brought to the table that I was unaware I possessed. I was surprised that my ideas were powerful and became essential to the proposal. I was getting respect from the other participants. There was a gentleman and I remember he came up to me, looked me dead in the eye, shook my hand, and said ‘I like the way you think.’

These quotes represent how challenging it is for individuals to become involved in the democratic process regardless of race, class, or education background. While the priority still needs to be placed on achieving more equitable education opportunities for the most vulnerable populations in our society, this finding indicates that there is also a more general need to reform the way that social policy is shaped in our society.

*Expanding Social Networks*

Two of the groups cited the important benefits of expanding social networks. JP-POP members reported on the value of meeting other families with children who had special needs. The arduous battle to obtain services can be a grind and it can feel isolating within the school community. This is particularly true, when one’s already confronting linguistic barriers. Participation in JP-POP allowed members to encounter others who had similar experiences. These individuals would become resources for one another, but just as important they would also become sympathetic listeners. With this level of value it was not surprising to learn that JP-POP members would actively recruit new members at the grocery store, the community health center, or the laundry-mat. They wanted to share the positive experiences that they had with others.

Stand for Children members did not need as much emotional support, but they still commented on how nice it was to have expanding social networks. For many of the members their social circles were limited to their children’s activities and their
professional relationships. Through Stand for Children they became less insular and learned about the rest of the community. Several of the members commented that it was nice to get to know people with children of different ages, but they also enjoyed meeting people with common interests. Many of the younger families were new to the town of Lexington and they were able to meet some of the older families as a result of their participation in Stand for Children and by attending town meetings. While they might not agree on every political issue (and the tensions in town were significant), they did come to know other families that they might not have encountered otherwise. The expansion of relationships had motivated the majority of the members to support funding for new endeavors like a senior center. A project that otherwise would not be a primary concern for most of the families in Lexington.

The only group that did not cite expanding social networks was UIA. This may have to do more with the different organizational structure of the group. As a broad-based interfaith organization, their mere participation was a form of social networking. Perhaps this is why developing new relationships didn’t really seem significant. They had expanded their social networks simply by joining UIA (Rooney, 1994). As previously mentioned the religious communities in New Bedford are insular institutions and participation in UIA demanded a level of networking (or relationship building) that would not otherwise be present. Another possible explanation is that UIA members already perceived New Bedford more holistically (even with its internal divisions), and hence the image of expanding social networks did not resonate. UIA was the only group where the theme of “renewed commitment to the community” emerged. Whereas, many
JP-POP and Stand for Children members were recent arrivals in their respective communities, UIA members had deep roots and really saw New Bedford as their city.

*Increased Civic Engagement*

Finally, consistent with the recent findings of Annenberg’s six year study of education organizing efforts (Mediratta et al., 2008), there is evidence of a general increase in civic engagement. Members in UIA reported that they were voting more frequently, as one respondent phrased it, “not just every four years, but now the little elections too.” They were more cognizant of local, state, and national politics, and more critical of the media’s coverage. Through their participation in UIA that had learned to use a critical eye to assess policies and they wanted more depth in reporting. Many of the leaders in Stand for Children had run for and won elected offices in town. For these individuals, participation was a primary factor in their decision to run for election.

Respondents in JP-POP were less likely to report an increase in participation for this area, but they were observed participating in a number of other civic oriented activities through CLVU, such as rallies for fair housing policies and resistance to gentrification efforts.

While the contributions of education organizing hold a great deal of promise for the future of education reform, we must resist the urge to assess its impact simply in terms of test scores. In Shirley’s analysis of the Valley Interfaith Alliance Schools, organizing activities resulted in only modest academic gains on the TAAS exams, and there were some significant tensions that emerged between some community members and school personnel. However, the book is filled with evidence of how the organizing process empowered the community and increased levels of social capital and civic
engagement (Shirley, 2002). While it is still too early to assess the impact of the specific actions detailed in this study, it is already clear that there has been a significant impact of the lives of the participants and thus on the rest of the community.

**Conclusion**

This study set out to explore the experiences of participants in CBOs engaged with education organizing. The findings reveal that these organizations provide an important alternative to traditional forms of family involvement. Individuals whose potential to impact education policy is limited by perceptions of self-efficacy or opportunity may find that CBOs provide a venue for more meaningful participation. It is also evident that the process involved in education organizing can have a substantial impact on its participants. Members whose initial involvement is framed by narrow conceptions of self-interest, discover the value of broader social policies for both their own children and the community-at-large. These types of revelations are in part developed through an organizational learning process that emphasizes relationship building and active participation. As Polletta states, “participatory decision making... help(s) residents who had little prior experience in routine politics take on roles in strategizing and in mobilizing fellow residents. Talking through issues and options enabled people to connect local injustices to national policies, exposed them to diverse rationales for participation, and helped them negotiate short and long-term goals” (Polletta, 2002, p. 204). Notably, the value of education organizing seems to cross ethnic and class lines, as individuals from all demographics struggle to have a voice in education policymaking at various levels. Participants from all different backgrounds
also reported increased feelings of empowerment and a renewed commitment to the community.

The findings also indicate that the success of a CBO in the field of education policy is contingent upon numerous factors. The structure of the organization, their capacity for learning, the types of issues that they are trying to address, and the strength of their relationships within the local civic ecology all have a substantial impact on the effectiveness of the organization. Those groups that are able to participate in diverse networks while developing the necessary technological, political, and cultural knowledge generally met with the most success.
Chapter Eight
Conclusion
New Directions in Education Organizing

In examining the work of UIA, JP-POP, and Stand for Children, I discovered groups of diverse individuals with a shared passion for improving the field of education. Unable to create change through traditional channels, they turned to grassroots organizing for the support of other like-minded individuals and to gain the knowledge required to influence education policy. The outcomes of their efforts have been mixed and in some cases small victories have raised new challenges, but it appears that education organizing can help shape public education in the United States. Participation in the process of education organizing has the potential to not only transform schools, but the participants themselves. Members report that participation has increased their confidence, desire, and ability to fully participate in democratic processes.

Advocating for effective and sustainable educational change is a complex process requiring the input of multiple stakeholders. Organizers, CBO members, researchers, and educators must learn to communicate more effectively if education organizing is going to realize its full potential as a transformative force in education policy circles. This final chapter will detail some observations based on the findings from this study and offer suggestions for the future of education organizing.

The field of education creates complex policy dilemmas that require knowledge of schools and their communities. CBOs bring knowledge of the community to the policy table, but organizing strategies that treat education like any other public policy issue are likely to fail. In order to effectively participate in the development of education policy,
CBO members must become familiar with the institutional culture of their local schools. Critics may contend that adapting to the dominant culture will only reinforce the hegemony of the status quo and thus limit a group’s capacity to impact broader social change. However, these assumptions underestimate the inherent value of the organizing process. When infused with consciousness raising the process of learning about dominant structures can be empowering as participants recognize both the social inequities that exist in our society and how they frame policy debates. Indeed, if CBOs are going to transform unjust social structures they must first understand how they operate. This could allow them to communicate their positions more effectively and build coalitions with other community stakeholders. In some cases CBOs can even use this knowledge to their advantage and create strategies that capitalize on specific policy levers (Oakes & Rogers, 2006; Shirley & Evans, 2007).

CBOs that represent marginalized groups and their voices will become even more important as the public school population continues to shift toward a minority majority demography. In order to move away from “one-size-fits-all” policies and address the needs of this increasingly diverse student population, it is imperative to foster more effective communication and collaboration between communities and schools. As Michelle Fine observes, “What is justified as ‘good for all’ (tracking, labeling, education for employment, discipline and order) is constructed through a discourse of efficiency, privileging the interests of capital and the state rather than the needs, passions, desires, strengths, and worries of parents and their children, which are framed as if simply private” (Fine, 1993, p. 684). In order to break this pattern both families and schools
need to re-conceptualization family, school, and community relationships and to utilize a holistic approach to education policy development.

Re-conceptualizing Family-School-Community Relations

Many of the challenges facing education change efforts are based on the struggle among stakeholders to assert and maintain power. As a result, many reforms stall when they reach a participant who was not involved in the initial decision making process. In education it is the teachers who are frequently excluded from the change process. Politicians or administrators can require the use of specific curricula or mandate participation in professional development activities, but teachers still retain a great deal of autonomy inside the classroom. Teachers serve as “street-level bureaucrats,” a term coined by Lipsky to describe how policy implementation in the end comes down to the people who actually implement it (Lipsky, 1983, pp. 13-25). Therefore, a key component of effective educational change is the commitment and participation of classroom teachers (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003).

This creates a tactical challenge for CBOs. Traditionally, CBOs present themselves as nonpartisan groups, meaning that they forge alliances or engage in confrontation based on the requirements of a specific action or the role of various stakeholders. While some elected public officials might desire a more consistent relationship with CBOs, they can at least appreciate this approach as a political tactic. However, research indicates that an understanding of this dynamic may not come as easily to educators who are already sensitive about their profession; in such cases
education organizing could exacerbate already tense school/community relationships (Hargreaves, 2001b; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003).

There are several factors that contribute to this situation. First, educators have worked over the past fifty years to improve the prestige of the teaching profession. Increased educational requirements have established teaching as a middle-class, white collar career, but in many ways it remains a “shadowed profession,” esteemed for its’ contributions to society, yet diminished as easy work or a “stepping stone” job (Lortie, 1975). Teachers who are sensitive to these perceptions place great importance on their professional autonomy and expertise, and may be reluctant to share power (Hargreaves, 2001a, 2001b).

Second, parent/teacher relationships have a history of tension rooted in what teachers see as a fundamental difference in priorities. Families usually are concerned about the needs of their individual children, whereas educators must take into the account the needs of all children (Waller, 1932). The media and popular culture promote these stereotypes, with the most recent manifestation of this dynamic represented in the depiction of “helicopter parents” who micromanage their children’s educations from kindergarten to college (Cline & Fay, 1990). These types of attitudes make it difficult to build trust and initiate communication between teachers and parents.

Finally, teachers’ voices are frequently excluded from school reform conversations or their roles are narrowly defined. Despite being on the “front lines” of education and the general recognition of their important role in determining student outcomes, teacher input is generally relegated to small scale concerns like the selection of
classroom materials (Winfield & Hawkins, 1993). For all of these reasons the input of CBOs may be interpreted as a challenge to teacher authority (Shirley, 2002), and confrontational tactics often will be seen as a personal affront.

Thus, it is important for CBOs to learn about the concerns of local educators before they try to implement widespread changes. There are often legitimate reasons why teachers are reluctant to participate in a particular reform (Gitlin & Margonis, 1995). This was the case in New Bedford where teachers were hesitant to take on additional curricular responsibilities with all of the pressure that was being placed on them through high stakes testing and NCLB. Shirley and I discuss similar challenges created by NCLB for more established school/community relationships in Chicago, Miami, and Texas. In the Texas IAF, where the Alliance schools had developed close relationships with CBOs, the imposition of high stakes testing essentially eliminated any further cooperation as teachers and administrators were forced to focus on the implementation of a highly standardized curricula or risk losing their jobs (Shirley & Evans, 2007).

While CBOs must be willing to recognize the challenges facing educators, at the same time schools must also reexamine the way they frame family involvement (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998). School-centric models based on Epstein’s typology are no longer adequate and parents from all demographics are feeling disconnected from their children’s schools. Too many educators lament both the presence of the overbearing “helicopter parent” and the absence of parents who do not attend school sponsored conferences or activities. The implication is that parents should be “seen but not heard,” but this approach fails to acknowledge the significant contributions that families and
communities can make to education (Gonzalez et al., 1995). CBOs have the potential to serve as intermediaries and facilitate the building of trust between communities and schools (Lopez, Kreider, & Coffman, 2005). As Baum observed in Baltimore:

Community organizations can influence schools by building bonds between staff and community members to create a climate of support for a school. If parents and teachers understand and trust one another, they will regard each other with less anxiety and antagonism. They can share knowledge about children and pool authority over them. Relaxation of tension creates emotional and political space for educators to think creatively about what students need and how schools can educate them (Baum, 2003, p. 261).

The creation of trust requires openness on both sides. Perhaps findings from this dissertation that identify links between CBO participation and increased awareness of broader education issues, coupled with Annenberg’s finding that two-thirds of participants in education organizing activities report increased participation in traditional family involvement activities will help educators see the potential value of education organizing as a means to improve family-school-community relationships and education as a whole (Mediratta et al., 2008).

There are a number of promising programs that can help facilitate these relationships, such as the FCOC positions that were implemented in the Boston public schools through the advocacy efforts of JP-POP. These internal staff positions were created with the mission to improve communication between teachers and community members, and as a result both sides reported a lessening of tensions (Constantino, 2006). The parent/teacher home visit program is another promising endeavor popularized in California through the work of Sacramento Area Congregations Together (Sacramento ACT), a PICO affiliate. Teachers are brought into the local community for meetings and
occasional visits to their pupils’ homes, while community members pledge their commitment to attend certain school sponsored events over the course of the year. Due to the programs’ early success the California state legislature allocated $15 million dollars to the Nell Soto Parent/Teacher Involvement Program and other communities across the country are piloting similar efforts.

Of course, family-school-community relationships are not limited to interactions between teachers and parents or guardians. There are numerous other stakeholders who are involved in the development of education policies and the need to bridge cultural gaps between communities and these groups persists. In his analysis of Chicago school reform efforts, Charles Payne observed the deeply rooted differences between school board members and community activists:

It was a predictable clash of cultures on several fronts, including the ways in which people thought about something as fundamental as time. Board people tended to think of the workday as having well-defined limits. If they put in a couple of extra hours, it felt like a significant sacrifice. Community activists, who live in a world where meetings may start at 9 or 10 p.m., could not abide this attitude. They had a more visceral sense of schools as being in a state of crisis, and one doesn’t respond to crisis by making a big deal over working a couple of extra hours now and then (Payne, 2008, p. 127).

Clearly there is a need for more effective communication. For example, research from this study and others suggest that it is necessary for CBOs to develop the ability to collect and interpret education research in order to effectively advocate for their positions with various political players (Henig, 2008). While there has been a growing trend among many CBOs’ to improve their capacity to accomplish these objectives, most
organizations remain limited in this area (National Center for Schools and Communities, 2002b; Renee, 2006).

In Baum’s study of Baltimore’s Southeast Education Task Force, he identified four conditions in which a community organization was more likely to use or conduct research. First, there needed to be interest in research and an appreciation for its value among core group leaders. Second, the organization had to have the ability to conduct research. This required a specific skill set that many CBOs lack or the financial means to outsource research responsibilities, a choice available to very few CBOs and one that may limit ownership of organizational knowledge. Third, there had to be a recognized need for additional research and it must be perceived as adding value to the decision making process. Fourth, there needed to be an audience that was receptive to or desirous of research. Education research is only an effective tool if it is valued by the decision makers involved in the process (Baum, 2003, p. 177). These circumstances make the development of research capacity a challenging task, but CBOs appear to be favorably situated to develop and/or utilize educational research in a manner that can lead to school improvement.

CBOs’ outsider/insider presence and their loosely coupled relationships with schools provides the opportunity for more nuanced policy adoption and creative planning (Weick, 1976). John Beam’s evaluation of education organizing efforts in ACORN describes how CBOs can utilize education research as a tool in both the local community and within broader policy circles:

At their most incisive, ACORN education campaigns can translate issues with extensive policy and research backup (e.g. teacher qualifications) into
an accountability or equity framework that organizers can easily communicate “on the doors” (e.g., percentage of appropriately certified teachers in neighborhood schools versus in the rest of the district). But, to speak before the school board, negotiate with the superintendent, or testify in court, community leaders need a solid understanding of the factors that contribute most strongly to successful academic outcomes (Beam, 2003, p. 17).

Many CBOs are developing strategies for building the knowledge that is necessary for participation in policy debates. In Michelle Renee’s examination of research practices among California education justice organizations, participants identified research advocacy organizations, the Internet, and personal relationships with researchers as their primary sources of information. Unfortunately, research advocacy organizations like California Tomorrow and Justice Matters cited in this study are not well developed in other parts of the country. Instead, most groups must attempt to teach themselves the skills that they need. They do recognize the need for additional training, but less than half of the groups in Renee’s study had ready access to appropriate resources (Renee, 2006). More often, groups relied on networking with other local non-profits to build their knowledge base.

For some groups partnerships with local universities provide access to education research or offer training in the skills required to engage in their own research activities. There are several innovative examples in Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York, but as

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Renee defines “education justice organizations” as “organizations who have a collective identity, goals and a program of work that actively challenge dominant education reform paradigms by defining inequity as a social problem worthy of policy attention, locating systemic oppression as the root cause of inequalities in educational opportunity; and aiming to improve learning opportunities of low-income students and students of color. (Renee, 2006, pp. 51-52)” It is important to note that some of the organizations included in this definition and Renee’s study would not necessarily be considered CBOs.
Beam found in his survey of education organizing efforts, the majority of CBOs do not have these types of relationships (National Center for Schools and Communities, 2002a).

Lack of access to appropriate research and information was a problem that appeared with similar frequency. Many organizations reported feeling under-equipped to challenge administrators and teachers on questions of educational management and methodology… In addition, little was known about the strategies, experiences, and success of public education activists in cities beyond state lines (National Center for Schools and Communities, 2002a).

This is primarily due to issues of capacity and geography (Baum, 2003). It takes time and resources to develop relationships and many CBOs do not have access to university researchers. Just as there are barriers between communities and schools, so too are there barriers between communities and institutions of higher learning.

However, groups that do find willing partners can create mutually beneficial relationships that improve the practices of both organizations. In Los Angeles the activist group Parent-U-Turn has partnered with UCLA’s Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access (IDEA). Initially the relationship involved UCLA serving in a consultant role, but the partnership has evolved over time with members of Parent U Turn acquiring the tools of scientific inquiry to conduct their own research. Members have adapted these tools of inquiry to suit their specific needs and the challenges that they encounter in the field. For example, Parent U Turn developed a “Parent Observation Check List” as an observational tool when its leaders found that more traditional field notes were too open-ended. This level of agency in the research process enables members to obtain necessary tools for participation in education policy talks, but keeps them empowered in the data collection process by adhering to the “Iron Rule.” Together, members of Parent U Turn

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and faculty from UCLA have presented peer-reviewed papers at major academic conferences around the country, offering additional legitimacy to both parties.

In return, IDEA has gained a collaborating partner with a genuine stake in the local community. According to John Rogers, the director of IDEA, the faculty has benefitted in three ways. First, they gain an insider’s perspective on the reasons for reform. They see first-hand “what it feels like to attend an overcrowded school or to be sent to an auditorium for the first couple of weeks of school when no math teacher is available” (J. Roger, Personal communication, March 3, 2009). They also learn about opportunities to effect power that they may have overlooked. Rogers cites the example of the NCLB provision calling for 1% of Title 1 funds to be spent on parent education, a provision that he had overlooked until it was pointed out by members of Parent U Turn.

Second, by being in partnerships with groups like Parent U Turn, the IDEA staff has the opportunity to build deeper relationships and to see the long term impact of actions in a way that would not be possible in a more traditional case study. Third and “most importantly, being in a long-term relationship with community-based groups can be a humanizing experience for researchers. Spending time with courageous, intelligent, and committed people pushes me to care more and feel a greater sense of urgency for change” (J. Rogers, personal communication, March 3, 2009). Similar mutual benefits have been observed in less formal relationships between Texas IAF leaders and public intellectuals like Cornell West, Theda Skocpol, and Mary Ann Glendon. These interactions took place in the form of seminars at the LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin. Shirley observed that IAF members “prefer to think of the seminars as
forums for an exchange of different kinds of knowledge and experiences than simply as a one-way street in which intellectuals have a monopoly of expertise regarding the civic problems of American democracy” (Shirley, 1997, p. 89). There is much to be learned by researchers and educators who are open to collaboration.

A central challenge to CBO/university partnerships is the negotiation of power in the relationship. UCLA and Parent U Turn managed to negotiate this challenge by emphasizing the collaborative elements of the partnership and jointly creating a safe place for critical dialogue. In Oakes and Roger’s description of a typical Parent U Turn/IDEA classroom experience, the course material discussed was requested by members, and the topics of investigation were generated by their experiences in the community.

Among several other serious philosophical critiques, Aaron Schutz laments that programs like those at UCLA cannot be easily replicated and create unrealistic or inappropriate models for other communities (Schutz, 2007). In particular, he raises concerns about the lack of a professional organizing presence in the example of Parent U Turn. His assessment of the difficulties inherent in creating this type of partnership may be true, but perhaps we need to stop looking for innovative programs that we can duplicate and instead focus on using these examples as starting points for generating new collaborative efforts. In addition, what are the alternatives? CBOs may choose to outsource the collection of data for campaigns, but they still need to know how to

27 Schutz ‘s review of Learning Power includes a broader critique of academia and calls into question the contributions that scholars are currently making to social action. His primary concern is that scholars impose (explicitly or implicitly) an academic lens that may not be appropriate for the needs of local communities.
interpret this information and apply it to an issue. As long as the university is not placed on a pedestal (which does not appear to be an issue for most CBOs), they are simply another valuable resource that should be part of policy conversations.

University partnerships are not a viable option for many CBOs, but there are other options for building research capacity. Community-to-community networking can help spread knowledge so that CBOs embarking on a new issue do not have to start at the beginning. Currently there are some limited examples of this type of collaboration, primarily among organizations that share the same national affiliation (IAF, PICO, and ACORN). The peer networking model has great potential and has proven its effectiveness among educational organizations. For example, the Raising Achievement, Transforming Learning (RATL) project in the United Kingdom is a network of over six hundred schools that seeks to share effective strategies for school improvement. Instead of a top-down reform approach, RATL connects underachieving schools with one another and with mentor schools for the purpose of sharing best practices. The schools are empowered to create solutions tailored to their own specific needs and the majority of the schools have maintained or improved student outcomes during their participation in RATL (Hargreaves, Shirley, Evans, Stone-Johnson, & Riseman, 2007). A similar approach could be applied to CBOs in the United States and the emphasis on lateral learning is a model that is consistent with the philosophy of most CBOs.

Collectively community organizations have the knowledge and information necessary to impact school reform, but they rarely share these resources. Networking among CBOs has been a challenge as groups must negotiate agenda differences based on
race, class, or mission (Orr, 2007b; Warren, 2001). In addition “when organizers try to build coalitions beyond the locality – beyond the range of regular, face-to-face interaction – securing informal consensus becomes more difficult” (Polletta, 2002, p. 185). However, it is not necessary to reach full agreement on strategy in order to share information. If CBOs were able to overcome some of these challenges they would not only improve their own efficacy as education stakeholders, but perhaps lay the groundwork for future national education campaigns.

Re-conceptualizing family, school, and community relationships will not be an easy task. It will require time and patience, but in the long run it could lead to more sustainable and effective change (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). As Sergiovanni has observed:

Changing a culture requires that people, both individually and collectively, move from something familiar and important into an empty space. And then, once they are in this empty space, they are obliged to build a new set of meanings and norms and new cultural order to fill up the space. Deep change, in other words, requires the reconstructing of existing individual and collective mindscapes of practice (Sergiovanni, 2000, p. 148).

When we consider the substantial changes that would come with such a cultural shift, it is clear that all parties will be taking a substantial risk (Stone et al., 2001). Educators may need to relinquish some of the power that they have fought so hard for over the past century, and communities may reduce their prophetic voice by grappling with the practical dimensions of change by joining forces with insiders. Academics might have to expand their definitions of what counts as research. Yet, there is much to be gained for stakeholders and the students that they seek to serve.
The creation of more effective communication in education policy development is a strategy that is relevant not only to the concerns of CBO members, but also the effectiveness of policy implementation with classroom teachers (Hill, 2006). The key to successfully making this shift will be in the creation of a sustainable environment that acknowledges the value of each stakeholders’ contributions (Hargreaves & Fink, 2003). In addition, accountability must expand to become the shared responsibility of the entire community and no longer be used as a tool to scapegoat individual players. It is time that we reengage with strategies that understand how education is related to other public policy issues. Finally, while improved communication and collaboration is necessary for the future of school reform, this does not mean that differences of opinion will disappear. It is unrealistic to think that some sort of utopian school community will suddenly develop simply by opening the lines of communication. Rather the suggestions offered here are meant to facilitate the creation of a culture where creative tension is accepted as an important part of the policymaking process.

Moving Beyond the Schoolhouse: Holistic Education Reform

The title of Jean Anyon’s latest book, Radical Possibilities, refers to a future in which social policy is viewed from a holistic perspective and no longer compartmentalized into the policy silos of economics, health, and education (Anyon, 2005). Such an achievement would indeed be a radical shift in the way that cities and towns traditionally do business, and over the past decade literature in the fields of education, social work, family studies, and political science have all alluded to the power of this approach. Current efforts that focus exclusively on the interactions that take place
inside of the schoolhouse fail to account for the numerous other social factors that influence the lives of individuals in a school community. Anyon addresses this dynamic, paying special attention to the macroeconomic practices that drive so much of policy development:

more equitable macroeconomic policies will not by themselves create high-quality urban schools. Macroeconomic policies will need to be augmented by educational reform. Providing economic opportunity and realistic hope in urban neighborhoods will be necessary to create conditions that allow for and support successful urban schools, but there nurturing conditions will have to be supplemented by reforms that prevent racial tracking, low-level curriculum, and poor teaching (for example) (Anyon, 2005, p. 3).

Many CBOs are well positioned to support the development of more comprehensive reforms. Members are not isolated in professional organizations and as a result the interrelatedness of social issues may be more readily apparent. Broad based organizations have the benefit of working across several different fields and experience first-hand the impact that various social policies have on one another. Among the case studies in this dissertation, United Interfaith Action, a group that initially struggled to interact with school officials, is perhaps the organization that is best situated to achieve sustainable change over time. They were initially drawn into education organizing during their attempt to implement a conflict resolution curriculum in NBPS. This was a campaign that was launched to address broader issues of violence in the community. As UIA became more involved with the schools they observed a culture where students felt that they had few options for their future. The relationship between violence, education, and the local economy became clear as UIA’s work progressed and this knowledge will help shape future actions.
A move toward more holistic education policy development may be more challenging for single issue groups like JP-POP or Stand for Children. By focusing exclusively on education issues these groups may build strong relationships with educators, but their scope of influence can be limited. Still, many JP-POP members are active in fair housing campaigns through CLVU and Stand for Children members have become more aware of the challenges that are facing the senior population in their community. There is the potential that these interactions can lead to improved policy development strategies and create a base that is willing to engage with issues that are outside the immediate realm of education.

The participation of stakeholders with broader views on policy can only improve the future of education. In *The Fourth Way*, Hargreaves and Shirley trace the shift in education policy from a welfare state, to more market oriented strategies, to our current system which blends the two previous approaches. Now there is an increase in material resources, but it is tempered by higher levels of government accountability. They propose that it is time entertain a fourth way in education “informed by an effort to identify and learn from the best of the past, enlightened by high-performance exemplars like Finland in the present, and inspired by a commitment to more innovative and inclusive goals in the future” (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2008, p. 59). Supporting this “fourth way” are five pillars: the creation of an inspiring and inclusive vision that draws people together, a deepening of public engagement, increased investment in facilities and other social services, shared responsibility among educators and corporations, and a commitment to empowering students to become partners in their own learning.
While ambitious, this is the type of approach that can address our unique needs as a diverse society and our role as a nation in an era of increasing globalization. With a commitment to relationship building and leadership development, CBOs are capable of making important contributions to these types of reforms and should be embraced as important, if not essential stakeholders.

**Conclusion**

For families who feel unwelcome at the schoolhouse door, for parents who would prefer to have “power with” rather than “power over” teachers, and for those who are looking beyond the bake sale and yearning to strive for more systematic change, community organizing is an intriguing alternative to traditional forms of parental involvement. Effective CBOs provide leadership development opportunities, structured training, and are targeted to address specific winnable objectives. With a tradition of achieving effective change on economic, housing, and healthcare issues in urban areas CBOs have the potential to become a transformative force in public education. Indeed, this has been the case in cities like Dallas, New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles. To be effective, however, work in the field of education organizing requires an awareness of school culture and the inner workings of education systems at the district, school, and classroom level. CBOs that lack knowledge about the way schools operate and what reforms have already been tried, find themselves at a distinct disadvantage and may become frustrated with the entrenched bureaucracy of school systems. Too often CBOs

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28 “The Fourth Way” includes two additional elements: principles of professionalism and catalysts of coherence. Please see the forthcoming text *The Fourth Way* (Corwin Press), due out in the summer of 2009 for more information.
turn to “google” or rely on word of mouth for the development of education proposals. In today’s educational landscape a premium is placed on “research” based reforms and those organizations with the capacity to generate their own research or interpret existing data are better positioned to advocate for their agendas.

CBO members bring a valuable perspective to education debates and they are motivated to work for sustainable change. These are the types of stakeholders that we need in order to address broader educational issues like the achievement gap. With a commitment to re-conceptualizing family-school-community relationships and an emphasis on holistic approaches to education policy development, CBOs can become important contributors to the creation of an education system that meets the needs of all students and the broader community.
Appendix A

Interview Protocol for Executive Directors and Lead Organizers

What is driving philosophy behind you organization?

What are the greatest benefits and challenges of organizing in this community?

Who are the primary decision makers in the community regarding educational policy?

Describe your organizations relationship with the local schools?

What are the most important skills for new member to learn when they join the group?

Describe your group’s greatest accomplishment. Why was this an important achievement?

What are your personal goals for this group over the next year? The next five years?

What impact (if any) do you think this organization has had on education in the community?

Interview Protocol for Group Leaders

How many children do you have? What grade(s) are they in?

How long have you been a member of this group?

Why did you decide to become involved with this particular group?

How did you become one of the group leaders?

Describe your responsibilities as a group leader?

What are the biggest challenges that you face as a group leader?

How (if at all) do you help to recruit new members?

What are the most important skills for new member to learn when they join the group?

Describe your group’s greatest accomplishment. Why was this an important achievement?

Describe your organizations relationship with the local schools?
What other people or organizations in the community help support your child’s education?

What are your personal goals for this group over the next year? The next five years?

What impact (if any) do you think your participation in this organization has had on education in the community? On your child?

How do you define family involvement?

Interview Protocol for Family Members in Community Organizing Groups
How many children do you have? What grade(s) are they in?

How do you define family involvement?

Describe the school-based activities (if any) that you are involved in (e.g. homework assistance, volunteering).

How and why did you first become involved in this community-organizing group?

How long have you been a member?

What are your specific responsibilities as a member of this organization?

What have you learned as a result of your participation in this organization?

What impact (if any) do you think your participation in this organization has had on education in the community? On your child?

Has your understanding/enactment of family involvement changed (if at all) as a result of participating in this organization?

Additional Questions for Educators (Teachers and Principals)
How would you describe the activities of this group to a new colleague at your school?

How (if at all) has your participation in this group influenced your interactions with parents at school?

What expectations do you have for the parents and families of children in your school?
## Appendix B

### UNITED INTERFAITH ACTION OBSERVATIONS: NEW BEDFORD, MA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OBSERVATION</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>EST. # TOTAL PARTICIPANTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meeting with Mayor, Police Chief, Dept. Superintendent</td>
<td>A meeting with public officials to discuss funding promised to support Conflict Resolution Education in the New Bedford Public Schools. Also, initial discussions regarding the support of the summer jobs program.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Meeting (4 Times)</td>
<td>A structured meeting among UIA leaders to discuss issues, plan research and actions, and share ideas and concerns from the member congregations.</td>
<td>8-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research meeting with Director of Guidance/Health &amp; Pupil Personnel Services</td>
<td>A research meeting where UIA members sought to learn more about the drop-out rates in New Bedford and to solicit input for Conflict Resolution Education.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability Meeting for Jobs and Education</td>
<td>A large scale event to begin planning for an education and jobs agenda. This event also sought to garner the support of three local politicians for three funding priorities.</td>
<td>160-180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting with Conflict Resolution Education Task Force</td>
<td>A planning meeting to discuss the creation and implementation of violence prevention curricula in the New Bedford schools.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCAN Regional Strategy Meeting</td>
<td>A monthly gathering of faith based CBOs from Worcester, Brockton, Springfield, and other cities around the state. The purpose is to share ideas and</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability Meeting Rehearsal</td>
<td>A practice and feedback meeting held prior to larger public actions.</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Training Day</td>
<td>A meeting to introduce new members to the principles of community organizing and to provide additional training for existing members.</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Compact Public Meeting</td>
<td>Accountability meeting with Mayor and School Board members to solicit support for education reform in the city</td>
<td>500</td>
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### JAMAICA PLAIN PARENT ORGANIZING PROJECT OBSERVATIONS: BOSTON, MA

<table>
<thead>
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<th>OBSERVATION</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>EST. # TOTAL PARTICIPANTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monthly Meeting (3 times)</td>
<td>Monthly meetings where JP-POP members share a meal, plan actions, and share resources.</td>
<td>12-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCAAP/BPS Special Education Conference</td>
<td>A training and information event focused on the transition of students with special needs to adulthood.</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JP-POP Advocacy Training (2 Times)</td>
<td>Training sessions organized by JP-POP to address the interest and concerns of the membership. Guest speakers are brought in to speak to specific topics.</td>
<td>15-25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Testimony: Boston Public School Committee Meeting (2 Times)</td>
<td>School committee meetings where members solicited public testimony regarding the BPS budget.</td>
<td>8-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Meeting at Freedom House: Roxbury, MA</td>
<td>A meeting in January 2007 attended by close to 500 people to address the achievement gap and the hiring of a new superintendent.</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix D

### STAND FOR CHILDREN OBSERVATIONS: LEXINGTON, MA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OBSERVATION</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>EST. # TOTAL PARTICIPANTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public Testimony: Ways and Means Committee Hearing</td>
<td>Testimony provided for the support of a education adequacy study to assess the state funding formula.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Testimony: Governor's Education Task Force</td>
<td>Following his election in 2006 Gov. Deval Patrick hosted a series of public meetings where community members could voice their concerns about public education in the state.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statewide Leadership Conference 2007</td>
<td>An annual conference for Stand members that offers a variety of training workshops and guest speakers.</td>
<td>100 +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly Chapter Meeting (3 times)</td>
<td>Monthly meetings primarily focused on planning, agenda setting, and the delegation of responsibilities.</td>
<td>10-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Leadership Meeting (2 times)</td>
<td>Chapter leadership gathering to share research and ideas and to discuss and plan for monthly meetings.</td>
<td>3-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applefest 2006</td>
<td>Recruitment event with kid friendly activities to inform the community about the work of Stand for Children.</td>
<td>100 +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statehouse Rally 2006, 2007</td>
<td>An annual lobbying day beginning with a massive rally on Boston Common and ending with visits to individual politicians.</td>
<td>1,000 +</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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