

# *Communities and Schools: A New View of Urban Education Reform*

MARK R. WARREN  
*Harvard University*

*In this article, Mark R. Warren argues that if urban school reform in the United States is to be successful, it must be linked to the revitalization of the communities around our schools. Warren identifies a growing field of collaboration between public schools and community-based organizations, developing a typology that identifies three different approaches: the service approach (community schools); the development approach (community sponsorship of new charter schools); and the organizing approach (school-community organizing). The author elaborates a conceptual framework using theories of social capital and relational power, presenting case studies to illustrate each type. He also discusses a fourth case to demonstrate the possibilities for linking individual school change to political strategies that address structures of poverty. Warren identifies shared lessons across these approaches, and compares and contrasts the particular strengths and weaknesses of each. Warren concludes with a call for a new approach to urban education reform that links it theoretically and practically to social change in America's cities.*

What sense does it make to try to reform urban schools while the communities around them stagnate or collapse?<sup>1</sup> Conversely, can community-building and development efforts succeed in revitalizing inner-city neighborhoods if the public schools within them continue to fail their students? The fates of urban schools and communities are linked, yet school reformers and community-builders typically act as if they are not.

Twenty years ago, one would have been hard pressed to find a community-based organization that was actively working on education issues. The young community-development and organizing groups that had arisen in the wake of the 1960s typically focused their efforts on housing, safety, and economic development initiatives (Halpern, 1995). In turn, public schools lost the close connections they had to neighborhoods at the beginning of the twentieth cen-

ture, when Progressive Era reforms centralized control of schooling in professionally run district administrations (Reese, 2002). For the last half of the twentieth century, then, educators and community developers have operated in a separate sphere, both institutionally and professionally.

More recently, though, a wide range of initiatives has emerged that seeks to forge collaborations between community-based organizations and schools. This new movement has historical roots both in John Dewey's conception of democratic, community-centered education (Dewey, 1915) and in the community-control movements of the 1960s (Fantini, Gittell, & Magat, 1970). But it has emerged over the past fifteen years with renewed vigor and distinctive strategies in a series of important but little studied experiments.

In this article, I set forth an argument for a community-oriented approach to urban education reform. I outline a conceptual approach to understanding school-community collaboration and develop a typology of the major approaches linking community organizations to school improvement that have emerged in the United States. I illustrate the different types of school-community collaborations with key examples based on original fieldwork. I conclude the article with a discussion of the possibilities of a community-oriented approach to education reform that is theoretically and practically linked to social change in our nation's cities.

### Why Link Schools to Communities?

School districts and leaders have struggled to improve schooling in low-income communities, largely in isolation from community-development initiatives.<sup>2</sup> In particular cases, gains have been made within the four walls of schools through reform strategies. Attempting school reform in isolation from community development, however, is problematic for a number of reasons.

First of all, children cannot learn well if they lack adequate housing, health care, nutrition, and safe and secure environments, or if their parents are experiencing stress because of their low wages and insecure employment (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997). Urban schools must do a better job of educating inner-city children, but it is patently unreasonable to expect that they alone can compensate for the effects of poverty and racism (Rothstein, 2004). Community-development organizations work directly to support the social and economic health of families and communities (Briggs & Mueller, 1997). Working together with such groups, schools can take a more holistic approach to address children's healthy development.

Second, schools cannot teach children well if teachers lack an understanding of their students' cultures and lives, and if they lack meaningful relationships with their families (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1978). Poor communities face problems associated with concentrated poverty and racism, but too often educators see families only as problems to be "fixed." However, poor communities represent more than a "bundle of pathologies" (Warren, Thompson, &

Saegert, 2001). They contain rich cultural traditions and social resources that have much to offer the work of schools (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). Community-based organizations can help bring the cultural and social assets of communities into schools and foster meaningful partnerships between schools and families.

Ignorance and isolation can feed a third and deeper problem. Teachers often operate from within a culture of power (Delpit, 1988), which fosters a curriculum and pedagogy that alienates and discriminates against children of color. Meanwhile, many urban teachers hold “deficit” views of low-income parents of color (Rioux & Berla, 1993); that is, they hold them in disdain (or pity them as victims), seeing them as part of “the problem.” Racial tension simmers under the surface of urban schools and erupts periodically in open conflict (Payne & Kaba, n.d.). Consequently, urban schools require something more than greater financial and social resources: The culture of schooling needs to be transformed (Ladson-Billings, 2001; Noguera, 1996). Community and parent engagement that is meaningful and powerful can play an essential role in making schools more responsive and in holding schools accountable for serving low-income communities of color (Mediratta & Fruchter, 2003).

Fourth, urban schools suffer from a lack of resources tied to their location in poor communities. Compared to more affluent suburban schools, inner-city schools typically are underfunded. As a result, they often have less-qualified teachers, overcrowded classrooms, older buildings in need of serious repair and upgrading, inadequate textbooks, and outdated facilities (Kozol, 1991; Schrag, 2003). We can ask schools to do a better job with the resources they have. We can engage the social capacities of parents and community organizations. But how can we reasonably expect inner-city children to achieve at a comparable level to suburban students when the resources of their schools are so unequal? Addressing the structural inequality in American education requires building a political constituency for urban public schools. Collaborations with broad-based community organizations whose constituents have their children in urban schools can provide an essential piece of the political effort necessary to address these issues, a piece that civic capacity analysts have noted is critically missing in many major citywide efforts at school reform (Stone, Henig, Jones, & Pierannunzi, 2001).

### A Framework for Understanding School-Community Collaboration

In sum, community initiatives can make a number of critical contributions to school improvement. They can:

- Improve the social context of education so that children come to school better able to learn
- Foster parental and community participation in the education of children and the work of schools

- Work to transform the culture of schools and the practice of schooling and hold school officials accountable for educational gains
- Help build a political constituency for public education to support the delivery of greater resources to schools and to address in other ways the profound inequalities in public education

In spite of this potential, the stark reality of most urban schools is one of isolation and disconnection from the neighborhoods they serve. Most teachers and staff commute to their schools and have little understanding of, or connection with, the lives of their students outside of school, in their families and neighborhoods. School leaders seldom see their school as one of a set of institutions that can anchor poor neighborhoods in partnership with other community organizations. Yet the potential is great, as public schools are the largest and most democratically accessed institutions in the country. They are located in virtually every neighborhood and serve nearly 90 percent of American children (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002).

In addition to their isolation from external communities, many public schools, especially in our most disadvantaged neighborhoods, reflect an internal isolation — that is, a weak and fragmented social fabric. Constrained by low resources and confined by a stifling set of bureaucratic rules, many teachers feel isolated and alienated within the school itself (Payne & Kaba, n.d.). Parents in low-income communities seldom venture into schools unless the school has problems with their children, or when parents perceive problems in the school.<sup>3</sup> A few brave souls do join PTAs, but they can easily become overwhelmed with fundraising and other support work. Few schools achieve broad-based participation and a meaningful role for parents and community members in school decisionmaking (Sarason, 1995).

### Social Capital and Relational Power

The concept of social capital provides a useful framework to think about overcoming both the external and internal isolation of public schools in order to reweave the social fabric of schools and urban communities. Social capital refers to the set of resources that inhere in relationships of trust and cooperation between and among people.<sup>4</sup> Given whatever other resources people have, including money and expertise, when people have close ties and trust each other, they are better able to achieve collective ends. In fact, when financial and other resources are in short supply, as they typically are in inner-city schools, mobilizing the social capacities of the school is perhaps even more important to achieve educational goals. Although social capital is not a panacea for the problems of urban schools, schools with higher levels of social capital can make the most of whatever assets they do have and can mobilize these social relationships to lobby for greater resources (Warren et al., 2001).

Social capital is fundamentally about relationships. Within schools, strong relationships based on trust and cooperation among teachers, principals, parents, and community residents can play an important role in improving schools in several ways. When parents and community members are engaged in the life of the school, they can support teaching and strengthen the environment for learning (Epstein et al., 2002). An intersecting set of relationships among adults (parents, teachers, service providers) can provide social closure (Coleman, 1988), that is, a context in which all the adults that children know also know each other and coordinate their actions. Social closure means that children can be raised with a unified set of expectations and behaviors and their development can be addressed holistically. Finally, when teachers and principals build trust with each other and with parents, they can develop a common vision for school reform and work together to implement necessary changes in the school (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; see also Shirley, 1997).

The relationship between the school and other community institutions can also be understood in terms of social capital and social closure. We can think of social capital as a set of links across institutions, like schools and community-development organizations (Warren et al., 2001; see also Woolcock, 1998). We can ask to what extent institutions in a community collaborate with each other and work together for the development of families and children. Institutions serve as sites for building social capital as they bring networks of people and resources to bear on achieving collective ends. Interpersonal relationships between individuals across institutions provide the glue for these collaborations, so the personal and institutional levels interrelate. We should be interested, therefore, both in the ways schools and community organizations form collaborations, and in how these partnerships strengthen relationships *within* school communities.

Theoretical work on social capital has highlighted the benefits of trust, cooperation, and collaboration, but only sometimes has it directly confronted issues of power (Foley & Edwards, 1997; Warren, 1998, 2001). Yet the lack of power, which lies at the core of poverty and racism, plays a key role in community decline and school failure. Powerful elites, for example, redline communities of color and concentrate environmental hazards there (Bullard, 1990; Squires, 1994). Urban schools will continue to fail their students when communities lack the power to demand accountability, when they are “captured populations” (Noguera, 2001, p. 198) without the resources to pursue alternatives. As powerful as building social capital can be for individual school and neighborhood improvement, a broader solution requires creating the political capacity to address issues of structural inequality, like the pernicious underfunding of urban school systems.

Structural inequality not only sets the context for school-community collaborations; unequal power also structures relationships between school staff and parents within schools (Fine, 1993; Lareau, 1989). On her own, a low-income

parent of color typically lacks the status and education to collaborate as an equal with her child's teacher. Efforts to build trust and to foster meaningful collaboration among principals, teachers, parents, and community members need to confront these power inequalities. If they don't, reform efforts can be derailed by mistrust and unresolved conflicts (Bryk & Schneider, 2002), or parents can withdraw if they feel they are being treated as pawns rather than respected as change agents (Fine, 1993).

The concept of relational power offers a useful way to approach issues of power in school-community collaboration. Relational power can be contrasted with unilateral power (Cortes, Jr., 1993; Loomer, 1976), which is the only type of power most people recognize. Unilateral power emphasizes "power over" others, the capacity to get others to do your bidding. Relational power emphasizes a different aspect, the "power to" get things done collectively. Unilateral power is zero-sum, typically with winners and losers. By contrast, relational power should reflect a win-win situation.<sup>5</sup>

Historically, community-organizing groups have followed a strategy that can best be understood as reflecting unilateral power. They organized the social capital of their community to leverage power into the political arena to force public, and sometimes private, institutions to improve services or to provide funds to build affordable housing or support economic development. Some community organizations have used this strategy in the education arena as well, lobbying for new school construction or policy changes at the district level. However necessary this "outside" strategy may be at times, it ultimately is insufficient for improving urban schools, because such schools lack the capacity to change on their own. Moreover, combative strategies can exacerbate a situation in which school principals and teachers are already wary of outside community organizations, and fear that these organizations will make unreasonable demands and intrusions into the professional sphere of educators (Goldring, 1990).

Fortunately, some community-organizing groups have developed more complex strategies to build both relational and unilateral power (Cortes, Jr., 1993; Warren, 2001). Their goal is collaboration. These groups are willing to confront powerful institutions, but only when recalcitrant elites refuse to negotiate. They approach schools as partners, but this does not mean ignoring tensions and conflicts. We know that authentic parent engagement flounders when educators are reluctant to address issues of race and power within the school community (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000). Emphasizing relational power can set a framework for working through the inevitable tensions and conflicts that arise in partnerships so that authentic forms of collaboration can be established.

In sum, community organizations can play a valuable role as an independent force in collaborations with schools and in the political arena. But they require a strategy to build trust and cooperation with school staff in order to build relational power. Collaborative approaches that seek to build both social



capital and relational power, therefore, offer the possibility of expanding the capacities of the school community while simultaneously holding promise for building a political constituency for urban school reform.

### Analysis of Major Community-School Initiatives

A growing number of efforts to overcome the disconnection between communities and schools have emerged in localities across the United States. In this section, I review what I have identified as three types of community-school collaborations:

1. The Service Model: represented by community (full-service) schools
2. The Development Model: represented by community sponsorship of new schools (e.g., charter schools)
3. The Organizing Model: represented by school-community organizing

In order to identify the key features of these three types of collaboration, and to provide a sense of the process of building them, I explore each type of collaboration through an illustrative case. In the category of school-community organizing, I add a shorter discussion of a statewide collaborative, the Texas Alliance Schools, in order to examine the possibility of linking change at the individual school and neighborhood level to broader policy reform. These examples were chosen to be broadly representative of the different types of collaboration. Each, though, is a relatively best-case example that highlights the potential of the field. I chose the cases through consultation with scholars and practitioners who were experts on each type of collaboration under consideration.

Each case narrative was developed through fieldwork involving observation and interviews at the site. My research assistants and I sought to interview a variety of participants in these efforts — representatives of community organizations, principals, teachers, and parents — and we talked informally with students.<sup>6</sup> We observed various school environments, as well as a variety of meetings among these stakeholders. Finally, we gleaned data from a variety of publications (newsletters, reports) from these initiatives and from the few published accounts of their activities.<sup>7</sup> In order to increase the accuracy of our analysis, we “triangulated” among these data sources; in other words, wherever possible we checked what people told us against what we observed ourselves and what was stated in published accounts.

In our fieldwork on each case, we sought to investigate the processes and methods used to build collaborations between schools and community organizations. We sought to identify the nature of social capital each built and how that was accomplished. And we sought to identify the ways in which relational power was addressed. We were particularly interested in identifying the role community organizations played in engaging parents and building new relationships among parents, educators, and community members. We also

sought to identify the different ways these efforts changed school practices and fostered community development.

### The Service Model: Community Schools

Community schools, also known as full-service schools, are public schools that serve as sites for the provision of a broad range of services to children and families through partnerships with community-based organizations (Dryfoos & Maguire, 2002). Seen as neighborhood hubs, community schools typically stay open after school hours and on weekends. They usually offer health, afterschool, and family support services, and many also provide adult education, ESL, and other programs for parents and neighborhood residents. The Children's Aid Society was one of the earliest pioneers of community schools, establishing pilot models in the New York City public schools in the early 1990s. Newark's Quitman Street School, the model for this type, utilized the society's model when it reorganized itself into a community school in the late 1990s.

#### *Quitman Street Community School*

As you drive through Newark, you see the remnants of a once-thriving manufacturing industry. Arriving at Quitman, the area around the school appears poor and distressed. Churches and mosques dot the landscape, but not many businesses or other neighborhood institutions can be seen. Across from the school is an empty lot with overgrown grass and weeds. The school is fenced in at the back, where it meets the housing projects. As we step out of the car, we notice broken glass and trash on the sidewalk.

The inside of the school is a stark contrast to the world outside it. When we walk into the school, we are greeted with the sight of smiling young children singing and dancing with each other. Next to the front door is a bench, and we see parents and grandparents sitting there with smaller children. Our eyes quickly dart to the school walls. While the walls are made of cement blocks, these blocks have been painted bright colors — yellow, blue, and pink. We sign in at the front hallway with the Newark Public School System security guards. They are expecting us. As we walk down the halls, we notice that there are cartoons painted on the walls, such as Donald Duck and Winnie the Pooh, along with nursery rhymes and high-frequency words for reading. (From researcher field notes)

Quitman School was not always a safe haven for children. In the mid-1990s the school reflected the turmoil of the neighborhood. Newark's central ward had been ravaged by industrial decline and the aftermath of the Newark riots. White flight, and the subsequent exodus of more affluent African American residents, left behind a poorer and more isolated community. Jean Anyon (1997) analyzed the chaotic environment, the criminal neglect, and the culture of disrespect endemic to Newark schools like Quitman in her book *Ghetto Schooling*. Quitman's current principal, Jacquelyn Hartsfield, captured the



state of affairs at that time in the telling quip, “Students threw chairs at teachers and the teachers threw them back!”<sup>8</sup>

The origins of the Quitman Street Community School can be traced back to 1996, when Don Mann, chairman of the Prudential Foundation, visited the school as “principal for a day.” Chiarina DiFazio, then principal of Quitman, took the opportunity to present Mann with her vision of how the school could be transformed. The foundation was based in Newark and had a mission to support innovative in-service programs for poor communities. This looked like a promising initiative in the foundation’s back yard, and Mann offered to make a major commitment to “adopt” the school on the spot. Working with the school district’s community-development office, Prudential and other school partners selected the Community Agencies Corporation of New Jersey (CACNJ) to be the lead agency to develop the Quitman Community School. CACNJ, a nonprofit organization that served as an umbrella group for five family and youth agencies, had deep roots around the school, having worked in Newark’s central ward for over one hundred years. The Children’s Aid Society provided critical technical assistance in the planning stage of the Quitman School, one of the first to adopt the society’s model, and has remained involved in supporting the project ever since.

Led by CACNJ’s Dorothy Knauer, the new project sponsors sought to respond to the tremendous needs facing children and their families in the central ward. Students at Quitman School are poor and predominantly African American; over 90 percent qualify for free or reduced-price lunch (Dryfoos, 2003b). In fact, the school serves the poorest of the poor. Census data for 2000 puts median household income around Quitman at \$11,000, with almost half of households living on less than \$10,000 per year. Reflecting the instability of poor families in Newark, the school experiences a high turnover rate as roughly one-third of the students leave each year.

To meet these needs, the community school opened a free extended day program in 1998. The afterschool program, which enrolled to capacity immediately, keeps the building open until 6 p.m., after which the city’s recreation department runs athletic programs until 9 p.m. most nights. Students get homework help in the afterschool program and can take classes in arts therapy, computer, chorus, drill team, sports, and other recreational activities. The school has attracted some well-known partners to offer classes, including the Alvin Ailey Dance Company.

Quitman next opened a full-service clinic, The Health Place, in June 1999. The Healthcare Foundation of New Jersey provided most of the funding for the clinic, although the Prudential Foundation also supported it. Families at Quitman typically lacked primary-care services and used emergency rooms as a last resort. As a result, many Quitman students suffered from untreated medical and dental problems. High lead levels, chronic asthma, severe allergies, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), post-traumatic stress syndrome, and other psychiatric problems plagued the student body. To address

these needs, the clinic offers full-service pediatric, mental health, and dental care to Quitman students, their siblings, and other neighborhood children at no cost to any family.

Community-school staff were determined that the afterschool program and health clinic would not be “add-ons” at Quitman. Some analysts worry that placing service provision at public schools can divert educators away from their core mission of teaching and learning (Merseeth, Schorr, & Elmore, 2000). Quitman made sure that afterschool and health-clinic staff, not teachers, shouldered responsibility for service provision. Rather than diversions, these programs were integrated into the school in order to strengthen teaching. Quitman made sure to have whole-school staff meetings so that clinic and CACNJ staff, the principal, and teachers could coordinate their efforts and build community. They placed the afterschool program, clinic, and parent room on the first floor of the school to symbolize the idea that the whole school was to reorient the way it operated. Quitman also moved to improve instruction directly by engaging Bank Street College to expand its professional development work with teachers. And it adopted the Comer (1996) model for whole-school improvement.

But physical integration proved easier than changing the way teachers operated. The new program met resistance from some teachers. According to Principal Jacquelyn Hartsfield, there were many barriers:

There were a lot of teachers who were here that did not need to be here [and] who really inhibited children from learning. It was a struggle, and a few of those teachers are gone. Now you see teaching going on; that’s because of the expectations [that were raised]. I had to change the tone of this school. The way I started that was [by] changing the way it looked inside, providing the teachers whatever their needs were and [asking them to] support me when I needed to initiate change. It was really hard. My vision was changing the tone of the school.

The current and former principals of the school worked closely as a team with community staff, particularly the clinic’s social worker, George Worsley, and the CACNJ afterschool program director, Jozette Mundine. Together they strategized about how to build support for change among the majority of the teaching staff. Although they expected teachers to change, they also wanted them to know they were supported. They offered teachers resources like books, practical assistance, and the use of a photocopier. They gave teachers a welcome basket at the start of the school year. From the outside, these may appear to be small tokens. But in a school where teachers felt so neglected, they became important symbols of appreciation.

Higher levels of integration began to mark the relations between teachers and community-school staff. Now when a child has a problem, a pupil rescue team that includes a learning specialist, social worker, and health-care professional comes together to solve the issue. Team meetings are held regularly so that staff can support each other’s professional development. According to Mary Jane Linnehan, the clinic’s pediatric nurse practitioner:

We interact with a student's teacher. We can walk right upstairs and ask about school performance, and the picture comes together. There is a lot of interplay. We do a lot of staff development, doing workshops for the aides, teachers, and principals. How do you take the knowledge of these problems and be a more effective teacher? . . . The awareness is not always there. They don't know what ADHD is; they just think the kids are being bad.

One new teacher, Myisha Banks, asked Mundine and Worsley to come into her class to speak with her students, as she was struggling to keep order in the classroom. "Jozette and Mr. Worsley came into my class and sat the kids down and said, 'What are you doing? We know you don't act this way for your parents. Do I have to speak to your parents about your behavior?' After that, they settled down."

Change also met resistance in a community that felt burned by too many "outsiders." Fortunately, two key members of the community school staff — Worsley and administrative supervisor Gloria Chison — have roots in the neighborhood and were able to build trust. Community-school staff also worked to expand parent involvement at the school. Mundine has worked with parents one-on-one to address their needs and concerns and to tap their talents. The school developed a range of initiatives that respond to parent issues, including the "Lean on Me" parent support group developed by the health clinic to address serious issues like depression among parents. In addition, in order to enroll a child in the extended day program, the parent must volunteer six hours per month at the school. As a result, parents now volunteer 750 hours per month, equivalent to nearly twenty full-time staff positions. CACNJ also offers parents positions as group leaders, where they earn \$8–\$9.50 per hour assisting teaching staff in the afterschool classrooms.

The community school recognizes that Quitman parents need opportunities for education and development. The afterschool program offers GED and computer classes that are open to all. Bank Street College conducts training for the extended day group leaders. Many group leaders who have struggled with achieving economic security go on to be hired as classroom aides, which are full-time jobs with benefits.

Over time, as parents developed their skills and leadership through these programs, they began to take initiative in the school. Parents proposed a uniform policy that the school adopted. More recently, they have become engaged around instructional issues at the school, discussing, for example, how to reduce class size. When a state takeover of the Newark district threatened to impose a principal on the school, parents joined with CACNJ to successfully pressure the district to have a say in the appointment.

The afterschool staff functions as a middleman between the parents and teachers, working hard to promote mutual understanding and engage parents. Teachers report asking the afterschool program director Mundine and her staff to speak to parents on their behalf. As a result, parents end up feeling that they are a more valued part of the school. One parent volunteer reported:

It is the first school to make me feel welcome as a parent. This school is a good community school. Everyone takes a hand in caring for children. The attitude here is that all kids are our kids. The kids are my babies. Any child or parent that comes in the door feels welcome. The PTA leader, the parent liaison, is great. We always have something going on, like a fashion show, plant sale for Mother's Day, grandmother's tea, and "Lean on Me."

As a result of all these changes at Quitman over the past five years, there is some evidence that student learning, as measured by test scores, is improving. The percentage of fourth graders scoring at the "proficient" level on the language arts literacy test of the state's Elementary School Proficiency Assessment rose from 24.2 percent in 1999 to 61.8 percent in 2002. This tremendous increase is explained in part by the fact that the school had chosen to focus on improving reading and writing during this period. By contrast, scores on the math section of the test did not improve over that period. Meanwhile, current scores on both tests remain below state averages, and are roughly similar to Newark averages.<sup>9</sup> But adults at the school seem to agree that children are much better behaved than in the past and more focused on learning.

To fund its extensive range of services and programs, Quitman School has had to raise a lot of money. The Prudential Foundation saw the school as a pilot project and has put in an exceptionally high level of funding. Prudential alone paid \$420,000 toward the construction of the school's playground. The Health Place clinic costs \$200,000 yearly. Federal initiatives like Title I and the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program, as well as small private foundations, also have supported the school.

Over the past six years, Quitman has worked hard to create a more personal, caring community for children and their families. In the meantime, Newark has continued to change as well, offering new challenges and opportunities to the Quitman Community School. Hispanic and West African immigrants are beginning to move to the city's central ward, while new townhouse developments are planned to replace some of the large housing projects that have been torn down. Meanwhile, the city of Newark is working to reinvent itself as a cultural and commercial center after many years of decline and neglect. Standing inside the front door of Quitman, one can now imagine the possibility that the revitalization of schools throughout the city could become an important component of Newark's promised renaissance.

### *Discussion*

The Quitman School is part of a larger trend that has seen community schools spread across the country, now numbering well over one thousand (Dryfoos, 2002). For example, the United Way led the Bridge to Success community-school development initiative in Indianapolis, which has grown to over forty schools involving three hundred public and nonprofit agencies. Bridge to Success schools typically offer medical and dental services, afterschool recreation activities, and family engagement programs (Melaville, 2004). Mean-

while, the University of Pennsylvania helped launch the West Philadelphia Improvement Corps (WEPIC), which has created thirteen community schools as centers for holistic education. WEPIC offers extended day and weekend classes for children and adults, and an in-school curriculum that links school- and community-based learning (Dryfoos, 2003a).

It seems reasonable to think that the Quitman experience is fairly representative of community schools, although it may be one of the more successful cases. It is also one of the more expensive ones. The cost of community schools varies, with some advocates arguing that the incremental costs do not have to be large (Children's Aid Society, 2001), but Quitman would certainly be at the high end. Quitman nevertheless appears to have the features that analysts have found to be associated with successful community schools (Dryfoos & Maguire, 2002). It has strong leaders, located its afterschool program and health clinic in the center of the school, and has worked out turf issues among staff.

Within the still new but rapidly growing body of literature on community schools, there have been some initial efforts to evaluate their effects (e.g. Dryfoos, 2003a; Dryfoos & Maguire, 2002). As with the Quitman case, there is evidence that such schools do promote student learning, family engagement with children and schools, and some broader revitalization to neighborhoods. Blank, Melaville, and Shah (2003) summarized evidence from twenty community-school evaluations showing improved student outcomes, including higher grades and attendance, reduced behavioral problems, greater classroom cooperation and homework completion, and a more positive attitude. The evaluations showed increased family engagement in such ways as better communication with schools, greater attendance at school meetings and increased parental confidence in teachers. Evidence for broader community revitalization included improved security and safety, strengthened community knowledge and pride, and increased engagement of citizens and students in community service.

As the Quitman case suggests, community schools build social capital around the holistic provision of services to children and their families. Quitman has become a center for the social life of the community where little else exists, bringing parents and other residents into the school. Teachers, service providers, and parents work together to integrate children's learning with health provision and cultural development. To get to this point, Quitman had to build trust among teachers and parents, but also had to challenge them to change practices and to take on new roles. In this way, the community school staff became a catalyst for the transformation of the school's culture. Quitman has made a strong beginning in fostering parental involvement; however, authentic parent leadership remains a challenge. In fact, CACNJ's Dorothy Knauer wants to explore partnering with the Industrial Areas Foundation (discussed below) to see if its expertise in organizing and leadership development can help strengthen Quitman's efforts in Newark.

## The Development Model: Community Sponsorship of New Schools

Community organizations have begun to experiment with sponsoring new schools within the public education system. The motivation to start their “own” schools typically stems from frustration with the lack of improvement in urban school districts, and concern that public schools are too big, impersonal, and disconnected from the community. In many cases, the new schools are charter schools, while in others they are semiautonomous schools incorporated into the school district. The sponsored schools are united around a set of values, and sometimes around pedagogical approaches. Perhaps the only thing we can say for certain, though, is that these schools share a community orientation. This section looks specifically at charter schools initiated by community organizations in close partnership with educators. We will start by exploring the Camino Nuevo Charter Academy in Los Angeles.

### *Camino Nuevo Charter Academy*

During our visit to Pueblo Nuevo Development, we see that community development is fundamentally about bricks and mortar — housing, a thrift store, and jobs for janitors. But at the charter academy, we see that community development is more than bricks and mortar too. Phillip Lance told us that building a school is not just about building a building in one piece. It’s about intangibles, by which he means building a school culture. The school culture at Camino Nuevo can be found in its teaching staff, social justice focus, holistic approach to education, community-based orientation, and parent involvement. Ana Ponce echoed this sentiment when she told us that the school is not just a school. If a family has problems with housing, immigration, or anything else, the school tries to help. (From researcher field notes)

The origins of the Camino Nuevo Charter Academy lie in the rapid transformations that have gripped Los Angeles over the last twenty years.<sup>10</sup> As a new wave of immigrants from Mexico and Central America swept into the country, many came to settle in neighborhoods like MacArthur Park in central Los Angeles. Many of these immigrants are undocumented, and most toil in low-wage, temporary employment. MacArthur Park became one of the poorest neighborhoods in the city, with a poverty rate of 35 percent (Farbstein, 2003). High population density and a lack of decent, affordable housing led to high residential turnover in the neighborhood, while gangs and violence grew.

In the early 1990s, Phillip Lance, an Episcopal minister, began holding a “mass on the grass” in MacArthur Park. Lance had received training in community organizing with the Industrial Areas Foundation, the national community-organizing network discussed below, and believed that addressing the community’s spiritual life was not enough. Taking a rather entrepreneurial approach to his social justice mission, Lance worked with residents to open a thrift store, which offered jobs for some residents and access to basic necessities for many who struggled below the poverty line. Lance capitalized on the quick success of the thrift store to found Pueblo Nuevo Development (PND),



a nonprofit community development corporation, in 1994. PND subsequently organized residents who were working as janitors into their own worker-owned janitorial company, Pueblo Nuevo Enterprises.

Lance next turned his attention to education. In the late 1990s, PND launched a series of conversations with local parents about their experiences with Los Angeles public schools. More than 16,000 children were being bused out of MacArthur Park to schools in other neighborhoods, and they were not faring well at these schools. Many parents said they wanted a neighborhood alternative for their children.

Lance became attracted to the idea of opening a charter school. He liked the model of a publicly funded school that would allow for autonomy from district administration and close connections to the community. While the few other charter schools in Los Angeles at the time rented their facilities, Lance moved to find a space that PND could own. PND identified an abandoned mini-mall in the heart of the neighborhood that was an eyesore. PND was able to raise funds to convert the mall to a school because it had built a (modest) track record for financial management and community roots through its thrift store and janitorial company projects. Lance raised financial support from the Local Initiatives Support Corporation and the Low Income Investment Fund, two community development financial intermediaries, as well as from the philanthropic community. PND built the first campus of Camino Nuevo for far less than the Los Angeles district average, although part of the savings came because the school lacks a gym, cafeteria, and playing fields. Nevertheless, the building met standards and even won a major architectural award for innovative design (Farbstein, 2003).

PND, like most community organizations that want to establish charter schools, lacked the capacity to launch a new school on its own. As a result, PND partnered with two organizations. Excellent Education Development, Inc. (ExEd), founded by former banker William Siart, located financing and handled accounting and bookkeeping for the new school. New Visions Foundation, founded by Paul Cummins, provided academic support by helping PND hire educators and develop curriculum.

The Camino Nuevo Charter Academy opened its doors in the fall of 2000 at two elementary school campuses: that is, at its newly constructed Burlington Street building and, because of high demand, at a rented space known as the Town House campus. The idea of a new school was so attractive to MacArthur residents that the charter enrolled to capacity at both campuses immediately. In fact, the community wanted middle and high school options as well. Responding to this demand, PND bought an abandoned office building down the street from the Burlington elementary campus and renovated it into a middle school. It also rented space for another middle school campus on Harvard Street, so by the fall of 2001 Camino Nuevo was running two middle school campuses. The phased opening of a college prep high school was scheduled to begin in fall 2004. The academy currently serves over 1,200 stu-



dents across four campuses, 65 percent of whom are English-language learners. Ninety-seven percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches. More than a thousand students are on a waiting list to get in.

Being a new school, Camino Nuevo had the opportunity to design its mission from scratch and to hire teachers who shared these goals. Compared to the Los Angeles school district averages, the school features smaller classes, a longer school day, and an extended school year. This schedule has created more instructional time and reduced the time children spend unsupervised outside of the home.

The academy adopted a social justice orientation, declaring in its public statements, “The mission of Camino Nuevo Charter Academy is to educate students in a college preparatory program to be literate, critical thinkers and independent problem solvers who are agents of social justice with sensitivity toward the world around them” (Camino Nuevo Charter Academy, 2004). It then set out to recruit, successfully, a teaching force attracted to its mission. Many teachers come from Teach For America and are consequently comparably young and socially committed. They see an opportunity for greater flexibility and creativity in their teaching by being at a charter school. Burlington campus teacher Kate O’Brien, for example, is working with her students to hold an ecological fair for the neighborhood. According to O’Brien, “The school offers the opportunity for me personally to do things I couldn’t do in other [Los Angeles district] schools. I am the ecology coordinator and am starting an ecology program. At other schools, there wouldn’t be that option.”

Like O’Brien, other members of the staff have taken the initiative to improve the neighborhood. The teachers and students at the Burlington campus school worked on a neighborhood beautification program, cleaning up graffiti and planting trees. As part of this project, the school helped mobilize residents to get the city to install trash barrels in the neighborhood where none had existed before. The academy also has sponsored several community health fairs.

Many new charter schools face difficulties getting established (Cookson & Berger, 2002), and Camino Nuevo was no exception. Camino Nuevo went through several principals before the academy hired Ana Ponce. Ponce brought expertise in administration and in instructional leadership to the academy’s social justice orientation, and she eventually became executive director of all four of the academy’s campuses.

Camino Nuevo and PND saw parents, as well as teachers, as vital members of the academy community and sought to encourage parent involvement from the beginning. Parents have to sign a compact when they enroll their children at the academy, requiring them to volunteer at the school for fifteen hours during the year. Parent volunteers help supervise lunch and recess, act as field-trip chaperones, and make phone calls about school events to other parents from their homes. The school also encourages parents to attend a num-

ber of workshops and school activities, like parent institutes on reading strategies or workshops on tenant rights.

Many teachers and parents seem to agree that parent involvement was a struggle in the first year, but has increased significantly over the four years of the academy's existence. Part of the credit for this progress goes to the academy's family programs coordinator, Zulma Suro. Suro emphasizes personal contact and relationship-building with parents as the only way to get them involved successfully. The academy is willing to place a high priority on this work, paying Suro to work full-time on family engagement and including her on the school's leadership team. The effort is paying off, according to Suro:

Their attendance has gone from just four to five parents to ninety parents. Parents like the school. They are involved not just because there is a requirement. Parents feel comfortable and they suggest ideas. There is mutual communication. The school distributes a survey at the beginning of the year and asks parents what they want. . . . Some parents [now] say that the fifteen hours of mandatory service is too little!

Camino Nuevo wants the school to be a place where parents and children feel welcome and their culture is valued. Half of the teachers hired are bilingual. Suro wants families to feel that they can come to the school for help with any kind of problem, not just educational, and says she will try to provide referrals to agencies that can assist them. There is also a monthly open coffee and conversation session with executive director Ponce held at each site.

Parents appear excited about the school. They report that the teachers really seem to care about their children and will go the extra mile to help them. Parents point out that Camino Nuevo is a very different kind of school from the Los Angeles district schools to which they had previously sent their children. According to one parent:

Here at this school we can easily talk to the principals and teachers. The community is very open and very easy to access. As for the school, it takes parents into consideration when they make decisions. When we compare it to past schools where our children have been, this school has more parent involvement [through] meetings and activities and workshops.

While parent involvement at Camino Nuevo has increased significantly, parent leadership remains a challenge. Many parents in MacArthur Park struggle to survive, working many hours just to make the rent. As undocumented residents, some are hesitant to play too public a role in the school. Meanwhile, parents with little education themselves hesitate to take leadership in the broader educational issues confronting the academy.

Nevertheless, some parents have begun to show initiative. The campuses have school site councils in which some parents participate. Other parents have taken action in areas like safety and school meals, issues that they feel

more confident addressing. Ponce wants strong and educated parents, even if that means they challenge educators:

My five-year vision is to have parents take on more leadership. I want them to develop parent workshops, parent institutes. I want them to hold community meetings and work on issues that affect their daily lives. . . . They can question me and challenge me. It keeps me in check. You have to be ready for parents to be against you. It's great when parents develop petitions and organize around issues important to them, but they should also know the facts. Our job is to provide information to them and to work with them around those issues.

Camino Nuevo has worked hard to develop programs designed to meet the needs of children in a holistic manner and to reach out and engage the community. PND has partnered with California Hospital to open a school-based community clinic at the Burlington school site. The clinic is free and open to all children in the afternoon. The clinic, working with family coordinator Suro, also sponsors health education and community health fairs. PND offers afterschool classes at all school campuses. Some of these classes feature Latin American cultural arts, with lessons for children in traditional dance, ballet, and guitar. Finally, PND has launched a small pilot program that offers early childhood education classes for preschoolers.

Pueblo Nuevo has developed an innovative financial strategy that links schools to community development. Because PND owns the school buildings and leases them to the charter academy, it builds financial equity. Leveraging its growing income and property base and working in partnership with ExEd, a nonprofit organization that specializes in offering business services to charter schools, PND has now raised the funds necessary to build the planned high school. It has also embarked on building a preschool.

Camino Nuevo appears to be modestly successful in fostering academic achievement, at least as measured by standardized test scores. Based on the results of a set of state tests, California calculates a composite Academic Performance Index score to rank schools, from 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest). In 2003, Camino Nuevo elementary school held a No. 1 ranking overall, but No. 6 compared to schools with similar demographics. The middle school held a No. 3 ranking overall and No. 9 compared to similar middle schools, a result academy staff view as highly competitive. Given that the academy is so new, however, and that the overall API score is so low, especially at the elementary level, it is inappropriate to claim much success yet for the school in meeting test-based standards. It should be noted that the evidence for charter schools' impact generally on achievement is mixed as well (Cookson & Berger, 2002; Finn, Manno, & Vanourek, 2001; Wells, 2002). The academy, however, is sensitive to the issue and has set ambitious targets for improvement in test scores over the next few years.

Camino Nuevo Academy struggles with funding its operations, which cost \$9 million annually. Under California's charter school law, it receives per-pupil funding of a little more than \$7,000 (see Farbstein, 2003, for details). But

that is not enough for the new school to accomplish its ambitious goals. Ponce and her staff work hard to raise an additional \$500,000 or so each year from private foundations to pay salaries to Suro and instructional leaders, as well as for professional development and teaching materials.

PND has come to place school work at the center of its community development program. According to Lance:

Working with schools builds new constituencies. You don't get that with housing. Some people become connected in a real way in the housing development. But for many, it's just a place to live. Families are really connected through schools. We've learned how much more connected we can become to a community, and how much more we can influence its development through our school work. . . . Also, it's proving to be a viable way to address infrastructural issues in the neighborhood. We're taking blighted properties and turning them into viable places. We're beautifying the neighborhood. And there are ancillary services, like health services, that are locating here, because the school is here. . . . School work is the most important thing we do, so that's what we'll focus on.

Camino Nuevo now serves as the linchpin for a set of institutions that help structure life for new immigrants in a very poor and transient neighborhood. These are promising steps for the families of low-wage workers who have been so defenseless in the brave new world of globalization.

### *Discussion*

The Camino Nuevo experience appears to be broadly representative of community sponsorship of new schools across the country. No systematic data is readily available about charter schools sponsored by community-based organizations. However, we can identify enough cases to suggest that a trend is beginning to emerge. For example, the Oakland Communities Organization (OCO), affiliated with the Pacific Institute for Community Organization (PICO), worked with the School Futures Research Foundation in the late 1990s to open the E. C. Reems Academy of Technology and Art and the Dolores Huerta Learning Academy, two charter schools in Oakland (Schorr, 2002). In Philadelphia, during a period of rapid expansion of charters, a coalition of community organizations working in the Lower Germantown Rebuilding Community Project founded the Germantown Settlement Charter School. In Boston, the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative and the Orchard Gardens Tenant Association sponsored a new pilot (semiautonomous) school as part of the HOPE VI redevelopment of the Orchard Gardens public housing project.

Charter schools seem to be emerging as a strategy of choice as community developers engage in a new conversation about the potential role of school-based strategies in community revitalization (see Chung, 2002; Khadduri, Turnham, Chase, & Schwartz, 2003; Stone et al., 1999). Several national community-development intermediaries have begun to help finance community-sponsored charters. For example, the National Council of La Raza and its

Raza Development Fund have shifted their community development investments dramatically toward education and have supported over one hundred community-based charters serving low-income Latino students. The Low Income Support Corporation (LISC), which supported Camino Nuevo, has raised \$30 million in loan funds for charter schools through its new Educational Facilities Financing Center.

As illustrated by Camino Nuevo, community-sponsored charters build social capital through partnerships based on a community-oriented vision. As in community (full-service) schools, the community organization partner and its staff play a critical role in engaging parents in the school. They work hard to bring families into the school, where at least some of their broader needs can be addressed. And, through (required) volunteering at the school, parents have the opportunity to build new relationships with one another and with teachers.

Compared to the service model, the sponsored-school model also suggests a more direct role for schools as agents for community development. By renovating abandoned buildings, this PND project reduces blight and spurs additional investment. Meanwhile, the school sponsors neighborhood clean-ups, environmental campaigns, and health fairs. Such efforts strengthen the community's social fabric and capacity for action, both in the school and in the community.

Yet this development model struggles to generate full parent leadership in the school and community. Of course, the community of MacArthur Park is highly mobile and, like Quitman's, struggles with basic needs. Camino Nuevo has begun to meet these needs, to create a base of parent involvement on which it could potentially build the kind of stronger leadership that features so prominently in the organizing model to which we now turn.

### The Organizing Model: School-Community Organizing

Community-organizing groups have become increasingly interested in fostering collaborations with public schools. Organizing groups are distinguished by their emphasis on building power for social and political change through relationship-building, leadership development, and public action. The field can be traced back to the work of Saul Alinsky, who was known for his brash tactics in organizing low-income communities in Chicago and across the country (Horwitt, 1989). More recently, many organizing groups have combined confrontational tactics with strategic efforts at collaboration and institutional development (Warren, 2001).

In this approach, schools collaborate with community organizations but are also institutional sites for the organizing itself. The Texas Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) pioneered such a strategy through its Alliance Schools network, but a variety of other community organizations have developed variations of this approach as well. I first discuss the collaborations of the Logan

Square Neighborhood Association, which has done intensive parent organizing with seven schools in one neighborhood in Chicago. I then examine more briefly the IAF, which organizes parents and educators around schools and has built a statewide collaboration involving over a hundred schools in Texas.

### *Logan Square Neighborhood Association*

As I walk down Milwaukee Avenue, I pass used-car lots with security fences, dollar stores, and small, crowded *taquerias*. It seems like a struggling neighborhood, but a lively one as well. I'm early and the members of the association's education committee slowly trickle in for their meeting. The Latina women talk excitedly in Spanish, catching up on personal news and school happenings. As the meeting begins, each school group gives a report on progress with their new Literacy Ambassador program. The parents then enter into a passionate discussion about the issue of high dropout rates among Latinos and African Americans, and agree to mobilize for a citywide rally on the issue. They brainstorm the names of people to nominate for officer positions in the association's upcoming board elections. These women strike me as comfortable here. They know exactly what's going on. They feel ownership of their work and take responsibility for this organization. (From researcher field notes)

Located on the west side of Chicago, the Logan Square neighborhood has long been home to successive waves of migrants.<sup>11</sup> During the 1970s and 1980s, Latinos from Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Central America began to replace the European immigrants who were living in the neighborhood. As a result, Latinos now comprise about two-thirds of Logan Square's population of 83,000. Most public schools in the neighborhood are over 95 percent low-income and 90 percent Latino. The children's parents struggle with low-wage work. Although poor, Logan Square nevertheless exhibits a mix of working-class and lower-middle-class families, with a significant homeownership population. It boasts lively commercial districts with thriving small businesses.

Some of the strengths and stability of the neighborhood can be attributed to the hard work of the Logan Square Neighborhood Association (LSNA). Founded in the early 1960s, LSNA has built affordable housing, improved neighborhood safety, and fostered economic development in Logan Square. LSNA has always focused on community organizing as a means to achieve these community-development goals. The association hires organizers to engage residents, hold leadership-training workshops, and mentor new community leaders so they can lead action campaigns to address neighborhood needs. LSNA's biennial assemblies attract over one thousand residents, one indication of the level of participation the association has been able to generate.

LSNA began organizing around education issues in the early 1990s after a citywide movement led to state legislation that devolved important decision-making powers to elected local school councils at each Chicago public school, including the power to hire and fire principals. While community groups employed a variety of strategies in the wake of the new legislation, LSNA took a collaborative approach that proved particularly successful. LSNA began by fo-



cusing on school construction. As the new wave of Latino immigrants grew, the school-age population in Logan Square increased rapidly in the 1980s so that local schools became overcrowded. In response, LSNA launched a successful campaign to get the city to build annexes to five elementary schools in the neighborhood and to build two new middle schools.

Organizing to get the city to build additional classroom space brought LSNA around schools, but not yet into them. The campaign, however, helped foster relationships with principals and leaders in the neighborhood's schools, which desperately needed the additional classroom space. In 1994, LSNA adopted a Holistic Plan that built on the trust established with principals to move organizing work directly into the neighborhood's schools.

LSNA organizers looked for a strategy that could involve parents in the schools, a starting point for leadership development so that parents could become active participants and decisionmakers. As a result, in 1995, LSNA developed the Parent Mentor Program and raised funds to hire parents in local schools to work two hours a day in classrooms supporting the work of teachers. Every Friday, these parent mentors attended workshops on a range of educational and social issues designed to enhance their ability to be school *and* community leaders. These leadership-development workshops covered issues like nutrition, strategies for teaching reading, and housing issues, and they included attention to group dynamics and to the development of mutual support among the parents.

Latina mothers, many of whom had not been working outside of the home, dominated the mentor program from the beginning. They appeared excited about this opportunity to become public leaders in their school and community and felt comfortable with each other. As part of the program, each participant set personal goals for growth and accomplishment. LSNA lead education organizer Joanna Brown sees the parent-mentor program as a model for leadership development for immigrant women:

Over and over again, the women themselves speak about being transformed by the experience. Many were isolated in their homes by language, culture, and small children. For many, it is their first step out into the public sphere. This works because the school is the safest public institution, filled with women and children.

Through their involvement in the mentor program, parents began to talk about how the schools could serve the broader needs of their community. Parent mentors at the Funston School developed a plan to open a community learning center at their school. Other parent mentors liked the idea and spread the model to their schools as well. The centers, now at seven schools in the neighborhood, offer a range of classes in the evening to children and adults. Some classes are more academic, including ESL, citizenship, and GED programs, while others involve cultural enrichment like folkloric dancing, quilting, and cooking. Latino participants see the cultural classes as important



to maintaining their heritage. Meanwhile, some parent mentors took the opportunity to become teachers in the centers, while others worked as security guards; a former parent mentor directs one of the centers.

As parent mentors gained confidence through the success of their work, some expressed interest in becoming teachers. LSNA thought they would make highly committed and culturally aware teachers, so in 2000, LSNA proceeded to launch an innovative collaboration with Chicago State University to train local residents to become bilingual teachers in local schools. Fifty students, virtually all Latina mothers involved with LSNA and/or parents in the schools, signed up for the *Nueva Generación* program, a college degree program leading to certification as bilingual and ESL teachers. A federal Title VII grant paid all program costs, so students were able to attend for free. Chicago State faculty members came to Logan Square to hold the classes at the community learning centers.

In 2003, LSNA launched its newest initiative, the literacy ambassador program. Teachers and parents team up and visit a host family, which typically invites two guest families to the house as well. The ambassadors bring books to read out loud, talk with parents and children about the importance of literacy, and suggest specific things parents can do to help their children with reading. The program also sponsors literacy events at the school involving the host and guest families that have been visited.

The program has a specific focus on literacy, but its purpose is also relationship-building between teachers and parents. LSNA offers host families \$30 to cover food, but many families put on lavish spreads of home-cooked food to welcome the ambassadors and guest families. According to Leticia Barrera, one of LSNA's education organizers, "It gets teachers and parents at the same level. At home, we don't have a desk for teachers or a special chair. They sit on the floor! It's very different the next day: Parents come in and say 'hi!'"

Many ambassadors report that the events have a special spirit, caused by the unusual step of a teacher reaching out beyond the walls of the school to meet people in their homes. Catherine Delgado, a parent who serves as the program's coordinator at Monroe School, reports one incident that captures this spirit: "The teachers at Ames are great. One mother had to work, so Mr. Perez, the teacher, went to her place of employment, a pizza parlor, and held the visit there. Other people in the shop got interested and joined in too." Ames Middle School principal Leslie Berman is a strong supporter of the ambassador program:

I sat in meetings in homes and they were magic. Children were waiting on the sidewalk because they heard teachers were inside! People went way out for food. I saw the best teaching on the part of teachers. It was all about literature. All the children were prepared. Everyone got a turn reading. I saw children behave very differently toward teachers at their home, not the kind of belligerence we sometimes get at school. . . . When a teacher takes an evening to go into a child's home, that's a powerful statement.

Over ten years of organizing, LSNA has built a multifaceted and interrelated set of organizing efforts coordinated by the group's Education Committee. A large-scale effort to develop parent leadership lies at the heart of the program. The first level of involvement and training is the parent-mentor program, which currently involves 120 parents each year across seven schools; over a thousand parents have gone through the program to date.<sup>12</sup> As a result of their training, many mentors go on to help lead other initiatives, become parent-mentor coordinators at their schools, or coordinators for community learning centers and literacy ambassador programs. Some parent mentors take paid positions as teacher's assistants. Others have run for the local school council at their schools.

Leticia Barrera is a good example of the development many Latina women pursue through the opportunities provided by LSNA programs. An immigrant from Mexico, where she worked as a teacher for a while, Leticia was working in a factory in Chicago when she heard about the parent-mentor program at her child's school in 1997. With the training and experience she got as a mentor, she was able to get a position with the Chicago Public Schools doing home visits in their Parents as Teachers First program. She then entered the *Nueva Generación* bilingual teacher-training program, where she is now in her fourth year. She also teaches Mexican folkloric dance in the community learning center at Monroe School. In 2002, she became one of LSNA's education organizers. In that position, she staffs the parent-mentor and literacy ambassador programs at several schools and helps train and mentor parent leaders like herself. Barrera says that the parent-mentor program was a key opportunity for her:

We ask, "Who is a leader?" A lot of mothers like me don't think of themselves as leaders. The parent-mentor program gives us the chance to develop. We have the opportunity to go to workshops and to learn. We set personal goals and it builds our self-esteem. As soon as teachers know that parents are in school and going to workshops, they see you differently.

As Barrera's comment suggests, the development of parent leadership changes the relationship between teachers and parents at school. Lead education organizer Joanna Brown notes the transition since before 1995, when some neighborhood schools were like fortresses with no parents allowed in:

Now the schools are full of parents, and many parents are taking leadership roles, organizing cultural events, speaking before teacher staff meetings about the literacy ambassador programs they design and run, running for local school councils. It changes the way parents think of school. They feel ownership of the schools as they take charge and organize events at the schools.

Based on the work of LSNA, teachers had to change their approach with parents. According to James Menconi, principal of Monroe School and one of the authors of LSNA's Holistic Plan for education:

Teachers respond to parents who get involved. Ninety-five percent have taken a liking to parents (although some parents do come in to get their own way). Teachers have come to share power. They have moved from “sages on the stage” to facilitators, to empower parents and aides to help, and kids to help themselves.

According to Eva Calderon, the parent-mentor coordinator at Mozart School, “Teachers feel more comfortable with parents. Before, it was, ‘Oh my God! I don’t want parents in my room. They’ll be there to judge me.’ Now parents understand teachers have a tough job; they understand each other’s roles.”

LSNA encourages parent leaders to address community and school issues, so parents provide the key link between school and community in this organizing model. For example, parents helped initiate and currently participate in LSNA’s Health Outreach Team, which has connected thousands of low-income families to affordable health services and state insurance over the past five years. Parents are also leaders in the association’s housing campaigns and they helped develop LSNA’s newest health initiative, Active Living by Design, whose goal is to increase physical activity in the neighborhood.

The parent-mentor program builds the broad base of participation out of which many leaders emerge, and stipends are one key to the program’s success. The stipends are rather small: Parent mentors receive \$1,200 per year for two hundred hours of work. Nevertheless, this is a significant amount to many parents. Although unpaid volunteering has been the paradigm for parental involvement in school, LSNA defends the necessity of paying stipends to encourage involvement and to bring in a broader range of people than would otherwise participate. LSNA organizers note that most parent leaders put in many more hours than officially required. Meanwhile, LSNA also pays stipends to literacy ambassadors and the parent coordinators of various programs.

LSNA has to raise money for all of these stipends. It also needs funds to pay salaries to education organizers and for the costs of the community learning centers, which total more than \$700,000 across the seven schools. The total cost of all of LSNA’s education organizing easily exceeds \$1million annually. LSNA has raised these funds from a variety of foundations and government sources, but it is a constant struggle that saps the time and energy of some organizing staff.<sup>13</sup>

As an organizing group oriented to the political arena as well as to school collaborations, LSNA has worked hard to build alliances with public officials in Chicago, including Chicago Public Schools CEO Arne Duncan, the local alderman, and state senators. These political relationships have helped protect the association’s innovative education programs and leverage its gains to the broader policy level. For example, LSNA was able to get Congressman Luis Gutierrez to help them persuade the governor to reinstate funds for their parent-mentor program when the new governor eliminated the program as a

cost-cutting response to a budget crisis. Recently, LSNA has worked with community groups, universities, the Chicago Public Schools, and others to replicate *Nueva Generación* as a model for training neighborhood residents as teachers. LSNA partnered with Illinois ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now) and others to secure \$10 million in state funding for such a “Grow Your Own Teacher” program.

There is much anecdotal and some harder evidence of improved learning at the schools with which LSNA works. According to data supplied by LSNA, between 1997 and 2002, student performance on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills in math and reading improved at all LSNA-affiliated schools, from an average of 28 percent scoring at or above the national norm in math in 1997 to an average of 39 percent in 2002. Meanwhile, the percentage scoring in the bottom quartile on the math tests fell at all schools, dropping from an average of 41 percent to 26 percent. Reading scores showed similar gains.<sup>14</sup> It would be difficult, however, to attribute these increases solely to LSNA organizing. Chicago public schools implemented a variety of programs to raise test scores under a high-stakes accountability initiative, and Iowa test scores generally rose across the city.<sup>15</sup>

To strengthen the claim that LSNA initiatives have improved student learning, LSNA and educators report a number of ways that LSNA initiatives have improved the learning environment, from improving safety to providing in-classroom help. Seventy-one percent of teachers in a staff survey of LSNA schools reported improved discipline as a result of parent mentors (Blanc et al., 2002, p. 22). Five LSNA schools reporting to the Annenberg Challenge all showed declines in disciplinary referrals, some as large as 37 percent (p. 22). Monroe principal Menconi emphasizes the positive, caring environment created by parent mentors:

When a parent works in the room, it puts children at ease, that’s key. My educational philosophy is bent towards being a community-based school because children feel safe. We don’t need metal detectors because we have networks of parents who will come quick to tell us who has a weapon.

### Texas Industrial Areas Foundation and the Alliance Schools

The models and cases reviewed so far in this article involve school-community collaborations in one school or with several schools in one neighborhood. Intensive work at this very local level constitutes the beginning point to improve education in schools and advance community development in neighborhoods. Most low-income parents, and most teachers for that matter, are more likely to begin their engagement in community and public life with the issues and institutions that most immediately affect them (Warren, 2001). Moreover, it is at this first level that the face-to-face relationships so essential to social capital must be built, and where parents and teachers can struggle to create more

equal relationships. At the same time, efforts limited to one school or neighborhood cannot address the broader structure of inequality that sustains poverty and school failure in the first place.

Some organizing approaches, however, combine intensive school-by-school organizing with an approach to building the power necessary to address broader structural issues. Such a strategy requires an intentional effort to link school-by-school collaboration with the building of a political constituency for urban school improvement. It also requires operating at a scale commensurate to the task, that is, beyond a single neighborhood.

The Texas Industrial Areas Foundation pioneered this approach in its Alliance Schools initiative in the late 1980s.<sup>16</sup> Beginning with an initial foray into school-based organizing in a predominantly African American neighborhood in Fort Worth, the IAF formally launched the Alliance Schools in 1992 with twenty schools across the state. This bold new experiment far eclipsed in scale and scope anything the IAF or, for that matter, any community organization had tried before. The Alliance initiative now comprises organizing at over a hundred schools across the state. The schools are located in predominantly Black and Latino neighborhoods and are clustered in the network's eleven local affiliates. The IAF is applying the model in Arizona, New Mexico, Los Angeles, and elsewhere as well, led by the Southwest IAF's director Ernesto Cortés, Jr. This makes the IAF's Alliance Schools the single largest experiment in community organizing for school reform in the country.

Alliance Schools are part of what the IAF calls broad-based organizations that are citywide and oriented to building power for communities. The local groups are institutionally based, that is, they are composed of institutions, mainly religious congregations — but with a growing number of schools, unions, and other community organizations as well. The congregations involved are primarily Latino Catholic parishes and historically Black churches, but they include a significant number of more affluent and predominantly White congregations and synagogues as well. Professional IAF organizers work with these institutions to engage and train leaders to take public action for the improvement of their communities, addressing such issues as affordable housing, job training, neighborhood safety, and health-care reform. The work is explicitly political, but nonpartisan. IAF organizations are arguably some of the largest, most participatory and powerful community-based political organizations in the country. Ten thousand people, mostly from low-income communities of color across the state, attended the Texas IAF's twenty-fifth anniversary convention in 1999, and over 12,000 attended the founding convention of One LA, the IAF's organization in Los Angeles, in 2004 (Fausset, 2004).

The IAF appreciates institutions as places that connect people, as foundations for community and democratic life (see Chambers, 1978), and so the network seeks to organize in and through them. In this approach, public

schools are not the object or target of outside community organizing; rather, organizing occurs in the school with all of its stakeholders. While LSNA focuses on parent organizing, the IAF seeks to organize teachers, principals, and other adult staff, as well as parents.

Such an approach, of course, requires the support of the school's institutional leader, the principal. It turns out that many school principals proved willing to join the Alliance because they saw the IAF as an effective organization with a willingness to collaborate and compromise. Nevertheless, principals had to be interested in moving away from traditional, hierarchical notions of management toward a collaborative model, to see their role as fostering teacher and parent leadership. The Alliance Schools have developed a principals' institute held annually to foster this new style of leadership that is congruent with organizing.

The Alliance Schools do not have a single agenda for school change. Rather, the IAF's "relational-organizing" approach works to build relationships in a school first. Change starts through conversations among parents, teachers, and other school staff about their concerns for the school. Agendas for action emerge from these conversations and relationships. Initial work is often done around immediate concerns, like safety. But as capacity and understanding develop, the organizing effort often turns toward more core pedagogical concerns. For example, parents and educators at Morningside Middle School in Fort Worth, Texas, worked with local congregational leaders to get the city to close down a store near the school that sold alcohol to underage students. As their organizing skills grew, they worked to develop a program to teach parents how to help their children with homework. Later, they organized free afterschool programs featuring art, science, and sports. Eventually, Alliance leaders at the school, including teachers and parents, redesigned curriculum to move instruction toward developing higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills among students. As a result of the first two years of Alliance organizing, Morningside moved its rank on the Texas Education Assessment of Minimum Skills (TEAMS) test from last among all district middle schools to third place, and won several awards (Warren, 2001, chapter 4).

Because these projects grew authentically from the interests and ideas of parents and teachers, the reforms had strong and often enthusiastic support — unlike many reform projects imposed from the outside. Moreover, the IAF includes systematic leadership training in every stage of its campaigns and sends hundreds of parents and educators to multiday, regional leadership training sessions on a regular basis. Nevertheless, these were not entirely bottom-up initiatives. The Alliance Schools network holds regular statewide conferences featuring nationally prominent educators and reformers, like Howard Gardner, Ted Sizer, and James Comer, who discuss innovative educational approaches that inspire local conversations and initiatives.



One of the IAF's key goals is to overcome the isolation of schools and bring a diverse set of institutions and leaders together. According to the group's discussion paper for its 2004 annual conference on Alliance Schools:

Schools, like most institutions, can become isolated and stagnant when left to their own devices. Connecting public schools to institutions outside the education system creates the public space where people of different backgrounds connect to one another, listen to each other's stories, share concerns, and develop the trust to act together to solve common problems. If we can stop sequestering our educators and schools from the broader civic culture, we can create a Community of Learners that includes adults as well as children and crosses lines of race, ethnicity, religion, geography and economics. (Texas Interfaith Education Fund, 2004, p. 6)

IAF organizations attempt to link their school-by-school efforts to broader citywide initiatives to improve education and community development. IAF organizers have demonstrated an ability to engage school and congregational leaders in a wide variety of campaigns in cities across the state, aimed at addressing the structures of inequality that trap families in poverty. In San Antonio, for example, the IAF organizations have been able to campaign for a series of education-related policies, including funding for afterschool programs at close to two hundred schools (including the Alliance Schools) and an Education Partnership that provides college scholarships to high school students. Alliance Schools have also participated in efforts to establish a variety of other community initiatives launched by the IAF organizations in San Antonio, including the Project QUEST job-training program, affordable housing initiatives, and voter education and registration drives.

IAF organizations and Alliance Schools have leveraged their local base to affect state-level policy as well. In fact, the earliest IAF initiative on education involved participation in the Texas school-funding equalization and reform effort led by Ross Perot in the early 1980s (Lavine, 1997). Later, the Texas IAF's state-wide political capacity helped get the legislature to pass a program allocating additional professional-development funding to schools that partner with community organizations. The program has directly helped the Alliance Schools, many of which received up to \$100,000 in extra funding and the ability to apply to their districts for expedited waivers for innovative experiments.

Alliance Schools have demonstrated some important success in improving achievement as measured by test scores, especially at the elementary level (see Shirley, 1997, 2002). But they face the challenge of moving students beyond basic skill development to higher-order learning, a task made more difficult by the high-stakes testing regime that has been implemented in Texas school districts. These regimes force teachers to teach in a highly structured and often scripted manner. Principals have a limited time in which to raise test scores at their schools or risk losing their jobs. Although the IAF continues to support testing as one means of accountability, such structured regimes are



crowding out the room for experimentation that Alliance schools need. Alliance principals, as employees of these districts, cannot stand up alone against these policies. The IAF, however, has independent, citywide organizations, so it is now turning to its base in congregations to influence district policy to give Alliance Schools the space and flexibility they need for organizing their own process of change. Whether the IAF will be successful in facing this challenge may well determine its ability to advance its efforts to change the culture of schooling and foster high-quality teaching and learning in low-income communities of color.

### *Discussion*

The Texas/Southwest IAF and LSNA are at the forefront of a growing trend of organizing groups that have moved toward school-based organizing in various ways. For example, the Oakland Community Organization (OCO), a member of the PICO network that operates statewide in California, organized to get the Oakland district to open a set of small schools in low-income neighborhoods (Gold, Simon, & Brown, 2002a). When the state took over control of the district, the political power of OCO stopped the planned closing of the OCO-sponsored schools. In another campaign, the PICO network in California got the state legislature to pass funding for home visits by teachers, based on the group's model efforts in this regard in Sacramento.

Surveys of community-organizing groups show that education has, in fact, become a top priority for their work. A national survey of faith-based community-organizing groups revealed that the majority worked on educational issues, with at least 117 schools participating (Warren & Wood, 2001). The Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform and the Institute for Education and Social Policy at New York University identified two hundred community-organizing groups working on school reform, a number of which involved school collaborations (Gold, Simon, & Brown, 2002b; Mediratta, Fruchter, & Lewis, 2002; see also National Center for Schools and Communities, 2002a, 2002b).

Community-organizing efforts build social capital both among participants in the school community and between institutions, like schools, neighborhood associations, and congregations. In this model, an intentional focus on relationship-building and systematic leadership development fosters strong forms of parent engagement. By paying more explicit attention to questions of power and developing parents as leaders, new relationships between educators and parents begin to be forged. These relationships have begun to transform the culture and practice of education at these schools, although perhaps both the LSNA and Alliance schools are still searching for strong models of high-level learning for their schools. Meanwhile, organizing approaches build relational power beyond the school as well, working to create a political constituency for public education as part of a broader agenda addressing the needs of low-income families and communities.

## From the Margins to the Center? Across the Field of School-Community Collaboration

The service, development, and organizing approaches discussed above all work to make public schools institutional anchors for low-income, urban communities. Despite their differences, they appear to have a number of features in common. Indeed, to some extent the approaches interpenetrate. The organizing strategies of LSNA and Texas IAF have led to the establishment of afterschool programs for children, community learning centers for adults, and sometimes even health clinics in schools, all key features of the community school approach. The Quitman Community School and the Camino Nuevo charter academy both invest in parent involvement and have become increasingly interested in stronger parent leadership, a key feature of organizing approaches.

All three models seek to build new, stronger, and more collaborative relationships between and among parents, educators, and community members. In conceptual terms, they work to build social capital and relational power. But each model does so in different ways, which gives them distinctive strengths and weaknesses.

With their service orientation, community schools perhaps provide the strongest direct support system for children. They build social capital by weaving relationships around the school, with parents and community residents brought in to receive services and take classes. As a result, teachers seem to better understand the families and communities of the children they teach and to work collaboratively for their holistic development.

The community-school model, as developed at Quitman, may well be an appropriate one to start to build social capital in a community that is so deeply troubled. Before we can focus on strong forms of parent leadership and broader community power, we may first have to meet the basic needs of children and their families. Some analysts worry that the service-oriented paradigm of community schools can only see parents as clients, not as change agents, and the power of professionals over parents thereby remains unchecked (Keith, 1996; Merz & Furman, 1997; Smrekar & Mawhinney, 1999). Yet the Quitman case suggests that some progress toward authentic collaboration and a real change in the practice of teaching can be made in community schools; this appears to be the case elsewhere, too (Keith, 1995, 1999). With the community agency as catalyst for change, Quitman has tried hard to see parents as partners in the provision of services, not just as their recipients.

When community-development organizations sponsor new charter schools, they have the advantage of starting anew, of building a school culture that is community oriented, creative, and flexible. Community-sponsored schools build social capital through parental involvement, which is typically required, and through close institutional links between the school and sponsoring com-

munity organization. The new school can hire staff committed to its mission of community engagement so that teachers can play a more active role in reaching out to families and fostering community change. Compared to community (full-service) schools, which remain very school centered, community-sponsored schools often play an explicit role in supporting community development beyond their walls, for example, by reducing blight and sponsoring clean-ups and health fairs.

The impact community-sponsored schools have on building a political constituency for school reform is less clear. In fact, critics charge that charters undermine public education. At a minimum, these critics assert, charters take funding away from school districts, making it harder for them to serve the majority of public school students who remain in-district. And charters might undercut efforts for broader reform, as the most active parents focus narrowly on their own schools and children (Cookson & Berger, 2002). Many community developers who sponsor charters, however, assert their support for publicly funded education. Frustrated with what they see as rigid school district administrations, they see charters as the best way for public education to meet the needs of low-income families. Some community sponsors, like Lance and the Camino Nuevo staff, hope their success can serve as a model to push the school district toward community-oriented schooling. Moreover, they are considering joining One LA, the Industrial Areas Foundation organization in Los Angeles, a collaboration that would certainly bring them into, rather than out of, the process of building political constituencies for public education.

Compared to the service and development models, organizing is a more explicitly political approach to school-community collaboration. Organizers approach parents not as recipients of services, but as public actors and change agents, people capable of being leaders of their community. In this way there is a clear focus on going beyond “involvement” to leadership, which implies more powerful forms of engagement in schools (see also Shirley, 1997). Because organizing fosters collective leadership development and empowers parents, it provides a way to restructure power relations to move toward more truly cooperative relationships between teachers and parents.

In this model, schools become institutional sites for organizing, as parents and sometimes educators who emerge through school-based organizing go on to become active in campaigns for health programs, job-training projects, affordable housing, and economic development. In the hands of the Texas/Southwest IAF, school organizing becomes embedded in city- and statewide networks that build political constituencies for the needs of low-income communities of color more broadly. Community organizing is therefore a powerful potential model for opening schools in order to connect change at the school level with efforts to address broader structures of economic and political inequality.

## Lessons Learned

Despite differences across the service, development, and organizing models, we can identify some shared lessons. First is the critical role of independent community organizations as builders of social capital. With their roots in the community, these organizations serve as mediators between families and schools. In this role, they can help schools understand families better and families understand schools better. They can focus on the demanding work of engaging parents and educating them, while school staff can continue to concentrate on improving instruction. Moreover, if parents get involved through an independent organization, they have a foundation from which to enter collaborations on a more equal footing. Parents no longer interact with teachers and principals as isolated individuals, a situation guaranteed to reinforce the power of professionals over parents of color (see also Smrekar, 1996). Rather, as an emerging collective body they stand a better chance to exert authentic leadership.

The models also demonstrate the need to invest resources in building social capital. In other words, full-time staff is needed to engage parents in schools. Educators can no longer send home leaflets and then complain that parents don't care when few show up for events. These collaborations show the gains that come through investment in patient work: reaching out to parents, engaging parents in authentic conversation, educating parents, and providing parents with avenues to develop as leaders.

Another lesson is the need to deal explicitly with issues of power and the difficulties of doing so. Through leadership development and a focus on relational power, collaborations can begin to work through conflicts associated with race, power, and narrow conceptions of self-interest in order to create authentic forms of collaboration and real change in the culture and practice of schooling. Nevertheless, there is a long way to go here. We found little explicit discussion of race relations in our cases, despite much implicit understanding of its impact. New research is needed on all aspects of this emerging field. But we certainly need to better understand the conditions under which principals and teachers are likely to reach out beyond the walls of the school to partner with community organizations. We also need to identify strategies that are effective in working through mistrust and conflicts, for example, between White teachers and parents of color, to forge relationships of equality and true collaboration.

## Conclusion: A New View of Urban Education Reform

Powerful arguments and passionate calls for linking education to social transformation in urban America have been made before (e.g., Anyon, 1997; Kozol, 1991; Noguera, 2003; Rothstein, 2004). A strong tradition dating back at least to John Dewey understands schools as foundational institutions for

American community and democracy, and sees education as fundamental to progressive social change. But even when school reformers appreciate these broad arguments, reform efforts concentrate again and again within the four walls of the school. In this article, I have tried to show that school reformers cannot do it alone. Moreover, they do not have to if we take seriously the new trend of community engagement with schooling documented in this article.

There are several possible reasons that school reformers keep their focus narrowly within the school and are suspicious about community engagement. They may fear having community activists interfere in “their” domain because they see them as uninformed or, worse yet, as potential disruptors pursuing a wrong-headed agenda. Alternatively, school reformers may see time and resources spent engaging parents, connecting with community organizations, and addressing the broader needs of children as distractions when schools are under great pressure to raise achievement immediately. In this view, limited resources are best spent through a tight focus on core improvements in teaching and learning.

In answer to these concerns, I have tried to show how linking school improvement to community development can have an important effect on improving learning, as well as on changing the community and structural factors that promote educational inequality. In order to pursue this new agenda for reform, however, educators need to shift from seeing children, their families, and their communities as problems to be fixed toward an appreciation of their potential strengths and contributions. Such a paradigm shift recognizes the potential of schools, in partnership with community organizations, to create agency among all stakeholders and to build the capacity for change. This requires providing parents and community members with opportunities to learn about educational issues, as well as with opportunities for meaningful and powerful forms of participation in school and community life.

Through the case studies presented above I have sketched out the various mechanisms through which school-community collaborations can lead to improved outcomes for children and their communities. Although further research is necessary to better measure these outcomes and more tightly specify the causal pathways, I can offer the following summary, using the conceptual tools discussed at the beginning of this article.<sup>17</sup>

Building social capital among educators, parents, and community members through parent and community involvement and personal relationship-building expands the capacities of schools in the following ways:

- Increases support parents give at home
- Brings support into classrooms and in-school activities
- Improves teaching by increasing teacher understanding of children’s needs and community strengths
- Creates coordinated action by teachers, parents, and community activists for holistic child development

Creating relational power through leadership development and collaborative relationship-building generates an internal capacity to change the culture of schools. It

- Spawns initiatives that are strongly rooted in local conditions, interests and values
- Creates reform projects to which educators, parents and community members are committed and enthusiastic
- Fosters accountability to an organized and informed constituency of parents and community members

Linking schools to community development and organizing projects builds a political constituency to make progress in addressing structural inequality. It

- Improves the living conditions of families and the health of low-income communities
- Creates conditions in which students are better able to learn
- Delivers greater resources to schools

Each of the three types of school-community collaborations achieves these outcomes to a different extent. Moreover, none of these mechanisms represents quick fixes to the problems of urban schools. All require a long-term investment in engaging parents and building multiple collaborations. With some practices, such as placing parent mentors in classrooms, the payoff can be rather immediate. In others, for example, establishing job-training programs for the parents of students, the results may take quite a bit of time, but may be no less significant in the long run.

Too much of the contemporary debate over education policy looks for “one size fits all” programs that can be scaled up to solve the problems of urban schools. Yet many good programs end up with disappointing results when they fail to take root and engage the interests and support of stakeholders at the local school level (Payne & Kaba, n.d.). Rather than being imposed from the top, reform strategies in this new community-based paradigm emerge in a dialectic between experts and an engaged community of stakeholders in and around schools. Parents, teachers, principals, and community leaders collaborate to develop a common programmatic vision so that any reform strategy conforms to their values, interests, and understanding of local conditions. Authentic participation creates a sense of ownership of the change process and a commitment to making it a success.

More broadly, experts and educators acting within the four walls of the school cannot solve the problems of urban schools and inner-city communities, because these problems are the result of fundamentally unequal power relationships in our society. We need an active and engaged citizenry to build the kinds of relationships and the type of power necessary both to transform education school by school *and* to address the broader structures of poverty



and racism that trap our youth. I have argued here for a renewed vision of education reform linked to the strengthening of civil society in our cities — and to building the power necessary for a protracted struggle. This is not a pious call for radical change. Rather, I have sought to ground this approach in an analysis of some of the hard, patient, and groundbreaking work that has emerged in our communities and schools over the past fifteen years. A serious commitment to these experiments in linking school reform to community development offers hope for real and sustained improvement, both in our children's learning and in the communities in which they grow and develop.

## Notes

1. The Ford Foundation supported some of the research conducted for this article. Carolyn Leung and Phitsamay Sychitkokhong conducted fieldwork on the Camino Nuevo School and the Quitman School for this project. I would like to thank Carolyn and Phitsamay for their thoughtful contributions to the analysis presented in this article. I would also like to thank the organizers, teachers, parents, and staff at LSNA, Quitman, Camino Nuevo, and the Texas IAF for hosting our research and sharing their insights. For helpful comments on this article, I would like to thank Kerry Venegas and the students in the Communities and Schools Pro-Seminar at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, the editors of the *Harvard Educational Review*, especially Soo Hong, and Richard Elmore.
2. For the purposes of this discussion, I define communities as geographical units, generally neighborhoods. People, of course, can form communities in other ways — by interest, identity, or values. For families raising children in the inner city, however, the quality of their lives and the opportunities and constraints they face are closely linked to residential location (Dreier, Mollenkopf, & Swanstrom, 2001; Driscoll, 2001).
3. This admittedly strong generalization is supported by the views of parents, particularly in low-income African American communities, as reported in, for example, Warren (2001, chapter 4), and by studies that discuss the history of mistrust those parents have of schools and their willingness to raise their criticisms of their children's schools (Lareau & Horvat, 1999).
4. According to James Coleman (1988, p. 98), "Unlike other forms of capital, social capital inheres in the structure of relations between actors and among actors. It is not lodged either in the actors themselves or in physical implements of production." Robert Putnam (1995, p. 67) defines social capital as "the features of social organization, such as networks, norms, and social trust, that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit."
5. For a related discussion, see the treatment by Stone, Doherty, Jones, and Ross (1999) of a social-production model of power.
6. For each of the three illustrative cases, fifteen to twenty subjects were interviewed over several days. For the Camino Nuevo case, interviews and observations were conducted mainly at the Burlington and Harvard campuses; most reported data come from the Burlington campus. The data on the Texas Alliance Schools draw from fieldwork the author has conducted over several years (Warren, 2001). I refer to subjects by their real name. In a few cases where this was not possible, I refer to subjects by their position (e.g., parent volunteer).
7. Particular publications are cited when used in the narrative and analysis presented for each case below. More information can be gained through websites sponsored by some



- of the projects: for Camino Nuevo Charter Academy, see [www.caminonuevo.org](http://www.caminonuevo.org). For LSNA, see [www.lsna.net](http://www.lsna.net).
8. All quotations and most data in this section come from interviews conducted for this project in May 2004. Some data about Quitman came from a five-year report on the school published by the Prudential Foundation (Dryfoos, 2003b).
  9. The school's high turnover rates make these scores difficult to interpret. Given the high level of need of Quitman children, comparisons should be made carefully.
  10. Unless otherwise noted, data and quotations for this section on Pueblo Nuevo/Camino Nuevo come from fieldwork conducted for this project in April 2004.
  11. Data and all quotations for this section on LSNA come from the author's fieldwork in March 2004. For further discussion of LSNA, see Blanc, Brown, Nevarez-La Torre, and Brown (2002).
  12. According to a survey conducted by Research for Action, 75 percent of the 114 parent mentors in the spring of 2001 were immigrants, with 44 percent having attained high school degrees or GEDs (Blanc et al., 2002).
  13. The Chicago Annenberg Challenge funded the parent-mentor program for its first five years. The community learning centers got initial funding from the federal government's 21st Century grant. Federal Department of Education Title VII funds paid for the *Nueva Generación* teacher-education program for a five-year period ending in 2005.
  14. Above norm reading scores increased from an average of 25 percent to 36 percent, while the percentage scoring in the bottom quartile fell from an average of 47 percent to 28 percent.
  15. According to systemwide data published by Chicago public schools, between 1997 and 2002 the percentage of students at or above reading norms rose from 34 percent to 43 percent, while the percentage in the bottom quartile fell from 35 percent to 26 percent. In math, the percentage at or above norm rose from 37 percent to 47 percent, while the proportion in the bottom quartile fell from 35 percent to 24 percent. Analysts (e.g., Bryk, 2003), however, have questioned whether the improved test scores reflect any real gain in student achievement.
  16. It is beyond the scope of this article to trace the full development of the Alliance Schools. Rather, I seek to highlight some of the distinctive elements of the IAF's approach in relation to the other models we have examined. I will draw from my own multiyear ethnographic study of the Texas IAF (see Warren, 2001), as well as other published accounts of the Alliance Schools (see Shirley, 1997, 2002; Simon & Gold, 2002).
  17. For some other efforts to specify the mechanisms and impacts of community organizing on school reform, see Mediratta (2004), Gold et al. (2002b), and Baum (2003).

## References

- Abrams, L. S., & Gibbs, J. T. (2000). Planning for school change: School-community collaboration in a full-service elementary school. *Urban Education, 35*(1), 79–103.
- Anyon, J. (1997). *Ghetto schooling: A political economy of urban educational reform*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Baum, H. S. (2003). *Community action for school reform*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Blanc, S., Brown, J., Nevarez-La Torre, A., & Brown, C. (2002). *Case study: Logan Square Neighborhood Association*. Chicago: Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform.
- Blank, M. J., Melaville, A., & Shah, B. (2003). *Making the difference: Research and practice in community schools*. Washington, DC: Coalition for Community Schools.

- Briggs, X. d. S., & Mueller, E. J. (1997). *From neighborhood to community: Evidence on the social effects of community development*. New York: New School for Social Research, Community Development Research Center.
- Bryk, A., & Schneider, B. (2002). *Trust in schools: A core resource for improvement*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation Press.
- Bryk, A. S. (2003). No child left behind, Chicago-style. In P. E. Peterson & M. R. West (Eds.), *No child left behind: The politics and practice of school accountability* (pp. 242–268). Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.
- Bullard, R. D. (1990). *Dumping in Dixie: Race, class and environmental quality*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Camino Nuevo Charter Academy. (2004). *Elementary school accountability report card 2002–2003*. Retrieved November 2, 2004, from [www.caminonuevo.org](http://www.caminonuevo.org)
- Chambers, E. (1978). *Organizing for family and congregation*. Franklyn Park, NY: Industrial Areas Foundation.
- Children's Aid Society. (2001). *Building a community school* (3rd ed.). New York: Author.
- Chung, C. (2002). *Using public schools as community-development tools: Strategies for community-based developers*. Cambridge, MA: Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University and Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation.
- Coleman, J. S. (1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital. *American Journal of Sociology*, 94 (Supplement), S95–S120.
- Cookson, P. W., Jr., & Berger, K. (2002). *Expert miracles: Charter schools and the politics of hope and despair*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Cortes, E., Jr. (1993). Reweaving the fabric: The Iron Rule and the IAF strategy for power and politics. In H. G. Cisneros (Ed.), *Interwoven destinies* (pp. 294–319). New York: W. W. Norton.
- Delpit, L. (1988). The silenced dialogue: Power and pedagogy in educating other people's children. *Harvard Educational Review*, 58, 280–298.
- Dewey, J. (1915). *The school and society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Dreier, P., Mollenkopf, J., & Swanstrom, T. (2001). *Place matters: Metropolitan politics for the twenty-first century*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas.
- Driscoll, M. E. (2001). The sense of place and the neighborhood school: Implications for building social capital and for community development. In R. L. Crowson (Ed.), *Community development and school reform* (vol. 5, pp. 19–42). Amsterdam: JAI.
- Dryfoos, J. (2002). Full-service community schools: Creating new institutions. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 83, 393–399.
- Dryfoos, J. (2003a). *Evaluation of community schools: Findings to date*. Retrieved April 20, 2005, from [www.communityschools.org/evaluation/eval1.html](http://www.communityschools.org/evaluation/eval1.html)
- Dryfoos, J. (2003b). *The Quitman Street Community School: 1998–2003 Five year report*. Newark, NJ: Prudential Foundation.
- Dryfoos, J., & Maguire, S. (2002). *Inside full-service community schools*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Duncan, G. J., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (1997). *Consequences of growing up poor*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation Press.
- Epstein, J. L., Sanders, M. G., Simon, B. S., Salinas, K. C., Jansorn, N. R., & Van Voorhis, F. L. (2002). *School, family and community partnerships: Your handbook for action* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Fantini, M., Gittell, M., & Magat, R. (1970). *Community control and the urban school*. New York: Praeger.
- Farbstein, J. (2003). *Creative community building: 2003 Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence*. Retrieved April 20, 2005, from [http://www.brunerfoundation.org/rba/book 2003/1-2003.pdf](http://www.brunerfoundation.org/rba/book%202003/1-2003.pdf)
- Fausset, R. (2004, July 12). Thousands attend parley to improve life in county. *Los Angeles Times*, p. B3.
- Fine, M. (1993). [Ap]parent involvement: Reflections on parents, power and urban public schools. *Teachers College Record*, 94, 682–710.

- Finn, C. E. J., Manno, B. V., & Vanourek, G. (2001). *Charter schools in action: Renewing public education*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Foley, M. W., & Edwards, B. (1997). Escape from politics? Social theory and the social capital debate. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 40, 549–560.
- Gold, E., Simon, E., & Brown, C. (2002a). *Case study: Oakland community organizations*. Chicago: Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform.
- Gold, E., Simon, E., & Brown, C. (2002b). *Successful community organizing for school reform*. Chicago: Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform.
- Goldring, E. B. (1990). Elementary school principals as boundary spanners: Their engagement with parents. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 28(1), 53–62.
- Halpern, R. (1995). *Rebuilding the inner city: A history of neighborhood initiatives to address poverty in the United States*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Horwitt, S. D. (1989). *Let them call me rebel: Saul Alinsky, his life and legacy*. New York: Knopf.
- Keith, N. Z. (1995). The community in the school: Can we create community across difference? *Educational Horizons*, 73, 169–173.
- Keith, N. Z. (1996). Can urban school reform and community development be joined? The potential of community schools. *Education and Urban Society*, 28, 237–268.
- Keith, N. Z. (1999). Whose community schools? New discourses, old patterns. *Theory Into Practice*, 38, 225–234.
- Khadduri, J., Turnham, J., Chase, A., & Schwartz, H. (2003). *Case studies exploring the potential relationship between schools and neighborhood revitalization*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.
- Kozol, J. (1991). *Savage inequalities: Children in America's schools*. New York: Crown.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2001). *Crossing over to Canaan: The journey of new teachers in diverse classrooms*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Lareau, A. (1989). *Home advantage: Social class and parental intervention in elementary education*. Philadelphia: Falmer Press.
- Lareau, A., & Horvat, E. M. (1999). Moments of social inclusion and exclusion: Race, class, and cultural capital in family-school relationships. *Sociology of Education*, 72(1), 37–53.
- Lavine, R. (1997). School finance reform in Texas, 1983–1995. In R. H. Wilson (Ed.), *Public policy and community: Activism and governance in Texas* (pp. 119–165). Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Lawrence-Lightfoot, S. (1978). *Worlds apart: Relationships between families and schools*. New York: Basic Books.
- Loomer, B. (1976). Two conceptions of power. *Criterion*, 15(1), 11–29.
- Mediratta, K. (2004). *Constituents of change: Community organizations and public education reform*. New York: New York University, Institute for Education and Social Policy.
- Mediratta, K., & Fruchter, N. (2003). *From governance to accountability: Building relationships that make schools work*. New York: New York University, Institute for Education and Social Policy.
- Mediratta, K., Fruchter, N., & Lewis, A. C. (2002). *Organizing for school reform: How communities are finding their voices and reclaiming their public schools* (A report). New York: New York University, Institute for Education and Social Policy.
- Melaville, A. (2004). *Doing what matters: The Bridges to Success strategy for building community schools*. Indianapolis: United Way of Central Indiana, Bridges to Success.
- Merseeth, K. K., Schorr, L. B., & Elmore, R. F. (2000). Schools, community-based interventions, and children's learning and development: What's the connect? In M. C. Wang & W. L. Boyd (Eds.), *Improving results for children and families: Linking collaborative services with school reform efforts* (pp. 35–51). Greenwich, CT: Information Age.
- Merz, C., & Furman, G. (1997). *Community and schools: Promise and paradox*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Moll, L. C., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory Into Practice*, 31, 132–141.

- National Center for Education Statistics. (2002). *Digest of education statistics, 2002*. Washington, DC: Author.
- National Center for Schools and Communities. (2002a). *From schoolhouse to statehouse: Community organizing for public school reform*. New York: Fordham University, National Center for Schools and Communities.
- National Center for Schools and Communities. (2002b). *Unlocking the schoolhouse door: The community struggle for a say in our children's education*. New York: Fordham University, National Center for Schools and Communities.
- Noguera, P. (1996). Confronting the urban in urban school reform. *Urban Review*, 28(1), 1–27.
- Noguera, P. (2001). Transforming urban schools through investments in the social capital of parents. In S. Saegert, J. P. Thompson, & M. R. Warren (Eds.), *Social capital and poor communities* (pp. 189–212). New York: Russell Sage Foundation Press.
- Noguera, P. (2003). *City schools and the American dream: Reclaiming the promise of public education*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Payne, C. M., & Kaba, M. (n.d.). *So much reform, so little change: Building-level obstacles to urban school reform*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Putnam, R. D. (1995). Bowling alone: America's declining social capital. *Journal of Democracy*, 6, 65–78.
- Reese, W. J. (2002). *Power and the promise of urban school reform: Grassroots movements during the Progressive Era*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Rioux, J. W., & Berla, N. (1993). *Innovations in parent and family involvement*. Princeton Junction, NJ: Eye on Education.
- Rothstein, R. (2004). *Class and schools: Using social, economic and educational reform to close the black-white achievement gap*. Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute.
- Sarason, S. B. (1995). *Parent involvement and the political principle: Why the existing governance structure of schools should be abolished*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Schorr, J. (2002). *Hard lessons: The promise of an inner city charter school*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Schrag, P. (2003). *Final test: The battle for adequacy in America's schools*. New York: New Press.
- Shirley, D. (1997). *Community organizing for urban school reform*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Shirley, D. (2002). *Valley Interfaith and school reform*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Simon, E., & Gold, E. (2002). *Case study: Austin interfaith*. Chicago: Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform.
- Smrekar, C. E. (1996). *The impact of school choice and community: In the interest of families and schools*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Smrekar, C. E., & Mawhinney, H. B. (1999). Integrated services: Challenges in linking schools, families and communities. In J. Murphy & K. S. Louis (Eds.), *Handbook of research on educational administration* (pp. 443–461). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Squires, G. D. (1994). *Capital and communities in Black and White: The intersections of race, class and uneven development*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Stone, C., Doherty, K., Jones, C., & Ross, T. (1999). Schools and disadvantaged neighborhoods: The community development challenge. In R. F. Ferguson & W. T. Dickens (Eds.), *Urban problems and community development* (pp. 339–380). Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press.
- Stone, C. N., Henig, J. R., Jones, B. D., & Pierannunzi, C. (2001). *Building civic capacity: The politics of reforming urban schools*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas.
- Texas Interfaith Education Fund. (2004). *Education conference discussion paper*. Austin: Author.
- Warren, M. R. (1998). Community building and political power: A community organizing approach to democratic renewal. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 41(September), 78–92.
- Warren, M. R. (2001). *Dry bones rattling: Community building to revitalize American democracy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

- Warren, M. R., Thompson, J. P., & Saegert, S. (2001). The role of social capital in combating poverty. In S. Saegert, J. P. Thompson, & M. R. Warren (Eds.), *Social capital and poor communities* (pp. 1–28). New York: Russell Sage Foundation Press.
- Warren, M. R., & Wood, R. L. (2001). *Faith based community organizing: The state of the field*. Jericho, NY: Interfaith Funders.
- Wells, A. S. (2002). *Where charter school policy fails: The problems of accountability and equity*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Woolcock, M. (1998). Social capital and economic development: Toward a theoretical synthesis and policy framework. *Theory and Society*, 27, 151–208.

This article has been reprinted with permission of the *Harvard Educational Review* (ISSN 0017-8055) for personal use only. Posting on a public website or on a listserv is not allowed. Any other use, print or electronic, will require written permission from the *Review*. You may subscribe to *HER* at [www.harvardeducationalreview.org](http://www.harvardeducationalreview.org). *HER* is published quarterly by the Harvard Education Publishing Group, 8 Story Street, Cambridge, MA 02138, tel. 617-495-3432. Copyright © by the President and Fellows of Harvard College. All rights reserved.