

26 CONVERSATIONS ABOUT ORGANIZING, SCHOOL REFORM, AND NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

Leigh Dingerson
Center for
Community Change

Chris Brown
Cross City Campaign
for School Reform

John M. Beam
National Center for Schools and
Communities at Fordham University

April 2004

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	3
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
INTRODUCTION	6
VIEW FROM THE STREET	9
PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS	13
CONVERSATIONS	16
NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND	24
SUMMARY AND OBSERVATIONS.....	32
APPENDIX.....	35
TABLES AND BOXES	
'No Child' Law Leaves Schools' Old Ways Behind	12
Base and Scope of Participating Organizations	13
Membership by Race and Cultural Groups	15
Summary of Campaign Types	18
Four Words or Less	22
Handles from No Child Left Behind	28
Participating Groups and Organizational Characteristics	37
Types of Recent Education Campaigns.....	39
Interview Instrument	41

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

While the three of us take responsibility for any fault our colleagues might find with this project, many people should receive credit for its strengths. First among these are the organizers around the country who took time they did not have to discuss the important but troubling issues of how to ensure that all public school students attend a high quality public school and whether current national education policy advances or impedes that goal.

Adam Levner, who works with the Center for Community Change education team, assisted with interviews. He and Michael Eskenazi checked facts and identified references. Eskenazi and Latisha Thomas prepared the surveys for analysis and Fatos Kaba developed the quantitative summary of the interviews. Kaba, Thomas, and Eskenazi are coworkers at the NCSC.

The views represented in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect institutional positions.

This report is also available on our websites and
may be downloaded and circulated freely
on the condition that the title, authors, and
their organizations are referenced:

<http://www.communitychange.org/Education/default.asp>
www.crosscity.org/
www.NCSCatFordham.org

Copyright June 2004 by the authors.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Those who designed, passed, and signed No Child Left Behind excluded low-income families from any of the fundamental decisions built into the act. Important educational policy choices - the use of standardized testing, for example, or the definition of highly qualified teachers or the type of curricula that may be used – are being relocated to state capitals and Washington. Meanwhile, parents continue to wonder why Ronald Reagan is the last president in their kids' history text, how many substitutes can rotate through one room in one year, and why their students bring home the same worksheets for three grades in a row.

The 2001 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (a.k.a. No Child Left Behind or NCLB), is sucking the oxygen out of any broader national debate over what to do about public education, especially in major urban centers. With a modest increase in school aid, a significant increase in regulation, and a full court press by top administration officials marketing NCLB, it smothers the discussion with a tangle of mixed signals. Governors, state education officials, and national interest groups wage a non-stop war of attrition to reshape the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) regulations, generally to protect their budgets or their reputations.¹ At the city level, school officials variously treat NCLB as the soon to melt away flavor of the week or a federal intrusion that pressures districts to pare the local educational program down to a reductionist version of literacy and numeracy.

Between October and March, we spoke with 29 organizers in 26 grassroots organizations that work on education justice issues in 14 states and the District of Columbia. We took an in-depth look at their recent school reform activity and explored the relevance of No Child Left Behind to solving the problems they confront in their local schools and districts. This report summarizes those conversations, identifies some themes, and, of course, raises new questions. We found that:

- While organizers and community leaders are conscious of No Child Left Behind as a national policy issue, they frequently do not yet see it as relevant to solving problems in their local schools. When NCLB is on a group's radar, it registers most often as a suspected Trojan horse for vouchers, charters, privatization, and other proposals seen as threatening the survival of neighborhood schools.
- Most groups, however, are working on issues directly related to quality of instruction, and when presented with a variety of policy options drawn from

¹ Gewertz, C. Urban Students Show Reading, Math Gains on State Assessments. *Education Week*, March 31, 2004; Richard, A. and Robelen, E. Federal Law Is Questioned By Governors. *Education Week*, March 3, 2004.

NCLB regulations, a majority expressed interest in those that relate directly to quality of instruction.

- In spite of their increasing focus on quality of instruction, community groups are less likely to have organizational relationships with teacher unions than with almost any other constituency.
- In terms of support – beyond funding – that groups need to pursue educational justice organizing, by far the largest group mentioned capacity building (specific technical assistance on NCLB), teacher quality, and access to education experts who can help them think through and plan education campaigns. Runner up concerns were increased and more experienced staffing and assistance in forming collaborations.

In a nation where for generations public education policy has been atomized into tens of thousands of public school districts, No Child Left Behind is forcing local groups into the classic environmentalist stance – act locally, think globally. The grassroots organizations we interviewed have to struggle just to remain politically competitive in a local policymaking environment. Many of the organizers we interviewed acknowledged that the education justice issues they confront should be viewed in some larger framework. They express interest in interacting with colleagues from other organizations to explore how that framework relates to their local work. The three organizations we represent and, we hope, others that include education justice issues among their priorities, plan to assist several grassroots organizations in building the necessary bridges to connect global educational policy to local educational quality.

INTRODUCTION

My concern with the NCLB is that it makes a lot of demands, higher expectations, etcetera, and simultaneously they cut 15 teachers from each high school last spring. While they're raising the bar, we're losing arts, staff, PE, numbers of classes that can be offered. If schools can get decertified etc. for not meeting standards, it raises questions of whether this is a set up to dismantle public education. You're making it impossible for staff and administration to rise to the occasion. T talking about icing out 12th grade altogether and putting the allocation into higher education.

The federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 has changed the terrain on which community organizing for education reform is taking place. The new policy environment challenges community organizations to understand if and how NCLB will narrow, expand, or complicate their education justice agenda. Over the last few months, the Center for Community Change, the Cross City Campaign for School Reform, and the National Center for Schools and Communities at Fordham University have explored how grassroots organizing is responding to this new climate. This study is an attempt to jumpstart the conversations we think must happen within and among groups about the potential impact of this national initiative on their local work.

NCLB is built on a rhetorical stage of equity, high standards, and accountability that is widely supported by communities, parents, and progressive school reformers. But, beneath its red, white, and blue bunting, the frame of No Child Left Behind is ominously shaky. Parents, organizers, and their allies suspect the motives of many of the law's architects, question its relevance to improving what happens in classrooms of low-income students, and fear its capacity for further stressing school systems that are already imploding.²

Districts are complying, creatively co-opting the program, or posturing about withdrawing completely from Title I and other federal education funding in order to avoid compliance. In some cases, they are "getting with the program" in ways that can only be seen as politically rather than pedagogically motivated. Associations and unions that represent educators, district and state

² "It's not only an unfunded mandate from the federal government but in its present form the law is "unworkable." Ferrandino, V. and Tirozzi, N. Improving NCLB. Principals' Perspective, March 15, 2004.

superintendents, school boards, and elected officials have expressed reservations about the law's requirements, and the cost of its implementation.³

In school districts that are dysfunctional and top-heavy, as are many of those where our respondents organize, the implementation of NCLB is, not surprisingly, proving to be top heavy and bureaucratic; the atmosphere teachers, administrators, and parents experience is one of fear and mistrust, anger and confusion. In other districts, NCLB may intrude on successful programs and assessments and on school cultures that work.⁴

Our observations of local implementation and conversations with grassroots organizations nationwide, including those analyzed for this report, suggest the early community responses to NCLB differ widely. Few of the organizers with whom we spoke felt they had a working understanding of the law, and specific organizing plans around No Child Left Behind are scarce. While many people were aware of various high-profile provisions of NCLB – for example, the school choice and supplemental services provisions – they were less likely to understand other, much more fundamental changes that the law requires.

There was a great deal of confusion about the law's intent and impact on the classroom. This lack of clarity in many segments of the community organizing world is not surprising for a number of reasons:

- The law and final regulations have been slow to roll out.

Various provisions and sanctions in the law will take effect over a number of years. In addition, though the law was enacted in December of 2001, the Department of Education (DOE) has been criticized for the slow promulgation of regulations on the law.⁵ For

³ For example, National Education Association President Reg Weaver has said, “[T]he so-called ‘No Child Left Behind’ law desperately needs to be fixed and funded to make accountability work.” Reg Weaver, National Education Association. [Statement by NEA President Reg Weaver on Today's National Poll by PEN and Education Week](#). *Press Release*, Washington, D.C. April 1, 2004.

⁴ “We find [the law’s] requirement that all schools show ‘adequate yearly progress’ by reaching a single bar—the status-bar model—has had the unintended effect of penalizing those thriving systems,” the chief [school officers] from California and 13 other states wrote in a letter to [Education Secretary Rod] Paige. Gewertz, C. [Urban students show reading, math gains on state assessments](#). *Education Week*, March 31, 2004.

⁵ “Among the factors shutting children out: bureaucracy, lack of clarity in the law, too few options and limits on the amount of federal money available for instruction.” Ghezzi, P. [Slow Start for Federal 'No Child' Law Red Tape Hinders Education Effort](#).

example, the final regulations on Title I – the largest section of the law, were released in December of 2002, a full year after the law was passed. Regulations for Reading First, the centerpiece of the Administration’s literacy program, came out the following August. The NCLB provisions on Title II, which relates to teacher quality, continue to be a work in progress. DOE issued its guidance on Title II, which included definitions for “highly qualified,” in June of 2002, but has issued revisions to the guidance at least twice since then, in December 2002 and in May 2004.

- Emanating simultaneously from various levels of government and national and local stakeholders (e.g., the teachers’ unions) the multiple messages around No Child Left Behind have been muddled and confused.

From inside the Beltway, we hear talk of high standards, quality teaching, and accountability. At the level of state-by-state implementation, however, DOE regs have allowed departments of education to dumb down the definition of academic success and maintain teachers with handcrafted waivers.⁶ Many parents and educators who know the inside of the nation’s low-income and predominantly minority schools share the conviction that No Child Left Behind is designed to delegitimize public education and build the rationale for vouchers, business models for managing schools, and under funding of public schools. Yet, they worry that opposing NCLB will shut off the important spotlight the law shines on the achievement of low-income and minority kids in neglected public schools.

The current administration has been brilliant at labeling those who criticize the law as being opposed to progress or even closet racists who support the “soft bigotry of low expectations.”⁷ Most often aimed at public school educators, such remarks threaten to marginalize those most familiar with the inside of America’s classrooms from what is arguably one of the most important domestic policy debates on the national agenda. In early March, Secretary of Education Rod Paige went so far as to label the

The Atlanta Journal – Constitution, Atlanta, Ga.: April 4, 2003, p. A.1.

⁶ For example, Virginia is allowing teachers to substitute their college board scores for proof of pedagogical prowess on the Praxis I teacher exam. Teachers who took the SAT before April 1995 will be required to document a 960 combined score (450 verbal/510 math). Aspiring Teachers Can Substitute SAT Scores for Praxis in Virginia. *Education Week*, April 7, 2004.

⁷ Dionne, EJ. Finally, Political Talk Making Sense. *The Denver Post*. Denver, Co.: September 10, 1999, p. B11.

National Education Association “a terrorist organization” for its criticism of the law.⁸

- NCLB may dominate the national discussion, but the capacity of local groups and the culture of organizing are local.

Many organizing groups working on education campaigns are working on school-related issues that are not immediately affected by NCLB, such as facilities improvement or crossing guards, for example. Others may be working on issues that pre-date NCLB that could be positioned in the NCLB frame but so far are not.

VIEW FROM THE STREET

The Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform, the Center for Community Change and the National Center for Schools and Community at Fordham University all provide strategic and technical support for community organizing for school change. We set about this survey of community organizations to determine whether and how No Child Left Behind affects organizing work on the streets for a number of reasons:

- NCLB is one of those rare pieces of legislation that both responds to a broadly felt social need and provides an impetus for further vigorous public debate. Had it been implemented with a more inclusive, less top down approach, it might even have become the civil rights act for public school students.
- Conceptually, No Child Left Behind is unified by a concern for the wide variation in achievement among American public school students, a gap that too often correlates with race and income.
- For organizers, the high profile of the new law does offer new ways to talk with members about education and opens doors to new campaigns on important school issues.
- NCLB presents new tactical opportunities for community organizations and, if adequately funded, *could* direct additional resources for improving public education. Sections of the legislation read like an organizer’s wish list of handles for

⁸ Education Secretary Rod Paige called the National Education Association, the nation's largest teachers union, "a terrorist organization" during a private meeting with governors Monday. Toppo, G. Education Chief Calls Teachers Union 'Terrorist Organization'. *USA Today*, February 24, 2004, p. A04.

education campaigns, particularly around issues of teaching quality and of the racial skew of both educational resources and outcomes.

- Specifically, the legislation pushes notions of high quality instruction and professional development. There are provisions to help parents, advocates, and their organizations understand and publicize the dimensions of that gap. These include requirements such as disaggregating achievement data by race, poverty, English language learner status, and special needs. In addition, parents have the right to information about the qualifications of their children's teachers and notification of extended presence of substitutes in a classroom.

We wanted to understand if and how community organizations are using these handles and to what end. We wanted to know how familiar community organizers are with the new law and its requirements. We wondered whether members – overwhelmingly low-income community residents, public school parents, and people of color– are talking about No Child Left Behind. We were curious about how the law is being felt at the local school level and to what extent NCLB is actually improving teaching and learning in the classroom. Or, on the contrary, does the NCLB exist primarily in district administrative offices and operate within an esoteric environment of bureaucracies, reports, rules, and requirements that have not yet filtered down to the classroom?

To help us focus our own work, we also wanted to know what type of information, support, opportunities to interact with colleagues, and other assistance local organizers felt they needed as the new law takes hold.

While there may be positive aspects to NCLB, it contains many negative dimensions as well. Activists and administrators alike frequently view NCLB as heavy on centralized directives and light on support for actually implementing those directives. Moreover:

- NCLB provides explicit support for charter schools and, through mandated set-aside of Title I funds, redistributes scarce education dollars to privatized educational services.
- Through its commodification of Title I funds and the emphasis on school failure, NCLB implicitly cultivates the environment for federally funded vouchers and privatization of public school services.

- The new rights to transfer children out of failing schools to non-existent spaces in more successful schools and to tutoring activities, as well as the required use of Title I money to pay for transportation to both also set the stage for privatizing public education.
- The legislation speaks at length to the importance of parents and their involvement in choosing educational opportunities for their children, but very little about a real role for organized parents in the school change process.
- The legislation speaks at length to the importance of highly qualified teachers but then acts to undermine their professionalism. The proposed FY 2005 budget proposes cuts that will reduce funding for improving teacher quality by a third over the current and proposed budget years. States are also taking great pains to craft definitions of “highly qualified” that do not threaten teachers already teaching in the public schools, thereby neutralizing the law’s promise.⁹
- Structurally, NCLB equates accountability with standardized testing that holds children responsible for the performance of adult policymakers. The constricted definition of Adequate Yearly Progress has accelerated the narrowing of the public school curriculum to phonics, basic comprehension, and calculation.
- NCLB neglects to provide adequate and, in some cases, any funding for many of its more appealing provisions. The Administration’s FY 2005 budget proposal has requested zero (\$0) for *authorized* subtitles covering comprehensive school reform for failing schools, drop out prevention, parent centers, and school counselors.¹⁰
- NCLB identifies the achievement gap and then ignores the hard bigotry of a historical maldistribution of resources that would easily meet the pre-Sandoval standard for institutional racism: disparate negative impact on children of color. ¹¹

⁹ Democratic Staff, Committee on Education and the Workforce, U.S. House of Representatives. FY 2005 Bush Budget: Shortchanging Education and Children AGAIN! Report, Washington, D.C.: February 2, 2004

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ *Alexander v. Sandoval* is the April 24, 2001 U. S. Supreme Court decision that held that there is no private right of action to enforce disparate-impact regulations promulgated under Title VI. pp. 3-17 of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The legislation's infrastructure promises to swamp and suffocate good, solid reforms at the local level that could do much more to level the playing field and close the achievement gap between rich and poor, white and children of color, than No Child Left Behind will do. For example, the carefully designed programs and physically limited space of several thriving "small schools" were overwhelmed when, responding to the NCLB mandate to allow students to transfer out of failing schools, New York City dumped students into thriving "small schools" without so much as providing the extra desks needed when a school's enrollment jumped from 250 to 315. The NYC Department of Education also scrapped its existing reading program in midyear and adopted a new federally approved one because NCLB would not reimburse the city for its existing program.

WARREN TOWNSHIP, Ind. -- Raymond Park Middle School lost its two arts teachers last year. Home economics was eliminated, along with most foreign-language classes and some physical education classes. The overwhelming priority these days is getting students to grade level in reading and math.

Instead of an art department, Raymond Park now has a computer wizard who, with a few clicks of a mouse, can produce charts of students lagging behind state and federal performance targets. An education consultant from Texas, preaching a business-driven model known as total quality management, has reorganized the curriculum into three-week chunks, each of which leads up to a test.

The changes at Raymond Park, a racially mixed school in a working-class suburb of Indianapolis, are symptomatic of an educational revolution symbolized and accelerated by President Bush's controversial No Child Left Behind initiative. An ever-increasing nationwide preoccupation with results and accountability is reaching down into the classroom, changing the way students are taught, and causing teachers and administrators to rethink the practices of a lifetime...¹⁹

Though some public school parents and their grassroots groups may be unengaged for the moment, as the law's mandates gradually gain footing, communities will need to pay increasing attention to NCLB. At minimum, superintendents and school systems will -- cynically or sincerely -- interpret community pressure for real change in the schools through the lens of the No Child Left Behind requirements. Organizing groups, therefore, need to understand the law and understand how to use it to frame and develop their campaigns. If grassroots groups can use NCLB to help their schools -- but not be used by it -- to erode public education, there could be a harvest of creative and substantive organizing blooming at the local level that advances the struggle for quality education for low-income children even in this era of No Child Left Behind. Our recent interaction with organizers around the country, however, suggests that No Child Left Behind is not yet central to how they think about their education justice work.

PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

Working from an initial list of 40 community organizations, between October and March, we engaged 29 organizers from 26 groups in extended conversations.¹² Our somewhat intuitive selection criteria identified groups which are (a) currently, if not exclusively, active around school related issues; (b) geographically dispersed; and (c) diverse in terms of constituency, organizing methods, and network affiliation, if any. (See box summarizing organizations.) We wanted to speak with some groups that are actively engaged with education justice but are still seeking the most effective handle for leveraging improvement in the local quality of education.

BASE AND SCOPE OF PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS		
	% N	# Groups
Constituencies N=25		
Parents	92	23
Other community residents/neighbors	76	19
High school students	56	14
Congregations	52	13
Other community and advocacy organizations	36	9
Other institutions	27	7
Two or more of the above	92	23

¹² One conversation was incomplete, so many of our comparisons are based on N = 25. Where appropriate, calculations use the number of interviews recording an answer to the particular questions being discussed.

BASE AND SCOPE OF PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS		
	% N	# Groups
Unit of membership N=25		
Individuals and families	64	16
Blocks and neighborhoods	20	5
Congregations	44	11
Community-based NPOs and advocacy organizations	36	9
Individuals and families as well as one other unit	32	8
Organizational scope N=24		
Individual school	25	6
Individual neighborhood	34	8
District wide	42	10
Citywide	29	7
Statewide	8	2
Two or more of above*	21	5
* Three of these organizations reported that the base and organization of their groups is both individual school and district wide; one group reported that it works with an individual school and an individual neighborhood as well as district wide; and one group maintained that it is all of the above.		

This table and the following one on race and culture of membership indicate that the groups we interviewed represent diverse ethnic/racial, geographic, and functional constituencies and frequently operate at more than one policy level, described as organizational scope in the table above. The data reinforce a finding of the Cross City Campaign Indicators Project which showed that groups have to be working at multiple levels to be successful. Community organizations must work at the local school level to serve the needs of their membership base.¹³ Since no individual school is the *source* of our educational crisis, however, groups fighting for school reform also have to operate at a higher level (e.g., district or state) to have the systemic impact they desire. The federal policy level is increasingly relevant as NCLB ratchets up the degree of federal oversight at the local school building and classroom level to an historic high.

That only 14 percent (three groups) claim majority African American membership probably reflects a shortcoming in our selection process but also may hint at the rapidly growing role of various Latino communities in urban school politics. Organizing around public school quality seems to draw large numbers of new and first-generation immigrants, particularly Hispanics, in to their local community organizations. Many of the organizations we talk

¹³ Gold, E., Simon, E. with Brown, C. *Strong Neighborhoods, Strong Schools: The Indicators Project on Education Organizing*. Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform, Chicago, IL, 2002.
<http://www.crosscity.org/pdfs/StrNbrhdsStrSchls.pdf>

and work with have identified a significant demographic shift within their constituency as the organization began to move on education issues.

The following table, based on very rough estimates from our respondents, shows the percentage of organizations with members from different subgroups and the concentration of those subgroups. For example, only one organization (five percent) had no Latino members. Over 40 percent of the groups had membership that was between a quarter and half African American.

MEMBERSHIP BY RACE AND CULTURAL GROUPS N=22							
Percent of membership from group.	Percent organizations by range and by category. (1 org. = 4.5%)						
	African American	Afro-Caribbean*	Latino**	E. Asian	S. Asian	Middle Eastern	White
75-100%	9%	0%	18%	0%	0%	0%	0%
50-74.9%	5%	0%	23%	0%	0%	0%	9%
25-49.9%	41%	5%	36%	0%	5%	0%	23%
1-24.9%	27%	0%	18%	23%	14%	9%	50%
0	18%	95%	5%	77%	81%	91%	18%
* We concluded that Afro Caribbean was not a common point of reference outside of the New York City and Miami.							
** We were unsuccessful in tracking major sub categories (Puerto Rican, Dominican, Mexican, Mexican American, Central, and South American) although these distinctions are politically interesting in cities where we interviewed.							

About half (48 percent) of the surveyed groups include youth in their leadership structure. None of the participating organizations focuses exclusively on youth development, so this level of formal recognition for younger members is potentially a very strong development given that even a few years ago this would not have been the case. Making room for young people in the leadership, rather than relegating them to a role as shock troops for the big actions, opens up a new constituency with whom community organizations can work and from which they can recruit a new group of leaders for present and future campaigns and organizational responsibilities.

We did not probe for changes in organizational culture related to either the participation of youth or immigrants, but experience suggests that there are bound to be shifts and, sometimes, tensions in the groups' equilibrium. An unresolved question is whether these shifts in constituency will affect the specific direction that

education organizing takes as in recent youth advocacy around the DREAM legislation.¹⁴

Almost all of the community organizations in our survey are multi-issue groups and see working on a range of community problems as an important part of how their organizations function. Sixty percent of the groups said they spend half or almost half of their time, money, staff, etc. on education organizing campaigns. With so many issues to work on in low- and moderate-income communities, these community groups are devoting a high level of resources to education justice issues.

THE CONVERSATIONS

We began by asking organizers, “What was the first education campaign you worked on and why?”

Earlier studies in which we have been involved suggested that some groups -- particularly ones not connected to tight networks where research, issues, and useful handles are efficiently shared -- have difficulty making the leap from physical and political concerns (facilities, safety, money) to confronting what actually happens in the classroom in terms of quality of instruction. In this particular set of organizations, however, a little more than half the groups (n=25) *started* their education organizing work with campaigns aimed at improving the quality of education. Moreover, as we will report below, 92 percent now include such issues in their active portfolio of campaigns. While we would not draw too many conclusions from one set of interviews, we hope the tendency of some groups to jump straight to what happens in the classroom at least hints at an evolution in how groups are now approaching schools organizing.

In total, 16 of these 22 organizations began their education organizing work with campaigns that directly relate to the quality of instruction children are receiving in their classroom. Nine organizations focused their first education organizing campaign on

¹⁴ “**Racine** - On the day that President Bush is to speak at Concordia University in Mequon, a group plans to hold a mock graduation to urge Bush to give illegal immigrants colleges and universities. If enacted, the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act would eliminate a federal provision that discourages states from providing in-state tuition without regard to immigration status. It would also permit some students who have grown up in the U.S. to apply for temporary legal status and eventually get permanent status to become eligible for citizenship under certain conditions.” Lalwani, S. *Break Sought for Illegal Immigrants*. *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, May 13, 2004. <http://www.jsonline.com/news/racine/may04/229310.asp>

instructional issues. Three of the nine fought for implementing a specific reading curriculum. Others focused on other reading programs, dual language instruction, professional development for teachers, and other strategies aimed at increasing the quality of instruction.

Three organizations undertook specific campaigns to address overcrowding. These campaigns worked to reduce school and class size.

Quality of school staff was the focus of four groups' initial education-related campaigns. Two of these focused their early organizing on removing racist administrators. The other two organizations began with teacher vacancies and substitutes.

The emphasis of many groups on problems directly related to quality of instruction does not foreclose other points of access to education justice issues. Where children go to school, the condition of their school buildings, the funding available to their schools, and a variety of other circumstances all impinge on their educational experience. When presented with the list of potential issues discussed below, organizers identify all these factors and many others as issues that have followed their groups' initial efforts.

Three organizations began their school organizing fighting for improvements to current existing school facilities and won repairs to roofs, windows, and buildings. Three more worked on school funding: one participated in a statewide funding equalization campaign, another on retaining Title I funding in a school, and the third on promoting a school bond issue. Two groups worked the issue of school suspensions and related this work to issues of race and class. Members of one group worked on school safety and a drug den located near their neighborhood school.

These results suggest that the adage that "community organizing starts where people are at" is true. The diversity of these campaigns shows that, rather than taking a monolithic approach to how they get into the work, the community organizations initially addressed issues that concerned their membership. It also shows that community organizations take on tough issues, such as quality of instruction, with steep learning curves even when their campaigns do not result in the more immediate "stop sign" type wins for which organizers look when entering new geographic or issue "turf."

We then read respondents a list of possible campaigns, grouped under various headings and asked them to identify any on which their organizations were currently working or had worked on in the past six months.

Table 3 summarizes the breadth of the work of these groups have recently undertaken within broad groupings of issues.¹⁵ (Exhibit B in the Appendix details the specific issues included under these headings.) The smallest portion of groups (84 percent) is working on campaigns related to facilities. As we mentioned above, the most groups are confronting issues of educational quality; 92 percent are also organizing around issues related to governance and parent involvement. But, the spread is relatively tight – just eight points.

SUMMARY OF CAMPAIGN TYPES.*	N=25	Yes
Quality of instruction and accountability	23	92%
Governance, parent involvement	23	92%
Equity, fairness, adequacy	22	88%
School Environment/Quality of School Life	22	88%
Facilities, capital budget	21	84%
Other types of campaigns	3	12%
* See appendix for issues categorized under each heading.		

The 92 percent now working on campaigns related to *quality of instruction* is based on an even narrower range of issues than we used to describe initial school related campaigns. In this category, 64 percent said were working on general campaigns related to the No Child Left Behind Act.¹⁶ Next highest, 60 percent of the organizations are organizing around more specific issues related to professional development for teachers. Campaigning for reading curricula drew the least support at 24 percent.

¹⁵ All percentages at both the “type of campaign” level and “sub-type” levels are based on n = 25.

¹⁶ Note that we asked this question *before* we focused on NCLB in concrete and detailed terms.

Most groups (another 92 percent) also pursue campaigns under the broad heading of *governance, parent involvement*, a finding pointing to ongoing interest by community organizations in the workings and governance of local schools in their communities. Within the governance category, about three quarters (76 percent) of all responding groups (N=25) are working on issues related to school leadership teams and committees. Nearly a quarter of the organizations (24 percent, the smallest percentage under this heading) are working on special education committees. (Given that only one organization we interviewed has an explicit priority of organizing around the issues of students with special needs, this number might be read as being surprisingly high.)

A high percentage of groups (88 percent) is also working on *equity problems*, many of which are especially related to racism. Under that broad category, the highest percentage (64 percent) of interviewed groups has campaigns addressing discipline, lock down, and police problems in the schools. The smallest portion of the groups (12 percent) works on racism within the student body, but 40 percent organizes against racism exhibited by school staff. In addition, 60 percent are working to fight budget cuts (perhaps a sign of the times) while almost a third of the groups are conducting campaigns related to textbooks.

Eighty-eight percent are also working on *school environment/quality of school life*. Undesirable people and activity (e.g., pushers and drugs) are a priority for the most groups in this category (44 percent) and gangs in the schools for the fewest (24 percent). In between are campaigns dealing with building conditions (e.g., asbestos), access to sports and physical education, and rest rooms, among others.

Within the category of *facilities, capital budget*, (84 percent of groups interviewed), class size was the most popular issue with nearly half the groups (48 percent) taking it on. Only one group (four percent) worked on science labs. Interestingly, six groups (24 percent) are working on issues related to computers and internet access and, when asked the question later in the inventory, eight groups reported that they are working on educational tools: labs, libraries, computers, internet access.

In sum, well over four fifths of the groups are dealing with issues in every major category we defined. We would suggest that this batch of organizations, at least, takes on issues across a wide front that encompasses both quality of classroom instruction and less systemic issues of pressing local concern. This convergence also speaks to the need for leaders, staff, and members to be well versed

on multiple issues and to be able to juggle a number of complex campaigns at any given time.

Clearly, many of the issues around which groups are currently organizing (e.g., teacher quality or parent engagement) are directly addressed by No Child Left Behind. For some issues, there are provisions within the federal law that communities can use. For other issues, NCLB contains parameters and embedded perspectives that, useful or not, may constrain the options of groups working on specific problems.

We asked people to outline the demands and timeline for their current or most recent campaigns.

Many groups mentioned more than one live issue and projected timelines stretching from two months to two years. Several framed their demands in terms of money, either stopping cuts or winning new funding for programs. Some organizations plan to address the achievement gap using data, specific instructional strategies, and new teacher training programs. No Child Left Behind was mentioned by some respondents as a focus of a campaign (compliance, improvement), as a tool (data source, a handle to leverage agreements from school officials), or as a leadership development opportunity (training, action research). This variety of ways in which organizers refer to NCLB combined with frequent comments that they and their members lack information to evaluate its local impact – or even relevance – suggests to us there is not yet a consensus on where NCLB fits into the lexicon of organizing, let alone onto any local time horizon. With or without consensus, however, groups will have to incorporate NCLB's erratic approach to time – twelve-year time lines for some goals, benchmarks for others that had not been met as of the moment the bill was signed – into their strategic and tactical planning.

What was your most recent public activity related to this campaign?

Almost all of the groups (18, N=23) responded that they had recently held some kind of public event or action about the issue(s) on which they were working. This is consistent with the Cross City Campaign Indicators Project¹⁷ theory of change model which identified public accountability, often demonstrated through public meetings, actions, and accountability sessions, as the way in which community organizations transform the process of organizing into

¹⁷ Gold, E. et al. 2002. Op. cit. <http://www.crosscity.org/pdfs/StrNbrhdsStrSchls.pdf>

the product of school reform. The size of these events ranged from as few as ten people to as many as 1,200. The groups confronted or negotiated with superintendents, local and state office holders, and district administrators. Other activities included letter writing campaigns, petition drives, committee or task force membership, and publication of reports and guides.

We read people a list of possible constituencies and asked them to tell us which, if any, they had worked with on their most recent campaigns.

Responses to this question highlight a couple of under tapped resources. A solid majority of groups reported working with both parents (80 percent) and teachers (84 percent) beyond their core membership. Interestingly, a much smaller number reported working with parent associations (44 percent) and teacher unions (26 percent). This may speak to the groups' desire to work with parents and teachers but also may indicate the difficulty they face when their outreach is mediated by structures already organized within the school (e.g., the officially sanctioned parents association) that often function as gatekeepers to these constituencies. Conversely, it may say something about groups' ability to work in coalition with other types of organizations.

The organizations also reported relatively low rates for working with businesses (44 percent), unions other than teachers unions (36 percent), and Local Education Funds (32 percent). These rates may represent a disconnect between these types of organizations and community groups but may also define an untapped pool of potential partners or financial support for community groups. (These data are also available in a table in the Appendix.)

Very briefly, what do you see as the highest priority education issue confronting your organization in the next six to 12 months?

We heard an assortment of responses to this question, but grassroots groups seemed to focus on variations of two issues: student achievement (teacher quality, instruction, etc.) and funding (facilities, overcrowding, etc.).

"Teacher quality and small schools."

"The next issue is around a predominantly Haitian high school that is restructuring in ways that appear to be very tracked, and lots of students not passing the FCAT - not getting diplomas."

“It was capital improvements, although *now* probably issues of equity and fairness in terms of what schools are getting in this neighborhood as opposed to other neighborhoods.”

“NCLB, with the shadow of vouchers hanging out there.”

Other priorities relate to organizational capacity, NCLB, program evaluation, high school restructuring, and small schools.

In four words or less, what is keeping your city from having public schools that do a good job for all the kids?

Of all the questions asked during the survey, this one might have been the most fun because of the effort participants made to keep their answers to four words; they actually average seven. By far the largest number of responses (16) related to the words money, funding, resources, and inequity. Respondents also mentioned [lack of] parent engagement/organizing, racism, leadership problems, teacher issues, school/class size, testing/accountability systems, politicians, and vision.

IN FOUR WORDS OR LESS <i>What keeps your city from having good public schools for all the kids?</i>
Bad funding formulas, lack of regional funding for schools, poor teacher quality especially at low-income schools, unevenness in instructional quality at schools, state funding cut backs
Colonial mentality, racism, lack of concerted leadership, management
District arrogance
Education funding and the fair distribution thereof, funding in itself is not the answer
Funding/equity, teacher accountability, political will
Lack of resources
Lack of funding/teachers
Lack of resources and staff development
(Four Words or Less, cont.)
Lack of vision and funding

Leadership, funding, community will
Mayor Bloomberg
Money, accountability, teacher quality
Money, parent engagement, go beyond a single test
Money, political organization to demand changes, constituency for reform
Money, resources, leadership
Republicans
Resource and power differentials based on race and class
Same Old Stuff: They don't believe they're going to have to change.
Lack of: leadership, vision, knowledge, will...followed by money
Teaching training, parent involvement, number of kids in schools (size of classroom, size of schools)
The government
Unequal distribution of resources
We need more money.

We asked groups what other support, in addition to money, they need to make the work around public schools more successful.

With only a couple exceptions, responses to this question fell into three categories.

- Capacity building, at 15 interviews, was far away the most frequently cited requirement.

Groups talked about needing specific technical assistance on NCLB, teacher quality, and campaign planning. They also said they needed access to education experts who could help them think through and plan education campaigns.

- Staffing.

Three organizations said they need more and more experienced staff.

- Collaborations.

Three respondents wanted to work in networks or collaborations to address education or funding issues.

NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

The 2002 No Child Left Behind reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act is sucking the air from any broader national debate over what to do about public education, especially in major urban centers. With a modest increase in school aid that state politicians and local school administrators frequently denounce as not covering the expense of new requirements, a significant increase in regulation, and a full court press of top administration officials marketing NCLB, it smothers the discussion with a tangle of mixed signals. Governors, state education officials, and national interest groups wage a non-stop war of attrition to reshape US DOE regs, generally to protect their budgets or their reputations.¹⁸ At the city level, school officials variously treat NCLB as the soon to melt away flavor of the week, a new rhetorical idiom to cut and paste as needed, and a draconian directive to pare the local educational program down to a reductionist version of literacy and numeracy that can be summarized in one economical standardized test.¹⁹

Important educational policy decisions -- the use of standardized testing, for example, or the definition of highly qualified teachers or the type of curricula that may be used -- are being relocated to state capitals and Washington. Meanwhile, parents continue to wonder why Ronald Reagan is the last president in their kids' history text, how many substitutes can rotate through one room in one year, and why their students bring home the same worksheets for three grades in a row.

We asked respondents about the impact of the legislation on their districts so far and what parents had to say about NCLB.

In terms of initial impact, about half of the 19 organizers who responded on this topic either did not know or felt that the legislation has had little or no impact to date and, in some cases, that implementation was in "disarray." Identifying process but not necessarily progress, more than a third suggested that there had been increased communication, sometimes related to controversy or relevant to organizing, between parents and school officials or among parents.

¹⁸ Ferrandino, V. and Tirozzi, N., Op. cit.; Viadero, D. Anniversary Brings Fresh Scrutiny of Federal School Law. *Education Week*, January 7, 2004.

¹⁹ Dobbs, M. 'No Child' Law Leaves Schools' Old Ways Behind. *Washington Post*, April 22, 2004, Page A01.

At least some organizers were, however, very aware of new types of NCLB-mandated data as a new element or potential tool; no one, however, raised the availability or lack of those data as an issue. Our guess is that the fact that access to NCLB mandated data is not yet an issue probably reflects the fact that groups have not yet sought access rather than that districts and individual schools are universally in compliance with key reporting (read: accountability) requirements of the law. When data are available, they do attract attention:

“[We liked] the required [school] report cards. Everybody at least sees them.”

“Revealing the dirty little secrets in supposedly high performing districts. [Information is available to] parents whose kids were [previously] largely ignored by districts because now their kids count all on their own.”

“Raising awareness that kids of color aren't doing very well.”

A few people identified increased emphasis on testing as the most obvious result of NCLB to date. As one organizer put it: NCLB has delivered “little to no impact in terms of improvement but has increased testing.”

In terms of current work, a very few made an explicit connection between NCLB and some very specific organizational priorities: a recreation center, Direct Instruction, school choice, and “new parent participation policy for the whole district that actually takes power away” from parents.

The organizers, who generally were quite open about how little they knew about NCLB and -- perhaps because of -- how little it intrudes on their actual organizing, felt that parents knew even less. They generally characterized the response of parents to the legislation in terms of lack of information, skepticism, and “confusion about what it means.” According to those surveyed, parents’ opinions on the topic, when they have any, tend to center on issues of money, accountability, and concerns over vouchers and charter schools. In the few places where NCLB-related district initiatives were mentioned, parents have found official attempts to publicize the legislation or specific programs such as supplementary services bewildering rather than informative. One person told us that “People talk about this and Iraq together,” presumably as examples of incomprehensible national policy.

We probed for how local teachers, principals, and district officials are dealing with No Child Left Behind...for what changes or problems, if any, might be connected to No Child Left Behind?

When we focused the discussion on the NCLB-related activity of local school people, respondents' perception of the program was even more negative. Fully half (10) of those who ventured an opinion described an NCLB implementation process that was inept, cynical, disconnected, or preoccupied with process rather than education.

"They don't know what it is. Nothing."

"Biggest reaction is trying to *appear* to be very responsive to NCLB."

"Administrators are scrambling to meet reporting requirements."

"Mostly they are blaming people: Congress for not giving them enough money, kids with special needs, poor kids for their test scores."

In addition, the few who could report actual impact were even more scathing:

"Our district has become even more of a fear-driven system, a punishment system..."

"The teachers...have to stop wonderful things they were doing to just do the test. They developed their own culture, etc. [Now, they] have to stop to teach to the test."

In spite of its rhetoric about high quality teaching, these interviews and our observations in cities where we work suggest that NCLB takes control and authority away from classroom teachers. The imposition of national policy that judges students and teachers based on standardized tests provided by the lowest bidding mega publisher challenges any notion of professionalism teachers might have. The bureaucratic gymnastics evident in the state-by-state definition of "highly qualified" suggest that for state and local administrators the priority of keeping teachers, any teachers, in urban classrooms trumps any consideration of the qualifications of those teachers. We do not minimize the problem of under-qualified teachers and low expectations to which too many teachers and principals hold our children. But, making teachers the

codefendants with the students for systemic failures must leave them defensive, if not resistant to the new law.

We asked organizers to describe the potential long-term impact of the Act on their local districts, predict its political downside, and share any strategies they have to address that impact.

Most of our respondents either could not venture any long-term impact or actively feel that there will, in fact, be no impact. As one put it: "So far, there's no more money and no better teachers."

The largest group (8) was concerned that NCLB would add pressure toward the dismantling and privatization of public schools through vouchers or "choice."

Four people were worried that the policy could assist President Bush's political fortunes or advance the agenda of the Republican Party, but two felt it might hurt Bush politically. An overlapping set of three optimists also defined the current situation as an organizing opportunity. In contrast, one person predicted:

It will further polarize schools that are more under funded, kids that are underserved. It is supposed to bring them up to the level. [However, there] are schools that are still in need of improvement but haven't made the list [for NCLB-mandated resources].

Four respondents felt the legislation would have a negative impact on the funding that is available to local public schools, often summarized under the shorthand of "unfunded mandates." From the glass is half-full perspective, another organizer thought that by adding to the crisis in our schools, NCLB "has kept funders at the table when they otherwise might have walked away from funding public education" related organizing.

Just five groups had even general strategies in mind for blunting the long-term impact of No Child Left Behind. Two are integrating information about and a critique of the legislation into their organizational issue framework and leadership development. The national organizing network to which one group belongs is exploring possible collaborations with a national advocacy network; another unaffiliated grassroots organization is having similar discussions with the local affiliate of the same advocacy network. And, leaders and staff from another are taking a wait and see attitude but "tracking the progress" of the NCLB implementation in their city.

We asked groups to consider the usefulness of various aspects of No Child Left Behind.

We culled through the No Child Left Behind Act to identify 17 components that might be of tactical or strategic interest to grassroots groups organizing around education justice issues. Respondents commented on whether their organization was likely to make use of a particular handle, would not make use of it, or might use it after receiving additional information. Note that we do not interpret these answers to mean that groups, in fact, are all currently using NCLB to frame their issues; rather, we assume that groups are already working on or want to move into issues to which these handles might provide an edge.

INTEREST IN HANDLES FROM NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND			
	Yes	No	If info*
Test results and progress toward state goals broken out by race and special needs status such as special education or English Language Learner? (n=23)	70% (16)	9% (2)	22% (5)
Requirement for highly qualified teachers? (n=23)	65% (15)	9% (2)	26% (6)
Special NCLB funding for professional development programs? (n=21)	65% (13)	10% (2)	30% (6)
Parent involvement in planning school-level parent involvement activities? (n=22)	64% (14)	23% (5)	14% (3)
Drop out data must be included in Annual Yearly Progress data? (n=24)	62% (15)	12% (3)	25% (6)
Right to funded tutoring or other remedial programming for kids in failing schools? (n=24)	62% (15)	17% (4)	21% (5)
Special NCLB funding for failing schools? (n=23)	60% (15)	4% (1)	28% (7)
Developing a school improvement plan? (n=22)	59% (13)	9% (2)	32% (7)
Parent access to qualifications of child's teacher? (n=22)	54% (12)	14% (3)	32% (7)
NCLB funds to expand counseling services at schools? (n=23)	43% (10)	30% (7)	27% (6)
Funding to help non-certified bilingual teachers meet "high quality" teacher definition? (n=23)	43% (10)	13% (3)	43% (10)
Parent right to transfer kids from failing school to better school? (n=22)	41% (9)	41% (9)	18% (4)
Parent right to transfer child from dangerous school? (n=24)	38% (9)	45% (10)	21% (5)
Requires schools to share student contact info with military recruiters? (n=22)	36% (8)	36% (8)	27% (6)
NCLB funding to create small schools within large schools? (n=23)	35% (8)	17% (4)	48% (11)
For Title I students, transportation to better or safer school or remedial programming? (n=22)	32% (7)	45% (10)	23% (5)
NCLB funds to organize or equip charter schools? (n=22)	9% (2)	64% (14)	27% (6)

* Indicates probably interest if more information were available.

Solid majorities of the organizers we interviewed (54-70 percent) identified nine options as being ones their groups were likely to use. Another tier of three options each had combined Yes and "If info" ratings of at least 70 percent.

These dozen components could provide the scaffolding for two distinct strategic approaches to local school reform, approaches that we intend to explore in our follow-up activities with local groups. The first would emphasize the accountability features of

the legislation to build public pressure to force local officials to maximize various funding options of No Child Left Behind. In this construction, the NCLB handles would sort out as follows:

Accountability:

- Parent access to teacher qualifications.
- Requirement for highly qualified teachers.
- Test results and NCLB-mandated Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) figures disaggregated by race and other student characteristics.
- Drop out data included in AYP.
- Development of school improvement plan.
- Parent involvement in planning school level parent involvement activities.²⁰

Funding and other resources:

- NCLB funding for professional development.
- NCLB funding for failing schools.
- Tutoring for students in failing schools.
- Tier Two: NCLB funding for non-certified bilingual teachers to meet definition of high quality teacher.
- Tier Two: NCLB funding to create small schools within large schools.
- Tier Two: NCLB funding to expand counseling services at schools.

The second non-exclusive strategy would use many of the same elements of NCLB to claim federal support and build legitimacy for major initiatives that home in on quality of instruction:

- Parent access to teacher qualifications.
- Requirement for highly qualified teachers.
- Development of school improvement plan.
- NCLB funding for professional development.
- Tutoring for students in failing schools.
- Level Two: NCLB funding for non-certified bilingual teachers to meet the definition of a high quality teacher.

This latter formulation is consistent with our sense that – in this cross section at least – more groups are interested in taking on quality of instruction than might have been the case even a few years ago.

²⁰ The law apparently requires parents to be involved in planning, but does not actually require any parent involvement. U.S. Department of Education, Stronger Accountability Questions and Answers on No Child Left Behind.
<http://www.ed.gov/nclb/accountability/schools/accountability.html#2>

We asked organizers what they thought their groups could do to help turn No Child Left Behind into a “national policy that would actually help big city schools.”

Some groups (8) were interested in linking their local experience to a national network of people thinking about the organizing implications of NCLB. There are organizations (7) that want to push parent and community voices into the forefront of the debate about school reform. A third theme is the desire to highlight the perceived hypocrisy of NCLB because it does not come with full funding (5).²¹ A grouplet of two organizations sees a need to highlight successful models of education organizing.

We then raised a number of specific ways grassroots organizations might begin a larger conversation around NCLB, its national implications, and its relevance to their local work. Although clear majorities said that each of several possible scenarios would be “useful,” the size of those majorities ranged widely from 60 percent to as high as 92 percent. (See Table Y in appendix, include maybe in table.)

Almost everyone was interested in meeting other organizers and leaders who are working on education justice issues and, in particular, in trying to use the organizing handles in No Child Left Behind. In contrast, only 60 percent wanted to listen to presentations or panels about real campaigns or receive technical assistance for the organizing dimension of local campaigns. However, 80 percent thought TA around policy analysis and research would be useful. A very few wanted a presentation on NCLB from a “knowledgeable policy wonk.”

One way to think about this range is that organizers do not want to be lectured about organizing by other organizers or so called experts, but that they are hungry for a genuine exchange with their peers and an opportunity to relate their local work to political themes only sketchily addressed in the overworked, under resourced daily rush of organizing.

²¹ Schemo, D.J. Kennedy Demands Full Funding for School Bill. *New York Times*, April 7, 2004.

SUMMARY AND OBSERVATIONS

After two years of NCLB, the fundamental question is: Have classroom teaching and instruction fundamentally changed for the better because of No Child Left Behind? Based on these conversations, the answer appears to be no.

The paradigm we share with most of the people we interviewed shapes our interpretation of what we heard: Public policy is the product of political and economic power and the distribution of that power. The primary source of power available to low-income people is rooted in their numbers and their ability to inject their numbers one way or another into the decision-making process. In the United States, organized communities most often invoke the power of their numbers through electoral clout (implied more often than applied) and mobilization (both actual and threatened). The success of the various ways groups employ these strategies defines the level of public accountability to which they can hold policymakers at any given time.

School-reform organizing is becoming a staple for multi-issue organizations. The grassroots organizations in this study devote significant portions, though usually not all, of their resources to education justice issues.

We approached these conversations with an expectation based on earlier projects that groups progress over time from concrete community grievances related to safety or condition of facilities (i.e., “stop signs”) to the teaching and learning that are not happening in the classroom. Now, we find that, compared to even the recent past, many groups leap into and even begin with school-related campaigns that directly target instructional quality.

Despite the supposed relevance of No Child Left Behind to school reform, the connection between the legislation and the work on the street is still vague and variable:

- While organizers and community leaders are conscious of No Child Left Behind as a national policy issue, they frequently do not yet see it as relevant to solving problems they and their neighbors are addressing in local schools.

In some cases, to the degree it is on their radar at all, they see NCLB as a potential complication. The first challenge is how to use NCLB without being swallowed up by it. In addition, the notion that NCLB might be vulnerable to the power even a very successful

neighborhood organization might unleash is also not intuitive to most organizers.

- Grassroots organizations are, nevertheless, the entities that represent the most heavily invested but individually least powerful stakeholders in the public education equation: children, their parents, and their neighbors who believe that healthy communities require high quality public schools.

Many of the people with whom we spoke do have an evolving understanding that taking on or taking over No Child Left Behind might be in their organizations' self-interest. But, either option injects them into arenas where they might not be ready to go. Using NCLB *strategically* requires more information, analysis, and synthesis than many individual grassroots organizations have time or other resources to generate.

- Despite skepticism about the relevance of No Child Left Behind to the day-to-day organizing agenda of some groups, there is significant interest in learning about, thinking about, and understanding this law and its effect on organizing work at the local, state, and federal levels.

Almost everyone we interviewed was interested in meeting with her peers, sharing stories about his work, or engaging in activities to plan for common action. Seventeen people expressed interest in “swapping emails and participating in conference calls to plan the agenda for such an event.” That is, very busy people were willing to put in some time to plan such an exchange with their colleagues. Groups which mostly are not part of the larger “senior” networks in the organizing world and generally go it alone are enthusiastic about exploring what to do about No Child Left Behind. Their collective interest is a development that calls for attention both from groups like ours that exist to support education justice issues as well as from funders concerned with the intersection of policy, school reform, and community organizing.

- Community groups generally relate to teachers as organized stakeholders less than they do to almost any other constituency.

Grassroots organizations have yet to develop consistent, successful relationships with organized teachers. The inescapable reality is that, while teachers have little control over policy and resource decisions, they have close to absolute control over whether adequately supported reform measures are implemented in the classroom. If community organizations really want to address the quality of what goes on in the classroom, they will have to develop new ways of working with organized teachers.

Given what we have learned from our conversations with community organizations around the country, we plan to reflect more deeply on ways in which our three organizations can broker and nurture a new set of connections – and conversations – that will produce useful frameworks for understanding and strategies for combating the highly problematic forces embedded in our newest national education strategy. Together, our centers constitute a major repository of organizing and campaign experience; skill sets for policy and data analysis, research, strategic planning, advocacy, and leadership development; and significant social capital within community organizing and school reform communities. The working partnership of our organizations can play a convening role in bringing a diverse set of community organizations together to think about NCLB and design new, perhaps collaborative strategies as well as actions to advance them in the near future.

Those who designed, passed, and signed No Child Left Behind excluded low-income families from any of the fundamental decisions implemented by the act. Whether cooperation by community organizations in different places with different contexts can transform No Child Left Behind into something that truly improves public schools serving low-income children may be the wrong question.

As one respondent said:

We see this as being part of a larger plan...the only way the direction can be changed is by the people who are directly involved being aware of what is going on and having the knowledge and skills to do something about it locally and nationally. [The Administration's agenda is] to not have to deal with equity, to reduce the role of government in the lives of people, [to have] a government that only has a Treasury and a War Department. The problems of equity really come into play when everything has to be local. [NCLB promotes] an abandonment of any pretense of a civil society. Getting rid of the idea of schools as places where people come together and learn to work together clears the way for the rest of the agenda.

The real questions may be: Can these organizations and others like them come up with ways to preserve and improve public education in spite of No Child Left Behind and what should we do to help them?

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Additional Notes on Survey and Participants

We used a semi-structured interview with lists of formal yes/no items followed by open-ended questions. This technique allowed us to follow leads while collecting answers to a set of standard questions. With these tools, we assembled comparable information from the groups about their education justice organizing, their grasp of and involvement with No Child Left Behind, and the interest in connecting their NCLB and other school reform work to what is happening in other parts of the country. We generally spoke with executive directors or lead organizers with specific responsibilities for staffing out school-related issues. At least three interviews included pairs of either co-directors or leader and organizer. The basic unit of analysis is the interview, regardless of whether one or two people represented an organization in the interview.

The following table lists in alphabetical order the organizations that participated in this survey. The table include additional details about network affiliation, if any; organizing model; scope of education justice organizing; and core constituency.

Characteristics of Participating Organizations						
<i>Full Name</i>	<i>Short</i>	<i>Network</i>	<i>Region</i>	<i>Model</i>	<i>Scope</i>	<i>Constituency</i>
Albany Park Neighborhood Council	APNC	NTIC/NPA	Midwest	Institution Based	Neighborhood	Parents/Students
Blocks Together	BT	NTIC/NPA	Midwest	Individual member	Neighborhood	Parents/Students
Brighton Park Neighborhood Council	BPNC	NTIC/NPA	Mid-West	Faith-based	Neighborhood	Parents/Students
Building Responsibility, Equality, and Dignity	BREAD	DART	Mid-West	Faith-based	Citywide/School District	Parents
Center for Immigrant Families	CIF	Unaffiliated	North East	Individual member	Neighborhood	Parents
Cleveland ACORN	OH ACORN	ACORN	Midwest	Individual member	Citywide/School District	Parents
Coalition for Educational Justice	CEJ	Unaffiliated	West	Individual member	Citywide/School District	Parents/Students/Teachers
DC Voice	DC Voice	Unaffiliated	North East	Other	Citywide/School District	Parents/Teachers
Eastern Pennsylvania Organizing Project	EPOP	PICO	North East	Institution Based	Citywide/School District	Parents/Students
Interchurch Coalition for Action, Reconciliation and Empowerment	ICARE	DART	South	Institutions	Citywide/School District	Parents
Metropolitan Organizations for People	MOP	PICO	West	Institution Based	Citywide/School District/Region	Parents/Students

Michigan Organizing Project – Grand Rapids	MOP-GR	DART & NTIC	Midwest	Institution Based	Citywide/School District	Parents
Milwaukee Catalyst		Unaffiliated	Midwest	Other	Citywide/School District	Parents
Milwaukee Inner-city Congregations Allied for Hope	MICAH	Gamaliel	Midwest	Faith-based	Citywide/School District	Parents
Mothers on the Move	MOM	Unaffiliated	Northeast	Individual member	Neighborhood	Parents
Northwest Bronx Community Clergy Coalition	NWBCCC	NTIC/NPA	Northeast	Individual member	Neighborhood	Parents/Students
Northwest Neighborhood Federation	NNF	NTIC/NPA	Midwest	Individual member	Neighborhood	Parents
Padres Unidos	PU	Unaffiliated	West	Individual member	Neighborhood	Parents/Students
Parents in Action	PIA	Unaffiliated	South	Individual member	Neighborhood	Parents
Parents Organized for Westside Renewal	POWER	Institutional member of IAF	West	Individual member	Neighborhood	Parents
People Acting for Community Together	PACT	DART	South	Faith-based	Citywide/School District	Parents
Philadelphia ACORN	PA ACORN	ACORN	Northeast	Individual member	Citywide/School District/ State	Parents
Portland Schools Alliance	PSA	Institutional member of IAF	Northwest	Institution Based	Citywide/School District	Parents
Statewide Parent Advocacy Network	SPAN	Unaffiliated	Northeast	Other	Statewide	Parents
Tenants and Workers Support Committee	TWSC	Unaffiliated	Northeast	Individual member	Citywide/School District	Parents/Students
The Metropolitan Organization	TMO	IAF	South	Institution Based	Citywide/School District	Parents

Appendix B: School-related Issues Within Six Months of Interview

TYPE OF CAMPAIGN	N=25	YES
Quality of instruction and accountability	23	92%
No Child Left Behind issues	16	64%
professional development for teachers	15	60%
test scores	12	48%
high stakes or gatekeeper tests, e.g., single graduation exam	11	44%
teacher experience	9	36%
teacher certification	8	32%
educational tools: labs, libraries, computers, internet access	8	32%
reading curriculum; e.g., Direct Instruction, Success for All: pro/con	6	24%
other specific curriculum issues such as:	4	16%
tracking and ability grouping	7	28%
other:	3	12%
Governance, parent involvement	23	92%
school leadership team, PA/PTA, school based budgeting	19	76%
fighting budget cuts*	15	60%
school-community relations (If yes, what?)	15	60%
principal selection	13	52%
parent involvement in classroom (If yes, what?)	13	52%
right to know	12	48%
Title I budget and Title I committee	10	40%
school board election	9	36%
other parent involvement; for example:	8	32%
special education committees	6	24%
other:	3	12%
Equity, fairness, adequacy	22	88%
discipline, lock down, police problems*	16	64%
distribution of programming and resources	14	56%
racism, school employees versus students or parents*	10	40%
text books	8	32%
bullying, sexual harassment*	6	24%
equity issues in sports program; e.g., for girls*	4	16%
racism, within student body*	3	12%
other:	3	12%
School Environment/Quality of Life	22	88%
drugs, gangs, older kids around school, dealers around the playground	11	44%

TYPE OF CAMPAIGN	N=25	YES
building maint. and safety: asbestos, ceilings, leaks, windows, heat	10	40%
access to sports programs and physical education	9	36%
traffic safety, speeding, crossing guards	8	32%
rest rooms	8	32%
other:	7	28%
gangs in school	6	24%
Facilities, capital budget	21	84%
class size	12	48%
new buildings for new school	10	40%
new buildings for existing school	10	40%
playground equipment, maintenance	10	40%
space for new school	8	32%
small schools, academies, schools within schools	8	32%
school size	6	24%
computers, internet access, etc,	6	24%
other:	3	12%
science labs	1	4%
Other types of campaigns	3	12%

This table analyzes the data in a format that differs from the way we originally collected it. (See interview instrument.) On our first cut at analyzing the data, we were surprised by the comparatively lower priority given to issues addressing race and racism: 74 percent of the groups identified issues in the “equity, fairness, adequacy category.” Upon reflection, we determined that this figure was at least partly an artifact of our instrument, which provided substantially fewer prompts in this category than in other categories and, hence, fewer opportunities for groups to categorize issues they may have actually pursued from an equity or race cut perspective. For our final analysis, therefore, we recoded a number of items as being more appropriate for the “equity” family of priorities. These issues, identified in this table with asterisks, were initially mostly in the “environment/quality of life category.” We also recoded “fighting budget cuts” by moving it from the equity group to the “governance, parental involvement” category.

Appendix C: Interview Instrument

Community Organizing/No Child Left Behind Survey

Hello, my name is _____ and I'm with _____. I'm working in partnership with the Center for Community Change, Fordham University's National Office of Schools and Community and the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform. Have you heard of any of our groups? Yes___ No___

[If not: We provide various sorts of organizing, research, and policy analysis assistance to grass roots organizations that are organizing for better public schools. The Center for Community Change is based in Washington, the National Center for Schools and Communities is in New York City, and Cross Cities is in Chicago, but we all work with a variety of groups throughout the United States.]

We are interviewing 30 to 40 groups around the country to get a better understanding of your organizations' work around education issues, to find out how federal legislation relates to that work, and to explore ways in which we might work together in the future.

We will summarize responses in a brief report, which you will receive. You will not be mentioned by name in the report or directly connected to your comments. We think this survey will take about 30 minutes.

Part A. First, we would like to ask you six sets of questions about your current school related organizing.

1. What was the first education campaign you worked on and why?

2. As I read you a list of possible campaigns, please tell me which ones your organization is currently working on or has worked on within the past six months.

Type of campaign	Yes
School Environment/Quality of Life	
traffic safety, speeding, crossing guards	
rest rooms	
building maint. and safety: asbestos, ceilings, leaks, windows, heat	
drugs, gangs, older kids around school, dealers around the playground	
gangs in school	
bullying, sexual harassment	
discipline, lock down, police problems	
racism, within student body	
racism, school employees versus students or parents	
access to sports programs and physical education	
equity issues in sports program; e.g., for girls.	
other:	

Governance, parent involvement	
school leadership team, PA/PTA, school based budgeting	
other parent involvement; for example:	
Title I budget and Title I committee	
special education committees	
school board election	
principal selection	
parent involvement in classroom (If yes, what?)	
right to know	
school-community relations (If yes, what?)	
other:	
Facilities, capital budget	
new buildings for new school	
new buildings for existing school	
space for new school	
playground equipment, maintenance	
class size	
school size	
small schools, academies, schools within schools	
science labs	
computers, internet access, etc,	
other:	
Equity, fairness, adequacy	
distribution of programming and resources	
fighting budget cuts	
text books	
other:	
Quality of instruction and accountability	
teacher certification	
teacher experience	
professional development for teachers	
reading curriculum; e.g., Direct Instruction, Success for All: pro? con?	
other specific curriculum issues such as:	
educational tools: labs, libraries, computers, internet access	
test scores	
high stakes or gatekeeper tests, e.g., single graduation exam	
No Child Left Behind issues	
tracking and ability grouping	
other:	
Other types of campaigns:	

3. What are the demands for your current or most recent campaign? What's your timeline?
4. What was your most recent public activity related to this campaign?
5. Which of the following membership units describes the members of your organization:
 - () Individuals and families.
 - () Blocks and neighborhoods.
 - () Congregations.
 - () Community-based non-profits and advocacy organizations.

6. I am going to read you a list of possible constituencies. Please tell me which, if any, you have worked with on your most recent campaign. (Probe for institutional versus individual participation; formal agreements/MOUs versus informal; program versus political relationship; negative as well as positive relations [?].)

	Ind.	Inst.	Prog.	Oppos.
Other parents beyond your membership or core participants?				
Parent and Parent-Teacher Associations?				
Students?				
Teachers union?				
Teachers?				
Principals?				
Neighborhoods?				
Other community organizations?				
Congregations?				
Colleges or Universities				
Other unions?				
Businesses, large corporations, business organizations (e.g., C of C)				
Social service agencies?				
District officials or school board members?				
Foundations, other ngo funders?				
Local Education Fund (PEN affiliate)?				
Elected officials?				
Other:				
Other:				

7. In terms of organizational resources, would you say this campaign is taking/took up about a quarter___, about half___, about three quarters___, or almost all___ of your group's

organizing efforts? (Time, budget, staff, leadership; mix will vary)

8. Very briefly, what do you see as the highest priority education issue confronting your organization in the next six to 12 months?

PART B. No Child Left Behind.

Now, I'd like to get a bit more specific about No Child Left Behind Act with four sets of questions. As you probably know, this is the Bush administration's version of the latest Elementary and Secondary Education Act. It contains a number of handles or hooks that parent and community groups around the country are using to raise questions and demands about the operation of their local public schools.

9. What has been the biggest impact of NCLB on your district so far?

10. What are you hearing from your members about NCLB?

11. As I read the following list of provisions in the No Child Left Behind legislation and regulations, for each item, please tell me if your organization will probably make use of it, probably will not make use of it, or might use it if you had additional information. Stop me if something isn't clear.

	Yes	No	If info
Parent access to qualifications of child's teacher?			
Requirement for highly qualified teachers? ¹			
Special NCLB funding for professional development programs?			
Funding to help non-certified bilingual teachers meet "high quality" teacher definition?			
Test results and progress toward state goals broken out by race and special needs status such as special education or English Language Learner?			
Drop out data must be included in Annual Yearly Progress data?			
Parent involvement in planning school-level parent involvement activities?			
Developing a school improvement plan?			
Parent right to transfer kids from failing school to better school?			
Parent right to transfer child from dangerous school?			
Right to funded tutoring or other remedial programming for kids in failing schools?			
For Title I students, transportation to better or safer? school or remedial programming?			
Special NCLB funding for failing schools?			
NCLB funding to create small schools within large schools?			
NCLB funds to organize or equip charter schools?			
NCLB funds to expand counseling services at schools?			
NCLB requires schools to share student contact info with military recruiters?			

12. How are local teachers, principals, and district officials dealing with No Child Left Behind? What changes or problems, if any, have you or your members noticed recently that you think are connected to No Child Left Behind?

13. In the broader view, what do you think the long-term impact of NCLB will be on X district schools.

14. Do you think there is any long term or political downside to No Child Left Behind?
___Yes ___No (If yes, probe for what.)

15. Are you developing a strategy to deal with the problem you just raised?
___Yes ___No
(If yes, probe for what.)

16. (If no) Are there any other groups that are? ___Yes ___No (If yes, names?)

PART C. RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Thank you for your patience; we are almost done. I want to ask you a few more questions about your organization and what you might need to strengthen your education-related organizing.

17. In four words or less, what is keeping [CITY] from having public schools that do a good job for all the kids?

18. In addition to money, what additional support does your organization need to make your work around public schools more successful?

19. How would you use [whatever]?

20. What role could your organization play in turning NCLB into a national policy that would actually help big city schools?

21. A few organizations have begun to discuss the possibility of coming together to explore how to use/hijack/co-opt No Child Left Behind and use it for real reform in big city schools. If your group participated in such a meeting, which of the following activities would you find useful:

- () Opportunity to meet other organizers and leaders working on education justice issues?
- () Opportunity to meet other organizers and leaders trying to use the handles in NCLB?
- () National overview on NCLB from knowledgeable policy wonks?
- () Organizing TA for local campaigns?
- () Policy analysis and research TA for local campaigns?
- () Exploration of joint campaigns to begin spotlighting the contradictions in NCLB?
- () Exploration of joint efforts to define the debate when NCLB comes up for reauthorization in 2006-7?
- () Presentations or panels by organizers and leaders about real campaigns?

22. Would you or someone from your organization be likely to participate in such a meeting?
Yes___ No___ (If not you, who?_____, position: _____)

23. Would you be interested in swapping emails and participating in one or two conference calls to plan the agenda for such an event? Yes___ No___

Just few specifics about your organization and we're done. We want to make sure we are comparing apples and apples and so forth.

24. Would you say the scope of your organization is primarily

- Individual school.
- Individual neighborhood.
- District wide.
- Citywide.
- Statewide.

25. Which of the following groups do you organize?

- Parents
- Other community members/neighbors
- High School Students/Youth
- Congregations (If yes, how many_____)
- Other community and advocacy organizations
- Other institutions:_____

26. About how many people would you say are in your core leadership?_____

27. About how many members or core participants do you have?_____

28. Does your leadership structure include high school students? Yes___ No___

29. Very roughly, what is the racial breakdown of your membership or core of participants?

- ___% African American
- ___% Afro Caribbean
- ___% Hispanic (primarily PR, Dom, Mx, other? [circle])
- ___% East Asian
- ___% South Asian
- ___% Middle Eastern
- ___% White
- ___% Other (primarily: _____)

30. Do you have children or grandchildren in public schools? Yes___ #___ No___

31. Confirm address:
32. Confirm phone:
33. Email:

Appendix D: References

Alpert, P. "Feds cut teachers some slack on professional qualifications," *Times-Picayune*, March 16, 2004.

American Federation of teachers "AFT to Congress: Address NCLB Problems if Education Department Takes No Action," Press Release, February 9, 2004.

American Federation of Teachers, "AFT Finds Most States Lagging in Support for Teacher Aides Report shows little progress in meeting No Child Left Behind deadline," Press Release, January 8, 2004

Democratic Staff, Committee on Education and the Workforce, U.S. House of Representatives, "FY 2005 Bush Budget: Shortchanging Education and Children AGAIN!" Report, Washington, D.C. February 2, 2004

Feldman, S. "AFT to Congress: Address NCLB Problems if Education Department Takes No Action" American Federation of Teachers: Washington, D.C. February 9, 2004

Ferrandino, V. and Tirozzi, N. "Improving NCLB" Principals' Perspective, March 15, 2004.

Gewertz, C. "Urban students show reading, math gains on state assessments." Education Week, March 31, 2004.

Ghezzi, P. "Slow start for federal 'No Child' law Red tape hinders education effort," The Atlanta Journal - Constitution. Atlanta, Ga.: Apr 4, 2003. pg. A.1

MacPherson, K. "States urge flexibility be added to new law," The Toledo Blade, March 28, 2004.

MacPherson, K. "Change of heart on No Child Left Behind," Pittsburgh Post Gazette, March 21, 2004.

National Education Association, "Statement by NEA President Reg Weaver on today's national poll by PEN and Education Week." Press Release, Washington, D.C. April 1, 2004.

Richard, A. and Robelen, E. "Federal Law Is Questioned By Governors." Education Week, March 3, 2004.

Viadero, D. "Anniversary Brings Fresh Scrutiny of Federal School Law." Education Week, January 7, 2004.
