Improving Schools through Youth Leadership and Community Action

Annenberg Institute for School Reform
AT BROWN UNIVERSITY

ORGANIZED COMMUNITIES, STRONGER SCHOOLS

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Acknowledgments

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All photos courtesy of Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition

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[The Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition] is the most instrumental community force I've seen function in New York City around the issue of school overcrowding. I think the results really underscore that to the point of making it indisputable.

— Bruce Irushalmi, assistant superintendent in charge of school facilities,
Community School District 10, Bronx, New York

[Sistas and Brothas United has] been very instrumental in developing the leadership of students to take action in their community and participate in our democracy. These are the kind of leaders we want for our future.

— Yvonne Torres, superintendent, Region 1

In 1996, a small group of public school parents in the Bronx, New York, launched what became a ten-year struggle to improve overcrowded schools and aging school facilities in their community. They conducted walkthroughs of school buildings to itemize necessary repairs and brought politicians, parents, and the media on tours of overcrowded and poorly constructed facilities. They staged rallies with elected officials and held press conferences at the downtown headquarters of city and state agencies. They catalogued sites for new school construction, developed innovative strategies for new school development, and met with federal officials to discuss the importance of school-facilities funds.

High school students joined in the effort. Young people built campaigns to fight against widespread and severe overcrowding in local high schools. They also mobilized to address the ancillary issues that arise from congested schools: increased violence among students; tense relationships between teachers and students; curtailed student access to vital academic supports such as guidance and college counseling; and a pervasive disengagement and apathy among young people and adults on campuses. They worked with educators and the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) to open a new school, the Leadership Institute, that would teach young people the skills of leadership and community action as part of the school's curriculum.

In this study, we document education organizing by the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition (NWBCCC) and by Sistas and Brothas United (SBU) from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s in Community School District 10 (high schools came under the control of the regional superintendents at the time of Chancellor Joel Klein's reorganization), the local district that included their Northwest Bronx neighborhoods. Drawing on interviews with district and school leaders, teachers, parents, students, and community members, as well as publicly available quantitative data on school facilities utilization and student performance, we describe the impact of the two organizations' work to influence district policy and increase school capacity and we discuss the implications of their work for improved student outcomes.

Our research found that organizing contributed to increased educational opportunities in several important ways.

More equity

✦ Data collected in the study show that NWBCCC's and SBU's organizing influenced the city's school-facilities priorities, producing a dramatic investment of resources in school facilities in Northwest Bronx communities. NWBCCC is credited with helping to secure 14,000 new seats through new school construction and leasing.

✦ NYCDOE data show that elementary and middle school overcrowding in District 10 decreased from 114 percent school utilization rates in 1996-1997 to 96 percent utilization in 2005-2006.

✦ Utilization rates in high schools in the same geographic area decreased from 135 percent to 110 percent during the same period.

Greater community engagement, student engagement, and school accountability to the community

✦ Educators believe the groups' willingness to use both collaborative and confrontational strategies expanded school system responsiveness to the school-facilities concerns of families in the southern part of District 10, which had historically received little attention from local political leaders.

✦ NWBCCC's work on affordable housing, banking practices, and neighborhood redevelopment brought knowledge of local conditions and added professional expertise that helped the district to identify new school spaces and strategies for leasing school space.

✦ SBU's high school reform campaigns heightened district awareness of the relationship between school overcrowding and the problems of school safety and student access to counseling. Input from SBU helped district leaders to refine their strategy for siting multiple new small high schools on large, low-performing campuses.

✦ For both groups, genuine engagement of parents and students added to the organizations' perceived legitimacy by school and system officials. SBU was particularly valued for bringing the voices of marginalized students – rather than the high-achieving students who usually populate student government – into conversations with educators.

Greater educational opportunity

✦ Local campaigns produced wide-ranging improvements in the climate of individual schools. NWBCCC and SBU won traffic safety improvements, cafeteria and bathroom improvements, and new policies on school communication with parents. SBU also secured changes to metal-detector policies and improved training for school safety agents in how to interact with students.

In spring 2009, the Leadership Institute graduated its first class of students. Like any new small school, the Institute is a work in progress, grappling daily with the challenge of building a strong and effective culture in which staff and students share a vision of academic success and young people's leadership. Yet, the school stands as a testament to young people's desire for educational quality in the Bronx and provides evidence that when students are given support and respect, they can and will get engaged in a deep and sustained way in the work of education reform.

Organized Communities, Stronger Schools: An Introduction to the Case Study Series

Because good intentions are not enough, when not fortified with political will and political power.

— U.S. President Barack Obama

The opening quote, a reflection from Barack Obama on the lessons he learned during his post-college stint as a community organizer, cuts to the core of why organizing matters. Even the most well-intentioned of policies (and politicians) are often insufficient to bring about desired outcomes. Political will and political power are necessary forces to carry those good intentions forward and to hold political actors accountable when those intentions go unrealized.

In low-income neighborhoods like the ones on the South Side of Chicago where Obama organized, political power is not attained through wealth or status. Rather, power comes from numbers – from bringing together ordinary people to identify critical community concerns and to act collectively and strategically for improvements to their communities, neighborhoods, and schools.

This research follows the organizing efforts undertaken by residents of low- to moderate-income communities throughout the country, specifically in the arena of public school reform. In addition to documenting their campaigns, we aim to get underneath the organizing process to assess the tangible impacts of organizing on students and their schools. In other words, does the political will generated by organizing – in the arena of education reform – ultimately enhance the capacity of schools to improve student learning?

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING FOR SCHOOL REFORM

Neither community organizing nor public education activism is new in the United States. But increasingly in the last fifteen years, community organizations have used organizing as a focused and deliberate strategy for school improvement, particularly within low- and moderate-income communities.

Instead of relying on more traditional forms of parent and community involvement (getting involved in school activities or serving on district-sponsored committees, for instance), organizing groups mobilize parents, youth, and community members for local school improvement and districtwide reform, often applying pressure from the outside to generate the political will necessary to adopt and implement reforms. In the process, these organizing efforts aim to equalize power dynamics between school and district administrators and low-income parents and

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Community Organizing for School Reform . . .

- Brings together public school parents, youth and community residents, and/or institutions to engage in collective dialogue and action for change
- Builds grassroots leadership by training parents and youth in the skills of organizing and civic engagement
- Builds political power by mobilizing large numbers of people around a unified vision and purpose
- Focuses on demands for accountability, equity, and quality for all students, rather than on gains for individual students
- Aims to disrupt long-standing power relationships that produce failing schools in low- and moderate-income neighborhoods and communities of color
- Uses the tactics of direct action and mobilization to put pressure on decision-makers when necessary

community members, who may otherwise feel marginalized or powerless to challenge educational inequities.

Nationally, it is estimated that more than 200 community groups are engaged in organizing for better schooling (Mediratta & Fruchter 2001; Gold, Simon & Brown 2002). These organizing groups have responded to a variety of parental and youth concerns, including unsafe environmental and facilities conditions, overcrowded schools, dangerous school crossings, inadequate school funding, unresponsive administrators, and inexperienced teachers.

Many researchers have noted the failure of traditional approaches to education reform to bring about deep and lasting school improvement. Jeannie Oakes and Martin Lipton, for example, attribute the "sorry and familiar story of school reform gone awry" to educators' singular focus on changing the internal "technical aspects" of schooling, without adequately attending to the political, social, and cultural dimensions of schooling. Oakes and Lipton argue,

> The logic and strategies employed in social and political movements – in contrast to those found in organizational change models – are more likely to expose, challenge, and if successful, disrupt the prevailing norms and politics of schooling inequality. . . . Without attention to these dynamics, such reforms are abandoned entirely or implemented in ways that actually replicate (perhaps in a different guise) the stratified status quo. (Oakes & Lipton 2002, p. 383)

Oakes and Lipton's analysis reflects an increased interest from both practitioners and researchers in understanding the potential role of community organizing in contributing to sustainable improvements in education.

ABOUT THE STUDY

To date, research on community organizing for school reform has been mostly qualitative and includes numerous reports (Gold, Simon & Brown 2002; HoSang 2005; Zachary & olatoye 2001), as well as excellent and detailed book-length analyses of organizing efforts (Oakes, Rogers & Lipton 2006; Warren 2001; Shirley 1997). But comparatively few research studies examine the effect of these groups' work on local schools and communities. How have organizing efforts influenced district policies and practices? In what ways does the culture of schools change because of involvement in organizing? And most important, are educational outcomes better for students when organizing is in the picture? This study, initiated in 2002 with funding from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, sought to address these critical questions.

The six-year, mixed-methods study – the first of its kind – followed the school reform campaigns of seven organizing groups nationally.[1] The study examined the impact of organizing on the leadership development of those involved and also assessed the impact of organizing on three critical indictors of education reform: district-level policy, school-level capacity, and student outcomes.

Organized Communities, Stronger Schools, the report of preliminary findings released in March 2008, measured and linked the impacts of community organizing to specific performance indicators (Mediratta, Shah & McAlister 2008). We found that sophisticated organizing at the grassroots level can indeed make major contributions to improving student achievement. Across multiple data sources, we observed strong and consistent evidence that effective community organizing:

✦ stimulates important changes in educational policy, practices, and resource distribution at the system level;

✦ strengthens school–community relationships, parent involvement and engagement, and trust in schools; and

✦ contributes to higher student educational outcomes, including higher attendance, test score performance, high school completion, and college-going aspirations.

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[1] An eighth group, Milwaukee Inner-city Congregations Allied for Hope, was involved at the onset of the study. Because they did not participate in the study across the whole six years, we have not produced a case study of their organization.

[2] The work described in this study was carried out by Chicago ACORN until January 2008, when the director, staff, and board left ACORN to start a new group called Action Now, which is continuing the education and other organizing campaigns initiated while they were affiliated with ACORN.

THE CASE STUDY SERIES

Following up on Organized Communities, Stronger Schools, we offer a case study series that presents an in-depth look at each of the organizing groups in our study. The study sites are:

✦ Austin Interfaith (Austin, Texas), affiliated with the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF)

✦ Chicago ACORN (Chicago, Illinois), affiliated with the national network Association of Communities Organized for Reform Now [2]

✦ Community Coalition and its youth organizing arm, South Central Youth Empowered thru Action (Los Angeles, California)

✦ Eastern Pennsylvania Organizing Project and its youth organizing affiliate, Youth United for Change (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania); EPOP was affiliated with the PICO (People Improving Communities through Organizing) national network until 2009

✦ Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition and its youth organizing arm, Sistas and Brothas United (Bronx, New York)

✦ Oakland Community Organizations (Oakland, California), affiliated with PICO

✦ People Acting for Community Together (Miami, Florida), affiliated with the Direct Action and Research Training (DART) Center

Each case study traces the group's education organizing campaigns and considers the impact of this work on promoting resource equity and district accountability for improved educational outcomes. In three districts – Austin, Miami, and Oakland – where the education reform strategy was in place at least five years, we also examine trends in school capacity and student educational outcomes. Though educators predicted gains in Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, and Philadelphia resulting from the organizing conducted by groups in our study, the reforms are either too new and/or do not integrate enough intensive school-based organizing for us to assess their school capacity and student outcome impacts through administrative or survey data. In these cases, we focus on documenting the group's organizing efforts and examining preliminary indicators of impact.

The case studies in this series will be made available for download, as they are published, at <www.annenberginstitute.org/WeDo/Mott.php>.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Our analysis of impacts both across sites and within sites is guided by a conceptual framework – or logic model – for how organizing leads to change in schools. The framework, presented in the 2004 publication Constituents of Change (see Mediratta 2004; Figure 1), provides a guiding theory of change for how community organizing stimulates improvements in both community capacity and district and school
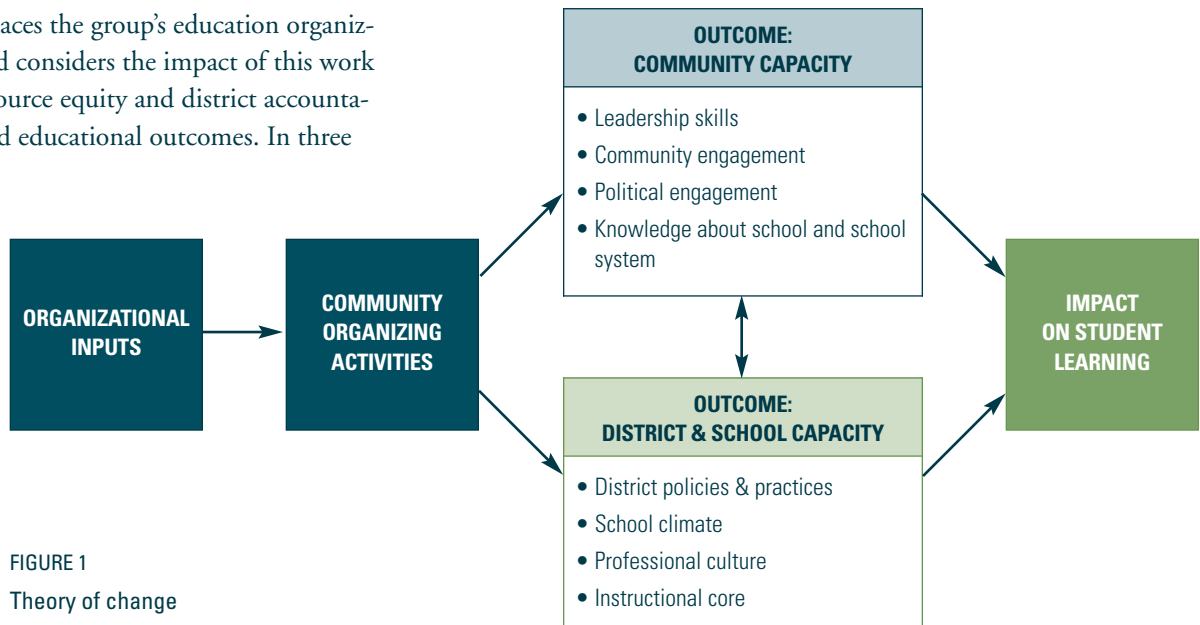

FIGURE 1
Theory of change

capacity. In the current series of case studies, we focus on how organizing influences district and school capacity and student learning.
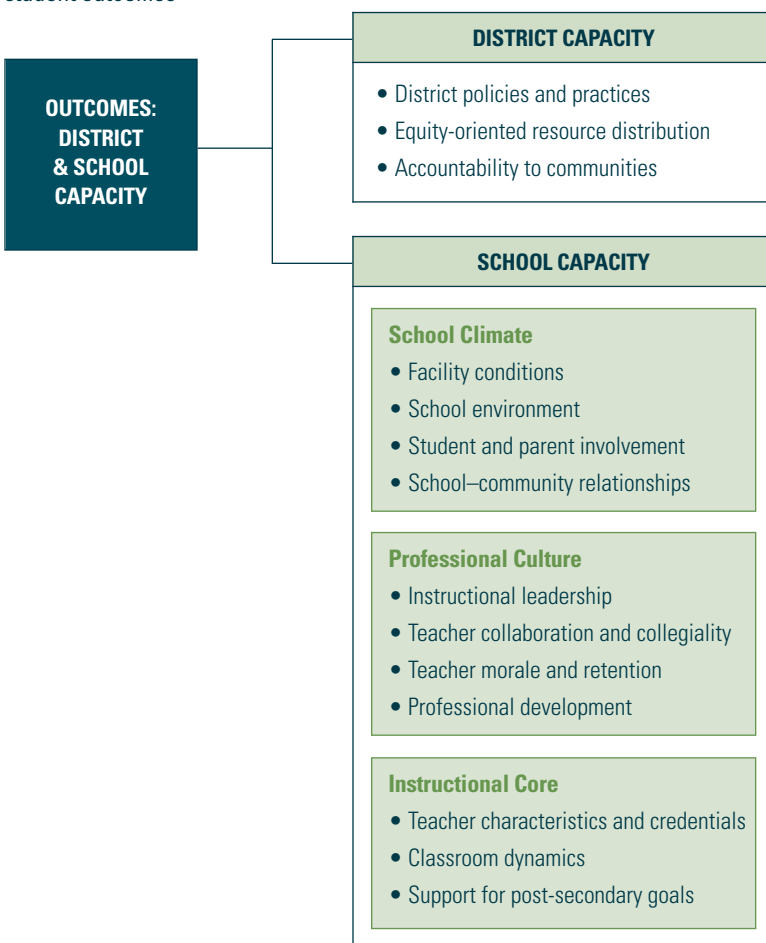
We ground our assessment of district and school capacity outcomes in the existing educational change literature. We draw primarily from the seminal research on essential supports conducted by the Consortium on Chicago School Research, which outlines five broad dimensions of school capacity (leadership, parent–community ties, professional capacity, student-centered learning climate, ambitious instruction) that are associated with better student outcomes (Sebring et al. 2006). We also pull from Anthony Bryk and Barbara Schneider's work on trust in schools (2002), Richard Elmore's writings on teaching practice (1996; 2002; 2004), the National Center for Education Statistics' articulation of school quality indicators (Mayer et al. 2000), and research on indicators of education organizing conducted by Eva Gold and Elaine Simon at Research for Action and Chris Brown at the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform (2002).

Based on the above conceptual framework, we would expect improvements on intermediate indicators of district and school capacity to produce a higher-quality learning experience. In turn, we would expect this stronger learning environment to result in improved student outcomes. Though changes in school and district capacity are important outcomes in their own right, they take on added significance because of their links to student achievement. Critical dimensions of district and school capacity are outlined in Figure 2.

DATA SOURCES

Our study uses a rigorous mixed-methods design to understand the impacts of organizing on district and school capacity and student outcomes. We collected 321 stakeholder interviews; 75 observations of organizing strategy sessions, campaign activities, and actions; 509 teacher surveys; and school demographic and outcome data for each of the seven school districts.

We used interviews and observational data with community organizers and adult and youth members to clarify the theories of action and resultant educational change strategies guiding organizing groups' work, and to assess members' knowledge about education policy and their sense of efficacy in generating change within their schools and communities. Publicly available school-level administrative data, interviews with district and school leaders, and teacher surveys were used to analyze district-, school-, and student-level outcomes. Impacts of community organizing were thus assessed in three ways:

✦ **District and school leaders' attributions.** We examined district and school leaders' perceptions of the impact of organizing groups on district and

FIGURE 2

Dimensions of district and school capacity that lead to improved student outcomes

OUTCOMES: DISTRICT & SCHOOL CAPACITY

DISTRICT CAPACITY
- District policies and practices
- Equity-oriented resource distribution
- Accountability to communities

SCHOOL CAPACITY

School Climate
- Facility conditions
- School environment
- Student and parent involvement
- School–community relationships

Professional Culture
- Instructional leadership
- Teacher collaboration and collegiality
- Teacher morale and retention
- Professional development

Instructional Core
- Teacher characteristics and credentials
- Classroom dynamics
- Support for post-secondary goals

school decision making, capacities, and relationships with parent, youth, and community constituencies.

✦ Teachers' attributions. We assessed teachers' perceptions of a variety of school context indicators, and whether they believed that changes in school climate, professional culture, and instructional indicators had been influenced by the groups' actions.

✦ Student outcomes. We reviewed administrative data on student attendance, standardized test performance, graduation and dropout rates, and college aspirations in the schools targeted by groups in our study.

We also analyzed our data to understand how groups achieve their impact – that is, we identified the critical organizing processes and strategic choices that enabled organizing groups to effectively challenge the status quo and help improve schooling conditions and educational outcomes in their communities.

A detailed description of the data sources and methods of collection can be found in Appendix A.

ANALYTIC STRATEGY

Community organizing for school reform does not occur in isolation from the messy realities of communities, politics, and schools. Linking organizing strategies to change – either in the community at large or in complex institutions such as schools – poses critical challenges for research. Given the intricacies of schools, communities, and the dynamic contexts in which they are situated, it is neither feasible nor desirable to create an experimental research design from which causal inferences might be drawn between the activities of organizing groups and the schooling outcomes they hope to stimulate.

For example, because organizing groups make decisions based on the priorities of community members and the urgency of problems in their local schools, random assignment of schools as "treatment" and "non-treatment" is not a reasonable or appropriate strategy. Even if such a design were possible, it would be difficult to pinpoint organizing as the "cause" of

these changes, given the high turnover among superintendents, principals, teachers, and students that characterizes large urban districts, the presence of other reforms at the school, as well as the ebbs and flows of organizing itself that occur over time (Connell et al. 1995; Berliner 2002).

To assess the schooling impacts of organizing groups, then, we employed a complex, mixed-methods design that assumes that community change efforts are multi-dimensional interventions that are evolving in response to constant changes in context. By using multiple data sources and carefully examining points of convergence and divergence within the data, we can contextualize and explain conclusions the data suggest about impact. Our ability to draw inferences in support of our research hypotheses is based on the consistency of evidence across these multiple data sources and forms of analysis.

In carrying out this research, we engaged in a collaborative research process with our sites, sharing preliminary findings at each stage of our analysis, so that their intimate knowledge of the school, district, and community contexts informed our interpretation and understanding of the data.

In 2002, Yorman Nuñez was a high school sophomore, struggling with a host of challenges all too familiar to Northwest Bronx youth. He was bored in school, tired of "being told to mind my own business when I had ideas about how to improve the school," and harassed by school safety agents on a daily basis.

> In some classes, I did not have a seat or a desk and was forced to sit on a heater. It didn't feel like anyone at school cared if I succeeded or not, or showed up or not, and I dropped out of school.

Unsure of how to pull his life together and without a clear direction or focus, Nuñez was invited by a friend to attend a meeting at Sistas and Brothas United, a local youth organization. Nuñez recalled,

> The moment I came here, I was at a school safety meeting and they were talking about meeting with politicians and stuff like that, people in charge, and I said that you could not just meet with people in charge and everybody there basically told me, "Yes we can. We in fact have a meeting scheduled in a day and that's what we're preparing for." And I was, like, "Wow."

From that day forward, he was hooked by the sense of power he drew from being a part of a youth-led organization. "I'm not gonna lie," he says. "I feel powerful when I'm here."

As a youth leader in the organization, Nuñez helped train schools safety agents on how to interact effectively with students and led neighborhood tours to build mutual understanding and respect among students and teachers. He helped to design a small public high school, called the Leadership Institute, to bring the concepts of youth leadership into schools. And he helped found the citywide Urban Youth Collaborative to bring young people's voices into citywide educational policy making.

With the support of SBU, he also re-enrolled in high school, graduated, and entered college.

Six years later, reflecting on his involvement in the organization, he said, "What started as an opportunity to get back in school and deal with problems in my community turned into a deep, powerful, and transformative period of change for me."

Sources: Interview with Yorman Nuñez by Mary Ann Flaherty, May 4, 2005; Nuñez 2009

Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition & Sistas and Brothas United

All my life people told me, you can't fight City Hall. But I came here and the atmosphere was totally different. Here the message is: You can *fight City Hall, and you can win.*

— *Ronn Jordan, parent leader, Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition*

New York City's public school system is the largest in North America, serving more than one million students in a district that spans the city's five distinct boroughs: the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens, and Staten Island. As in many urban districts, there are great disparities in school conditions and student outcomes. Schools on the Upper East Side of Manhattan traditionally produce students destined for the city's elite specialized high schools. In contrast, in many Bronx neighborhoods, few elementary and middle schools even offer the preparatory curriculum required to pass the entrance exam to these specialized schools.

Until Mayor Michael Bloomberg won control of the schools in 2002, the New York system was divided into thirty-two districts, each with its own elected school board and superintendent. Citywide educational priorities were set by a board of education, comprising two members appointed by the mayor and five appointed by the borough presidents.

The decentralized governance system created separate conduits for residents in each of the five boroughs to advocate for their educational priorities. While some districts produced exemplary schools, a large number did not. By the mid-1990s, three of the six districts in the Bronx, for example, were under investigation for voter fraud, embezzlement, and nepotism. The citywide board was mired in political battles between the mayor's allies and opponents and had little authority or will to intervene in the affairs of local districts.

ABOUT THE NORTHWEST BRONX

Community School District 10, in the northwest corner of the Bronx, exemplified the disparities within the city as a whole. At the upper reaches of District 10 lies Riverdale, a wealthy neighborhood with large houses and the feel of an upper-middle-class suburb. The southern neighborhoods of the district, where the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition (NWBCCC) organized, were much poorer. Schools in the southern half of the district posted much lower scores on standardized tests than the more affluent schools to the north.

Housing development and in-migration had transformed these predominantly Irish neighborhoods into an ethnically diverse and densely populated area, heavily developed with apartment buildings, stores,

New York City Public Schools at a Glance, Academic Year 2006-2007	
Total student enrollment	1,042,078
Black	32%
Latino	39%
Students categorized as low income	71%
Limited English proficient	14%
Number of schools	1,499
Per pupil expenditure*	$16,566
Graduation rate**	62%
Student attendance rate	89%

*Data sources: NYCDOE 2008, grades K–12*
* Brennan n.d.
** NYCDOE n.d.

and a host of other small businesses. Newer residents included African Americans, Latinos, Eastern Europeans, Southeast Asians, and West Africans (see figures 3 and 4).
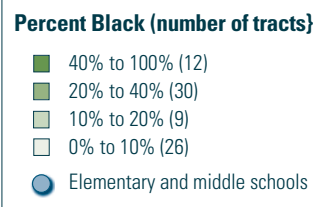
As the population grew, more and more students were crowded into existing facilities. Total enrollment in District 10 averaged around 40,000 students a year between 1995-1996 and 2005-2006. Local high schools were very large, serving collectively between 18,000 and 20,000 students annually.

Several elementary schools were also severely overcrowded, with building utilization rates of 150 percent of capacity (in other words, 1.5 students for every classroom seat). Overcrowding in high schools was even worse; several faced over-enrollments of more than 1,000 students. Compounding the overcrowding was the terrible physical condition of the local schools, some of which were over 100 years old and had suffered from years of delayed maintenance.

FIGURE 3

Geographic distribution of Black students in Community School District 10, percentage by census tract, 1998
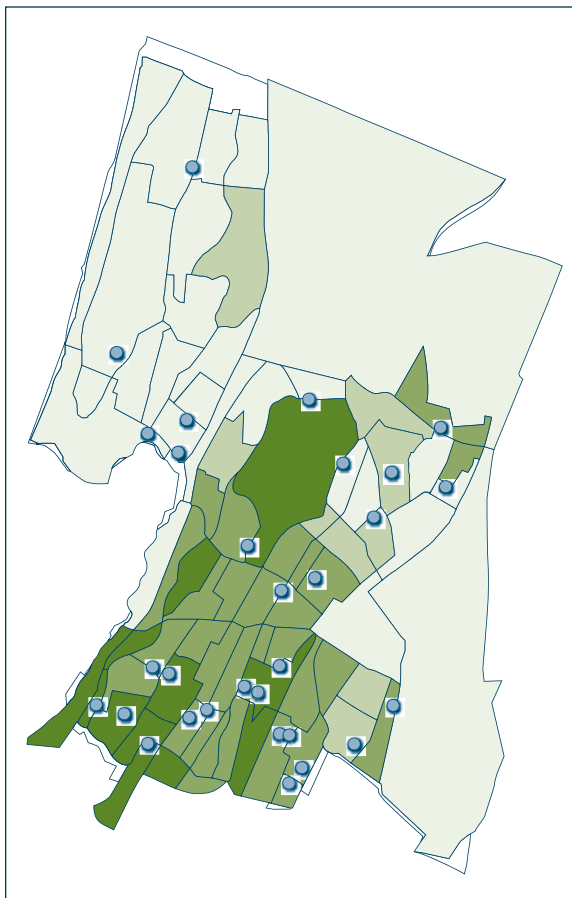
Note: This map was prepared for NWBCCC by the Institute for Education and Social Policy, New York University, 1998

Percent Black (number of tracts}
- 40% to 100% (12)
- 20% to 40% (30)
- 10% to 20% (9)
- 0% to 10% (26)
- ⊙ Elementary and middle schools

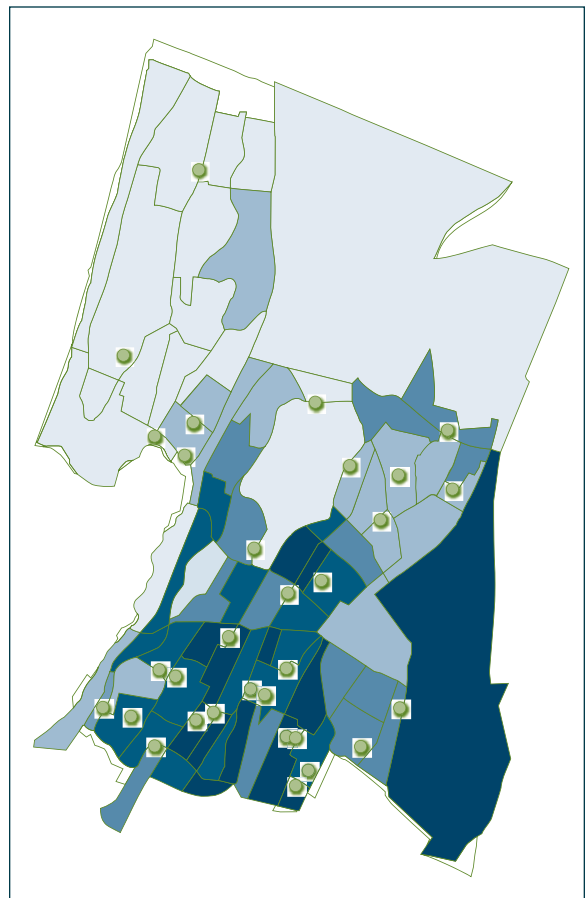FIGURE 4

Geographic distribution of Latino students in Community School District 10, percentage by census tract, 1998

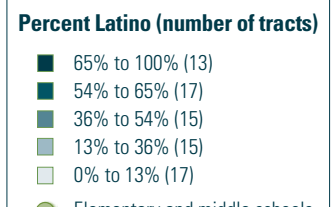Note: This map was prepared for NWBCCC by the Institute for Education and Social Policy, New York University, 1998

Percent Latino (number of tracts)
- 65% to 100% (13)
- 54% to 65% (17)
- 36% to 54% (15)
- 13% to 36% (15)
- 0% to 13% (17)
- ⊙ Elementary and middle schools

NWBCCC'S AND SBU'S EDUCATION ORGANIZING

In a context of educational inequity and weak district accountability to the needs of low-income communities of color, the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition (NWBCCC) – an organization with a long history of community organizing on neighborhood issues – and its youth affiliate, Sistas and Brothas United (SBU), began organizing to improve Bronx schools.

Beginning in 1996, the NWBCCC led a decade-long fight to resolve severe and chronic overcrowding of local schools. In 1998, SBU formed as a youth-led organizing project and later joined with NWBCCC in school-overcrowding campaigns. SBU also organized to reform policies that placed new small high schools in already crowded high school facilities, as well as to oppose the city's use of policing strategies to quell the growing tension on these campuses. SBU designed its own small high school, which opened in 2005 with a curriculum centered on community organizing and youth leadership development, and fought a long battle to find a permanent home for the school.

Early History of NWBCCC: Organizing to Improve the Neighborhood

NWBCCC grew out of the joint efforts of two groups – local clergy and neighborhood residents – to shore up their neighborhoods against the tidal wave of arson and middle-class flight that decimated the southern half of the borough during the 1970s. Armed with the slogan "Don't Move, Improve," NWBCCC organized residents into neighborhood associations and enlisted the help of local churches.

NWBCCC helped tenants in abandoned and neglected buildings force repairs from landlords. In some cases, the organization helped residents purchase and run their buildings. This work spawned a host of local economic development corporations that constructed new housing and rehabilitated old buildings for low-income families. NWBCCC mounted campaigns to force banks that held millions in deposits from Northwest Bronx neighborhoods to write mortgages for local homeowners and fought to reform a water-billing system that threatened to bankrupt many tenant-owned buildings. The NWBCCC also worked to increase community policing, shut down nuisance hotels, and preserve funding for youth services and employment programs.

NWBCCC developed a structure in which local residents were organized into neighborhood associations with the active participation of religious institutions, particularly the large Catholic parishes in the area. NWBCCC organizers worked with these neighborhood associations to identify neighborhood issues and develop campaigns to address them. Former staff director Clay Smith explained NWBCCC's approach:

> The job of the organizer . . . is to go out into that neighborhood and organize tenant associations, block associations, and neighborhood campaigns, to go out and knock on people's doors and say, What are your concerns? Do other people have the same problems? Are you interested in starting a tenants' association to build some power to fix the problem? What we do is help people understand that as individuals, they don't have any power. There's not much that they can do – the landlord won't listen to them, and the city probably won't listen to them. But as a group, they have power to put pressure on the landlord or on the city or on the bank that has the mortgage on the building and they can get their building fixed. So, we start teaching [community residents the power of] collective action through [local] organizing.

"We started complaining about our issues, and then we came up with our own work plan, just amongst the youth. And we started getting all these meetings with people and getting all these demands met. And we just started growing a lot of power."

— Fernando Carlo, founding member, SBU

NWBCCC's organizational structure wove together neighborhood-based associations – comprising residents who participate in tenant associations, block associations, church-based social action committees, or school-level parent committees – with organization-wide clergy and youth organizing committees. This structure was designed to hold the organization accountable to the needs, concerns, and values of neighborhood constituents and to ensure broad-based participation in community improvement campaigns.

Sistas and Brothas United: Developing Youth Power to Make Change

Sistas and Brothas United began in 1998 as a youth committee of one of NWBCCC's neighborhood associations, the Kingsbridge Heights Neighborhood Improvement Association (KHNIA). Though KHNIA had a longstanding youth recreation program, in 1998 a young organizer, Laura Vazquez, began organizing young people who lived in the building next door to the KHNIA office, many of whom had parents or older siblings involved in the neighborhood association. These youth had grown up attending NWBCCC rallies and were familiar with the organization and the concept of community action. In conversations with youth, Vazquez learned that they were concerned about the lack of recreational activities in the area and that many did not enjoy going to school.

Over the summer, Vasquez began to transform the recreation program into a youth-led organizing group. Using the strategies she had learned as a tenant organizer, she and the youth reached out to involve other students from the neighborhood. When schools reopened in the fall, the young people turned their attention to problems in their schools. They recruited students from their classes to join the effort and quickly succeeded in winning support from the Bronx high schools superintendent, Norm Wechsler, for improvements to their school facilities. Fernando Carlo, a youth leader involved in these early efforts, recalls:

> [Laura] was supposed to outreach to youth for the Kingsbridge Heights Association; her job wasn't to start a whole organization, it was just to get youth involved. But when September came, all of us went back to high school and we started complaining about our issues, and then we came up with our own work plan, just amongst the youth. And we started getting all these meetings with people and getting all these demands met. And we just started growing a lot of power.

Their success in these early campaigns gave the youth a taste of their power to make change. They attracted more young people to the fledgling group and quickly outgrew their office in Kingsbridge Heights. After several locations, the group eventually established its office on the top floor of NWBCCC's headquarters. To maintain its youth-led identity, the young people selected the name Sistas and Brothas United. They formed their own youth board of directors, sent a youth representative to NWBCCC's board, and participated in organization-wide decisions alongside representatives from each of the other neighborhood associations.

In its early days, SBU sent leaders to leadership development activities convened by the NWBCCC. Over time, SBU staff adapted the training materials to be more relevant to middle school– and high school–aged students. SBU now conducts formal leadership training for new members every summer to complement the skills leaders gain during the year

through their roles in facilitating meetings, conducting research, and carrying out campaigns. Leaders meet daily after school in the SBU office to do homework, check in with an academic counselor, and meet as a group to plan and discuss campaigns. SBU leaders also participate in NWBCCC's education committee and are active in many of NWBCCC's non-education campaigns. Adult leaders likewise support SBU campaigns.

NWBCCC's Increased Involvement in Education Issues: Overcrowded Schools

In 1995, NWBCCC established an education committee in response to the problem of overcrowded local schools. The organization had previously been involved in education issues, but these efforts were sporadic and tended to be very local in focus. By the mid-1990s, school overcrowding in the area had become so extreme the organization felt it could no longer stay on the sidelines; overcrowded schools threatened the neighborhood stability that the organization had fought so long to achieve.

Clay Smith, an organizer with one of the neighborhood associations, called a meeting of parents to discuss the situation. Parents told stories of classes being taught in hallways, locker rooms, and storage closets; schools holding classes in multiple shifts; and kindergarten students being bussed long distances to schools in other neighborhoods.

The entire city was struggling with exploding school enrollment. The 1996-1997 school year opened with 91,000 more students than seats. The crisis was the product of two decades of financial trouble and mishaps (Belluck 1996b). During the 1970s, in response to declining enrollment and a fiscal crisis, the city had sold off or converted to other uses more than 100 school buildings. Tight budgets in the early 1980s led the city to defer maintenance on the remaining buildings, in some cases to the point where buildings were in dangerous condition.

In 1988, the state established the School Construction Authority (SCA) in an attempt to address the problem of school facilities and confront the corruption and delays that impeded what little facilities

Parents told stories of classes being taught in hallways, locker rooms, and storage closets; schools holding classes in multiple shifts; and kindergarten students being bussed long distances to schools in other neighborhoods.

development was under way (Belluck 1996a). The tripartite structure of the SCA quickly sank the effort. Controlled by representatives from the New York State governor's office, the New York City mayor's office, and the New York City board of education, the SCA lumbered along without clear oversight and was plagued by delays, cost overruns, and poorly supervised contractors. In less than five years, the SCA had become a dartboard for just about everybody – local politicians, parents, education reform advocates, and the media.

School overcrowding was particularly acute in the middle and southern sections of District 10. As schools opened in September 1996, the district's elementary and middle schools averaged 114 percent of their capacity, and local high schools averaged 135 percent of capacity. Several schools were over 150 percent.

The First Campaign: Two Unsafe Elementary Schools

Two new elementary schools, P.S. 20 and P.S. 15, had been constructed to capture the overflow of students from six neighborhood elementary schools. P.S. 15 had opened half-complete in the previous year with unfinished floors, exposed ventilation ducts, and no working telephone system and with construction continuing around the children. P.S. 20, known as the "sinking school" because of inferior infill at the construction site, was three years behind schedule and ridden with problems.

"It is a miracle that any of our children pass [standardized tests] with the condition of their schools."

— Ronn Jordan, Kingsbridge resident and parent activist

Although school-facilities construction and maintenance was the job of the SCA, the District 10 school board had a role in advocating with the city for additional facilities resources. The local board had traditionally been dominated by Riverdale parents, even though White students made up only eight percent of District 10. Many parents in the district believed the board catered to the wealthy Riverdale elite at the expense of the rest of the district.

NWBCCC's nascent education committee first turned its attention to the two new elementary schools, P.S. 20 and P.S. 15. The committee launched a campaign to press the SCA to bring P.S. 20 to a safe state before the start of the school year. NWBCCC parents conducted walkthroughs of the building to itemize necessary repairs and brought local and city politicians, parents, and the media on tours of the overcrowded and poorly constructed facilities. They staged rallies with elected officials and held press conferences at overcrowded schools and at SCA headquarters. The New York Times and the Daily News reported the parents' complaints and the promises of SCA officials to move quickly on construction. The Times described the scene of one protest:

> Yesterday, the day [P.S. 20] was supposed to be ready again, carpenters were still drilling, hammering, and cleaning, and 100 angry parents and children – joined by elected officials, including the Bronx borough president, Fernando Ferrer, and the city comptroller, Alan G. Hevesi – showed up to express their dismay at

yet another delay. Officials of the city's School Construction Authority, which is building the school, have set and missed seven deadlines since construction began on the terra cotta building.

> "We are not surprised that it is not finished today," Lois Harr, a parent and a director of the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition, told the crowd of angry, placard-waving parents gathered in an unfinished hallway of the school. "The SCA has wasted too much money, delayed too many schools, and left too many children in overcrowded classrooms," Ms. Harr said. (Newman 1996)

Public pressure ensured that P.S. 20 opened in September 1996, farther along than P.S. 15 had been but still incomplete. The group followed up with more press conferences and another tour of the schools with a trustee of the SCA to demand the completion of the P.S. 20 cafeteria and other repairs at both schools (Walker 1996).

The fight to finish these two elementary schools attracted parent leaders from across the district, many of whom shared the concern about overcrowding and poor school conditions. A district decision to bus a third of one school's kindergarten students to a facility five miles away catalyzed parent anger. Ronn Jordan, a Kingsbridge resident and the father of two children at the school, sought out NWBCCC when he learned of the district's decision. Jordan, who later became president of NWBCCC, summed up parents' frustrations:

> Our kids are doing badly because there are not enough seats for them. They are learning in ridiculous conditions – in trailers, renovated bathrooms, and things like that. It is a miracle that any of our children pass [standardized tests] with the condition of their schools.

Mayoral candidate Ruth Messenger and the Rev. Al Sharpton joined with Jordan and NWBCCC parents in a rally demanding that the board of education build more schools. "Four- and five-year-old kids

should not have to go to school on the bus," Jordan told the New York Times, explaining that he preferred to keep his daughter out of kindergarten rather than have her bussed so far away. "I've got 'Hooked on Phonics,' " he said. "But I shouldn't have to do this" (Sengupta 1997).

Engaging with District and City Officials: Alliances and Pressure

NWBCCC catalogued facilities needs of neighborhood schools and investigated the school construction and repair process. Through their research, organizers and leaders learned that the power to allocate additional facilities resources and speed up facilities construction rested in the hands of city-level officials. The organization reached out to Irma Zardoya, the District 10 superintendent, and Bruce Irushalmi, the local assistant superintendent in charge of facilities, sparking an alliance that would provide support and access to information.

Zardoya, a Bronx native and an educator with two decades of experience as a teacher, principal, and district administrator in the city schools, had become district superintendent in 1994. Her improvement strategy relied on:

> [providing] principals and the teachers with enormous amounts of professional training and support . . . [and] keeping a sharp focus on data . . . to gauge student achievement and adjust instruction. (Herszenhorn 2005)

Zardoya was keenly aware of the limitations of inadequate facilities for effective teaching and learning and was appreciative of NWBCCC's role in pressuring the SCA to finish P.S. 15 and P.S. 20.

Funds for new school construction were allocated through a citywide five-year capital planning and budget process. The capital planning process presented a key moment for district action and community pressure. NWBCCC education leaders worked with one of the organization's affiliated community development corporations, the Fordham-Bedford Housing Corporation (FBHC), which had compiled extensive and detailed maps of the area for its housing development work. FBHC helped NBWCCC parent leaders to identify spaces that could accommodate new schools or annexes. The leaders took lists of spaces to the district administrators and worked with them to finalize the district's request for the capital plan.

At the city level, education committee leaders met repeatedly with Schools Chancellor Rudy Crew's staff to demand new classroom seats and share their data on potential sites for new buildings. Much of this work was coordinated through the citywide Parent Organizing Consortium, a coalition of six organizing groups focused on facilities reform, class size reduction, and improving teacher quality. NWBCCC also staged rallies in the Bronx and mobilized local elected officials to press the district's case.

In July 1997, Crew announced that he planned to submit a request adding 3,000 seats to District 10. The amended budget passed in 1998, securing six new school buildings for the Northwest Bronx – a mix of stand-alone schools and annexes to be built on playgrounds of existing schools – as well as upgrades and repairs to existing buildings (Corey 1998).

Though a huge victory, the seats in the capital plan were a "drop in the proverbial bucket of the overcrowding problem," recalls Irushalmi.

Another strategy to take pressure off schools, at least in the short term, was to lease space for annexes in vacant or underused buildings. NWBCCC leaders brought lists of available leasing sites to District 10 leadership. They made phone calls and wrote letters to city board of education members requesting their support for the leasing strategy, and they talked extensively with the press about the deteriorating conditions their children faced while buildings sat vacant down the block. This organizing helped the district to secure annex space in synagogues, churches, and vacant commercial buildings.

NWBCCC leaders searched for a systemic strategy to solve their local school overcrowding problem. Part of the problem was the lack of resources, which they aimed to address by putting pressure on officials at all levels of government.

During this period, NWBCCC leaders searched for a systemic strategy to solve their local school overcrowding problem. Part of the problem was the lack of resources, which they aimed to address by putting pressure on officials at all levels of government to recognize and respond to the needs of Northwest Bronx communities. NWBCCC was active in National People's Action (NPA), a national network of organizing groups, and through NPA advocated with national leaders for a greater federal investment in school construction. Work with NPA led to a site visit in 1998 by then–Secretary of Education Richard Riley, who toured schools in the Bronx with NWBCCC leaders and discussed the need for more federal dollars.

But there were not enough large tracts of vacant land on which the SCA could build new schools, even if more funds were provided to the city. Drawing on its experiences of nonprofit housing development in the area, NWBCCC proposed that the city expand its leasing program through a turnkey strategy of school facilities development. Community development corporations could use community reinvestment funds to purchase and rehabilitate smaller, abandoned properties and lease them back to the city for schools.

In 1998, the NWBCCC formed a coalition called the School Construction Working Group with New York University's Institute for Education and Social Policy, the Pratt Center for Community and Environmental Development, and other community development corporations to develop a nonprofit

leasing program that would address the city's school-facilities needs. School-system officials were receptive, and the group won support from national community development finance institutions. But Chancellor Crew's ouster in 1999 (after a dispute with the mayor over school privatization) unraveled the alliances that the group had built with educators at the city level.

Beyond Facilities

In early 2000, NWBCCC returned to a local focus in its school-facilities organizing. Staff and leaders continued to work with District 10 officials to locate and lease annex space and fought to preserve the facilities improvements they had already won. They also helped parents at individual schools to conduct local campaigns to address problems. In one school, for example, organizers helped a group of Bangladeshi parents win district support for a Bengali dual-language program. Parents in other schools won improvements in cafeteria and bathroom cleanliness, homework policies, parent–teacher communication, and neighborhood safety (e.g., additional security guards, speed bumps, and traffic control devices).

In addition to local campaigns, NWBCCC joined in coalition efforts to secure crucial resources and develop new relationships that might improve the quality of local schools. In 2000, NWBCCC helped form the Alliance for Quality Education, a statewide network of over 200 groups, and mobilized hundreds of parents and students over the next six years to demand school fiscal equity reform. In 2002, the organization joined a coalition of Bronx groups called the Community Collaborative for District 9 (CC9, later renamed Community Coalition for Bronx Schools). CC9's focus on the neighboring district – Community School District 9 – provided NWBCCC a way to help strengthen the performance of schools in the Crotona neighborhood, which

the NWBCCC considered part of its catchment area but, as it was not located within the boundaries of District 10, had never been the focus of the group's education organizing. As a member of CC9, NWBCCC helped raise city and private resources for a new lead teacher program in Bronx schools and organized school-based parent committees to create schoolwide activities that promoted effective family–school partnerships.

Although deeply involved in coalition activities, the organization also asserted its voice on citywide issues that impacted Northwest Bronx schools. In 2003, for example, Northwest Bronx parents staged a series of press conferences protesting the city's decision to base third-grade promotion on test score results, given the overcrowded settings in which students went to school. Education officials later acknowledged that parent protests, combined with criticism from education reform advocates throughout the city, led the city to institute an appeals process to allow teachers to petition for student promotion on the basis of student work.[3]

Confronting the Nexus of School Overcrowding and Safety

Overcrowded, poorly maintained, and under-resourced school facilities were the entry point to organizing for Sistas and Brothas United. Most of the young people recruited by Laura Vazquez in 1998 attended John F. Kennedy, Walton, Roosevelt, or DeWitt Clinton high schools, all large and aging. These schools suffered from the same severe overcrowding and deferred maintenance that plagued elementary and middle schools.

In their first campaigns, SBU leaders catalogued student complaints: the poor condition of classrooms, missing textbooks, inoperable escalators, and classes that met without a permanent teacher for months on end. Guidance counselors were too busy to meet with students, and the climate in schools was often chaotic. SBU leaders presented school system officials with a list of facilities upgrades and proposals

"We met with the deputy chancellor of operations to talk about the guidance counseling stuff and the lack of school safety agents. After our meetings, Kennedy High School got nine new guidance counselors and school safety agents."

— *Fernando Carlo, founding member, SBU*

for improving access to guidance counselors. Fernando Carlo, one of SBU's founding members, recalls,

> We went straight to the Bronx high schools superintendent and asked [him] what things he [could] help us with and if he [couldn't do it], who do we go to [to] deal with [the problems]? We met with the deputy chancellor of operations to talk about the guidance counseling stuff and the lack of school safety agents. After our meetings, Kennedy High School got nine new guidance counselors and school safety agents. The Bronx high schools superintendent has power over the funds for the Bronx high schools and he used that money to get doorknobs, fix the lights and windows, get the bathrooms cleaned more than once on a daily basis, and fix the escalator.

In 2001, the board of education launched an initiative called New Century High Schools, with funding from Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Open Society

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[3] Public remarks by Jean Desravines, former executive director for the Office of Parent and Community Engagement, New York City Department of Education, presented at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation 2006 Education Grantees Convening, Chicago, April 25, 2006.

"It doesn't matter how many security personnel there are. If the halls are that impassable, there are going to be fights. There's going to be fighting, and the security can't be everywhere at once."

— a Walton High School teacher

Institute. The aim of the initiative, which was managed by New Visions for Public Schools, a local education fund, was to improve high school instruction by establishing new small high schools to replace large, low-performing zoned high schools. The partners hoped that small, intimate schools would personalize education and provide better supports to students in completing rigorous courses. Each school would have a collaborating organization that would support educators and help to personalize learning for students. These new schools would expand the system of high school choice in New York by creating more high-quality schools for students to choose from (New Visions for Public Schools n.d.).

SBU leaders were enthusiastic about small high schools as a reform strategy and, later, worked with New Visions to design and open their own (see p. 21). At the same time, the explosion of new small schools in the Bronx added a new dimension to the overcrowding problem. A majority of new small schools were squeezed into existing school buildings and often shared their buildings with the remaining classes of large schools that were being phased out. Because large schools served populations that often needed five or six years to graduate, the addition of new small schools swelled the numbers of students on already overcrowded campuses (see Figure 5).

Walton, Kennedy, and Roosevelt (which many SBU leaders attended) were among these schools. Carving the buildings into separate schools disrupted student access to libraries, gyms, and cafeterias and produced additional tensions between students and administrators. Even the large high schools in the Bronx that remained intact saw their enrollment swell from the influx of students who chose not to attend small schools – or weren't accepted by them (Hemphill et al. 2009).

In fall 2003, following violent incidents among students at two reconfigured campuses in the Bronx, city officials announced a new safety initiative. Schools Chancellor Joel Klein placed metal detectors and school safety agents in high schools across the city, with extra agents and police assigned to the twelve most persistently violent schools (Herszenhorn 2003). Two Northwest Bronx high schools, Walton and Roosevelt, were soon added to the list.

SBU leaders were convinced that the tensions and violence on these campuses were a direct result of overcrowding and the resentment bred by placing too many small schools in already overcrowded buildings. Teachers and parents shared SBU's assessment. After a series of fights between students of different schools on the Walton campus, a teacher told the New York Times,

> It doesn't matter how many security personnel there are. If the halls are that impassable, there are going to be fights. There's going to be fighting, and the security can't be everywhere at once. (Gootman 2004)

By 2004, Walton was nearing 175 percent of capacity, with three small high schools and the remnants of the large traditional school sharing the building (see Figure 6).

SBU staged rallies and press events denouncing the city's emphasis on policing rather than school construction. The group called for an immediate reduction of overcrowding on large campuses housing multiple small schools. SBU also lent support to a student walkout at Clinton in September 2005 to

FIGURE 5

Enrollment in SBU high schools
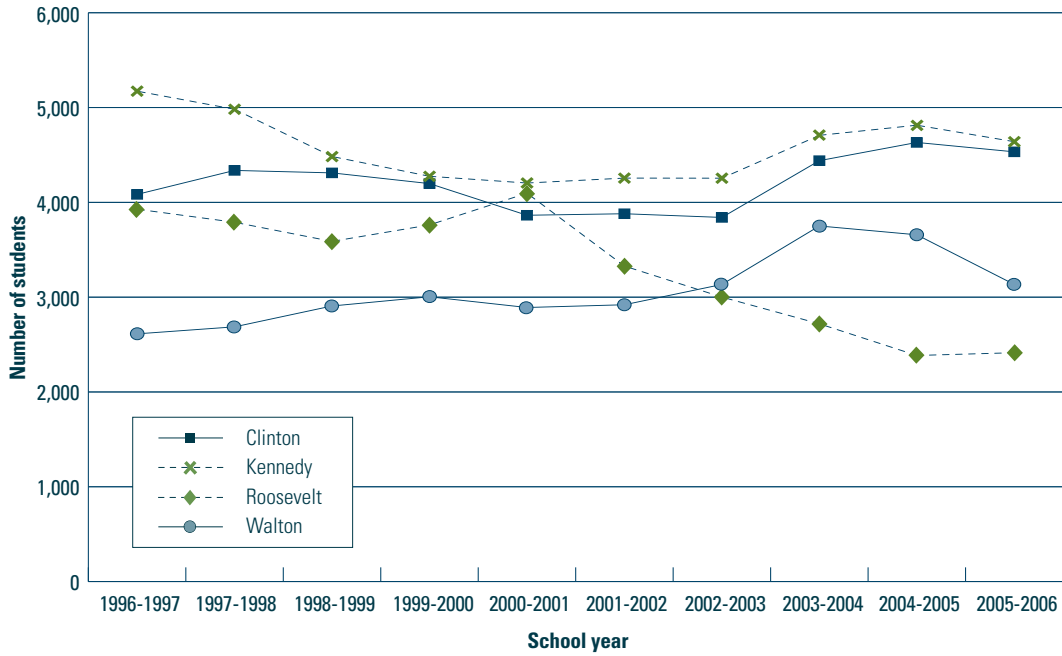
Source: NYCDOE School Facilities Capacity, Enrollment, and Utilization reports

FIGURE 6

Percentage of building utilization in SBU high schools, by school
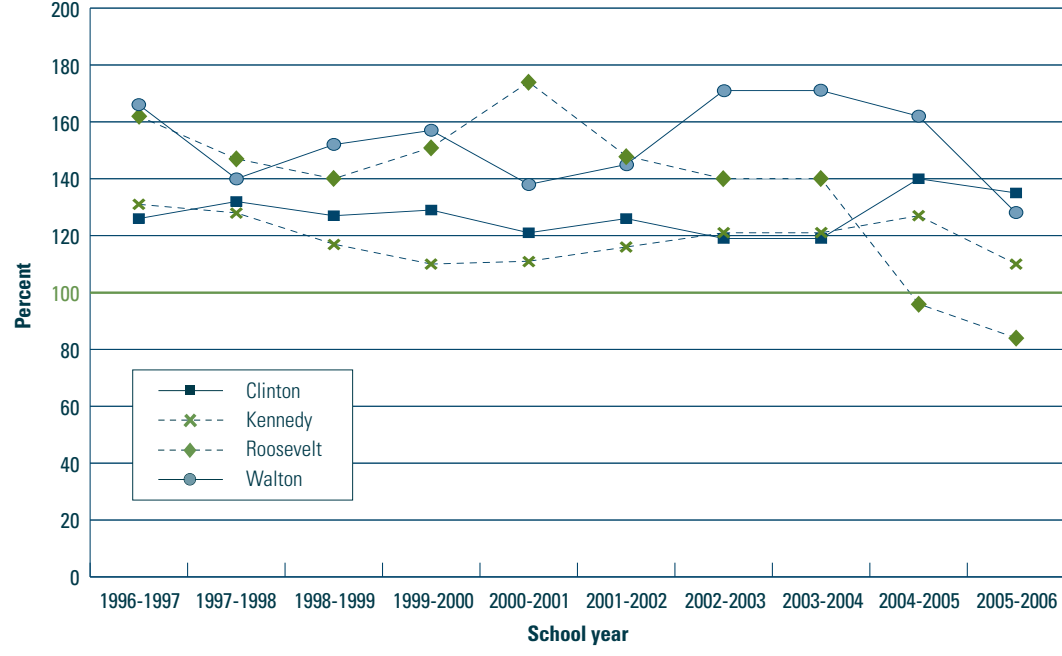
Source: NYCDOE School Facilities Capacity, Enrollment, and Utilization reports

protest long lines at newly installed metal detectors that made students late for class. Leaders collected surveys from hundreds of students, the majority of whom reported feeling no safer with metal detectors and extra police. Students complained of harassment by the school safety agents and arbitrary application of the discipline code.

SBU's investigations into the city's school safety policies revealed that local educators had as little control over safety as they did over school facilities resources. Under an agreement by the previous mayoral administration, the New York City Police Department was solely responsible for planning and executing policing activities in schools. Principals, even the local superintendents, had no oversight over school safety agents or police officers. SBU leaders were convinced that expanding the police presence in overcrowded schools would only increase student suspensions and discourage others from coming to school. Citywide action was needed to focus city leaders on the need to address the underlying problem of severe overcrowding.

In 2005, SBU leaders joined forces with three other youth organizing groups – Youth on the Move in the South Bronx, Make the Road by Walking, and, later, Future of Tomorrow of the Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation in Brooklyn – to launch a citywide coalition, the Urban Youth Collaborative (UYC), with assistance from the Institute for Education and Social Policy's Community Involvement Program at New York University. The Urban Youth Collaborative staged rallies at City Hall and delivered thousands of postcards to Chancellor Klein demand-

ing an end to harsh policing tactics in high schools and calling on the chancellor to involve students in developing strategies to improve their high schools. Each of the member groups also worked locally to press its demands with education officials.

While NYCDOE insisted that metal detectors would remain, city leaders agreed to the UYC's recommendations for improving the scanning procedures for student entry into schools. Education officials also negotiated an agreement with the police department to launch a new training program to increase agents' sensitivity to the conditions inside schools and to students' needs.

Creating a Model of Youth Leadership in Schools

In 2001, as the small high schools strategy got off the ground, the Bronx superintendent of high schools, Norman Wechsler, planned to break up three large high schools in the Northwest Bronx. He reached out to SBU to explore the group's interest in partnering on a new small high school.

The idea of creating a school captured the young people's imaginations. SBU leaders wanted to create a school in which SBU's vision of young people's capacity for leadership and action would frame the school's mission and curriculum. In 2002, the youth leaders assembled a design team of NWBCCC and SBU members and local education leaders, including faculty from Fordham University. Together, they began an intensive process of writing a proposal and developing a curriculum for the new school. The timeline for proposals was quite compressed, but the group refused to compromise their process of youth leading the development of the proposal for the sake of expediency.

The proposal was initially rejected as insufficiently developed. SBU was undeterred; leaders continued to meet weekly and recruited faculty from Bank Street and Lehman colleges to help rework the proposal. They reached out to experts at The Education Trust, whom Laura Vazquez and Fernando Carlo had met at an organizing training institute sponsored by

the Eastern Pennsylvania Organizing Project in Philadelphia. The leaders began meeting weekly to hammer out the details of the proposal, with young people facilitating meetings and making important decisions about curriculum and governance. Other community and school reform groups were struck by the depth of youth leadership in the process. Fernando Carlo said at the time:

> [Our role] is, like, the biggest thing; everywhere we present, that's what we're known for. A lot of the schools have youth on their design team, but, to be honest, it's just for the sake of having youth on the design team, just to say there was input. And usually it's just around the theme and when it gets down to the curriculum part, that's when the teachers just get together and design the curriculum. So that's why every time we speak about how did we get – when we stand up and say we designed a school, people really try to test us and go, "What do you mean?" And we went back and forth; we had to meet with teachers, and they had to tell us what are the things that need to be taught in class. And then we went back and forth to figure out what can we mold and what can we shape to make it work with the theme of the school. So, it's, like, we really did all that.

In 2004, SBU presented its refined proposal to small schools officials and New Visions, and this time it was enthusiastically approved. The Leadership Institute, as the school was named, was designed to provide mechanisms for student leadership and participation in school governance. Students would study the role of community organizing and activism in history and work in teams to complete Community Action Projects that would put their leadership skills to use.

The school was set to open in September of 2005, but the question of space remained. SBU was offered space on the Walton campus, where Walton High School was being phased out and several new schools had been added. SBU had already fought to keep

more schools from being packed into the campus, given their concerns about overcrowding and school safety. SBU leaders and school administrators scrambled to find space while working to recruit a class of ninth-graders. The school opened in a vacant Police Athletic League building in September 2005.

SBU leaders and school staff were ecstatic to finally have their school. Still, start-up high schools face a host of challenges in their first years: communicating the vision to students and staff, establishing a productive school culture, instituting rigorous instruction for students who may be several years behind. For the Leadership Institute, these challenges were compounded by the uncertainty about the school's location and the less-than-ideal temporary site.

The following September, the school moved to a wing of an underutilized elementary school, where Leadership Institute students complained of furniture and classrooms designed for young children, the absence of science labs and a library, and supply closets converted to class space. The first Community Action Project students developed was a facilities campaign. They learned about New York State government, met with local city council officials, participated in citywide rallies of the Alliance for Quality Education, and attended private meetings with officials in the state capital to discuss the need for more funding for city schools.

SBU's student surveys revealed crucial differences between students and teachers: students believed teachers had low expectations and failed to make classroom learning interesting; teachers were frustrated by student apathy and felt they received insufficient support from both school leaders and families for their efforts.

Delving into Teaching and Learning

In addition to training young people in organizing skills, SBU provides tutoring, homework help, and assistance with navigating school bureaucracies. SBU organizers noticed disparities in the type of homework assigned to SBU youth leaders attending the different high schools and to youth attending different programs within each school. SBU collected homework assignments during a six-month period and reviewed the assignments with researchers from The Education Trust, who confirmed the organization's perception that students were not all being held to the same expectations.

SBU youth and organizers were reluctant to use their information about homework assignments to denounce local teachers, particularly given the stresses of burgeoning enrollments and tensions between schools sharing campuses and the ever-present irritation of dealing with metal detectors and police. Instead, they decided to try to build relationships with teachers in the hope of developing a more collaborative effort to transform teacher expectations.

During the spring and summer of 2004, SBU students collected a hundred surveys from three large high schools – Kennedy, Walton, and Clinton – on teacher and student perceptions of their classroom experiences. These surveys revealed crucial differences between students and teachers: students believed teachers had low expectations and failed to make classroom learning interesting; teachers were frustrated by student apathy and felt they received insufficient support from both school leaders and families for their efforts. SBU sought the help of The Education Trust in analyzing the data and prepared to reach out to teachers.

Reaching Out to Teachers

At the national training convened in 2003 by the Eastern Pennsylvania Organizing Project where they had connected with The Education Trust, SBU leaders learned about neighborhood walks that other community organizing groups used to build educators' knowledge and stimulate the development of more open and trusting relationships between schools and communities. Youth were intrigued by this strategy, which they thought might help teachers to gain a more complete picture of their lives and thus increase educators' interest in working with young people to improve their schools. They saw the neighborhood walks as a starting point for conversations with teachers.

In 2004, SBU negotiated an agreement with the Region 1 superintendent (high schools came under the control of the regional superintendents at the time of Chancellor Klein's reorganization) for SBU to lead a back-to-school neighborhood tour for administrators and teachers in the four large high schools in their neighborhoods. Students planned and facilitated the tours, which included neighborhood landmarks as well as sites of SBU's and NWBCCC's organizing, and led small groups of teachers in discussions afterward. A local district official recalled these tours as

> really great, because many of our teachers had never been in the community. Some of the principals had never been in the community. So why not walk the community and let kids take you through it and say, "This is my life. This is a grocer on my corner. This is the health center up my street."

After the neighborhood walk, SBU leaders convened a small group of teachers to discuss issues that they could work together to resolve and the formation of an alliance called STARS – Student and Teacher Alliance to Reform Schools. A variety of suggestions emerged – a new attendance program, more resources, and school facility improvements. But sustaining the conversations proved a challenge. Teachers tended to dominate the small-group discussions and, though they applauded the passion and assertiveness of the youth, it was hard for them to step outside the role of teachers – and to imagine how educators might ally with SBU to improve their schools.

SBU led a second neighborhood tour in September 2005. They again recruited teachers for the STARS campaign. Besides their struggles in shifting the conversation to include the young people's concerns, it was difficult to maintain a consistent group of teachers – many of the teachers recruited in 2004 had left local schools, and other teachers had graduate classes and competing obligations after school that made it hard to find a time for students and teachers meet. After several meetings in fall 2005, the youth decided that their teachers, however well intentioned, did not fully grasp SBU's vision of youth leadership and that these conversations were not an effective vehicle for changing the classroom experience for students.

A New Focus on College Access

The SBU leaders shifted their energies around teaching and learning to citywide work through UYC. In addition to the need for school safety reform, the lack of access to guidance counselors and college preparation was a common concern for UYC member organizations. Many students reached senior year having no idea what credits they needed to graduate, and many schools had so few guidance and college counselors that average students were lucky to meet with their counselor once in their high school career.

UYC researched best practices around counseling and college preparation. They learned that national groups recommended a ratio of one guidance counselor for 250 students; New York City high schools had as many as 700 students per counselor, and the counselors often had other duties, including substitute teaching, that kept them from meeting with students. With the other UYC groups, SBU leaders worked to elaborate a platform that demanded one guidance counselor for every 250 students, standards of practice for guidance counselors, and "student success centers" to centralize counseling and college assistance. UYC leaders had learned about the idea of success centers from a visit to schools in Philadelphia, where two youth organizing groups, the Philadelphia Student Union and Youth United for Change, had led a successful campaign for improved counseling. SBU leader Cheyanne Garcia recalled:

> We thought that that was a great idea and it worked. The school was a public school, just like Walton, overcrowded, also a bunch of minority children, crashing against each other, in dress code. They willingly wore dress code. They don't do that here. Those students willingly wore dress code and their graduation rates went up because they had support, that extra support. It went from a thousand students for one guidance counselor to two hundred and fifty because of that success center.

SBU met with local principals to raise concerns about counseling and college preparation and with city-level officials to discuss the need for counseling standards and success centers. Most of the schools where UYC groups were involved lacked the funds and space to hire more counselors. City education officials were unwilling to mandate more guidance counselors to schools, but they agreed to explore the concept of student success centers. The deputy chancellor for teaching and learning, Andres Alonso, met with representatives from the Philadelphia school district to learn about the model and, with UYC, convened school principals in New York to discuss the possibilities in their schools. He and his successor, Marcia Lyles, provided support and funds to establish Student Success Centers in two Brooklyn high schools in 2007 and expanded the funding to support additional centers in the Bronx in 2008.

The Continuing Fight for Facilities

Though NWBCCC and SBU succeeded in winning thousands of new seats for the Northwest Bronx and mitigating the impacts of overcrowded high schools, the fight for well-maintained buildings and adequate school space has continued. For nearly a decade, NWBCCC and SBU have worked to build political support to convert a nearby and largely abandoned National Guard armory into new school space. The groups advocated for the armory's redevelopment into school, community, and retail space; they enlisted the Pratt Institute Center for Community and Environmental Development to draw up plans and recruited a developer. The groups also pressured city and state officials to spend unused state funds to make building repairs that were necessary to maintaining the viability of the building site. With local

politicians, retail and building trades unions, and community institutions, NWBCCC formed the Kingsbridge Armory Redevelopment Alliance (KARA) to press for living wages and union protections and ensure that the redevelopment would reflect community needs.

In 2006, after long delays and fights about jurisdiction, the Bronx Overall Economic Development Corporation released a request for proposals for the redevelopment. Local politicians, including former Bronx borough president Adolfo Carrion, credited NWBCCC with influencing the language of the request for proposals and the resulting designs, all of which included space for community uses and schools.

In the fall of 2006, to the consternation of local elected officials and KARA, the NYCDOE revised its estimate of school capacity needs in the Bronx, announcing that no new schools would be built on the armory site (Moss 2007). NWBCCC responded with a report, produced with research support from the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, accusing the city of "planning for failure" with unacceptably low projections of high school graduation (Moss 2007; Annenberg Institute 2006). The city's facilities planning estimates assumed that roughly two-thirds of students would drop out of school by the time they reached high school, even though education leaders had invested substantial resources in improving high schools and, presumably, reducing dropout rates in Bronx communities.

NWBCCC and its allies held press conferences in the Bronx and at City Hall and, once again, held meetings to press its case with local, city, and state officials. By 2008, NWBCCC had won a commitment from city officials to site two new schools on land adjacent to the armory building. Since then, the organization has continued working through KARA on a community-benefits agreement ensuring that the armory redevelopment will bring union jobs to the community.

ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF NWBCCC'S AND SBU'S ORGANIZING

Data Collected

Our analysis drew primarily upon qualitative data, including interviews, archival documents, and city-wide media coverage on education. We also examined quantitative data obtained from NYCDOE.

Interviews

We conducted forty-four interviews with NWBCCC and SBU organizers and leaders to learn more about the organizations' methodologies and to follow the progress of their education campaigns. Nine interviews were conducted with allies and education stakeholders to assess perceptions of the NWBCCC's effectiveness. In addition, eight interviews were conducted with local district administrators, citywide NYCDOE officials, and elected officials to obtain their perspective on the impact of NWBCCC's and SBU's work.

Document review

We reviewed documents produced by both organizing groups and monitored local newspapers to keep abreast of the changing education context in both New York City and the Bronx.

Administrative data

We collected data on school capacity and utilization rates for the elementary, middle, and high schools in Community School District 10 and for high schools within the same geographic area from 1996 to 2006.[4] Data from 2002 onward were downloaded from NYCDOE's Web site. Prior data were obtained in electronic and paper formats from the NYCDOE School Facilities Division.

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[4] High school data excluded special education and alternative graduation programs.

Analytic Approach

Specific questions guiding our research were:

1. To what extent do educators attribute influence on educational policy and resource decisions in support of low-performing schools to NWBCCC's and SBU's education organizing?

2. To what extent has NWBCCC's and SBU's work influenced the capacity of schools to educate student successfully?

Our analysis draws primarily on interviews with organization staff and district officials, as well as on press accounts of the groups' activities. Drawing on our initial year of fieldwork, we defined indicators of change in school capacity relevant to the NWBCCC and SBU campaigns. As school facilities was a dominant theme in both organizations' work, our analysis of administrative data examined trends in school utilization for the elementary, middle, and high schools targeted by the groups' campaigns.

FINDINGS

Interviews with education officials suggest that NWBCCC's and SBU's work produced a dramatic investment of resources in school facilities in District 10. School and citywide student-led campaigns also heightened district awareness of schooling problems and the value of youth voice at the high school level.

Influence on District Capacity

Policies and resources

Local and city education officials widely credit NWBCCC with drawing city and state attention to the problem of severe school overcrowding. They also view the organizations as helping to build political will and secure financial resources for new school creation in communities of highest need. Interviewees consistently asserted that NWBCCC's organizing resulted in the addition of classroom seats to the district over a ten-year period.

Bruce Irushalmi, the former assistant superintendent in District 10 who was in charge of facilities, credited the groups with helping the district secure 14,000 new seats through construction and leasing. He described NWBCCC as

> the most instrumental community force I've seen function in New York City around the issue of school overcrowding. I think the results really underscore that, to the point of making it indisputable.

Overcrowding in local elementary, middle, and high schools decreased considerably during the period of NWBCCC's advocacy. Facilities data reported by NYCDOE show an overall decrease in elementary and middle school overcrowding from 114 percent utilization rates in 1996-1997 to 96 percent utilization in 2005-2006; utilization for high schools in the same geographic area decreased from 135 percent to 110 percent during this same period (see figures 7 and 8). At the elementary and middle school levels, the decrease in overcrowding stemmed from both the influx of new seats (which increased dramatically during the period of NWBCCC's and SBU's organizing; see Figure 9) and a modest decline in enrollment.[5] High schools continued to experience high levels of enrollment that were mitigated, in part, by the increase in the number of school seats (see figures 8 and 10).

NWBCCC's history and knowledge of the community made it a particularly effective partner to the district in addressing the school facilities crisis. Irushalmi recalled:

> We worked on locating potential sites for schools together. They would suggest sites to us, and we would take a look at them. More often that not, they were good sites, though some were not. They allowed us to discount poor sites by respecting our knowledge of what a school location needed to be. They had tentacles in the community we couldn't possibly establish.

The reputation as a powerful organization that NWBCCC built over the years through neighborhood organizing helped mobilize elected officials to address local schools' needs. A New York City Council member who supported the group's work to renovate the armory observed:

> We did a lot of neighborhood tours with the Coalition and that helped to give me more information about what's going on. You know, when you get there into a school, you can actually see the conditions and you say, "Wow. No wonder these kids aren't doing as good as they should be. Look at where they're learning."

This ability to move powerful allies in support of the community's agenda created openings for local officials to advocate for district needs at higher levels of the school system. Irma Zardoya explained that the groups' clout with elected officials enabled the district to push its demands around the capital budget and leasing of school space. "They leveraged support in addressing mutually identified district needs," she said.

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[5] Student enrollment in District 10 declined from 41,912 students in October 1996 to 39,916 students in October 2005 (these figures do not include special education students).
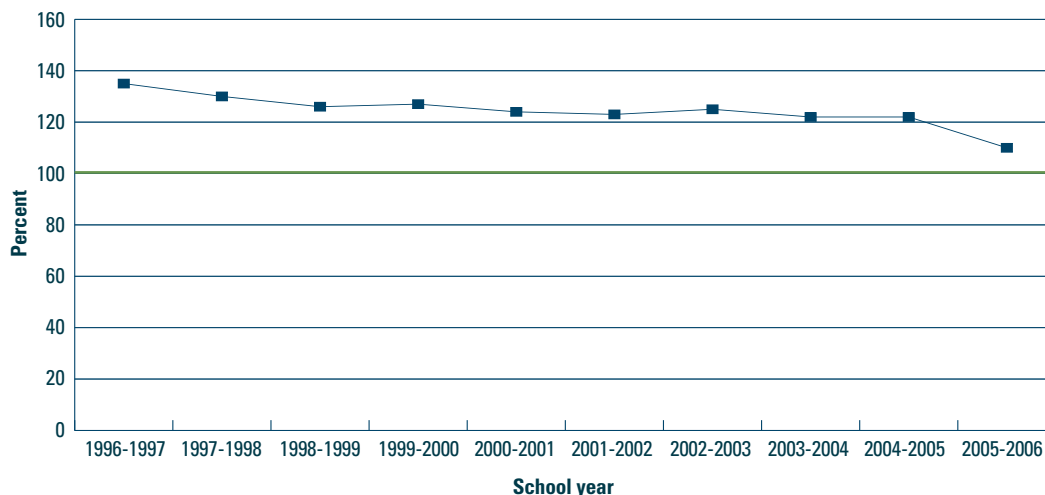
FIGURE 7

Percentage of building utilization for Community District 10 elementary and middle schools
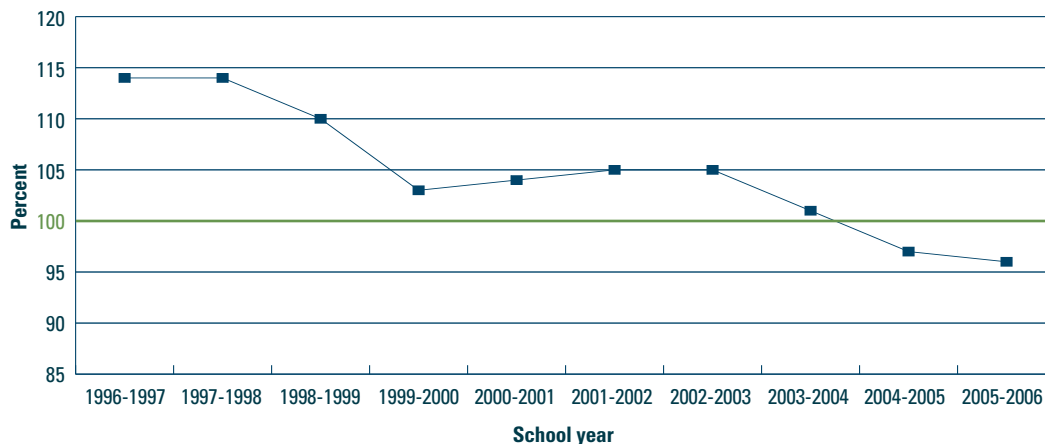
Source: New York City Department of Education School Capacity, Enrollment and Utilization reports

FIGURE 8

Percentage of building utilization in Northwest Bronx area high schools, aggregated

Source: New York City Department of Education School Capacity, Enrollment and Utilization Reports

Note: High schools included Bronx High School of Science, Dewitt Clinton High School, Grace H. Dodge Career and Technical High School, High School of American Studies, and John F. Kennedy, Roosevelt, Walton, and University Heights high schools.

Reflecting on how NWBCCC was perceived by system decision-makers, Irushalmi stated:

> They were able to articulate the community's view that [overcrowding] needed relief, and they were able to articulate it to elected officials who often measured their acquiescence by voting potential. The Clergy Coalition had a strong, solid voice – a well-organized voice, always able to turn out people for positive events – and was always able to convince elected officials that they had a clear agenda. I think the fact that we and they worked together, rather than at odds, distinguished us from many other communities in other districts, where oftentimes there were activist groups, but they were fighting the school district.

FIGURE 9

School capacity in Community School District 10 elementary and middle schools
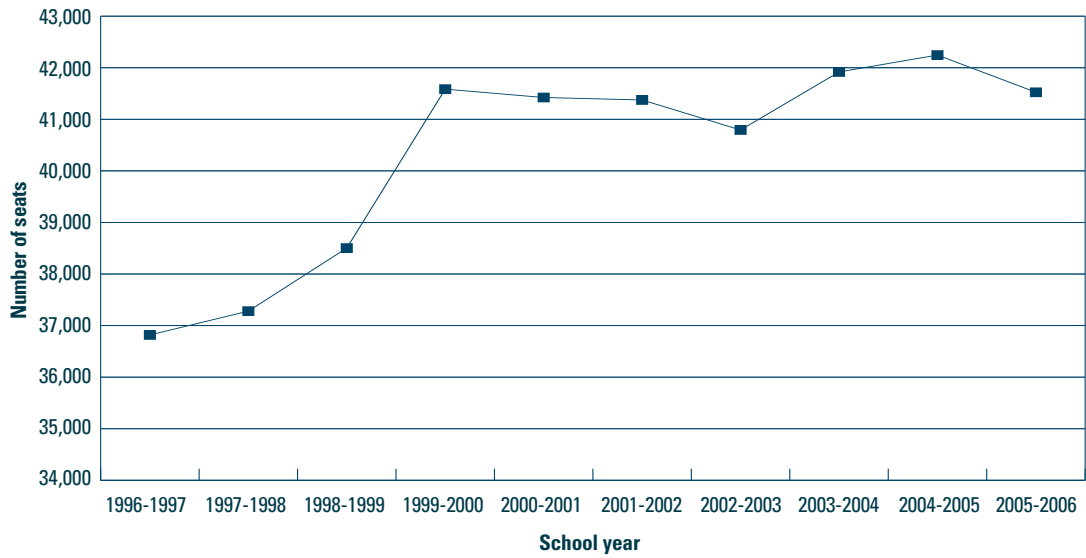
Number of seats / **School year**

Source: New York City Department of Education School Capacity, Enrollment and Utilization reports

FIGURE 10

School capacity in Northwest Bronx area high schools
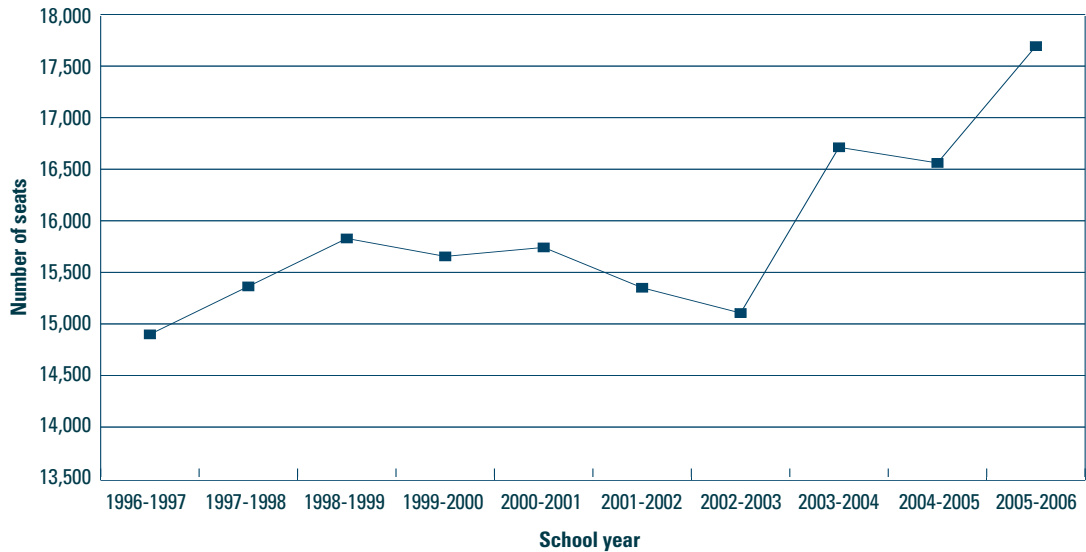
Number of seats / **School year**

Source: New York City Department of Education School Capacity, Enrollment and Utilization reports

Note: High schools included Bronx High School of Science, Dewitt Clinton, Grace H. Dodge Career and Technical High School, High School of American Studies, John F. Kennedy, Roosevelt, Walton, and University Heights High Schools.

NWBCCC's and SBU's work also provided city officials with information about the impact of city-wide reform initiatives on local school conditions. A senior advisor to the chancellor credited SBU youth with informing system leaders about tensions resulting from the department's decision to site multiple small high schools on the Walton campus and the need for more careful policies about school placement. SBU persistence in raising the issue of school overcrowding, she recalled, prompted better planning to mitigate the tensions between small and large schools:

> The way Walton got organized and what space was given to different schools – I had no idea that was happening and the way that the space got divided in the building. . . . It was too informal before September 2004. [SBU] pushed really hard, and they should have. So that was important, what they did.

Pressure from SBU helped city school officials to advocate successfully for expanded training for school safety officials, which a citywide official described as "a big breakthrough" with the New York City Police Department. Youth demands for postsecondary counseling through the Urban Youth Collaborative also helped to shift the priorities of school system administrators. The senior advisor observed:

> I just had a meeting with the . . . directors of student placement and youth development, and four out of ten of them put [postsecondary counseling] as one of their top two priorities that they've worked on this year. I think that Sistas and Brothas United was important in raising the student voice on that.

Accountability to the community
NWBCCC's and SBU's willingness to utilize both collaborative and confrontational strategies expanded school system responsiveness to the concerns of families in the southern part of District 10, which had historically received little attention from local political leaders. Education officials in the Bronx credited the organizations' success in pressing their education

agenda to their power and their skill in wielding it, through media attention, large protests, and access to elected officials.

Describing the work to find the Leadership Institute a permanent home, a local instructional superintendent noted:

> People were scared of them, in a good way, I thought. The last thing people want is to have parents and students marching in the streets. And there's a lot to be learned there – maybe we should be doing more [marching] if we want to change schools. The Leadership Institute was one of the few schools that actually got a promise of their own building. That doesn't happen every day, and that's a direct result of SBU's organizing and being very, very visible in the media. But also, they have a lot of connections politically, so they're well situated in a political context.

At the same time, as one district official observed, NWBCCC's and SBU's tendency toward what she perceived as confrontational tactics (as opposed to consultation and dialogue) sometimes made for a difficult relationship with school principals and teachers. A press conference against police in schools held outside of Walton campus, for example, made it more difficult for SBU to continue its activities inside the school, even though the group had intended to call attention to the need for city action to reduce overcrowding in the building. Still, she acknowledged that the organizations' willingness and ability to apply pressure was crucial to making sure that local and city leaders were accountable to their demands.

> They're watchdogs, they're catalysts . . . and they push. And they remind you about priorities. So, whereas sometimes it's been uncomfortable, the relationship has always been focused toward the same goal. I believe that if they see that you're trying to honestly deliver on some of the promises and some of the concerns that they have, then they begin to take on less of an activist role and take on more of a partnership role.

> *"SBU prepares young people . . . to take action in their community and participate in our democracy. These are the kind of leaders we want for our future . . . children who will stand up and be counted and say what they need to say."*
>
> *Yvonne Torres, superintendent, Region 1*

District leaders valued SBU for bringing a youth perspective into policy and resource debates. Indeed, as a local instructional superintendent observed, SBU was one of the only vehicles for marginalized students – as opposed to the high-achieving students who usually populate student government – to have a voice in their schooling.

> The leadership of the school thought they were meeting with the leaders of the school, and I said, "Well, you're meeting with – again – the kids that come to school every day and get the As and the Bs, but you're not meeting with the everyday kid who struggles in school."

Zardoya recalled that SBU students "opened up my eyes in terms of the lack of student engagement in decisions." Yvonne Torres, the local superintendent who assumed the Region 1 superintendency after Zardoya's retirement, added:

> SBU prepares young people to articulate their needs and be proactive in defining solutions. I think they have been very instrumental in developing the leadership of students to take action in their community and participate in our democracy. These are the kind of leaders we want for our future . . . children who will stand up and be counted and say what they need to say.

REFLECTIONS ON FINDINGS

Implications for School Capacity and Student Learning

Through their organizing for new school spaces, NWBCCC and SBU helped education officials reduce severe overcrowding in local schools. Teasing out the impact of reduced overcrowding on school effectiveness and student learning is difficult to do, given the range of other factors affecting school performance, such as teacher quality, curriculum, assessments, and principal leadership. But few would disagree that decent buildings are a crucial starting place for functioning schools. In the mid-1990s, teachers in the Northwest Bronx routinely taught thirty or more students at a time in classes crammed into locker rooms, supply closets, and hallways. Research on school improvement has shown that school climate and teacher morale are important components of a school's capacity to produce good outcomes, and both are hard to maintain in the face of such dire conditions.

The model of organizing used by both organizations involved developing leadership at the most local level: neighborhood blocks and schools. Leaders then were engaged in campaigns that moved local concerns into broader-scale efforts. School-level organizing provided the bedrock for both organizations' school overcrowding campaigns, and these local efforts produced wide-ranging improvements in the climate of individual schools. NWBCCC and SBU won traffic safety improvements, cafeteria and bathroom improvements, and new policies on school communication with parents. SBU also secured changes to metal-detector policies and improved training for school safety agents in how to interact with students. SBU's insistence that violence in high schools stemmed in part from overcrowding and the resulting friction between schools sharing buildings led city education officials to reexamine their process for siting small high schools and to allocate additional resources to help reduce tensions on Bronx

campuses. All of these changes are likely to positively impact students' sense of safety and community in their schools and facilitate a greater focus on learning.

In spring 2009, the Leadership Institute graduated its first class of students. Like any other new small school, the Institute faced the challenges of teacher and administrator turnover, establishing a healthy culture, and communicating its vision to staff and students. For the Leadership Institute, these challenges were compounded by a long search for a permanent home and the less-than-ideal spaces its students had to contend with. Nonetheless, the research on small schools suggests that personalization and deep engagement of students can help to improve student outcomes, when combined with ambitious instruction and effective leadership. In this respect, SBU's continued involvement in the school and the school's emphasis on youth leadership development and community action are promising signs of things to come.

Lessons Learned

Schools facilities were not the only problem, but until schools had a functioning environment, nothing else could be addressed.

The story of the Northwest Bronx begins and ends with school facilities. Parent and youth leaders widely acknowledge that school overcrowding was not the only problem in their schools. They believe that helping principals and teachers become successful required, at minimum, a functional environment. A safe facility in which children have sufficient space was an important step toward creating such a space. Ronn Jordan observed:

> We started with facilities out of necessity. I think that if it would have been a situation where our schools were in good condition and our kids just were failing, and there were serious teaching and learning issues going on, we would have [gone] that way. But we went the way we did out of necessity.

Few would disagree that decent buildings are a crucial starting place for functioning schools.

Local leadership development was key to the organizing strategy.

Parents and young people conducted outreach, researched issues and demands, planned strategy, and spoke with public officials and the media. Even in district-level campaigns and citywide coalitions, leaders played prominent roles in developing strategy, negotiating with allies and public officials, and representing the organization to the media.

The participatory nature of the work may be one factor in explaining the longevity of the organizations' campaign, despite the twists and turns of city politics, turnover in school system leadership, and the inevitable aging out of parents and students from local schools. Leaders developed a deep sense of ownership of education campaigns, knowledge of the intricacies of school facilities reform, and belief in their capacity to make change happen that kept them engaged over time.

NWBCCC's work on other community issues provided valuable insights and experience.

NWBCCC's extensive work on other community issues contributed new insights about how to solve school problems and greater savvy about how to use the media to mobilize officials to action. Organizing campaigns to improve housing conditions and local banking practices built a reservoir of tactical knowledge and professional expertise that the organization brought to bear on the school facilities problem. NWBCCC's turnkey strategy of school development and leasing resulted directly from the organization's long history in affordable housing development.

Organizing work benefited from stability in local district leadership.

Irma Zardoya and Bruce Irushalmi spent more than a decade in District 10, facilitating the development of a long and productive relationship. Each brought their own commitment to educational equity and improvement. As Irushalmi asserted, NWBCCC's style of parent leadership development was consistent with Zardoya's beliefs about parent involvement in schools.

> It was exactly what she was trying to encourage principals to facilitate in their own schools. It gave her the opportunity to not only practice what she preached, but also to model it.

Young people brought a vital energy as full partners in the struggle for decent schools.

Though parents initially led the way, SBU's perseverance in creating the Leadership Institute provides evidence that when students receive both support and respect, they can and will get engaged in a deep and sustained way on education matters – even when the issues do not directly affect them. Yorman Nuñez, a long-time leader of SBU who is currently running for a seat on the New York City Council, explained,

> Many of us are going to become staff at SBU and make it bigger – have it be all around the country. . . . Whatever I do in the future, I'm going to change the world. I'm going to affect it. With my history and background, I don't want to see today's youth grow up in the way I did. I take everything in this organization personally because of that.

The challenges SBU experienced in getting teachers to listen to high school students underscore the need to create a culture of youth leadership and teacher–student collaboration in schools. As a NYCDOE small schools coordinator said simply, "If a student can tell us: 'This is what I need,' I think we should listen."

Data Sources for the Case Study Series

Over the six-year study, the study group collected and analyzed a total of 321 stakeholder interviews; 75 observations of organizing strategy sessions, campaign activities, and actions; 509 teacher surveys; and school demographic and standardized test score data.[6]

INTERVIEWS

Our research team conducted 321 open-ended, semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders across the sites. Between January 2003 and September 2006, we conducted 160 interviews with organizing staff, 77 interviews with parent and youth leaders, 56 interviews with educators, 28 interviews with allies, and 15 interviews with national network staff.

In the initial phase of the study, we interviewed organizing staff and leaders and focused on organizational characteristics – including the group's mission, theory of change, strategy, capacity, and leadership development activities. Early interviews also aimed to understand the impetus for and strategies underlying groups' campaigns for school improvement. To follow campaign developments, we interviewed organizing staff multiple times over the course of the study.

Interviews with allies, principals, teachers, district administrators, superintendents, and other key stakeholders elicited perceptions of the groups' power and reach and the ways in which the groups' organizing efforts may have impacted school, district, and community capacity.

OBSERVATIONS

During multiple site visits to each of the groups, we observed committee meetings, trainings, negotiation sessions, and public actions. More than seventy-five field notes written by research team members document these observations.

DOCUMENT REVIEW

We reviewed documentation and archival materials produced by the groups, including newsletters, organizational charts, and training materials, across five years of the study.

CONTEXT REVIEW

In addition to conducting extensive background research on the local and state context for each group (e.g., defining the critical policy reforms, state-level issues, governance structure for each school system, political landscape), we followed the local media coverage of education issues in all of our sites. Our database includes more than 1,700 articles. These articles, combined with the interview data, provide a picture of the shifting context for reform in each site.

TEACHER SURVEYS

We administered online teacher surveys in three sites – Austin, Miami-Dade, and Oakland – where organizing groups had used an intensive school-based strategy of organizing and had mounted signature campaigns for several years. The survey explored four critical areas of school capacity, including district support, school climate, professional culture, and instructional core. Survey questions were drawn from a variety of established measures, but primarily from scales developed by the Consortium on Chicago School Research. Appendices in the Austin, Miami, and Oakland case studies include a description of survey measures and their psychometric properties.

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[6] We also collected 241 adult member surveys and 124 youth member surveys to understand how involvement in community organizing influenced members' leadership skills and their community and political engagement. However, the case reports focus on school and district outcomes and do not include an analyses of these parent and youth survey data. Results of these surveys will be presented in future publications.

Surveys were administered to teachers at schools where the group was highly engaged in organizing efforts, as well as in a set of comparison schools. A total of 509 teacher surveys were collected from the three sites.

ADMINISTRATIVE DATA

We also examined publicly available teacher and student data from all districts. Data vary from district to district but include measures of teacher and student race/ethnicity, years of teaching experience, dropout rates, graduation rates, student performance on standardized tests, and a range of other variables. To assess indicators that did not have corresponding data for publicly available download, data requests to the district were made. In Austin and Oakland, these publicly available data included district-administered parent and teacher surveys.

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About the Annenberg Institute for School Reform

The Annenberg Institute for School Reform is a national policy-research and reform-support organization, affiliated with Brown University, that focuses on improving conditions and outcomes in urban schools, especially those serving disadvantaged children.

In pursuing its mission, the Institute collaborates with a variety of partners committed to educational improvement – school districts, community organizations, researchers, national and local reform support organizations, and funders. Rather than providing a specific reform design or model to be implemented, the Institute's approach is to offer an array of tools and strategies to help districts strengthen their local capacity to provide and sustain high-quality education for all students.

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