Building a Districtwide Small Schools Movement

Annenberg Institute for School Reform
AT BROWN UNIVERSITY

OAKLAND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

ORGANIZED COMMUNITIES, STRONGER SCHOOLS

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BUILDING A DISTRICTWIDE SMALL SCHOOLS MOVEMENT

Overview: Oakland Community Organizations

The new small schools movement began as a community movement, and grassroots organizing was essential.…We intentionally opened schools only where organizing was occurring in order to grow and maintain a level of energy needed to initiate new reform. This was wildly successful thanks to the tremendous organizing done by Oakland Community Organizations.

— Oakland Unified School District Web site

It is not often that a government entity publicly credits community organizing for a positive transformation in public schools. But this is exactly what happened in Oakland, California, where years of on-the-ground organizing – community meetings, relationship building, and public actions – led to the creation of forty-eight new small schools, fundamentally transforming the district landscape. The work of Oakland Community Organizations (OCO) played a critical role in sustaining the small schools movement in the midst of a fiscal crisis and multiple transitions in district leadership. Yet the story of OCO cannot be summarized in a single quote or accolade. Community organizing for school reform is deeply entwined in the complex dynamics of communities, politics, and schools.

To capture this context, the study team followed the OCO small school campaign over six years, collected data from multiple sources, and analyzed these data alongside data from six urban districts around the nation. This study of OCO utilizes extensive document analysis; student outcome data; and interviews and surveys from parents, teachers, district administrators, and the organizers themselves to answer three key questions.

In what ways has OCO's organizing influenced school district policy?

- OCO received unequivocal credit from district administrators, teachers, and other key education stakeholders for its role in winning the small schools policy. OCO worked tirelessly to ensure that the supports necessary for the successful development of small schools were in place and to create the political will to sustain the reform within a turbulent political environment.
- OCO helped integrate more nuanced and meaningful forms of parent and community engagement into district and school practices. Parents have been at the front and center of the small schools reform, involved in every step of the process, from advocating for the small schools to participating in design teams and leading school-based organizing committees.
- OCO advocacy led to the creation of new school facilities, the development of new school district departments and staff positions, and increased philanthropic spending in the school district.

To what degree has OCO's organizing influenced the capacity of schools to educate students successfully?

- Both teachers and parents report that school climate, especially school safety, parent-teacher relationships, and shared decision making, was positively influenced by OCO's work.
- OCO helped build a stronger professional culture for teachers in the new small schools. Teachers in the new small schools reported greater input in school decision making, a stronger sense of collective responsibility, and higher norms of collaboration and joint problem-solving than teachers in large schools.
- Teachers and principals report that small schools are providing students with more individualized academic supports, thus enhancing prospects for better educational outcomes.

Has OCO's organizing to create and support the small schools policy produced measurable gains in student outcomes?

- ✦ Small schools in Oakland are outperforming the large schools from which they emerged. In particular, students are completing more rigorous coursework and dropping out at lower rates, compared to the large schools.

Beyond these questions, the trajectory of OCO's organizing offers a powerful example of how persistent organizing – especially the intentional development of relationships between parents, community members, teachers, and administrators – can result in equitable districtwide reform. Grassroots pressure and subsequent public will to address overcrowding in Oakland schools was as essential as the participation of parent leaders, teachers, and administrators in design meetings and day-to-day implementation of creating forty-eight new small schools. Remarkably, even though this organizing took place in a period of significant fiscal and political turbulence, OCO's persistent focus on equity and outcomes helped to protect and sustain the small schools reform.

OCO's organizing yields important lessons about how communities and educators can come together to generate reform efforts, the challenges and opportunities associated with reforms when they are scaled up, and the importance of community engagement in sustaining reform over time.

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

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. 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.

[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 is affiliated with the PICO (People Improving Communities through Organizing) national network
- 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.

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*, provides a guiding theory of change for how community organizing stimulates improvements in both community capacity and district and school capacity (see Figure 1; Mediratta 2004). In the current series of case studies, we focus on how organizing influences district and school capacity and student learning.

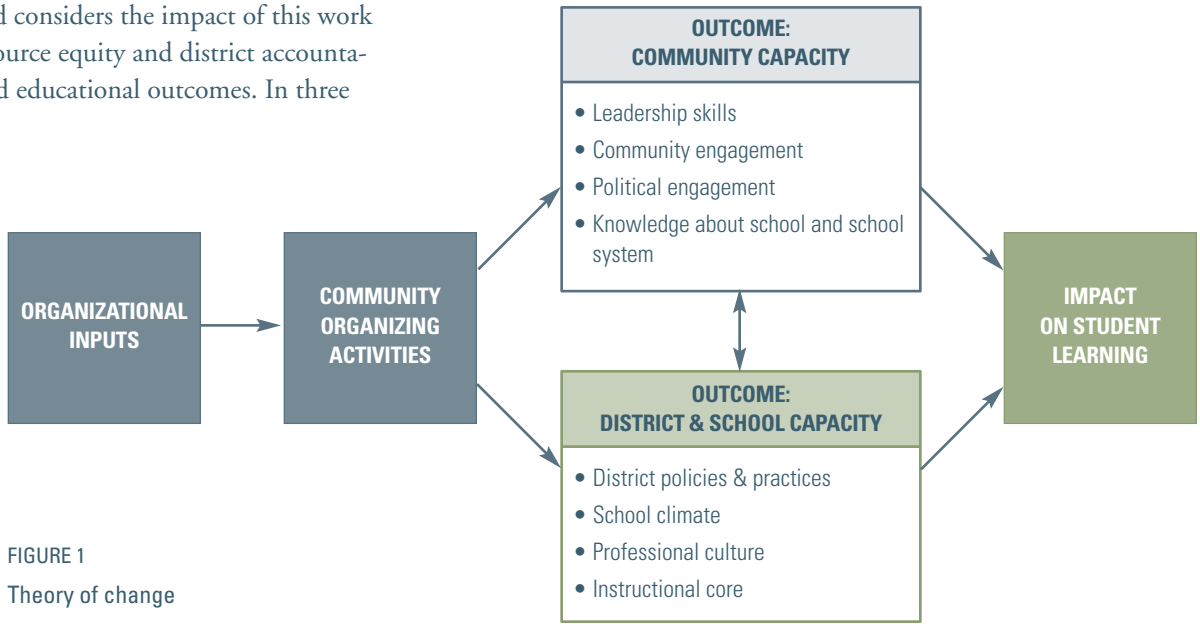


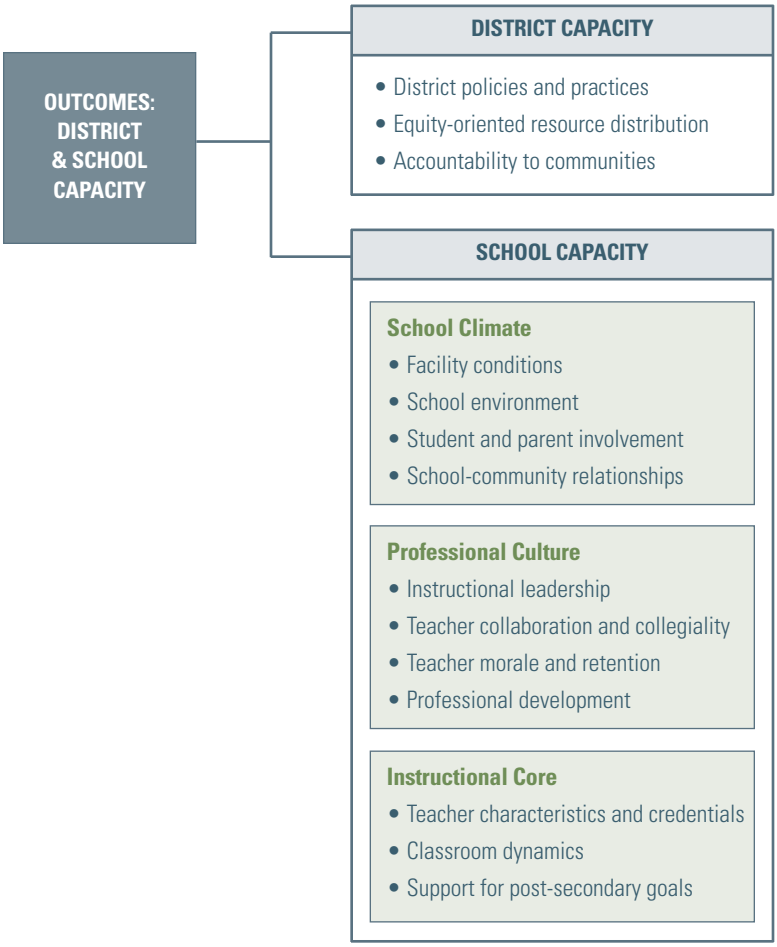
FIGURE 1

Theory of change

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).

FIGURE 2

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



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 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, Kubisch, Schorr & Weiss 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 2000, following months of strategy sessions and research on the problem of overcrowded schools, organizers and parent leaders at Oakland Community Organizations (OCO) undertook a simple, yet profound, task. They sketched a map of their city. On it they charted elementary schools located in the wealthy hills section of Oakland. Then they mapped schools in the low-lying flatlands of Oakland. Underneath each schoolhouse they noted the number of students attending the school and its ranking on the state Academic Performance Index. On a scale of 1 to 10, an API rank of 1 signifies that the school is in the state's lowest decile; a 10 indicates that the school's academic performance falls within the top decile.

The map they generated showed the dramatic disparities between smaller, higher-performing schools in the hills and the overcrowded, low-performing schools in the flatlands. In bold letters, the map's headline asked, "Is this fair?" (Figure 3).

As OCO started organizing for small schools in Oakland, the map hung prominently in its office. Universally, the map stopped people in their tracks. Liz Sullivan, a former elementary school teacher and an OCO organizer, explains, "We had structure, but it didn't catch fire until we came up with the research on the map. Once we had done that research and produced the map, people [would] just come in and gasp because it's so blatant."

Oakland Community Organizations

OCO's map depicts the city of Oakland, like many urban centers in the United States, as a place of stark contradictions. Both literally and figuratively, these contradictions play out in Oakland's geography – and in its public education system.

ABOUT OAKLAND

Oakland's low-lying flatlands, stretching east of San Francisco Bay, rise into rolling foothills toward the northeast. The hills are home to Oakland's wealthier, predominantly White neighborhoods, where homes routinely sell for upward of a million dollars. At the same time, for the past two decades, Oakland has consistently ranked as one of the fifteen most violent cities in America. The majority of violent crimes occurred in Oakland's working-class flatland neighborhoods. Crime rates, like virtually any indicator of social and economic well-being, convey the story of two distinct Oaklands.

Education indicators are no different. A medium-sized district with approximately 43,000 students, a third of the students in the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) are classified as English language learners (ELLs) and about two-thirds qualify for free or reduced lunches. While there are several notable examples of high-performing schools, clustered primarily in the hills, the district's academic performance has been subpar overall. In the 2000-2001 academic year, around the time that OCO's organizing campaign for small schools began, the district's dropout rate was 33 percent, compared with a 10 percent dropout rate statewide.

The district has struggled to serve its Black and Latino students, who make up approximately three-quarters of the district's population. According to data from the California Department of Education, in 2001, only 16 percent of Black students and 17 percent of Latino students in Oakland high schools met proficiency on the state math test, while 60 percent of White students did so. Similarly, on the state

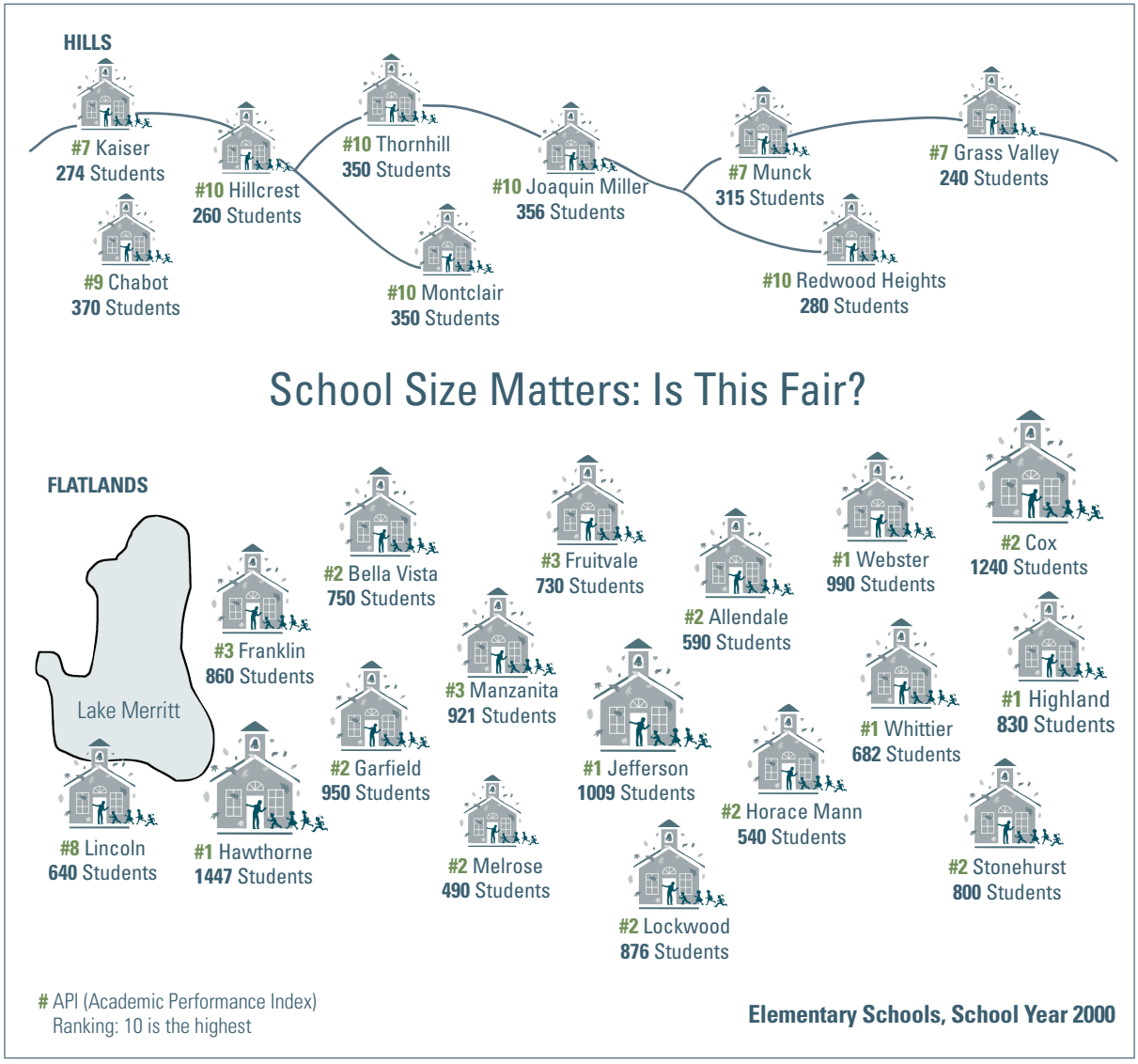
language arts exam, 33 percent of Black students and 30 percent of Latino students met proficiency, compared to 67 percent of White students (Education Department Partnership n.d.).

Compounding these academic challenges, the district faced ongoing fiscal and administrative turmoil. Dennis Chaconas, hired as the district's superintendent in 2000, brought dramatic and much-needed reform to the district. He increased the number of credentialed teachers and raised test scores (May 2002, p. 1). By late 2002, however, the district had accumulated a deficit of approximately $80 million, due to antiquated budgeting practices, overspending, and teacher raises (May & Rosenfeld 2003, p. A1).

The depth of the district's fiscal problems prompted calls from state officials for Chaconas' ouster. While many parents and community members supported him, the district's fiscal problems were far too

FIGURE 3

Hills vs. flatlands: Academic Performance Index rankings and school size in OUSD elementary schools, 2000



Source: Oakland Community Organizations, reproduced by Jean Wing, Oakland Unified School District

By the start of the 2007-2008 school year, forty-eight new small schools in Oakland had opened, fundamentally and dramatically transforming the landscape of public education in Oakland.

entrenched to be solved without a state bailout. In May 2003, the California State Assembly approved a $100 million emergency loan, paving the way for a state takeover of the district until its loan could be repaid (Coleman 2003, p. 1). Randolph Ward, a former state administrator in Compton, California, who had helped establish fiscal stability there, was appointed as OUSD's state administrator. The elected school board was stripped of its decision-making authority and allowed to serve only in an advisory capacity.

In 2006, three years after his appointment, Ward moved on to the superintendent's position in San Diego. His tenure in Oakland received mixed reviews, particularly from the teachers union, and the district's financial condition remained precarious (Allen-Taylor 2007, pp. 1–3). Since Ward's exit, there have been two additional state administrators. In late 2008, both a state administrator and an interim superintendent were at the district's helm under a bifurcated structure, providing leadership over different areas of district administration. Plans are under way to transition fully to local control and to hire a permanent superintendent by April 2009.

OAKLAND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS' EDUCATION ORGANIZING

It is within this tumultuous context that OCO's organizing to reduce school overcrowding in the city's low-performing flatlands schools has taken place. Initially involved in creating new charter schools (with mixed success) in the late 1990s, OCO organizers and leaders came to view charters as a piecemeal response to the systemic problems facing the flatlands schools.

With this analysis, OCO shifted its organizing strategy to demand small schools reform as a strategy for leveraging districtwide change. Partnering with the Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools (BayCES), in 2000 OCO developed and won approval for a new small schools policy, leading to the development of nine new small schools in the district within a three-year period. Promising results from the new small schools prompted the district to adopt small schools as the cornerstone of its reform efforts. By the start of the 2007-2008 school year, forty-eight new small schools in Oakland had opened, fundamentally and dramatically transforming the landscape of public education in Oakland.

This report documents OCO's small schools campaign and describes the impact of OCO's work on influencing district policy, increasing school capacity, and improving student outcomes.

OCO's Mission Statement

We envision Oakland as a safe and vibrant city united in our ethnic, religious and economic diversity. We see Oakland as a city where all children and families have equal access to a first-rate education; affordable housing and home ownership; skills training and good employment opportunities; quality health care; and safe, clean streets in vibrant neighborhoods. Our vision for Oakland is guided by our belief that dignity, respect and equality are a fundamental right of every family in this country.

The Founding of OCO

In the early seventies, two young Jesuit priests, John Baumann and Jerry Helfrich, moved to California to begin organizing in Oakland's most impoverished neighborhoods. Their work would lay the foundation for the creation of both OCO and PICO, a national organizing network (see sidebar). For Baumann, who had been trained in Saul Alinsky's model of organizing in Chicago (see Alinsky 1971), organizing provided a natural bridge to the social justice traditions of his theological training. Baumann observed that he was especially struck by the power of organizing to move "people that were in pain … to really make differences in their community."

Using Alinsky's neighborhood-based model of organizing, Baumann and Helfrich organized community members in the Fruitvale and East Oakland neighborhoods to address problems such as vacant housing and neighborhood crime. Their organizing built momentum, and in 1977 they formally founded OCO. As OCO's work evolved, the organization transitioned from the time-intensive model of neighborhood-based organizing to a congregation- and institution-based organizing model. Today, more than forty congregations, schools, and allied community organizations are dues-paying members of OCO. Through these institutions, OCO represents 40,000 community residents and public school parents throughout Oakland.

Identifying School Size as an Issue

Consistent with its mission of contributing to a "safe and vibrant city," OCO's organizing efforts have targeted a range of community problems over the years, including the dearth of affordable housing, the drug epidemic, and the high incidence of violent crime. By 1989, issues affecting local schools had become one of OCO's organizing priorities.

OCO helped create neighborhood drug-free zones designed to improve safety for students traveling to and from school. On the district level, OCO members led campaigns to expand school-to-work programs and reduce class size. By the late 1990s, parents involved with local organizing committees in OCO congregations had brought complaints about Oakland's overcrowded public schools to the fore.

To understand the depth and nature of the overcrowding problem, OCO organizers and parent leaders began conducting one-on-one meetings with school staff, including everyone from principals to janitors. They learned that overcrowding was a pervasive problem across many flatland schools. Overcrowding had forced schools to operate on year-round, multi-track schedules and contributed to poor teacher morale, school climate, and student achievement. As former teacher and OCO organizer Liz Sullivan recalls, the combination of chronic overcrowding and large school size created "a dehumanizing environment" for students. A senior OUSD

The OCO Model Inspires a Regional and National Network

In tandem with its early organizing efforts in Oakland, John Baumann created an institute to train other organizers, a number of whom started their own local affiliates in other parts of California. The institute became known as the Pacific Institute for Community Organizing. The regional network grew, expanding its reach beyond the West Coast, and is now known as People Improving Communities through Organizing (PICO).

Currently, the PICO network consists of fifty organizing groups in seventeen states. PICO trains local organizers and leaders in its organizing model via quarterly national trainings and also brings together affiliates to work on state and national campaigns. Like most organizing groups, PICO affiliates identify issues of local concern and then use data, meetings with public officials, and rallies to push for change that will improve neighborhood conditions. PICO emphasizes the importance of building a "relational culture" through its organizing. Notes Ron Snyder, OCO's long-time executive director, the PICO method of organizing rests on the notion that "power is a product of relationships, and building relationships of trust through face-to-face visits and house meetings allows people to move together."

administrator attributed the poor learning environment in flatland schools to a "long history of inequity and distrust, lack of social capital, [and] generally very scarce resources." In contrast, schools in the more affluent hills section of Oakland were smaller, better funded, and higher performing.

Notes OCO executive director Ron Snyder, "The easiest organizing is about opposing something. OCO's work is about building something new." In that spirit, OCO leaders began their campaign to create new small schools. The idea emerged from a book that Matt Hammer, an organizer working with frustrated parents at several OCO congregations, had read. He shared the book, *The Power of Their Ideas* by Deborah Meier (2002), which documents the founding of a small school in Harlem, with a number of parent leaders. Organizer Liz Sullivan recounts,

> So what happened is that Matt got super-excited about this and the parents got excited about this. … Some of the parents that were involved said, "Well, what if we were able to start our own school, like what Debbie Meier did?" [They started] having these sessions where they visioned this whole thing – basically on Saturday mornings when their kids were in catechism they would be working on this idea, [on what] their own school would look like.

Every child needs to be known by name. They need to be safe. They need to be challenged to do their best. They need dedicated, well-prepared teachers. They need to be surrounded by a supportive community of caring adults. Parents, teachers, and students are all essential partners.

— from OCO's vision for small schools, crafted by OCO parent leaders

The emerging campaign established its footing through a series of research activities, including an analysis of school size and student achievement data in Oakland and consultation with experts. Based on their research, parents and organizers believed that small schools would boost student achievement by building a sense of community and a greater sense of mutual accountability among parents, students, and school staff, thus creating an environment in which the status quo of unsatisfactory student outcomes would no longer be acceptable. Indeed, OCO parents and organizers saw the potential of small schools to transform all aspects of school culture and practice.

From Individual Charter Schools to Small Schools Districtwide

In 1998, OCO developed a proposal to open a small school pilot within Jefferson Elementary School, which was over-enrolled by 400 students. Although the proposal generated enthusiasm from many parents and teachers, school faculty ultimately nixed the idea. Faculty were concerned that funding allocations between the large school and the small school might differ, that students not enrolled in the small school would be shortchanged, and that the reform would ultimately be abandoned by the district (as previous reforms had been) (Schorr 2002).

Though disappointed, OCO parent leaders did not abandon the concept of small schools. Instead, they began exploring the feasibility of creating charter schools in the flatlands. As a part of an organizational research process, OCO received a modest grant in November 1998 to visit model small schools in New York City to learn more about small schools as a reform strategy. About twenty-five individuals – parents, organizers, school board members, district officials, and representatives from other community organizations – made the trip. Visiting several

schools during a two-day whirlwind visit, the group from Oakland was impressed with the warm and welcoming school culture, as well as data showing strong academic gains made by students in New York's small schools.

Sullivan recalls the visit as a pivotal moment for the organization:

> I can say up until that point, I had been a cynic. … So when I went to New York, I was just amazed, because I realized that in California we just settled for such mediocrity, because those kids look just like our kids, and those kids were doing great. They had wonderful schools.

Sandra Frost, an OCO parent leader and a member of the New York delegation, recollects how the visit convinced her and OCO to keep pushing forward, "You know once you step into something like that to make a change, you can't step out of it." OCO started collaborating with several charter management organizations to develop proposals for five new small schools, which they intended to submit to the school board for approval. OCO met behind the scenes with school board members and then-Mayor Jerry Brown to seek their support and address their concerns, particularly about the teachers union's strong opposition to the plan. In April 1999, OCO's proposal for five new charters came before the school board, and each was approved unanimously (Schorr 2002).

The first two charter schools, E. C. Reems Academy and Dolores Huerta Academy, opened the next year. The new charter schools gave parents and teachers an opportunity to shape small, intimate school communities. These schools experienced numerous hurdles, including inadequate facilities and staffing challenges, but also demonstrated notable successes, such as rising test scores at Dolores Huerta.[3] More important, from OCO's perspective, the new small charter schools forced opponents to reconsider the viability of small schools within the district. Because a few model charters would not leverage the scale of change inside the system that OCO deemed necessary to improve educational outcomes for the majority of African American and Latino children attending flatland schools, OCO began its fight for larger-scale district reform.

By this time, OCO had begun meeting regularly with BayCES, a school reform organization affiliated with the national Coalition of Essential Schools. In 1999, the two organizations partnered to craft a proposal for a policy of small schools creation. OCO and BayCES understood from their analysis of small schools research that smaller school size, in and of itself, would not lead to better outcomes (Cotton 1996; Oxley 1996; Fine and Somerville 1998; Gladden 1998). Small schools would be successful only with the appropriate structure and supports. Thus, local school autonomy, along with an emphasis on parent and community engagement, lay at the core of their vision for Oakland's new small schools.

New, Small, and Autonomous Schools

In its introduction, the *New Small Autonomous Schools: District Policy* (OUSD 2000) defines the terms "new," "small," and "autonomous."

The word "new" connotes the need for innovation and change. "Small" refers to the often-expressed desire for school environments that are safe, clean, caring, and of a size that allows for deep, personal connections among parents, teachers, and students. It also refers to the need for academically rigorous learning environments for urban students who do not currently have access to them. Finally, "autonomous" means that if we are to expect innovation and excellence, we must provide the resources, authority, and flexibility for staff and parents at each site to make the changes necessary at the school level. A mounting body of evidence points to precisely these conditions as necessary elements for the reform of urban schools.

[3] Jonathan Schorr (2002) chronicles the struggles and successes of these new charter schools in his book *Hard Lessons: The Promise of an Inner City Charter School.*

OCO and BayCES met with school board members, district officials, and educators to generate support for their vision of small schools reform in Oakland. In the fall of 1999, OCO mobilized 2,000 community members to participate in a public action on small schools. At the meeting, OCO secured public, verbal commitments from key decision-makers in support of the proposed small schools policy.

OCO's methodical approach of meeting with stakeholders throughout the district to share its data and rationale, combined with the group's ability to demonstrate strong community support for the policy, convinced Greg Hodge, a school board member, that OCO was "well-organized and understood the issues." When the New Small Autonomous Schools (NSAS) policy came to a vote before the school board in May 2000, it passed unanimously (see Appendix B). With the ultimate aim of increasing student achievement and narrowing the achievement gap, the policy called for ten new small schools within a three-year period.

The Small Schools Initiative: A New Partnership

The NSAS policy heralded the beginning of a three-way partnership among OUSD's Office of School Reform, BayCES, and OCO to spearhead the development of these new small schools. Beyond monitoring implementation of the policy, OCO saw its role as building capacity for community and parent engagement in the new small schools as they developed. After the first cohort of schools opened, the newly formed Small Schools Initiative continued to solicit proposals for additional schools and to provide support to foster the successful and systematic development of small schools in Oakland. With a $15.7 million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, BayCES created a small schools "incubator" to coach design teams of principals, teachers, and parents through a year-long planning process, with the schools' authority to recruit students contingent upon successful completion of the incubation.

"This is not about ten small schools as a policy; this is about a tipping-point strategy that moves to change the district."

— Ron Snyder, Executive Director, Oakland Community Organizations

The collective effort of all three partners behind the new small schools and early signs of promising results expanded the initial vision for the small schools reform in Oakland. Recalls Ron Snyder, OCO's executive director,

> As we were moving through the opening of the first set of small schools, we began to think that we could actually get to a place where this whole district would look different. … This is not about ten small schools as a policy; this is about a tipping-point strategy that moves to change the district.

That vision became a reality as promising early reports of higher student achievement, higher parent engagement and satisfaction, and higher teacher quality and satisfaction in small schools convinced the district to make the replacement of large, failing schools with new small schools a cornerstone of its reform efforts (Little & Wing 2003).

Overcoming Challenges and Achieving Results: Forty-eight New Small Schools

In 2003, a massive budget deficit led to a state takeover of the district, resulting in the ouster of Dennis Chaconas, the superintendent with whom OCO had developed a strong partnership. Chaconas' departure jeopardized the future of the districtwide small schools reform.

OCO responded by holding sixty action meetings throughout Oakland, attracting thousands of parents who came out in support of small schools. OCO also held a large action with State Senator Don Perata and State Superintendent of Education Jack O'Connell to get their public commitment to preserve the small schools policy. As a result of these organizing

efforts, the state legislation authorizing the takeover of OUSD included language in support of the small schools reform (Snyder 2008).

Language in the state legislation, however, did not explicitly mandate the continuation of the policy. To complement their state-level advocacy, OCO and BayCES worked locally with district allies to convince Randolph Ward, the new state administrator, to continue the effort. Early in Ward's tenure, OCO organized a meeting between Ward and principals and parents from the new small schools. Convinced by the data and the widespread commitment to systemic school change in Oakland, Ward agreed to sustain the reform, despite the district's large budget deficit.

By 2004, the OUSD Office of School Reform had morphed into the New School Development Group, a division of OUSD Instructional Services. The New School Development Group took over the incubation of small schools from BayCES and began supporting new small schools in their development from design teams to full-fledged schools. By the 2007-2008 academic year, Snyder's assertion that OCO's organizing was about "creating something new" could not have been more true: the district had opened a total of forty-eight new small schools, all in the flatlands of Oakland.[4]

OCO's School-Based Organizing Support

OCO's district-level organizing for the small schools policy went hand-in-hand with school-level organizing to influence the design and culture of the new small schools. Under the small schools policy, a design team consisting of parents and educators helped birth each new small school. Design team members came together to shape the vision and practices of each new small school.

Particularly in the early years of the reform, the work of these design teams was deeply intertwined with OCO's organizing efforts. OCO parent leaders or organizers actively participated in twenty-three school design teams, often with prospective principals and teachers with whom OCO had already developed relationships. In fact, OUSD strategically targeted communities for new school creation where organizing was taking place, because they realized that the viability and sustainability of the reform effort would require a high level of energy and engagement from community constituents (New School Development Group 2007).

Chronology of Small Schools Reform and District Context, 1998–2007

1998	OCO organizes at Jefferson School to create a school-within-a-school. The idea is rejected by a faculty vote.
1999	OCO obtains school board approval to open five small charter schools.
2000	Dennis Chaconas, a supporter of small schools, becomes superintendent.
	The Oakland School Board approves the New Small Autonomous Schools Policy, calling for the creation of ten new small schools within a three-year period.
	The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation awards BayCES a $15.7 million grant to fund the small school incubator.
2001	Under the new NSAS policy, five new small schools are opened in fall 2001.
2002	Three additional small schools are opened in fall 2002.
2003	With the district carrying a deficit of $82 million, Chaconas is ousted, and the state takes over the district. Randolph Ward becomes the state administrator.
	Ward agrees to continue the small school reform and makes it the cornerstone of the district's reform efforts.
2004	By fall 2004, there are twenty-one new small schools in the district.
	The New School Development Group, which supports the incubation of new small schools, is formed by the district and continues the work of the BayCES incubator.
2005	Expect Success! – a re-organization of OUSD – is launched. The reorganization continues to prioritize the development of new small schools.
2006	Randolph Ward resigns as state administrator. Kimberly Statham, formerly the district's chief academic officer, is appointed the new state administrator.
2007	Statham resigns, and Vincent Matthews is appointed state administrator.
	At the start of the 2007-2008 academic year, there are forty-eight new small schools in the district.

[4] See Appendix D for a chart of the formation of new small schools in Oakland.

In addition, through its partnership in the incubator, OCO helped create rubrics guiding principal selection and provided training to school staff on parent engagement and teacher home visits. In this way, OCO indirectly influenced the culture and structure of all forty-eight new small schools.

As new schools opened, OCO organizers worked with principals, parents, and staff to build a "relational culture," in which parents and educators develop a shared sense of connection and accountability. OCO organizer Liz Sullivan believes creating a relational culture in schools serves as a building block for an effective learning environment and induces a transformation in how school constituents work with each other. She explains, "Instead of thinking bureaucratically – I'll call a meeting, I'll send home flyers, I'll do this, I'll do that – the principal thinks about who do I need to have a conversation with."

The concept of relational culture has influenced district leaders' thinking about the kind of relationships, ownership, and sense of commitment they hoped to create in small schools. A district official involved with the small schools reform described how developing a relational culture helps principals and teachers feel an increased sense of ownership and commitment to students. She states,

> The difference between a traditional principal and a small school principal is that the small school principals own every child. It doesn't matter who they are [or] where they show up, they think, "That's my child." Whereas the large school principals see a child that's trouble and they try to send them off. … And so it's that value that we're going to educate everybody is … taken much more seriously. … And then the relationship between the teachers and the staff and the parents – the whole relationship is just very different.

OCO catalyzed this relational culture in schools by staffing each of the first cohort of small schools with an OCO organizer. The organizer brought together parents to form school-based organizing committees to help problem-solve school issues (modeled after organizing committees at OCO member congregations); provided leadership training to parents, teachers, and principals; and linked the school to supportive community members and external resources.

Yet, as the number of new schools increased, assigning an organizer to each new small school became impractical. The realities of scale far outstripped OCO's organizational capacity to provide the kind of intensive organizing support it had originally envisioned. In response, OCO and the New School Development Group agreed to change the nature of OCO's role. Instead of taking an active presence in each school, OCO would help identify and train parent leaders who could take on the organizing function. This shift enabled the organization to maintain an active relationship with a smaller number of the new schools, while continuing to influence the nature and quality of parent and community engagement across the district.

ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF OCO'S EDUCATION ORGANIZING

The research study out of which this case study arose followed OCO's small schools campaign over six years and aimed to assess the impact of this structural reform both at the district level and the school level. We focused on three questions:

- In what ways has OCO's organizing influenced district policy and to what extent do key stakeholders attribute changes in district policy to OCO's organizing?
- To what degree has OCO's organizing influenced the capacity of schools to educate students successfully? Specifically, how do the new small schools compare on core dimensions of school capacity (school climate, professional culture, and instructional core) relative to the traditional large schools in the district?
- Has OCO's organizing to create and support the small schools policy produced measurable gains in student outcomes?

Data Collected

To address these research questions, the team collected and analyzed interview, survey, and administrative data. Figure 4 summarizes the data sources. A full description of data sources can be found in Appendix C. We also draw upon findings from an external evaluation commissioned by OUSD. The 2007 evaluation, conducted by Strategic Measurement and Evaluation, Inc., assesses the progress of Oakland's new small schools.

Analytic Approach

The increasing scale of the small schools initiative – within a rapidly shifting district context – created a moving target for our research, requiring a multidimensional analytic approach. (For a visual representation of new small schools created in the district, see Appendix D.) To assess the full range of the impact of OCO's work, we used both qualitative and quantitative data sources, with an eye toward identifying points of convergence and divergence within

FIGURE 4

Summary of data sources

Data Sources	Period of Data Collection	Scope of Data
Interviews	2003–2006	40 interviews • 25 with organizers and parent leaders • 9 with school-level educators • 6 with local education stakeholders, including senior district staff
Teacher Survey (Annenberg Institute administered)	SY2005-2006	• 130 teachers at elementary and secondary schools • 9 small schools compared with 4 large schools
Attribution Questionnaire (Annenberg Institute administered)	SY2005-2006	• 31 teachers from small schools familiar with OCO's organizing
Use Your Voice Teacher Survey (OUSD administered)	2007	• 519 teachers at elementary and secondary schools • 31 small schools compared with 9 large schools
Use Your Voice Parent Survey (OUSD administered)	2007	• 4,809 parents at elementary and secondary schools • 31 small schools compared with 9 large schools
Administrative Data	1999–2007	• Demographic data for all schools • Student outcome data for all schools
Document Review	2002–2006	• District-released reports and policies • OCO grant reports • Media coverage

the data. When possible, longitudinal analyses were conducted to understand trends across time. Survey data, which were collected at one point in time rather than across time, required a cross-sectional analysis.

Analysis of Influence on District Policies and Practices

To address our first research question about the district-level impact of OCO's organizing, we relied primarily on educator interviews, archival data, and media coverage to understand the ways in which OCO's organizing influenced district priorities. Several items from the teacher survey were also used in our analysis of OCO's influence on district policy.

Analysis of Influence on School Capacity

Survey, interview, and administrative data were used to assess the impact of the small schools reform on indicators of school capacity. These data allowed us to understand educator and parent perceptions of three broad domains of critical school capacity indicators – school climate, professional culture, and instructional core.

Both the Annenberg Institute–administered teacher survey and the district-administered *Use Your Voice* parent and teacher satisfaction surveys capture perceptions at one point in time, rather than across time. For these data, t-tests were conducted to compare differences between perceptions of school capacity at Oakland's new small schools and the remaining large schools in the district. In addition, effect size calculations were computed to assess the magnitude of the difference between the means. Analyses using t-tests tell us *whether or not there is a statistically significant difference* between two means. Effect size computations give us information about the *size of the difference* (small, medium, large) between the two means.[5]

When conducting such comparisons, it is ideal for schools in both groups to possess demographically similar populations. Because Oakland's small schools policy prioritized the reconfiguration of the district's lowest-performing schools, by the time of both surveys (in 2006 and 2007), the remaining traditional large schools in Oakland were less-than-ideal comparisons because they were not demographically similar. The district's remaining large schools enrolled lower percentages of Latino students, lower percentages of ELL students, and lower percentages of students receiving free and reduced-price lunch (Strategic Measurement and Evaluation 2007). Given these distinctions, we would expect the large schools to have higher ratings of school capacity. Therefore, any differences observed in our surveys between the new small schools and the traditional large schools are particularly noteworthy.

Analysis of Student Outcomes

Trends in student educational outcomes were assessed through a year-to-year analysis of academic indicators (such as dropout rates) over time for each large school and the new small schools that emerged from it. Because this type of analysis allows us to observe progress over the time period of the reform, this is arguably the best way to assess the efficacy of Oakland's new small schools in raising student achievement and reducing the achievement gap. For these analyses, we used administrative data, which are collected annually by district and state education departments. These indicators provide global, though somewhat crude, assessments of academic performance. Interview data from educators supplemented our analyses of quantitative data.

Caveats

Our analysis explores how school capacity and student educational outcomes were changing in the new small schools targeted by OCO's education organizing. As this was not an experimental study, our findings must be interpreted as illuminating a phenomenon, rather than as providing a causal explanation of effects that might be generalized to other schools and communities. In particular, we do not know what other reforms were occurring in schools that may have influenced the findings we report. Changes in school leadership and district

[5] On a t-test, a p-value of less than .05 indicates statistical significance – in other words, a p-value of less than .05 means that there is less than a 5 percent probability that the difference between the two means is due to chance.

priorities and the presence of other school reform programs are potentially confounding factors.

In light of these limitations, the inferences we present here are argued on the consistency of evidence across multiple data sources, as well as on their congruence with the theory underlying OCO's reform strategy and the research literature on the role of autonomy and community engagement in small schools.

"They're kind of in it for the long haul, so you never feel like they're just going to come in at the initial stage when you're designing and then … you're on your own when you open the school."

— *Jean Wing*

FINDINGS

OCO's organizing efforts for new small schools in Oakland began with the idea of creating a small school pilot within one overcrowded neighborhood school. Within a few short years, OCO helped develop and win policy that created ten small schools in the district. As the reform gained momentum beyond these ten schools, district officials, organizers, and parents began referring to the districtwide creation of small schools not simply as a reform, but as a movement. With forty-eight new small schools in the district as of the 2007-2008 school year, the small schools movement has catalyzed a dramatic structural reorganization of the district.

Influence on District Capacity

OCO's organizing in Oakland has resulted in a policy shift – one that has helped create a more equitable distribution of resources to the schools in the flatlands. In addition, OCO's work with the district has led to expanded opportunities for community and parent engagement in the district.

Policies and Resources

District officials, community partners, and school-level educators unequivocally credited OCO's leadership for initiating and sustaining the small schools movement in Oakland. OUSD's own Web site notes:

> The new small schools movement began as a community movement, and grassroots organizing was essential. … We intentionally opened schools only where organizing was occurring in order to grow and maintain a level of energy needed to initiate new reform. This was wildly successful thanks to the tremendous organizing done by Oakland Community Organizations.

District administrators and other education stakeholders identified OCO's sophisticated understanding of power, willingness to stand firm and be the "bad guy" if necessary, and ability to forge strategic alliances with key partners, such as BayCES and OUSD, as critical factors in winning the small schools policy. Interviewees also attributed OCO's effectiveness to its strong community base of parents and community members and the capacity to leverage this base to exert pressure on public officials. The ability to mobilize large numbers of supporters was particularly important during the shift to state receivership, a challenging political transition during which the reform effort was in danger of being curtailed.

In addition to leading the effort to transform district policy, interviewees noted OCO's methodical and tireless advocacy for putting into place the necessary district supports that would undergird the chances of success for the small schools policy. Jean Wing, a senior researcher with the New School Development Group, observed that the creation of their office wouldn't have happened without OCO's organizing and represented "a way of institutionalizing the incubation of new small schools as an integral part of the district redesign." Reflecting on OCO's long-term commitment to the reform effort, Wing added,

> They're kind of in it for the long haul, so you never feel like they're just going to come in at the initial stage when you're designing and then…you're on your own when you open the school.

OCO's efforts to support successful implementation of the small schools reform included advocacy for new school facilities. Indeed, the problem of overcrowding that had inspired OCO to fight for reform was due, in part, to the lack of space. Now, three new facilities house five new small schools with a commitment from the district to construct an additional facility that would house two small schools and two child development centers. Over the years, OCO's advocacy for new facilities included an eight-year campaign to raze an abandoned warehouse to make way for two schools, support for bond measures to pay for four facilities, and securing city, state, and school district commitments to make land available. A senior OUSD administrator reflected,

> We [now] have three shiny new school buildings. There hadn't been any new school building in thirty years in the most troubled neighborhoods. … Our new buildings have all been in the neighborhoods that are the poorest neighborhoods and that's very different.

The study data suggest that OCO's role in stimulating and sustaining the small schools movement was recognized beyond high-level district administrators with whom OCO interacted directly. Teacher respondents on our attribution questionnaire rated OCO's influence on "school organization" (e.g., small schools/smaller learning environments) the highest of any item – 2.33 on a 3-point scale. Because our survey reached teachers in schools where OCO had not maintained an active organizing presence, this level of attribution suggests that OCO was a highly visible partner in the reform effort.

Accountability to the Community

OCO's relationship with the district advanced the district's understanding of and commitment to parent and community engagement. Although the district was not always in a political or fiscal position to adopt OCO's ideas around community engagement, the senior OUSD administrator explained, OCO's advocacy and organizing consistently "pulled us to a further place."

In 2005 the district institutionalized its commitment to community engagement by creating a Chief of Community Accountability position as a part of the Expect Success! initiative, the district's comprehensive plan to build on grassroots reforms (OUSD 2007). Described by district leaders as "an OCO concept," the position was a top-level post designed to ensure that input from the community was included in all major district plans. In the words of one district official, creating the position pushed the district to "shift its emphasis" from focusing on more traditional types of parent engagement to thinking more deliberately about engaging parents and community members in increasingly collaborative ways.

The district's increased focus on parent and community engagement and its ties to OCO reaped other benefits as well. One district administrator observed that the district became more successful in leveraging additional grant dollars from philanthropies, which expected to see evidence of authentic parent and community engagement.

Interestingly and somewhat counter-intuitively, on our teacher survey, teachers at small schools rated two dimensions of district influence – creating local accountability and partnering with non-system actors – lower than teachers at large schools (see Appendix E). These differences were statistically significant. Importantly, this reform intentionally aimed to transform the relationship between the district and its schools. Because many of the questions on these two scales identify "the district" as the actor (e.g., "District staff make an effort to reach out to individuals and organizations in the community"), it is possible that while small schools saw themselves partnering with outside entities and felt accountable to community constituencies, they did not believe the district office was initiating these activities.

Influence on School Capacity

Any systemic reform occurring at both the pace and scale of the NSAS reforms would be expected to experience growing pains. Oakland has been no different, and many schools opened under less than optimal conditions (Little & Wing 2003). Some schools lacked adequate facilities and resources, such

as a full supply of textbooks, at start-up. A few of the early schools opened without the full slate of supports offered through the incubation process, considered to be vitally important to the success of a developing new school. Yet the data suggest that new small schools in Oakland are performing better than the large schools from which they emerged, particularly in the areas of school climate and professional culture.

School Climate

One of the theoretical underpinnings of small schools is that they allow for a more personalized learning environment, "where every child is known by name," as OCO's vision for small schools states. The smaller environment allows for deeper, more sustained relationships among parents, students, and staff. Our analysis found that the new small schools are showing promising signs in this area.

- Teachers familiar with OCO's organizing at their schools rated three items relating to their school climate – school's relations with the community, school's relations with parents, and shared decision making between students, parents, teachers, and administrators – as being highly influenced by OCO's work (see Appendix F).
- Statistically significant differences in favor of small schools were evident on three out of seven school climate scales. Teachers at small schools rated the following school climate indicators higher than did their counterparts at large traditional high schools: the sense of school community and safety, teacher outreach to parents, and, in elementary schools, parent's sense of influence in school decision making. Results are summarized in Figure 5. Results from the district survey were consistent with these findings (see Appendix G for t-test and size effect analyses).

FIGURE 5

Teacher perceptions of school climate

School Climate Measures	Small Schools Mean (*n*=47)	Large Schools Mean (*n*=83)	p-value	Effect Size
Sense of School Community and Safety	3.76	3.20	**.000*** **	large
Teacher Outreach to Parents	3.23	3.00	**.001** **	medium
Parent Influence in School Decision Making (elementary and middle schools only)	1.87	1.47	**.022***	large
Achievement-Oriented Culture	3.78	3.56	.066	small
Knowledge of Students' Culture	3.51	3.36	.135	small
Student Influence in School Decision Making (high schools only)	1.65	1.52	.238	small
Parental Involvement in Student Learning	1.93	1.96	.792	negligible

Note: Sources and reliability data for subscales are provided in Appendix H. An explanation of t-tests and effect sizes can be found on page 18. Complete results for the teacher survey are summarized in Appendix F.

Values in **bold** *represent p-values that are statistically significant, as follows:*

*** $p < .001$

** $p < .01$

* $p < .05$

- ✦ We also found small effect sizes in favor of small schools for three of the remaining four school climate scales: an achievement-oriented culture, knowledge of student's culture, and student influence in decision-making for high school students (see Figure 5).

Consistent with teacher reports, parents from small schools rated school climate significantly higher than did parents of students at large schools. In addition, small school parents rated their engagement in their child's learning higher than did parents of students at large schools (see Appendix I for t-test and size effect analyses).

Interview data suggest that educators at the new small schools are particularly attentive to building positive parent-teacher relationships. Larissa Adam, a principal at Ascend Elementary School, observed,

> I think for most people [who] have come from traditional schools, there was more of an adversarial relationship sometimes. … Here there's an expectation for there to be constant communication between staff and parents, both positive and negative and neutral. And so I think that people just work more with the parents and see them as allies.

Similarly, a senior district administrator involved in the small schools reform described how the new small schools in Oakland intend to create a qualitatively different school culture, especially in the way that school staff relate to students and their parents:

> The nature of the schools that we've created [is that they] have a different vision about what it means to have parent engagement and community involvement. … We have a year-long curriculum and it's got a whole piece on how to engage community. So the values that are in those schools are different, both in terms of what the standards are for children and the ownership of all children.

A parent leader who got involved because her daughter attended the overcrowded classrooms at Jefferson Elementary lauded the emphasis on parent involvement at her child's new small school and described the ways in which she felt it contributed to her child's sense of commitment to school:

> When parents are involved in their kids' education, it's different than just sending them to school. … The kids notice that we participate in the schools, and it makes a difference on how your child thinks of school. You take pride in something, your kids are definitely going to take pride.

Professional Culture

The vision for small schools included increased supports for school staff (much of which was provided by BayCES and OCO), and a relational culture-building strategy for creating greater collegiality and collaboration among school faculty and administration. Again, the small schools are making positive strides in this area. In fact, the data indicate the strongest effects of the small school reform were on professional culture.[6]

- ✦ Respondents in small schools rated professional culture items more highly than teachers who taught in traditional large schools. Statistically significant differences were found on several dimensions of teacher collegiality and instructional leadership, including: peer collaboration, teacher influence in school decision making, collective responsibility, peer collaboration, joint problem solving, and teacher-principal trust. We found smaller effect sizes on teacher-teacher trust, school commitment, and principal instructional leadership. Results are summarized in Figure 6.
- ✦ Likewise, the district's *Use Your Voice* teacher survey showed that teachers at small schools rated their professional culture more positively than teachers at large schools and that this difference was statistically significant (see Appendix G).

These strong effects in the professional culture domain are likely due to the incubation process and

[6] Despite finding large differences between large schools and small schools on measures of professional culture, findings from the attribution survey indicate that teachers familiar with OCO's organizing did not credit OCO with having a strong influence on professional culture items. This is likely due to the fact that BayCES played a prominent role in working with teachers and principals – thus, teachers may not have associated improvements in professional culture directly to OCO.

the intensive and ongoing professional development support provided through the partnership among OCO, BayCES, and the district's New School Development Group. Specifically, Oakland's vision of small schools emphasizes the importance of a relational culture and establishing a school community in which teachers, parents, administrators, and students work collaboratively toward learning goals. While the emphasis on relational culture is likely to impact perceptions of school climate more generally, it is also apt to engender a sense of ownership that creates an environment in which teachers are more inclined to share ideas and collaborate with one another.

Maureen Benson, a principal at Youth Empowerment School, observed that teachers "are completely supportive and helpful of each other," and unusually comfortable in offering one another constructive criticism. And as a principal, being in a small school simply affords more time and opportunity to support teacher instruction and professional development. Noted Benson:

> I get to work intensely with the teachers on their curriculum because that's what I'm most passionate about. For each teacher, we develop a personal plan, we have a conversation that comes back to their goals. It's very comfortable just having a regular conversation about how their classroom is going. I'm in every teacher's classroom once a week, so I know how the teaching is going as opposed to a big school where you just have no idea.… I'm seeing my teachers a lot more than twice a year.

OCO's role in developing a stronger professional culture was borne out in interviews with principals and teachers. Principal Larissa Adam reflected,

FIGURE 6

Teacher perceptions of professional culture

Professional Culture Measures	Small Schools Mean (*n*=47)	Large Schools Mean (*n*=83)	p-value	Effect Size
Teacher Influence in School Decision Making	2.64	2.00	**.000*** **	large
Collective Responsibility	3.88	3.38	**.001** **	medium
Peer Collaboration	3.26	2.92	**.002** **	medium
Joint Problem Solving	2.83	2.55	**.009** **	medium
Teacher-Principal Trust	3.23	2.87	**.011***	small
Teacher-Teacher Trust	3.20	3.03	.088	small
School Commitment	3.10	2.92	.099	small
Principal Instructional Leadership	3.09	2.94	.177	small
Quality Professional Development	2.76	2.65	.312	negligible

Note: Sources and reliability data for subscales are provided in Appendix H. An explanation of t-tests and effect sizes can be found on page 18. Complete results for the teacher survey are summarized in Appendix F.

Values in bold *represent p-values that are statistically significant, as follows:*

*** $p < .001$

** $p < .01$

* $p < .05$

> At my old school, just because of how dysfunctional it was, there was a tendency for all the teachers to hide in their classroom. You stick each day with your one group of kids where you have some sense of control over the quality of instruction you can give. I think through all the collaborative work with OCO that there's just been less isolation and I've learned to give and take more. … I see others' perspectives more clearly and really seek them out more frequently.

Similarly, on the subject of his instructional leadership within the school, Rick Gaston, principal of Castlemont Business and Information Technology School, believes working with OCO organizers supported his overall vision for the school:

> I think having folks like them to get with regularly really just helps me shape my vision and my understanding about what we're trying to do here. It's definitely about democracy and community involvement and empowering the full spectrum of voices from across our school community, and that doesn't always come naturally to our district or school culture.

Instructional Core

Given the relatively short time frame in which small schools have been operating, it is reasonable to expect that differences on measures of instructional core would be less evident.

- One scale of school capacity was statistically significant – teacher influence in classroom decision making was perceived as higher in small schools. This finding is consistent with the cultural norms of small schools. We found a small effect size in favor of large schools for coherent curriculum and instruction. That teachers at large schools would rate coherent curriculum and culture more highly than teachers at small schools is not surprising, given the autonomy teachers and principals at small schools possess in creating their own curricula. Figure 7 summarizes results.
- On the attribution questionnaire, teachers familiar with OCO's work did not rate the influence of OCO's organizing on dimensions of instructional core very highly. This finding may reflect teacher perceptions of OCO's role as a catalyst for parent and community engagement. OCO's organizing was more structural in nature and it is plausible that teachers would not link OCO's organizing

FIGURE 7

Teacher perceptions of instructional core

Instructional Core Measures	Small Schools Mean (*n*=47)	Large Schools Mean (*n*=83)	p-value	Effect Size
Teacher Influence in Classroom Decision Making	2.95	2.48	**.003****	medium
Educational Practices and Beliefs	3.01	2.94	.653	negligible
Instructional Focus	3.26	3.32	.672	negligible
Educational Goals (high school only)	2.85	2.89	.843	negligible
Coherent Curriculum and Instruction	3.39	3.56	.098	(small)

Note: Sources and reliability data for subscales are provided in Appendix H. An explanation of t-tests and effect sizes can be found on page 18. Complete results for the teacher survey are summarized in Appendix F.

Values in **bold** *represent p-values that are statistically significant, as follows:*

**** p < .001*
*** p < .01*
** p < .05*

Parentheses indicate effect sizes in favor of large schools.

efforts to the day-to-day teaching and learning taking place in their schools (see Appendix F).

- The district's *Use Your Voice* teacher survey, which asked about classroom participation and project-based learning, showed that teachers at small schools rated the factor related to instruction more highly than teachers at large schools (see Appendix G).[7] This finding is consistent with interview data, in which principals reported on the increased use of project-based curricula to enhance opportunities for interactive learning.
- The *Use Your Voice* parent survey showed that parents at the new small schools rated academic rigor more highly than parents of students at large schools (see Appendix I).[8] Parent perceptions of increased academic rigor were supported by our analysis of administrative data, which found substantial differences in the curriculum offerings provided in the new small schools and the high schools they replaced.

In 2000-2001, the three large, low-performing traditional high schools in Oakland had an average of 21 percent of students who completed the California college preparatory requirements. By school year 2005-2006, these three large schools did not exist; they had been broken into twelve small schools. Collectively, these small schools had an average of 33 percent of students who completed the California college preparatory requirements. Consistent with this finding, on the *Use Your Voice* survey both teachers and parents at small schools rated college readiness more highly than did teachers and parents in large schools.

Interview data from principals supported the ways in which small school size promoted increased attentiveness to students' academic goals. For example, principals and teachers repeatedly referred to the strong emphasis on using diagnostic data to assess proficiency in fundamental subjects such as reading and math and using those data to better support students academically. Other individualized supports, such as advisories, helped sharpen the focus on student academic goals. Alison McDonald, high school principal of Life Academy, explained:

> I think there's a real culture in the school that we have to academically challenge students. The other side to that is we have a really strong personalization piece here. All of our students are in advisories and all of our teachers are advisors including myself. So we have a group of students that we keep from ninth through twelfth [grades] and it develops a lot of depth because we get to know our parents, and we get to know those students that we have each year very well.

A strategy for parent-teacher-student collaboration used in many of the small schools is the personalized learning plan. As McDonald explained,

> Basically, a personalized learning plan is when you sit down with a student in your advisory and you set down on paper some of the information about them – grade point average, reading grade level, how they're doing in math, some of their test scores, things like that. And then talk over some of the goals that they should be pushing for themselves. … We take a lot of data [and] we update them as they improve.

Consistent with and complementary to our findings, the evaluation conducted by Strategic Measurement and Evaluation (2007) found that:

- Students at new schools had higher attendance rates, relative to the comparison group of large schools.
- Students, parents, and teachers at the new small schools were more satisfied with their schools than their counterparts at traditional large schools.

[7] Items focused on instruction that rated highly included "I regularly have students collaborate on lessons and projects" and "I often encourage students to participate in class discussion."

[8] Items on academic rigor included "My child receives challenging and rigorous instruction in his/her classes."

Influence on Student Outcomes

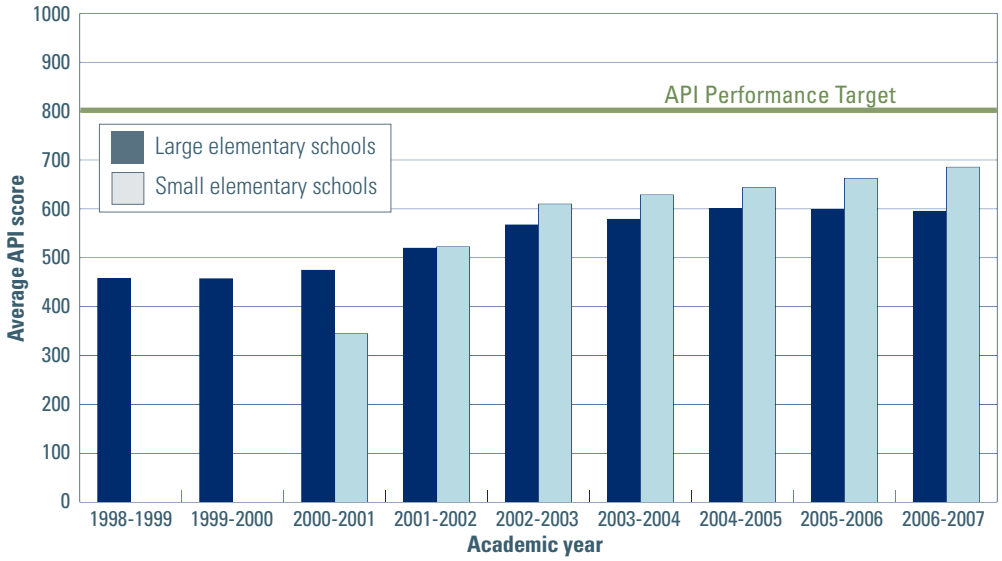
Although the district projects that the reform will need to be in place five to seven years before tangible academic gains in the new small schools can be measured, analyses of Academic Performance Index scores, test scores, dropout rates, and graduation rates show that students at new small schools are making important early strides in academic performance.

In California, the state measures the academic performance of schools through the Academic Performance Index (API). Created by California's Public Schools Accountability Act of 1999, the API is calculated through a formula that integrates results of various state standardized exams, including scores from the math, reading, and social studies tests. Scores can range from a low of 200 to a high of 1000, with a performance target of 800 (California Department of Education 2008). An analysis of API scores at the elementary, middle, and high school levels shows that though Oakland schools continued to struggle, new small schools were achieving higher API scores than the large schools from which they emerged (see figures 8–10). Gains are particularly pronounced in elementary and middle schools.

Additional information about student achievement comes from the external evaluation commissioned by OUSD. We report Strategic Measurement and Evaluation's (2007) findings here because evaluators conducted an analysis of student-level data, which they obtained directly from the district. Even though the new small schools in this evaluation were compared to large schools with substantially lower percentages of ELL students and students receiving free and reduced-price lunch, new small schools were more likely to accelerate scores on both the California Standards Test Math and English language arts exams. In other words, student scores improved at a faster rate in the new small schools than would have otherwise been predicted based on previous student performance.

FIGURE 8

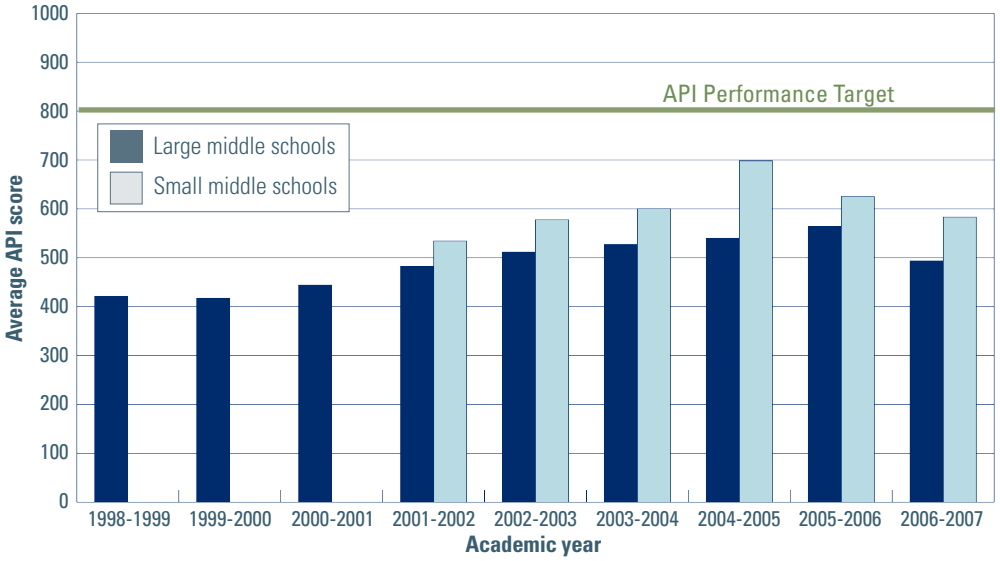
OUSD elementary school base API, large schools vs. small schools (1999–2007)



Note: Only within-year comparisons are valid for API base scores, as the calculation may change between years.

FIGURE 9

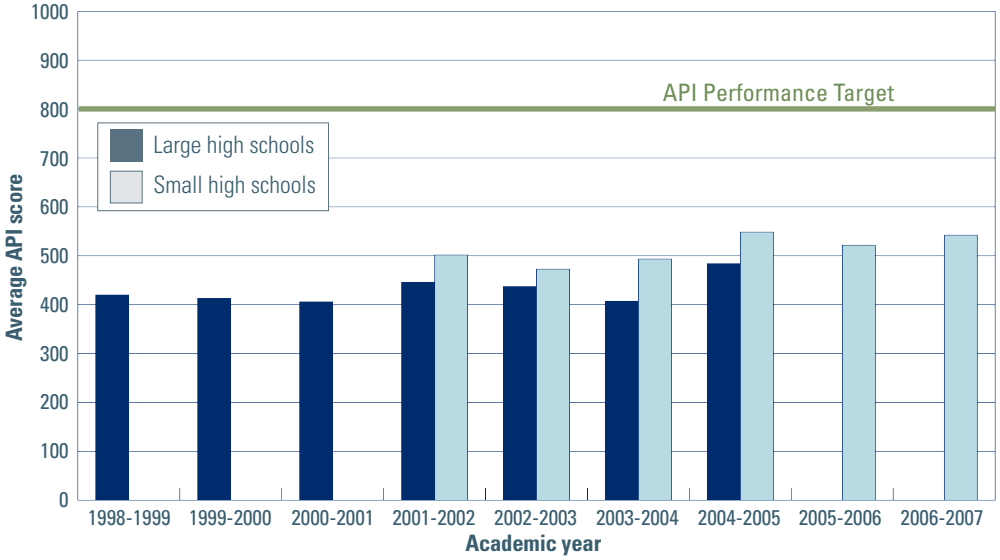
OUSD middle school base API, large schools vs. small schools (1999–2007)



Note: Only within-year comparisons are valid for API base scores, as the calculation may change between years.

FIGURE 10

OUSD high school base API, large schools vs. small schools (1999–2007)



Note: Only within-year comparisons are valid for API base scores, as the calculation may change between years.

Even when immediate changes in grades and achievement were not evident, interview data show positive trends in school climate in the post-conversion phase and that these trends helped create more educational opportunity than what had previously existed. For example, when Castlemont High School broke into small schools, immediate changes in grades and achievement were not evident. Rick Gaston, the school's principal, noted that Castlemont, for many years, had some of the state's lowest standardized test scores and highest dropout rates. The first year of conversion resulted in only a modest improvement in test scores. However, Liz Sullivan, an organizer familiar with the school, noted, "The tone in the school is completely changed. And for me, that's the first step. You can't learn when you're afraid."

An analysis of district administrative data shows that high school dropout rates were lower in small schools than in the large, low-performing high schools they replaced. The calculation of dropout rates is controversial, as the rates are consistently and notoriously under-reported (Koehler 2004). With these caveats, the aggregate dropout rate in the large schools from 1998 to 2004 was 11.5 percent, whereas the aggregate dropout rate in the small schools from 2001-2002 to 2006 was 2.9 percent.

At Life Academy, the only small school where we were able to track a four-year cohort, the graduation rate for the class of 2005 was 59.5 percent, and for the class of 2006 the rate was 74.6 percent. In comparison, at Fremont High School, the large school from which Life Academy was created, the graduation rate for the class of 2002 was 30.9 percent, and for the class of 2003 the rate was 34.4 percent. While it is too early to determine the long-term impact of the small schools on graduation and dropout rates, these data suggest promising outcomes.

Though data on college acceptance rates are not available, a district administrator gives at least one example of gains seen in that arena:

> The high schools at Fremont just had their accreditation visits and Mandela High School has about 50 percent of its high school seniors going to – already accepted to four-year colleges and they're not even finished getting their acceptances. That is dramatically higher than what was in place before. So it's really concrete results.

REFLECTIONS ON FINDINGS

OCO receives unequivocal credit from district administrators, teachers, and other key education stakeholders for its role in winning the small schools policy and for working tirelessly to ensure that the supports necessary for the successful development of small schools were in place. The trajectory of OCO's organizing offers a powerful example of how organizing around local school concerns led to a larger grassroots organizing campaign focused on large-scale districtwide reform.

While the long-term impact of the reform on student achievement remains to be seen, small schools in Oakland are already outperforming the large schools from which they emerged. Students are completing more rigorous coursework and dropping out at lower rates. In addition, teachers and parents of students at small schools rate critical school capacity variables related to professional culture and school climate significantly more highly than their counterparts at traditional large schools.

Research in other school districts show that small schools have demonstrated mixed results (Rethinking Schools 2005; Hartmann, Maluk & Reumann-Moore 2008; Kahne, Sporte & de la Torre 2006; Foley, Klinge & Reisner 2007). Our data suggest that the small schools reform in Oakland is promising and that many of the positive results seen can be attributed to the thoughtful and deliberate way in which OCO, BayCES, and OUSD developed the Small Schools Initiative.

One of the most remarkable aspects of OCO's success is that their organizing occurred during a period of significant fiscal and political turbulence. Yet even within this tumultuous context, they were able to achieve significant reforms in their district. Reflecting on OCO's education organizing efforts over the past decade yields several important insights.

Community members and educators must work together to create sustainable reform.

One key to OCO's success was the ability to form a strong and strategic partnership with BayCES and, ultimately, with the district. Each partner brought unique and complementary strengths that helped sustain the reform and weather the storm of the difficult financial decisions that had to be made during the state receivership. At pivotal moments when the reform came under fire, OCO used its political power as an outside partner with an expansive community base to help create the public will to continue the reform. BayCES, in turn, brought policy expertise, foundation monies, and strong technical assistance capacity. By partnering with the district, they were able to gain support on the "inside" among district leaders and central office staff as well, and were able to use the resources and infrastructure of the district to make the reform a reality.

Commenting on the partnership, long-time BayCES executive director Steve Jubb reflects that reconciling different cultures and ideologies among partners is a "struggle you're never done with" and that "conflict is a necessary dynamic in the process." While acknowledging the realities and challenges of working collaboratively, he says,

> There are many groups that can organize protests and complain. But what happens when OCO and BayCES combine their efforts is that real change can occur, because you have both the power of the people making demands and the possibility of offering policy alternatives and then being willing to work within the system to implement them.

Scaling up presents important opportunities and challenges.

OCO's organizing also tells a powerful story about scale and the complications that accompany it. When OCO began its small schools organizing, it did not imagine that the reform would be adopted districtwide. As the scope of the reform expanded, however, it became increasingly difficult for OCO to maintain the intensity of its school-based organizing efforts in the new small schools.

Jean Wing from the New School Development Group notes,

> OCO has a limited number of organizers who are assigned to education issues. … So I think at a certain point in time, as more and more new schools opened, they have found themselves stretched kind of thin and have had to rethink, how can we support these schools? And so our relationship has had to change. And as this office opened up as part of the district, we've met with OCO to figure out, on a case-by-case basis, how much support they can provide to the design teams for schools that are coming into being. For example, next year we're opening twelve and it's a tall order to say, "Can you support twelve schools, plus the thirty you're already working in?"

Because OCO's small organizing staff could not have an active presence in all the new small schools, OCO and the district's New School Development Group compensated by turning to a train-the-trainer model, with mixed success. It's unclear to what extent the lack of intensive and consistent organizing has adversely impacted the ability of some new small schools to achieve high capacity and student achievement outcomes. But the case of Oakland demonstrates that organizing groups need to be attentive not only to the positive effects of scale, but to the potentially unintended negative consequences as well. How do groups anticipate and adapt to the demands of scale? What are the compromises that must be made when reforms go to scale? How can groups buttress their organizational capacity to respond more effectively to the changing landscape scale brings?

OCO education reform efforts to protect the small schools reform and respond to the tumultuous political landscape have continued as leaders and organizers grapple with these challenges. The district's New School Development Group no longer exists, and fiscal constraints continue to impact staff positions and responsibilities across the district, resulting in a constant sea change of alliances. In response to the changing district landscape, as well as OCO's own limits on organizational capacity, OCO is currently testing out the use of a citywide Education Committee that focuses on district-level reform strategies and brings together leaders whose school sites do not have local organizing committees. In addition, OCO continues to provide site-specific organizing support based on requests for assistance and organizational capacity. Through the PICO Network, OCO leaders are pushing for education reform through meetings with state and national policy-makers in Sacramento and Washington, D.C.

Organizing builds sustained community engagement for reform.

Whatever the challenges OCO has faced in its organizing, OCO has helped to integrate more nuanced and meaningful forms of parent and community engagement into district and school practices in ways that helped expand, sustain, and protect the small schools reform. Parents have been at the front and center of the small schools reform, involved in every step of the process, from advocating for the small schools to participating in design teams and leading school-based organizing committees. At the school level, Wing notes that OCO's work "strengthen[ed] the skills and leadership of parents…[creating] a much deeper and more integral and empowering role for parents than just the traditional fundraiser events," thus giving parents the opportunity to contribute to more lasting transformations in their children's education.

APPENDIX A

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.[9]

INTERVIEWS

Our research team conducted 321 open-ended, semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders across the sites.[10] 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.

Interviewees 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.

[9] 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.

APPENDIX B

Key Components of the New Small Autonomous Schools Policy

New Small Autonomous Schools Policy (Passed May 16, 2000)	
Goal	
To raise student achievement and close the achievement gap for underserved students by decreasing school size, adhering to high academic standards, and increasing the quality of choices available to students and parents.	
Definition of Terms	
NEW:	The school offers a new context for teaching and learning, not a repackaging of an existing program.
SMALL:	Maximum limits on enrollment (K–5 up to 250; K–8, 6–8, or 9–12 up to 400; K–12 or 6–12 up to 500).
AUTONOMOUS:	School controls curriculum, budget, and the hiring and evaluation of teachers.
Core Principles of New Small Schools	
DIVERSITY AND CONSISTENCY:	All New Small Autonomous schools (NSAS) create their own vision and philosophy for the schools. Schools hold their children to high academic expectations in an intimate, caring, and safe learning environment. Emphasis on parent involvement is expected.
CHOICE:	All NSAS must be a "school of choice" for parents, students, and teachers.
ADMISSIONS:	Priority is given to students from schools designated as overcrowded and low performing; admissions must reflect district demographics.
SCHOOL EMPLOYEES:	Teachers and other staff receive the same salary, benefits, and protections of their comprehensive school counterparts.
SHARED DECISION MAKING AND SITE-BASED MANAGEMENT:	NSAS determine their own schedule, program, staff duties, leadership structure, and calendar within a set of broad guidelines. Budgets are created at the school level.
DISSEMINATION OF NSA SCHOOL OPPORTUNITIES:	Opportunities for networking and professional development will be available to teachers. New school incubators to help school design teams think through their plans will be available to coach parents and educators.
SITES FOR NEW SCHOOLS:	Sites are either newly created or will exist in renovated schools with a new outlook and goal.

Source: New Small Autonomous Schools: District Policy *(OUSD 2000)*

APPENDIX C

Data Sources for the OCO Case Study

INTERVIEWS

Between January 2003 and September 2006, the research team conducted nine interviews with school-level educators and district officials in Oakland, six interviews with policy-makers and other local education stakeholders, and twenty-five interviews with organizing staff and parent leaders. Interview data were used to elucidate OCO's theory of change and education organizing objectives, document the trajectory of OCO's education campaign, and gather the perspectives of school and district officials on the extent to which OCO's organizing influenced their priorities and decisions.

TEACHER SURVEY

Between fall 2005 and early spring 2006, the Annenberg Institute administered surveys to 130 teachers at thirteen elementary and secondary OUSD schools. The survey included multiple measures of school climate, professional culture, and instructional core and assessed teachers' perceptions of their school's capacity in these areas. (A complete list of measures used in the teacher survey and their reliabilities is in Appendix H.) The sample was drawn from nine new small autonomous schools and, as a comparison, four traditional large schools. The survey response rate for large schools was 34 percent; for small schools, 48 percent.

ATTRIBUTION QUESTIONNAIRE

Embedded within the teacher survey administered by the Annenberg Institute, we included a series of attribution questions to assess the extent to which teachers in the new small schools believed there was a relationship between their school's internal capacity and the actions of OCO. Thirty-one of the 47 respondents who reported being familiar with OCO's work in their school answered this questionnaire. Using a three-point scale, teachers rated OCO's influence on twenty-two items relating to different areas of school capacity (e.g., safety and discipline in the school, professional development opportunities, quality of curriculum and instruction).[10]

USE YOUR VOICE TEACHER SATISFACTION SURVEY

Teacher responses from the 2006-2007 district-administered *Use Your Voice* satisfaction survey were obtained. The teacher survey was made up of eight subscales. We examined four subscales that were relevant to the current study: professional culture, school climate/instruction, college readiness, and parent-teacher relationships.[11]

Our analysis focused on thirty-one small schools and nine large schools (elementary and secondary) located in the flatlands region of the district. There were 519 responses from teachers (118 from large schools, 324 from small schools).

[10] These items were used across three survey sites in our study; not all items were relevant to OCO's work.

[11] Subscales were determined through a factor analysis conducted by Strategic Measurement and Evaluation, Inc. (2007), as a part of their evaluation of the Oakland New Small School Initiative. To enhance ease of interpretation, our research team labeled the subscales (or factors) for our analysis.

USE YOUR VOICE PARENT SATISFACTION SURVEY

Parent responses from the 2006-2007 district-administered *Use Your Voice* satisfaction survey were reviewed. We examined each of the survey's five subscales: academic rigor, school climate and culture, college readiness, parent engagement in student learning, and school safety.

Our analysis focused on thirty-one small schools and nine large schools (elementary and secondary) located in the flatlands region of the district. There were 4,809 responses from parents (1,558 from large schools, 3,140 from small schools).

ADMINISTRATIVE DATA

Publicly available student demographic and outcome data on OUSD schools from 1999 to 2007 were downloaded from the California Department of Education Web site and included enrollment, ethnicity, English language learner status, free/reduced-price lunch eligibility, high school dropout rates, graduation rates, and rates of graduation with University of California/California State University required courses (Education Data Partnership n.d.).

DOCUMENT REVIEW

We examined a variety of archival documents, including district-released reports and policies, OCO grant reports, and media coverage.

APPENDIX D

Creation of New Small Schools in Oakland

Elementary Schools								
Originating Large Schools / Small Schools \ Academic Year	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
Highland Elementary						closed 2006		
*ACORN Woodland**								
Rise Community								
New Highland								
Lockwood Elementary							to close in 2009	
*ACORN Woodland**								
Futures Elementary								
Community United Elementary								
Hawthorne Elementary						closed 2006		
International Community School								
Think College Now								
Jefferson Elementary							to close in 2009	
*ASCEND**								
Dolores Huerta (charter)								
Global Family School								
Learning Without Limits								
Manzanita Elementary						closed 2006		
*ASCEND**								
Manzanita SEED								
Manzanita Community School								
Webster Academy							to close in 2009	
EnCompass Academy Elementary								
East Oakland PRIDE								
Washington Elementary					closed 2005			
Sankofa Academy								
Cox Elementary					closed 2005			
Reach Academy								
Melrose Elementary						closed 2006		
Bridges Academy								
Prescott Elementary						closed 2006		
PLACE @ Prescott								
Stonehurst Elementary						closed 2006		
Esperanza Elementary								
Fred T. Korematsu Discovery Academy								
Whittier Elementary							to close in 2009	
Greenleaf Elementary								

Italic = school drew most of its students from the originating school(s)
* = school drew its students from more than one originating school

Middle Schools								
Originating Large Schools / Small Schools \ Academic Year	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
Havenscourt Middle							closed 2007	
Melrose Leadership Academy								
Coliseum College Prep Academy								
ROOTS International								
Simmons (Calvin) Middle							closed 2007	
Urban Promise Academy								
United for Success Academy								
Peralta Creek Middle School								
Lowell Middle						closed 2006		
KIPP Bridge College Prep								
Kizmet Academy Middle								
King Estates Middle					closed 2005			
EXPLORE College Prep Middle School								
Carter Middle						closed 2006		
Sankofa Academy								
Elmhurst Middle							closed 2007	
Alliance Academy								
Elmhurst Community Prep School								
Cole Middle								to close in 2009
West Oakland Middle School								

High Schools								
Originating Large Schools / Small Schools \ Academic Year	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
Fremont Senior High					closed 2005			
Life Academy of Health and Bioscience								
Paul Robeson School of Visual & Perf Arts								
Media College Preparatory Academy								
Mandela High School								
YES (Youth Empowerment School)								
College Prep and Architecture Academy								
Castlemont Senior High				closed 2004				
School of Social Justice					closed 2005			
Leadership Prep High School								
Castlemont Business & Info Tech School								
East Oakland School of the Arts High School								
McClymonds Senior High					closed 2005			
BEST								
Excel								
Kizmet Academy Middle							closed 2007	
MetWest High School								
East Oakland Community High School							closed 2007	

APPENDIX E

Teacher Perceptions of School Capacity: Small Schools vs. Large Schools

Domains	Measures	Small Schools Mean (*n*=47)	Large Schools Mean (*n*=83)	p-value	Effect Size
District and community influences	**District support**				
	Creating local accountability†	2.35	2.87	.002	(medium)
	Community support and accountability				
	Partnering with non-system actors†	2.20	2.70	.010	(medium)
School climate	**School environment**				
	Sense of school community and safety†	3.76	3.20	**.000*** **	large
	Knowledge of student's culture†	3.51	3.36	.135	small
	Achievement-oriented culture†	3.78	3.56	.066	small
	Parent involvement in the school				
	Parental involvement in student learning†	1.93	1.96	.792	negligible
	Teacher outreach to parents	3.23	3.00	**.001** **	medium
	Parent influence in school decision making (elementary and middle schools only)	1.87	1.47	**.022***	large
	Student influence in school decision-making (high schools only)	1.65	1.52	.238	small
Professional culture	**Teacher collegiality and engagement**				
	Peer collaboration	3.26	2.92	**.002** **	medium
	Teacher influence in school decision making	2.64	2.00	**.000*** **	large
	Collective responsibility†	3.88	3.38	**.001** **	medium
	Teacher-teacher trust	3.20	3.03	.088	small
	Teacher morale and retention				
	School commitment	3.10	2.92	.099	small
	Professional development				
	Quality professional development	2.76	2.65	.312	negligible
	Instructional leadership				
	Joint problem solving	2.83	2.55	**.009** **	medium
	Principal instructional leadership	3.09	2.94	.177	small
	Teacher-principal trust	3.23	2.87	**.011***	small
Instructional core	**Classroom characteristics and effectiveness**				
	Coherent curriculum and instruction†	3.39	3.56	.098	(small)
	Teacher influence in classroom decision making	2.95	2.48	**.003** **	medium
	Educational practices and beliefs	3.01	2.94	.653	negligible
	Instructional focus†	3.26	3.32	.672	negligible
	Support for post-secondary goals				
	Educational goals (high school only)	2.85	2.89	.843	negligible

Note: The majority of measures were scored using a 4-point scale, with a higher score indicating a more positive response. A dagger (†) denotes measures that were scored on a 5-point scale. An explanation of t-tests and effect sizes can be found on page 18.

Values in **bold** *represent p-values that are statistically significant, as follows:*

**** p < .001*
*** p < .01*
** p < .05*

Parentheses indicate effect sizes in favor of large schools.

APPENDIX F

Teacher Attributions of OCO's Influence on School Capacity

How much do you think that working with OCO has influenced...	Mean (*n*=31)
District and community	
School organization (e.g., small schools/smaller learning environments)	2.33
Attraction of community and financial resources to school	1.84
Student readiness to learn (e.g., access to Pre-K programs)	1.41
School climate	
School's relations with the community	2.23
School's relations with parents	2.03
Shared decision making between students, parents, teachers and administration	2.00
Parent involvement in the school	1.90
Sense of community and trust in the school	1.86
Changes in school overcrowding	1.83
How teachers get along with parents	1.79
Physical condition of the school building	1.78
Safety and discipline in the school	1.71
How students get along with other students	1.52
Professional culture	
Quality of principal leadership	1.62
Professional development opportunities	1.43
Commitment to the school	1.31
How teachers get along with other teachers	1.26
Instructional core	
Quality of curriculum and instruction	1.54
Classroom resources (e.g., textbooks and other supplies)	1.50
Teacher expectations for student achievement	1.38
Teaching effectiveness	1.32
Student learning	
Student academic performance	1.35

Note: Teachers were asked if they were aware of OCO's organizing in their schools. If they answered yes, they were asked to rate OCO's influence in a variety of areas on a 3-point scale: 3=very much influence, 2=some influence, 1=no influence. Means between 2.1 and 3.0 indicate a high degree of influence. As the same influence items were used across three survey sites in our study, not all items were relevant to OCO's organizing.

APPENDIX G

Use Your Voice Teacher Survey: Small Schools vs. Large Schools

Measures	Small Schools Mean	Large Schools Mean	p-value	Effect Size
Professional Culture	1.83	1.68	**.008****	large
School Climate/Instruction	1.94	1.90	**.023***	large
College Readiness	1.77	1.63	**.048***	large
Parent/Teacher Relationships	1.77	1.69	.191	medium

Note: Scores range between 1 and 2. Higher averages indicate more positive responses. An explanation of t-tests and effect sizes can be found on page 18.

Values in **bold** *represent p-values that are statistically significant, as follows:*

*** $p < .001$
** $p < .01$
* $p < .05$

APPENDIX H

Description of School Capacity Measures

Category/Measures	Items	Objective	Sample Item	Scale	Reliability
District Support (Policy, Leadership Priorities)					
Creating Local Accountability (Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, 2001-2002 Teacher Survey)	6	To assess the district's efforts to foster local accountability	This district encourages schools to be accountable to their own local communities.	5-point	0.90
Community Support and Accountability					
Partnering with Non-system Actors (Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, 2001-2002 Teacher Survey)	2	To measure partnerships with non-system actors	District staff make an effort to reach out to individuals and organizations outside of the school district.	5-point	0.91
School Environment					
Teacher-Parent Trust (Consortium on Chicago School Research, 2003 Teacher Survey)	4	To assess parent-staff relationships	At this school, it is difficult to overcome the cultural barriers between staff and parents.	4-point	0.90
Sense of School Community and Safety (Los Angeles Annenberg Metropolitan Project, 1997 Teacher Survey) [12]	7	To assess facility conditions and school environment	Please rate the sense of safety in the school.	5-point	0.86
Knowledge of Students' Culture (Consortium on Chicago School Research, 1999 Teacher Survey)	4	To measure teachers' efforts to understand their students' culture	How many teachers at this school talk with students about their lives at home?	5-point	0.76
Achievement-Oriented Culture (Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, 2001-2002 Teacher Survey)	4	To measure the extent of an achievement-oriented culture within the school	Students are well aware of the learning expectations of this school.	5-point	0.77

[12] One item, "Please rate the sense safety in the school," was added to the original six-item scale.

Category/Measures	Items	Objective	Sample Item	Scale	Reliability
Student and Parent Roles in the School					
Parent Involvement in School (Consortium on Chicago School Research, 1999 Teacher Survey)	4	To measure parent participation and support for the school	For the students you teach this year, how many parents volunteered to help in the classroom?	5-point	0.56
Parent Involvement in Student Learning (The American Institute for Research, "High Time for High School Reform: Early Findings from the Evaluation of the National School District and Network Grants Program," Teacher Survey 2003. Prepared for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation) [13]	4	To assess the extent to which teachers involve parents in a number of schoolwork-related activities	How often do you involve parents in judging student work?	5-point	0.78
Teacher Outreach to Parents (Consortium on Chicago School Research, 2003 Teacher Survey)	8	To assess the school's efforts to work with parents to develop good communication and common goals and to strengthen student learning	Parents are greeted warmly when they call or visit the school.	4-point	0.87
Parental Influence in Decision-Making (The American Institute for Research, "High Time for High School Reform: Early Findings from the Evaluation of the National School District and Network Grants Program," Teacher Survey 2003. Prepared for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation) (elementary schools only) [14]	6	To assess parents' influence in school decision-making processes	Please indicate the amount of input or influence that the parents have in the decision-making process affecting this current year for establishing or improving the curriculum.	4-point	0.79
Student Influence in Decision-Making (The American Institute for Research, "High Time for High School Reform: Early Findings from the Evaluation of the National School District and Network Grants Program," Teacher Survey 2003. Prepared for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation) (high schools only) [15]	6	To assess students' influence in school decision-making processes	Please indicate the amount of input of influence that the students have in the decision-making process affecting this current year for establishing or improving the curriculum.	4-point	0.81

[13] Two items were omitted from the original scale. One item, "How many parents volunteered to help in the classroom?" was asked only of elementary and middle school teachers. The reliability of the three-item scale used for high school teachers was 0.48.

[14] This scale is identical to the American Institute for Research "School Decision Making" scale but has been modified to apply to parents rather than teachers.

[15] This scale is identical to the American Institute for Research "School Decision Making" scale but has been modified to apply to students rather than teachers.

Category/Measures	Items	Objective	Sample Item	Scale	Reliability
Teacher Collegiality and Engagement					
Peer Collaboration (Consortium on Chicago School Research, 1999 Teacher Survey)	4	To assess the extent of a cooperative work ethic among staff	Teachers design instructional programs together.	4-point	0.85
Teacher Influence in School Decision Making (The American Institute for Research, "High Time for High School Reform: Early Findings from the Evaluation of the National School District and Network Grants Program," Teacher Survey 2003. Prepared for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation)	6	To assess teachers' influence in school decision making processes	Please indicate the amount of input of influence that you have in the decision-making process affecting the current school year for choosing school programs or reforms.	4-point	0.88
Collective Responsibility (Consortium on Chicago School Research, 1999 Teacher Survey)	7	To assess the collective commitment among faculty to improve the school so that all students learn	How many teachers in this school feel responsible when students in this school fail?	5-point	0.94
Teacher-Teacher Trust (Consortium on Chicago School Research, 1999 Teacher Survey) [16]	5	To assess the extent of open communication and respect among teachers	Teachers respect other teachers who take the lead in school improvement efforts.	4-point	0.90
Teacher Morale and Retention					
School Commitment (Consortium on Chicago School Research, 1999 Teacher Survey)	4	To assess the extent of teachers' commitment and loyalty to the school	I would recommend this school to parents seeking a place for their child.	4-point	0.88
Professional Development					
Quality Professional Development (Consortium on Chicago School Research, 1999 Teacher Survey) [17]	8	To measure the quality of professional development	Overall, my professional development experiences this year have included opportunities to work productively with colleagues in my school.	4-point	0.92
Instructional Leadership					
Principal Instructional Leadership (Consortium on Chicago School Research, 1999 Teacher Survey)	7	To assess the extent to which teachers regard their principal as an instructional leader	The principal at this school understands how children learn.	4-point	0.93
Teacher-Principal Trust (Consortium on Chicago School Research, 1999 Teacher Survey) [18]	7	To assess the extent to which teachers feel that their principal respects and supports them	It's OK in this school to discuss feelings, worries, and frustrations with the principal.	4-point	0.96
Joint Problem Solving (Consortium on Chicago School Research, 1999 Teacher Survey)	5	To assess the extent to which teachers maintain a public dialogue to address and solve problems	Many teachers express their personal views at faculty meetings.	4-point	0.84

[16] One item from the scale was omitted, and another was modified from "To what extent do you feel respected by other teachers?" to "I feel respected in this school."

[17] One item from the original scale was omitted.

[18] One item from the scale was omitted, and another was modified from "To what extent do you feel respected by the principal?" to "I feel respected by the principal."

Category/Measures	Items	Objective	Sample Item	Scale	Reliability
Classroom Characteristics and Effectiveness					
Teacher Influence in Classroom Decision Making (The American Institute for Research, "High Time for High School Reform: Early Findings from the Evaluation of the National School District and Network Grants Program," Teacher Survey 2003. Prepared for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation)[19]	6	To assess teachers' influence in decisions affecting classroom practices	Please indicate the amount of input or influence you have in the decision-making process affecting the current school year for determining the goals and objectives for student learning.	4-point	0.92
Coherent Curriculum and Instruction (Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, 2001-2002 Teacher Survey)	9	To assess the degree of coherence in the school's curriculum and instruction	The curriculum is planned between and among grades to promote continuity.	5-point	0.85
Classroom Resources (Los Angeles Annenberg Metropolitan Project, 1997 Teacher Survey)[20]	4	To assess school resources	Basic materials for teaching (e.g., textbooks, paper, pencils, copy machines) are readily available as needed.	4-point	0.62
Educational Practice and Beliefs (Consortium on Chicago School Research, 2005 High School Teacher Survey)	4	To assess the degree of importance teachers place on student learning about social and political issues	In your classes, how much emphasis do you place on having students learn about things in society that need to be changed?	4-point	0.89
Instructional Focus (Consortium on Chicago School Research, 2003 Teacher Survey)[21]	3	To examine the school's instructional core	The school day is organized to maximize instructional time.	5-point	0.75
Post-Graduation Planning (Consortium on Chicago School Research, 2005 High School Teacher Survey) (high schools only)	6	To assess the extent to which teachers help students plan for college	Teachers in this school feel it is part of their job to prepare students to succeed in college.	4-point	0.63
Educational Goals (Consortium on Chicago School Research, 2003 High School Teacher Survey) (high schools only)[22]	3	To assess the extent to which teachers help students plan for careers	Do you help students learn skills needed for particular careers?	4-point	0.90
Organizing Attribution Questionnaire					
Influence of Organizing (Annenberg Institute–generated)	21	To assess the extent to which teachers believe that working with Oakland Community Organizations has influenced changes in various domains of school capacity and school climate	How much do you think that working with OCO has influenced changes in safety and discipline in the school?	3-point + "don't know"	(not a scale)

[19] Two items from the original scale were omitted.

[20] Two items were taken from Los Angeles Annenberg Metropolitan Project's "Instructional Materials" scale and two items from LAAMP's "Student Assessment" scale.

[21] One item was taken from the Consortium on Chicago School Research 2003 Teacher Survey "Focus on Student Learning" scale and two from the CCSR 2003 Teacher Survey "Program Coherence" scale.

[22] Three items from the original scale were omitted and one item was slightly modified.

Category/Measures	Items	Objective	Sample Item	Scale	Reliability
Teacher Characteristics					
Teacher Demographic Questionnaire (Annenberg Institute–Generated)[23]	8	To collect demographic and professional information about respondents	How long have you been teaching in this school?	N/A	(not a scale)
Student Readiness					
Student Readiness (Consortium on Chicago School Research, 2003 Teacher Survey)	2	To assess the extent to which students are prepared for grade-level material	About what portion of your students have serious reading difficulties?	6-point	(not a scale)

[23] The questionnaire was based on similar items from the Consortium on Chicago School Research, 2003 Teacher Survey, elementary edition.

APPENDIX I

Use Your Voice Parent Survey: Small Schools vs. Large Schools

Measures	Small Schools Mean	Large Schools Mean	p-value	Effect Size
Academic Rigor	1.91	1.83	**.020***	large
School Climate and Culture	1.82	1.75	**.039***	large
College Readiness	1.89	1.85	**.034***	medium
Parent Engagement in Student Learning	1.88	1.83	.139	medium
School Safety	1.41	1.39	.735	small

Note: Scores range between 1 and 2. Higher averages indicate more positive responses. An explanation of t-tests and effect sizes can be found on page 18.

Values in **bold** *represent p-values that are statistically significant, as follows:*

*** $p < .001$
** $p < .01$
* $p < .05$

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