BRIDGING RESEARCH AND EDUCATION ORGANIZING:  
CAN WE STRENGTHEN OUR COMBINED POWER?

Justice Matters Institute  
Olivia E. Araiza  

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SUMMARY
Justice Matters Institute, a San Francisco-based research organization, has encountered major questions related to the role of research in education organizing. Interviews with organizing groups and organizations that provide technical support to such groups pushed us to question assumptions underlying our work. We found that the role of research in education change work takes on different meanings for community organizing groups and research-based organizations. This paper explores the implications of each research approach for education change efforts. Bridging the two fields by using research findings while maintaining organizing principles and frameworks can strengthen our combined power for education change.

SETTING THE CONTEXT
Justice Matters Institute, a San Francisco-based research organization, has encountered major questions related to the role of research in organizing in the context of its education work.

Justice Matters Institute (JMI) conducts research, advocacy, and policy work for racial justice in education. JMI focuses on racial justice in education because institutional racism deeply shapes education. The education system perpetuates racism as students of color emerge from school without the tools they need to earn a living that can support a decent quality of life for them and their families or to fully participate in a democratic society, and lacking the option to consider opportunities found in higher education. At the same time, schools reproduce the status quo in the larger society by passing on a particular history and culture, while denigrating, appropriating, or ignoring histories and cultures of people of color. Increasingly, communities of color are organizing to change these systemic problems.

JMI uses an interactive research process in collaboration with grassroots communities of color that organize around education. In these partnerships, JMI strives to strike a balance between providing support for specific campaign needs and developing mutual learning processes that will enhance overall campaign impact. JMI believes that community organizing is an essential and necessary factor in changing school systems, and that research can enhance the impact of education organizing.

In our work to support campaigns for educational justice, we have witnessed community policy demands fall short of sought after changes. These experiences pushed JMI to ask how we could strengthen our research work to help overcome these obstacles. Accordingly, we have turned to potential areas of research on policy questions related to how to get large, complex school systems to make significant changes that positively affect students of color.

In Fall 2002 JMI interviewed community organizers and research-based groups that provide technical assistance to education organizing groups. The interviews were meant to gather feedback on potential JMI research areas, as well as to learn more about how community organizing groups use research-based knowledge in the development of their policy demands (the interview guide and list of participants are included in the appendix). Many themes surfaced from the interviews that led us to question some of our original assumptions about our work to support organizing with research. JMI grappled with these ideas and they continue to raise our interest and challenge our assumptions.
The interviews yielded some surprising information. Some of the research questions that we had hypothesized might be most useful to organizers generated the least interest. The interview participants connected their lack of interest in these questions to their overall understanding of the role of research in organizing.

The responses of interview participants raised questions around what, if any, is the role of traditional research in developing community policy demands and campaign strategy. By traditional research, we mean research that meets generally accepted criteria in academia. Community organizing has its own approach to research. As we analyzed the interviews, it became increasingly clear that interview participants’ lack of interest in or criticism of traditional research questions were not merely a series of isolated responses to particular research questions. Rather, the underlying principles and framework for community organizing was coming into conflict with the underlying principles and framework that guides traditional research.

What follows is reflection and analysis that draw heavily on the interviews we conducted. We also gained many insights by putting information drawn from the interviews together with reports on education organizing conducted by colleagues. Some of the topics explored in this paper are raised in those reports; for a sample of overlapping topics and references, see the appendix. This paper begins with an overview of both community organizing and traditional research approaches, how they differ, and sometimes clash. Next, we argue that these conflicts can and must be bridged. Finally, we offer recommendations on how to bridge the two.

**Community Organizing and Traditional Approaches to Research**

It is important to understand the differences between community organizing research approaches and traditional research approaches in order to understand how they interact with each other. Each has a distinct purpose and its own set of implications for education change. More and more education change efforts involve partnerships between education organizing groups and organizations that either conduct or review traditional research—having a common understanding of each other’s research approaches and critiques can help with communication between groups.

Interviews with organizers and organizations that provide technical assistance to organizers gave us insight into how research is perceived within the community organizing framework. The description of traditional research is based on our own experience conducting and using such research. Although JMI draws on traditional research methods, we do not mean to imply that JMI’s work is a typical representative of what we describe as traditional research. Similar to the organizations that provide support to organizing that we interviewed, we combine traditional research with other techniques to make it accessible and useful to grassroots community groups. The descriptions of both research approaches provide a general picture of core elements rather than a narrow definition of each.

**Community Organizing Research**

There are many purposes for research in organizing, but all of them help build an organization and win issue campaigns—research is a tool closely tied to political and campaign analysis frameworks. Organizing involves research throughout campaigns, using members and
organizers as researchers and analysts. Organizers often refer to the different research areas as community analysis, power analysis, target research, data gathering and analysis, and monitoring institutions before and after a campaign. Below is a narrative that walks through the community organizing research process, touching on some of the areas mentioned above; the order is not necessarily static, and in practice, many aspects overlap.

Typically, a community organizing group will survey the community, using various methods to identify problems that are important to them and that prepare for further recruitment and alliance-building. Through “door-knocking” —which is one way of interviewing people in their homes, student surveys at schools, or membership polling, among other methods, organizers get a sense of what is going on in neighborhoods, and what the “buzz” is on problems. In cases where the group leadership already selected a problem to work on, the issue is tested in the community using similar methods to assess whether or not the issue can garner broad community support and to help refine the issue to meet community needs.

Following community analysis which helps identify a problem, the group researches the associated public system by listening to community members’ stories and experiences. Groups investigate the problem further by sending in members to monitor, gather data or request public information. Group members formulate a vision of change, craft demands, and an issue campaign begins to unfold. This process involves surfacing community values and manifesting them into policy demands and a “framed” issue with messages that shape public debate—whether the issue is framed in terms of racial justice, social justice, morality or accountability depends on the group’s analysis of social change and the roots of injustice. The issue is evaluated against campaign criteria to help decide on whether and how to proceed. Simply stated, criteria assess whether an issue is winnable, and whether it will contribute to organizational power and systemic change.

The group conducts a power analysis in light of the problem, once again using research as it answers questions about power brokers and other stakeholders. Questions might include where does the stakeholder fall in relation to the issue, how strongly is the stakeholder tied to this stance and who influences stakeholder opinion. The target is identified—the individual with the decision making power to give the group their demand—and figures into this power analysis. This process leads to “ally and enemy” identification and an assessment of ways they will both make the campaign easy or difficult.

“Handles” — legal, moral, factual, or policy grounds that will position the group favorably and weaken the target— are researched and kept at hand for particular points in the campaign as warranted. Groups search for handles by analyzing public information on the problem and comparing it to other cities, neighborhoods, or states. In addition, groups study other grassroots campaigns to pick up strategy tips or to point to a policy model outside of their community.

All of the above campaign research activities are heavily reliant on community-based knowledge and organizing research tools. Groups use traditional research and other sources of information outside of community knowledge bases for various purposes. For instance, traditional research that provides evidence that confirms or denies the validity of the demand is very useful and important for effective campaigns. Traditional research that supports campaign demands...
sometimes helps shape policy nuances, and answer media or opponent’s questions and attacks. These sources are also places to find the “handles” discussed above. Traditional research also informs leadership development processes that seek to raise membership’s level of knowledge on the issue in order to support their decision-making and participation.

Exceptions Education organizing groups vary in how much they follow the community organizing research approach sketched above. Groups that are affiliated with a network or that have strong partnerships with education research groups make fuller use of traditional research-based knowledge to inform their decisions around campaign demands and to shape the demands into detailed policy proposals. Yet another exception are groups not affiliated to a network that have in-house research support or that over years have developed a high level of sophistication around policy and traditional research in the issue area. Both of these types of groups also turn their research into policy reports that are very persuasive and successful at communicating their demands.

In any case, the group’s membership, not externally derived information, is still placed as the primary engine behind campaign decisions, no matter how groups differ in using research-based knowledge in shaping campaigns.

Factors contributing to this research approach Listed below are some factors contributing to the community organizing research approach:

- **Understanding of the political process and social change**
  A core element of community organizing is the belief that by organizing into powerful organizations, oppressed people can control the institutions that affect their lives. Policy makers are accountable to communities only when communities are organized and can impact political careers. *Consciousness raising or empowerment* is another fundamental element of social change that community organizing facilitates. Community members’ active participation in campaign development is indispensable for *empowerment*. Both of these elements call for participatory research methods done through a social justice framework that looks at political and power dynamics.

- **Central importance of community-based knowledge**
  The knowledge base in communities is extremely valuable in understanding problems and finding solutions. However, one tactic of oppression is to strip people of their strength by invalidating their experiences and indigenous knowledge base. Institutions overlook community knowledge in favor of research-based knowledge that is very often from sources outside of communities of color. If community groups only used traditional research, they would perpetuate the myth that communities are not knowledgeable or credible sources of information.

- **Limited resources affect staff, time and priorities in community groups**
  Organizers’ skill set is not developed in traditional research and analysis techniques—these skills are not a requirement for the position or an area that groups dedicate limited resources to strengthen and—if skills are in-house—to use. Organizers organize. That requires being where community members are at, which include homes, schools, parks,
etc. Examining traditional research happens in the office, at a desk, behind a computer—places where you cannot organize.

**Critique of Community Organizing Research by Traditional Researchers**

Organizations that use traditional methods of research aim for systematic investigations that produce reliable and valid findings beyond the specific situation being studied. Several generalizations can characterize their critique of community organizing research and policy development processes.

- Community groups’ core understanding of power is the driving force behind their research and demand development—traditional researchers say that while a power analysis is useful, garnering political will is not enough to bring about educational improvement. Knowing what education strategy will make a difference in academic outcomes also necessary, requiring a deep understanding of education research.

- Related to the previous critique, flawed assumptions about what is needed to improve schools may underlie policy demands; even if the community’s demand was fully implemented, the results would not be the intended outcomes. While winning these demands may help build organizational power and alter power relations, problems facing education remain unchanged.

- Groups’ lack of traditional research-based knowledge leads them to work on issues that are not fundamental to improving education—teaching and learning issues are missing or are addressed superficially. Issues dealing with physical structures or school climate predominate in education organizing.

**Implications of Community Organizing Research for Education Change**

Community organizing research approaches are very successful at getting close to the heartbeat of communities of color and thus, identifying issues that are important and meaningful to them. Moreover, groups understand the school system in relation to the people most impacted by failing institutions and the historical context of people of color. Both of these aspects make organizing campaigns appealing to grassroots communities, and can generate political power.

Policy processes are political, and community organizing groups understand the inner workings of the process very well. Successful issue campaigns provide the vehicle to make things happen in the political arena of education. Community members are engaged, and indigenous leadership is developed—both of which build on and strengthen the social and political capital of communities of color. Moreover, the status quo is challenged and power relationships altered. This power analysis is important because the education system reflects societal inequities and systems of oppression.

Nonetheless, campaign demands are not always reflective of the most advanced traditional research-based knowledge that can ensure greater impact on students’ academic performance and opportunities to further their education. Use of research-based knowledge developed by traditional methods can broaden and deepen the scope of issues to include ones that get closer to teaching and learning. Moreover, the complexities of school systems require understandings that
go beyond the visible “symptoms” of educational problems to uncover administrative and organizational factors that impact education.

**Traditional Research**

Traditional research uses methods that will stand up against criticism and produce “pure” findings and knowledge. Investigation happens free from pressure to find particular hypotheses true or false or to advance a political agenda. The purpose is to contribute to a knowledge base or to provide analysis that is impartial and can help society make decisions that are in its best interest. Although this is an oversimplification, it provides a backdrop from which to characterize basic approaches to reach these ends.

Main components of traditional research include:

- **Question Formulation**: Research questions are formulated that either build on an existing knowledge base or that go into new territory.
- **Data Collection**: Data is collected and existing research is studied—systematic methods are undertaken to preserve impartiality.
- **Analysis**: Analysis is carried out, weighing data and studies for validity and reliability (true and consistent measures), and hypotheses are created or tested.
- **Findings and Recommendations**: In addition to presenting findings, research often includes recommendations.

**Exceptions** Many institutes and policy advocacy groups use research methods that depart from the traditional methodology sketched above, of which start with a defined question about a topic. Instead, researchers focus on campaign problems or needs in search of solutions that fit specific local contexts. In addition, some researchers using traditional methods also consider political dynamics as an important variable to include in analysis.

Organizations exist in all political camps that describe their work as meeting traditional research standards but who are pushing political agendas rather than attempting to be neutral and objective.

**Factors contributing to this approach** Listed below are some factors contributing to the traditional research approach:

- **Best methods for research-based knowledge creation**
  The methods used in traditional research are the best at arriving at universal knowledge. These methods allow theories to be applied and tested outside of the institutional or geographical context used for investigation. Traditional research attempts to minimize subjectivity with methods that are open to public scrutiny.

- **Dominance of traditional research methods**
  Researchers aspiring to work at or who want tenured positions in higher education institutions are pressed to publish papers that meet traditional research criteria, and research that is closer to applied or community organizing methods is viewed as second rate work. There is also a strong governmental push for “pure” research (the federal...
education legislation, No Child Left Behind provides a good example). As a large consumer of traditional research, government influences what type of research constitutes “good” research.

**Critique of Traditional Research by Community Organizing Groups**

Community organizing groups use traditional research to add credibility to their demands by citing research that supports their position. Sometimes traditional research also helps community organizing groups broaden and deepen their understanding of education issues. Although traditional research has a place in community organizing, it is viewed critically by community groups for the following reasons:

- Traditional research findings and recommendations frequently leave out demographic and political contexts—community groups analyze both to develop campaign strategy. Organizers are unable to make use of general recommendations because their campaign work is set in very specific social and political settings.

- Timeframes for change strategies found in traditional research are not compatible with organizing. Reform proposed in traditional research does not result in change quick enough for organizers to sustain a membership driven campaign.

- Traditional research is often written for an audience that already understands and uses the technical terminology found in the work. This makes traditional research studies inaccessible to most people outside of the field. Translation into accessible language is necessary before trying to break it into action pieces for a campaign. Both of these steps take time and expertise that organizing groups may not have.

- Community groups resent the fact that researchers are credited with knowing about the problems of communities and that researchers are used as experts on subjects that people have lived with their entire lives. Rarely do public systems or mainstream media search for people affected by public problems to give advice on solutions or participate in problem solving processes.

- Community groups also feel that the public service sector is supposed to know how to implement policy demands—they believe that public administrators are paid to figure out solutions using the research. Community groups are reluctant to do the work for public institutions because their job is to organize the community to make systems work better for them, not to figure out the details of what that should look like. Groups are also concerned about cooptation if they get overly immersed in detailed policy development.

**Implications of Traditional Research for Education Change**

Research-based institutions have a deep level of capacity that is fundamental to knowledge development for education change. Traditional research approaches use systematic methods for developing theories that can be tested and proven—this is an indispensable tool for the development of solutions. Research studies meeting certain standards can be generalized to give us a picture of educational issues across systems and, over time, can tell us how these issues have changed. Moreover, using statistical methodology, problems can be associated with factors that may be at the root of the
problem. Nonetheless, traditional research use by grassroots groups is difficult for various reasons.

Organizers and practitioners consider their environments and tools—either political or bureaucratic—when making sense of information. The fact that a lot of research does not consider the political and organizational contexts of school systems makes it difficult for organizing groups, and even for practitioners in schools systems, to apply findings. This is unfortunate because community groups are increasingly gaining a place at the decision making table in districts across the country.

Finally, recommendations for reform by traditional research typically do not take into account the historical context in which education exists—leaving out institutional racism from the analysis. If policy is implemented strictly from research-based recommendations without an analysis of institutional racism, systemic racism goes unchallenged.

The chart below summarizes how both approaches have implications for educational change.
Bridging Research and Education Organizing

| Generalized across school systems. | Educational outcomes can be traced over time to measure changes. |
| Research often leaves out political and institutional contexts and dynamics when targeted variables are isolated in studies. | Community organizing groups, and also educational practitioners, find it difficult to apply findings because their work is highly embedded in local contexts. |
| Research studies often leave out historical social and political analyses of education issues. | Absent of these analyses, policy recommendations that are based solely on research studies may not address deep institutional social problems. |

The Role of Research in Changing Complex School Systems

Education change presents unique demands that require the use of traditional research-based knowledge by community organizing groups. Community organizing groups’ critique is valid. However, traditional research is necessary if we want a deeper understanding of education’s systemic problems, and development of policy demands that work in schools. Because community organizing is essential for transforming school systems, both traditional education research institutions and organizing groups must reevaluate these challenges and ask what it will take to confront them.

We believe that the education organizing movement can benefit from traditional research that provides insights into the complexities of school systems.

Complex School Systems Community organizing groups face many obstacles to education change including: credibility issues, access to parents and students on school grounds, technical and analytical capacity, sustaining memberships and organizations over long reform timelines, and explicit discrimination. The complexities of school systems exacerbate these challenges.

Communities must figure out how to craft demands that result in meaningful improvements in students’ education. There are many layers within the school system that have a role in determining whether or not students receive a good quality education. First, there is the level of educational practice itself, which requires the community to know which practices are educationally sound and effective. Good educational practice must be delivered by an individual who is recruited, trained, and supported in a way that enables him or her to carry out this practice skillfully, and who uses judgment in order to implement the practice flexibly according to the needs of individual students. This individual educator works in a school that must create an environment where it is possible to effectively carry out this practice. The leadership of the school, its culture, its ability to operate as a functional system will all play a role. This school is in a district, where leadership, culture, and systems issues also have an important impact. The district in turn is impacted by funding decisions, legislation, and regulations developed at the state and federal level.
Making the situation even more complicated are the political and power dimensions of the layers. Politics and power struggles often result in student needs being somewhere outside the center of policy dialogues, replaced instead by special interests of other stakeholders within and without the system. Generally speaking, all stakeholders except for low-income students of color have either powerful, organized, or both forces behind them to push their agenda forward. In fact, school systems often exclude students, their families and communities from schools and school governance arenas. The participation imbalance found in policy making circles at all levels of the school system, from school sites to the federal government, leads to entrenched organizational cultures and programs that are not relevant to today’s student population and seemingly unmoving barriers to educational change that are not always meant to protect student interests.

In addition to politics and power, there are other crosscutting factors that make school systems complex: race, class and culture. The students and staff come from a diverse variety of backgrounds. Not only do students have significant variation in how they learn, with some students carrying particular learning challenges, but students and staff come from a variety of racial, linguistic, and class backgrounds. Culture and race impact the schooling experience of students at every point in the system. Knowing how race, language, class and culture relate to institutional culture and climate and academic outcomes cannot be stressed enough as an important aspect of educational change. Ignoring how race and culture interact with schooling dismisses the rich diversity of students and treats the current features and history of institutional racism that people of color live with everyday as unimportant. When systemic problems of racism are not addressed, all of society suffers because underlying causes remain entrenched.

The following chart includes examples of questions that organizers or other stakeholders might ask themselves about the complex layers described above in relation to the problems or issues they are addressing.
### Complex School Systems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Layers</th>
<th>Example Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educational Practices</td>
<td>What educational practices are sound and effective?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Educator</td>
<td>What judgment calls must be made by educators in order to flexibly implement educational practices to best meet the needs of individual students? How are individual educators recruited, trained and supported so to enable them to carry out educational practices skillfully?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools</td>
<td>What is the right environment to carry out specific educational practices? How do schools change or maintain environments that are conducive to teaching and learning? What is the role of school level leadership, culture and systems in determining educational outcomes?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>What is the role of district level leadership, culture, systems and governance in all of the layers described above?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State and Federal Governments</td>
<td>How do state and federal level legislations, regulations, and allocation of funding sources impact the layers described above?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Crosscutting Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Layers</th>
<th>Example Questions</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Politics and Power</td>
<td>What impact do politics and power struggles have on the entire school system?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race, Language, Class and Culture</td>
<td>How do race, class and culture interact with and how are they impacted by all of the layers and factors described above?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How do communities formulate demands that can cut through the complex layers of the school system and produce tangible, meaningful outcomes? Research that has developed a knowledge base about each layer of the system as well as about how the layers interact can make a powerful contribution to developing demands that make headway against daunting obstacles. Bodies of research that can help address these questions have been developed. For example, there is useful research on: a range of effective educational practices, the development of effective educators, exemplary schools, the school improvement process, district roles in improving achievement, district change processes, etc. There is a rich literature on how racial and cultural issues play out in schools that identifies exemplary approaches to incorporating understandings of these issues. Outside of the field of education, there are relevant research literatures on systems change, leadership, organizational culture, etc.
If we can harvest and translate relevant findings from this research for an organizing audience, we can enhance the capacity of education organizing to move the diffuse, complex, entrenched system known as public education. In fact, policy and research institutes increasingly are working with community organizing groups, bringing traditional research based knowledge to grassroots audiences in a variety of ways through action campaigns.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**
The critiques of both traditional and community organizing approaches to educational improvement leave out the fact that one without the other holds back struggles for systemic change of complex school systems. In spite of substantial differences and even conflicts in the orientation of community organizing and traditional research, urgent educational problems require finding ways to build bridges between the two. The following recommendations suggest ideas for building such a bridge:

*Traditional research should be set in its political and demographic context.*
Research that is explicit about the political and demographic context raises its’ level of credibility among organizers, and allows them to dispel concerns about its applicability to specific communities. Political and demographic contexts are also important because they do matter in determining whether an academic program or practice is appropriate or what organizational culture is required for successful implementation. For example, political details about school and community leadership would allow groups to assess what kind of dynamics were present and needed to achieve a particular policy. Findings should include details on the ethnic, racial, linguistic, immigration and economic status of school and community populations that can provide insight into the types of academic needs confronting school systems, cultural dynamics at play, historical relationships to educational systems, and socio-political vulnerabilities, weaknesses and strengths.

*Research–based organizations and organizing groups should align agendas.*
Combining each organization’s research agendas with long-term community organizing campaigns would enhance each other’s work to ultimately bolster impact on education systems. Conducting education research with an organizing framework will ensure that research is in line with what is most pressing for communities of color, increase the capacity of organizing groups to apply research-based education strategies to campaign demands and deepen groups’ analytical skills. To do this, research must fulfill specific campaign and organizational needs that can be achieved by following community organizing methods and values. For example, ongoing collaboration on issues surrounding teaching and learning would involve interactive and experiential learning activities that are based on both research and community knowledge. The purpose would be twofold, both to strengthen and broaden community leadership understanding of issues through research and to raise researchers’ understandings of community priorities, problems and perspectives around education.

Crafting organizing demands would be enhanced by organizers jointly asking questions with researchers such as, how does our current and historical experience with teaching and learning compare with the best practices advocated by leading practitioners in education? Next, what is missing in traditional research and community organizing theories and expectations around
education and how can we combine them into policy demands that are relevant to school systems’ socio-political and organizational reality? Alternatively, after studying particular problems and practices in education, what political and organizational considerations should we understand to make an informed decision on whether a campaign will be successful and result in improved academic outcomes?

Ongoing collaborations are the most effective ways for groups to increase their joint impact. Because of the differences highlighted above between traditional research and community organizing, short-term trainings and workshops and stand-alone written materials developed by researchers will have limited effectiveness, except when the content is exclusively focused on what is needed in specific issue campaigns. In order to share broader educational knowledge and effect deeper levels of systemic problems, a partnership where research content can be translated for sustained organizational development and adapted to an organizing campaign is the best way to ensure that traditional research can be meaningfully utilized.

The division of labor between organizing groups and research groups should support organizing needs.
Organizing groups have differing needs when it comes to determining the division of labor related to research and policy development activities. Because it is of primary importance that members determine the direction of a campaign and build their leadership through a campaign, participatory research, where members participate in some or all stages of the research process can be an important organizing tool. In this case, the research organization provides technical assistance to the research process or conducts particular pieces of the research process as requested.

On the other hand, organizing groups are frequently concerned that research will dilute their focus on organizing or even contribute to potential cooptation. Often the phase of a campaign which calls for the most detailed education research is after a broad set of demands have been won, and school system officials are planning the details of implementation. Participating in the planning and implementation process has the potential to divert valuable time and energy away from organizing. Perhaps the process will coopt the group by pushing them to function as a district policy-making body rather than as an independent organizing entity. At the same time, if implementation is not planned well, the organizing victory could easily turn out to be an empty one.

This is a situation where, if the organizing group desires it, a research partner could invest time in research and policy development related to implementation. This work would enable the organizing group to more easily weigh in on implementation issues while minimizing its investment of time and energy to this work. Of course, such a division of labor can only take place when the trust and communication between the two types of organizations is strong, and the role of each in participating in the implementation process is clear.

Researchers should place education change strategies within incremental policy recommendations that are compatible with community organizing frameworks.
Education change takes years to demonstrate improvement in academics, physical conditions and cultural climate. A strategy that calculates five or more years to produce outcomes can deter
group members from campaigns. Dividing multi-year strategies into a series of winnable policy demands could feed into a long-term or broader campaign platform that better fits an organizing framework. This not only helps organizers sustain a membership but also helps groups have deeper impact on education issues.

**Reflection and Questions**

Across the country there are examples of education organizing groups that are using research-based knowledge to inform policy demands and that are forming strong alliances with a variety of education stakeholders, from organized labor to principals. These experiences have led organizing groups and organizations that partner with them to rethink strategies for organizing. Placing pressure on decision makers as a primary strategy has broadened to include collaboration with school governance bodies, administrators, and teachers. This shift from making demands based on moral imperatives to coupling moral imperative for change with research and collaborative strategies raises new dimensions and questions for education organizing. Below are some reflections and questions that this shift has raised for education organizing.

This paper argues that if education organizing groups incorporated traditional research knowledge more extensively, their campaigns might have a greater capacity to bring about fundamental educational change. At the same time, incorporating such research changes organizing dynamics in significant ways. Using traditional research to understand the complexities of school systems and inform policy demands leads groups to develop their demands in much greater detail. To make sure that these details get implemented, groups need to spend much more time negotiating and planning with school officials. This dynamic was discussed above in terms of its potential to divert the group’s time and energy. Beyond questions of use of time, this type of work can have other major impacts on community organizing.

The collaborative work with school officials necessarily is built on trust and relationships, making it more difficult or counterproductive to use the adversarial tactics that make up a significant part of the community organizing repertoire. This type of collaboration requires a set of skills that some groups may have but not with the same expertise or confidence as with pressure tactics and strategies. Traditional and powerful organizing tools must be replaced with ones that build mutually respectful and trusting relationships. Not only does this type of work call for different skills, but also it makes it harder for groups to draw on their major source of power, the threat of adversarial tactics carried out by a grassroots community-based membership. Furthermore, the collaboration or negotiation will probably run on an institutional calendar, one that is much slower than an organizing campaign calendar and require some compromise.

Below are some questions that follow from these assumptions:

- Although traditional research in the areas described above may inform and provide a strong backing for groups in negotiation, how do organizers work with membership to balance the roles of direct action and collaboration, being on the outside and the inside?

- Can organizers sustain a viable membership if the relationship lasts years? How would this change the structure of organizing groups?
What must school systems do to become an institution that accepts and appreciates organized community participation, and that knows how to collaborate in ways that reflect community needs and values?

CONCLUDING REMARKS
Bridging traditional research and community organizing in ways that facilitate enhanced applicability of research findings to campaigns will require both fields to reexamine how they approach education change. Researchers must consider social and political factors that affect education, and organizers must further incorporate research findings into both demand and campaign development processes. The bridge should be created through partnerships between community organizing groups and research-based groups that support education organizing. These partnerships should be grounded in community organizing principles, which will ensure accountability to the values and priorities of grassroots communities of color. However, community organizing has encountered complications by entering the education change process that affect longstanding methods and practices of organizing. Questions surrounding the dynamics of these complications should be considered by both community organizing and research-based groups.
APPENDIX A: JMI INTERVIEW GUIDE FALL 2002

Explanation of Interview Purpose
People organizing for education change face many barriers to making real or major change. Of course, one of the biggest barriers has to do with the power imbalances we face, and the only way to address that is to keep working to build power. But we also think that some of the obstacles that people face in education organizing could be addressed with the support of certain kinds of research. That is part of what we are trying to get feedback on in this interview. We want to learn more about the barriers you face in getting real changes made, and how research might help.

Campaign Particulars

- Do you have any types of overall goals for your education work?

- What education issues have you been working on?
  - What level(s) of the system is being focused on (school, district, etc.)?
  - Has the group completed campaigns, or is the group in the middle of its first campaign?

Pick a campaign experience to use for interview questions that rely on this information

- What were the demands for this campaign? How did you develop this demand?
  - Given the problem, how did you decide what demands would be most important or strategic?
  - Given the problem, how did you decide what to demand first?
  - What knowledge did you draw on in thinking about this?
  - Was there information you didn’t know that would have been helpful?
    - If yes, what, and how would it have been helpful?

- How did the campaign conclude? Were your demands met?
  - If demands were met, ask how satisfied they are with the result
    - Did the demands get implemented?
    - Were they fully implemented?
    - Did they produce the change that people hoped for?
      - If not, what was lacking?

School Change Process Research

- Did you draw on any knowledge about how schools change in formulating your demand?
  - If yes, what was the knowledge? How did you use it?

- Is there knowledge about how schools change that could have helped you develop your demand/have more insight into what demand would be most important or should come first?
  - If yes, what knowledge? How would it help?
  - If possible, do a follow-up with a specific example of a kind of knowledge. Ask if it would have been helpful and how.
For groups who had a demand fully implemented, but it didn’t achieve what they hoped:
Would knowledge about how schools change have helped develop a demand that might have brought about bigger or more strategic change?
  o  If yes, what knowledge? How would it help?

District Research I: Groups demanding district-wide change
  ➢ Did you draw on any knowledge about school districts, how they function, or examples of districts that are doing a good job in formulating your demand?
    o  If yes, what was the knowledge? How did you use it?
  ➢ Is there knowledge about school districts, how they work, or good examples of districts that could have helped you develop your demand/have more insight into what demand would be most important or should come first?
    o  If yes, what knowledge? How would it help?
    o  If possible, do a follow-up with a specific example of a kind of knowledge. Ask if it would have been helpful and how.

For groups who had a demand fully implemented, but it didn’t achieve what they hoped:
Would knowledge about school districts have helped develop a demand that might have brought about bigger or more strategic change?
  o  If yes, what knowledge? How would it help?
  o  If possible, do a follow-up with a specific example of a kind of knowledge. Ask if it would have been helpful and how.

District Research II: Groups who have not placed demands for district-wide change
  ➢ Have you ever thought about pushing for change at the district level? Why or why not?
  ➢ In your experience, does the school district have much impact on what happens in schools? If yes, how?
  ➢ If you had more information about how school districts work and examples of districts that were doing a good job, would it make it easier for you to push for change at the district level? If yes, what kind of information would be helpful, and how would it help?

Systems Theory Research
  ➢ In your experience, do school systems resist change? How so?
    o  How did it impact your campaign?
  ➢ Could anything have prepared you to counter the resistance better?
  ➢ We are planning to do some research on the common patterns of how school systems resist change and successful strategies for getting past that resistance and getting the system to really move. Do you think that kind of research would be helpful to your work? How so?
Accountability Research

- Have you ever developed demands that monitored the implementation of your other demands? (Such as demands that would collect data about whether other demands were being implemented and make a public report, or demands that created a community body to oversee the implementation.)
  - If yes, what was your experience with these demands?
  - Did they accomplish what you hoped they would?
  - We are looking into research about effective approaches to monitoring implementation of demands, or approaches that make sure that the system has to respond when it is not implementing something, or effective approaches to giving the community an ongoing voice in overseeing something. Do you think that kind of information could have been helpful in the situation you described? If yes, how would it have been helpful?

- If no, we are looking into research about effective approaches to monitoring implementation of demands, or approaches that make sure that the system has to respond when it is not implementing something, or effective approaches to giving the community an ongoing voice in overseeing something.
  - Do you think that kind of information could have been helpful in the situation you described? If yes, how would it have been helpful?
APPENDIX B: ORGANIZATIONS INTERVIEWED BY JUSTICE MATTERS INSTITUTE—FALL 2002

1. Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now—ACORN (Brooklyn, NY)
2. Advancement Project (Washington, DC)
3. Applied Research Center (Oakland, CA)
4. Boston Parent Organizing Network (Boston, MA)
5. Community Asset Development Redefining Education—CADRE (Los Angeles, CA)
6. California Tomorrow (Oakland, CA)
7. Californians for Justice (Oakland, CA)
8. Center for Community Change (Washington, D.C.)
9. Citizens for Community Improvement (Iowa)
10. Community Coalition (Los Angeles, CA)
11. Cross City Campaign for School Reform (Chicago, IL)
12. Direct Action for Rights and Equality—DARE (Providence, RI)
13. Generation Y (Chicago, IL)
14. National Center for Schools and Community at Fordham University (New York, NY)
15. Oakland Community Organizations (Oakland, CA)
16. Padres Unidos (Denver, CO)
17. Southern Echo (Jackson, MS)
18. Temple University Center for Public Policy (Philadelphia, PA)
## APPENDIX C: RELATED TOPICS IN REPORTS ON EDUCATION ORGANIZING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Report</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reference</th>
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<tr>
<td>California Tomorrow with the New York University Institute for Education and Social Policy</td>
<td>“School Reform Organizing in The San Francisco Bay Area and Los Angeles” This report was part of a larger study synthesized in “Mapping the Field Organizing for School Improvement: A report on education organizing in Baltimore, Chicago, Los Angeles, the Mississippi Delta, New York City, Philadelphia, San Francisco and Washington, D.C.”—August 2001</td>
<td>Differences between community organizing groups and traditional education reform organizations</td>
<td>“What is striking is the distance and lack of connect between these formal, legitimized, heavily financed school reform efforts, and the community organizing efforts aimed from the community level at improving the schools…However, the alliances have not happened due to several important differences: differences in the basic theory of change, a difference in the goals, a difference in the analysis of what needs to be changed in schools, a tremendous mismatch between the strength and legitimacy of school reform entities and the struggling, small-budget community groups.” Page 94-95</td>
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<td>National Center for Schools and Communities at Fordham University</td>
<td>“From Schoolhouse to Statehouse” Community organizing for public school reform”—March 2002</td>
<td>Access to research</td>
<td>“Many organizations suffer from a lack of both information and access to quality research. We found that many organizers and leaders pointed to their limited access to research as a significant barrier to success; research needs commonly extended from simply understanding local decisions to accessing state-of-the-art analyses of pedagogical methods.” Page 3</td>
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<td>“Unlocking the Schoolhouse Door: The Community Struggle for a Say in Our Children’s Education”—April 2002</td>
<td>Disconnect between organizing issues and the research groups identify is needed for their work</td>
<td>“There is an interesting disconnect between the organizing priorities of many organizations and perceived information needs. For example, the percentage of groups that consider professional development an issue is fifteen times greater than the percentage of groups interested in knowing more about the topic.” Page 6</td>
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<td>“Organizations express interest in a number of relatively complex issues but frequently demonstrate no concern for obtaining additional information or building capacity related to those issues.” Page 19</td>
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<td>Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform</td>
<td>“Strong Neighborhoods, Strong Schools,” part of the Indicators Project on Education Organizing – March 2002</td>
<td>Community organizing paradigm of education reform Complex education system</td>
<td>“Community organizing is based in a new paradigm of school reform, one in which the connection between schools and communities is central to school change…the strengths and knowledge of parents and community members are essential to transforming schools to serve the best interests of families…” Page 38</td>
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<td>“…school districts are complex and entrenched bureaucratic institutions—notoriously resistant to change.” Page 36</td>
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CONTACT INFORMATION

Justice Matters Institute
1375 Sutter Street, Suite 110
San Francisco, CA 94109

Ph:    (415) 353-5735
Fx:    (415) 353-5733

www.justicematters.org