Supporting the Education Organizing Movement:
An Exchange Between Intermediaries

June 13 and 14, 2003

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A Justice Matters Institute Report
Supporting the Education Organizing Movement: An Exchange Between Intermediaries

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As community organizing to improve schools gains increasing recognition as an important approach to bringing about educational change, it is worthwhile to examine the organizations that provide various kinds of support to education organizing efforts. Sometimes referred to as “intermediaries,” this diverse group of organizations seeks to augment the impact of education organizing by providing a broad range of technical assistance and support.

Through a series of conversations with some of our intermediary colleagues in the fall of 2002, we at Justice Matters Institute became aware of an interest in coming together and discussing what we do. As an organization relatively new to providing support to education organizing efforts, we ourselves were hungry for such discussions. We wanted to know: Did others face similar questions and challenges? Were there values, practices, and standards that education organizing intermediaries share? Would it be possible, by exchanging accounts of our efforts, to develop a common vocabulary that would help us analyze our work more deeply and raise our collective practice to a higher level?

As we began to explore the possibility of convening education organizing intermediaries, the Ford Foundation came forward to provide support. Once we knew it would be possible for the gathering to take place, we set about facilitating the development of an agenda. We knew it was important for all the participants to have the opportunity to shape our collective dialogue. Two rounds of in-depth telephone calls with invitees yielded an ambitious and stimulating set of agenda topics.

Supporting the Education Organizing Movement: An Exchange Between Intermediaries took place in Oakland, California, on June 13 and 14, 2003. People from 10 education organizing intermediary groups participated. This report details the major themes that emerged from the lively and insightful conversations that ensued.

—Susan Sandler and Olivia E. Araiza
Justice Matters Institute
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Supporting the Education Organizing Movement: An Exchange Between Intermediaries took place on June 13 and 14, 2003. For the first time, organizations that provide various kinds of support to education organizing efforts came together to talk about this work.

What Are Education Organizing Intermediaries, and Why Are They Important?

Over the last several years, there has been growing recognition that community organizing around education issues can be a significant strategy for educational improvement. Because community organizing engages a constituency that is deeply and continuously invested in educational success and is also knowledgeable about building power, it offers an avenue for sustained educational change.

Education organizing may be one of the most viable approaches available for bringing about enduring educational improvement that is accountable to grassroots communities. Nevertheless, the considerable obstacles to making significant educational change threaten to keep education organizing from fulfilling this potential. Education organizing efforts must deal with the complexity of educational policy and practice; the entrenchment of the status quo; the difficulty of developing strong, sustainable grassroots organizations; and many other challenges.

To help education organizing address its many challenges, the work of entities that support groups engaged in organizing has been in increasing demand. These entities offer a variety of support, such as research, policy development, organizational development, organizing training, alliance-building, legal assistance, and fundraising assistance, tailored to the needs of local community groups.

These entities—sometimes referred to as intermediaries—enhance the ability of education organizing to fulfill its potential for making fundamental and lasting educational improvement. Joining forces with intermediaries allows education organizing groups to amplify their voices and augment their power.

Purpose of the “Intermediary Exchange”

Justice Matters Institute, an organization that provides policy research to education organizing groups, hosted the Supporting the Education Organizing Movement: An Exchange Between Intermediaries gathering in response to intermediaries’ interest in coming together. The gathering’s purposes were for groups to learn about each other’s work, to reflect on their own efforts, and to build relationships that can enhance their collective ability to support education organizing.

Emerging Themes: A Snapshot of What’s on the Minds of Today’s Intermediaries

The discussions of the 10 organizations that participated in the “Intermediary Exchange” surfaced a number of important themes:

- How Do Theories of Change Chart the Course for Intermediaries that Support Education Organizing? Participants surfaced the deep underlying assumptions that guide why their organizations do what they do. The choices of whether to focus on state or local change efforts, whether to focus on efforts to increase educational resources or increase the knowledge base about education, and many other decisions are determined by organizations’ theories about what must happen to produce a meaningful impact.
What Makes a Strong Partnership? Participants shared lessons about building strong relationships with community organizing partners, examining such issues as race and power dynamics and what it means to build accountability into these partnerships.

Should Capacity-building Be a Goal of Organizing/Intermediary Partnerships? Participants explored different interpretations of capacity-building, as well as when building the capacity of a community organizing partner is a helpful goal, and when it may not be.

Network, Unaffiliated, and Fledgling Groups: With Whom Do Intermediaries Work, and What Are the Implications? Intermediaries provide vital resources to education organizing, and how they allocate their efforts has a significant effect on the overall direction of education organizing work. Participants explored the considerations and dilemmas in making choices about which education organizing groups to partner with.

How Do Funding Dynamics Affect the Field of Education Organizing? Funding patterns can inadvertently contribute to fragmentation of efforts and work against movement-building. Discussion focused on strategies to alter funding patterns so as to minimize fragmentation.

Across this range of topics, some overriding concerns shaped what participants found of import and interest:

How to have an impact. What are the activities and roles that intermediaries should undertake to best support their community organizing partners and bring about meaningful educational change?

How to support movement-building. What principles should guide intermediary work so as to best support a stronger democracy, unity of change efforts, and respectful, empowering relationships with community organizing partners? (Movement-building is very much related to having an impact, but also transcends questions of pragmatic results.)

How to think about racism and other forms of systemic inequity. How should intermediaries address issues of inequity in their relationships with their community organizing partners and in efforts to change school systems?

These concerns kept cropping up, shaping the discussion and analysis of each theme.

Next Steps

While not producing a definitive action plan, the “Intermediary Exchange” generated several ideas for further steps to enhance the collective impact of education organizing intermediaries. Possible follow-up actions include: engaging in activities that continue the learning process begun at the gathering; mapping the needs for and availability of intermediary activity; finding ways for intermediaries to complement each other’s work; and pursuing strategies to increase the funding available for education organizing, as well as for intermediary work.
INTRODUCTION

Background and Context

Over the last several years, community organizing for educational improvement has become an increasingly visible and central strategy for improving public schools. Established community organizing groups and networks have placed a much greater emphasis on education issues, and new education organizing groups are forming all the time.

As education organizing has expanded, there has been a growing recognition of its significance as a strategy for educational improvement. The last two decades have seen many change efforts led by educators and academics from the education reform community. Despite some important achievements, these efforts have had some major weaknesses. Families and students have tended to have little to no involvement in shaping these efforts, and, as a result, the efforts have had no mechanisms to ensure relevance or accountability to community concerns. Furthermore, these education reforms frequently lacked the wherewithal to withstand opposing political forces, bureaucratic inertia, and the absence of a base of ongoing support.

Documentation of Community Organizing for Educational Change: A Growing Field

Education organizing’s growth and increasing visibility are reflected in the recent interest in documenting this field. Four reports on this topic were published within an eight-month span in 2001 and 2002. Together, these reports provide a comprehensive overview of the activities, needs, and accomplishments of communities engaged in education organizing.

In August 2001, the Institute for Education and Social Policy at New York University, with California Tomorrow, Designs for Change, and Southern Echo, published Mapping the Field for Education 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. Based on information from 66 community groups in eight sites around the country, the study describes the methods, achievements, and challenges of community groups organizing to improve public education.

The National Center for Schools and Communities at Fordham University published From Schoolhouse to Statehouse: Community Organizing for Public School Reform in March 2002, describing the issues, stakeholders, strategies, progress, and problems of 40 community organizations in 14 states involved in education organizing. Published one month later, the companion report, Unlocking the Schoolhouse Door: The Community Struggle for a Say in Our Children’s Education, based on a more recent set of interviews, explores the capacity-building and policy needs, as well as the impact of race and other critical issues, facing education organizing groups in 51 communities in 27 states.

Published in March 2002, Strong Neighborhoods, Strong Schools, The Indicators Project on Education Organizing, written by Research for Action and the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform, documents the ways in which community organizing for school reform contributes to improving schools and strengthening communities. The report’s major contribution to the field is an Education Organizing Indicators Framework for practical use by funders, educators, and organizers in making visible the results of education organizing.

Although these reports have different emphases, three themes cut across the group: 1) the expansion of education organizing; 2) its record of accomplishments and successes; and 3) its pressing need for additional resources in the forms of funding and various types of technical support.
Community organizing for educational change has important strengths in the places where initiatives coming from within education reform circles fall short. Because community organizing groups are made up of members directly affected by the issues they work on, their educational change campaigns are relevant and accountable to the families and students affected by problems in education. Community organizing engages a constituency that is deeply and continuously invested in educational success and is also knowledgeable about building power and negotiating the political dynamics of the policy process. These are important elements for bringing about sustained educational change that education reformers often lack. In addition to the potential for educational improvement, community organizing builds social and political capital within communities that leads to a series of other benefits.

In its “Indicators Project on Education Organizing,” the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform developed case studies that demonstrate the strengths that community organizing brings to educational improvement efforts.¹ For example:

- Oakland Community Organizations sustained its effort to have a new school built in an abandoned building to relieve overcrowding over the course of the eight years that it took for construction to get underway;

- Chicago's Logan Square Neighborhood Association overcame the district's political maneuvering aimed at selling a lot designated for a new school to a developer because the group had built broad-based community support and had compelled the district to make public commitments;

- Austin Interfaith (of Austin, Texas) placed community issues on the school reform agenda that otherwise would have been absent—its outreach to the community raised a concern about high absenteeism among students that parents attributed to a lack of health services, which, in turn, led to a campaign resulting in the establishment of a health clinic at the school.

These examples illustrate community organizing strengths in terms of sustaining change, contending with powerful political forces, and incorporating community voice. The specific organizing issue may be quite different from those described here. Beyond efforts focused at the school level, organizing efforts may be directed toward district-wide or even statewide change. They may address issues related to staffing, curriculum, pedagogy, school climate, allocation of resources, facilities, and more.

¹ These case studies are summarized in the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform’s report, Strong Neighborhoods, Strong Schools, The Indicators Project on Education Organizing, which is available at www.crosscity.org. A more detailed version of each case study is also available.
Groups that Support Education Organizing Efforts

Education organizing may be one of the most viable approaches available for bringing about enduring educational improvement that is accountable to grassroots communities. Nevertheless, the considerable obstacles to making significant educational change threaten to keep education organizing from fulfilling this potential. Education organizing efforts must deal with the complexity of educational policy and practice; the entrenchment of the status quo; the difficulty of developing strong, sustainable grassroots organizations; and many other challenges.

As education organizing has expanded, the demand has increased for organizations that can partner with organizing groups in activities that augment the probability of successful educational change campaigns. These organizations offer a variety of support that may include, but is not limited to, research, policy development, organizational development, organizing training, alliance-building, legal assistance, and fundraising assistance tailored to local community groups’ needs. Organizations engaged in this work believe that education organizing is a fundamental and central strategy for bringing about meaningful educational change. The support these organizations provide is intended to ensure that the potential of education organizing is fully realized.

Augmenting Power and Amplifying Impact. Community organizing groups find that support from intermediaries makes a difference in their work in a variety of ways, as the examples below illustrate.

- **“Intermediaries are repositories of knowledge,”** according to Abdi Soltani of Californians for Justice (CFJ). When CFJ shifted its organizational focus to education, it had to contend with a steep learning curve. Intermediary organizations brought CFJ “up to speed in a short amount of time by providing the context for a strong understanding of the education policy landscape.”

- **“Good policy is built around good data,”** commented Doug Bloch of ACORN. Community organizing backed with data led to ACORN’s recent victory over budget cuts that would have adversely affected public schools in San Diego’s low-income communities. At ACORN’s request, the Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access (IDEA) at UCLA examined the distribution of qualified teachers in low-income communities of color and highlighted the importance of preventing teacher layoffs in these areas. IDEA’s study supported ACORN’s organizing efforts and resulted in the superintendent’s commitment to additional funds for teachers in impacted communities.

What Do Organizations that Support Education Organizing Call Themselves?

Organizations represented at the June 13 and 14 “Intermediary Exchange” provide education organizing groups with a range of support, from litigation and media strategy to campaign technical assistance and policy development. Given the diversity of these organizations’ activities, no one discipline adequately describes the work these groups do collectively. While the areas of expertise vary, participants share a common purpose in their focus on supporting community organizing as a major vehicle for educational change. So, what do organizations that support education organizing call themselves?

**Are they “technical assistance providers?”** This term could suggest that such entities are neutral, passive providers of a technical service. Their work goes beyond the “technical,” involving values and relationships. They engage in active and deliberate strategies to direct their support.

**Are they “intermediaries?”** To many people, the term “intermediary” has such connotations as doing work that is indirect or removed from the frontlines, and being an upstream provider of an input that goes into a final product. These connotations seem to be consistent with the idea of supporting community organizing groups. However, the term has been confusing to some because it suggests that intermediary groups are between community organizing groups and something else. Most participants in the June event do not engage in activities that place them between the community organizing partner and other entities. Furthermore, some people engaged in supporting education organizing (intermediary work) do not like the connotation of being “between;” they do not want to stand between community organizing groups and any source these groups might wish to access. “Intermediary” also suggests a sense of being apart from communities, yet some of these groups are immersed in the communities with which they partner.

Among participants at the gathering, it became clear that there was discomfort with the values suggested by both the above terms. Although there was no consensus on a term, for the purposes of this report, groups that support the work of education organizing will be referred to as intermediaries.
“We need each other. No one has all the answers,” said Ron Snyder of Oakland Community Organizations (OCO). The “Indicators Project” of the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform gave community organizing groups a method for evaluating their own work. These kinds of tools strengthen efforts for systemic change.

Community organizers serving as panelists during the “Intermediary Exchange” made the above comments, which focus on research and policy-related tools and support. Other types of support for education organizing include:

- Supporting a group in developing and executing a media strategy for an action, an event, or an entire campaign;
- Working with a group to identify potential allies and develop a strategy to engage them, as well as providing introductions to possible allies;
- Providing information on legislation that can be used as potential points of leverage in an organizing campaign, and assisting with accessing relevant commissions and governmental offices that enforce this legislation;
- Arranging for a group to visit schools that are exemplary with respect to the issue the group is organizing around;
- Introducing a group to community organizing principles, developing specific skills related to community organizing, and helping to develop a strategy for a campaign; and
- Showing a group how to develop a budget and fundraise, and engaging in joint fundraising.

Beyond working together on specific organizing campaigns, community organizing groups and intermediaries can shape the overall direction of each other’s work and their contribution to educational improvement over the long term. Sometimes intermediaries bring a history and analysis of educational change work that can help push an organizing agenda beyond immediate, tangible wins to systemic, far-reaching change. At the same time, partnership with community organizing groups can help ground intermediaries in the often untapped expertise of those most directly affected by educational problems.
A Gathering for Intermediaries

In recognition of the role intermediaries play, Justice Matters Institute (JMI) hosted Supporting the Education Organizing Movement: An Exchange Between Intermediaries in Oakland, California, on June 13 and 14, 2003. This event marked the first time that intermediaries came together to discuss their work to support education organizing.

JMI supports education organizing efforts through its research and policy work for racial justice in education. JMI sought to design this event in a way that would enable those attending to engage in substantive discussion of a limited number of topics. To encourage a clear focus for the “Intermediary Exchange,” criteria were established for the type of work that participating organizations carry out. These organizations might conduct a wide range of activities, but must partner with at least one education community organizing group. Such partnerships must be central to the organization’s overall approach. JMI defined community organizing groups as membership-based organizations in which those directly affected by the issues in question have control and ownership of the organization’s direction. Action campaigns serve as the primary tool for change among these groups.

When JMI reached out to the invited participants, it encountered a high level of interest in the idea of coming together. Many people dedicated substantial time to shaping the program.

With financial support from the Ford Foundation, JMI held the event at the Center for Third World Organizing in Oakland, California. Participants included staff representatives from Advancement Project; Applied Research Center; Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools; California Tomorrow; Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform; Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access at the University of California, Los Angeles; New York University’s Institute for Education and Social Policy; the National Center for Schools and Communities at Fordham University, and Southern Echo.²

Goals of “Intermediary Exchange”

In collaboration with participating organizations, JMI developed a broad set of goals that aimed to meet collective expectations, but also to leave open the possibility of exploring uncharted territory. The goals were grouped into five key areas:

**Relationship**
- To identify the common ground in our work that might serve as a basis for supporting each other and/or working together
- To clarify each other’s roles so as to have a better understanding about the best ways to interrelate

**Replenishment**
- To engage in stimulating, honest exchanges about our work that provide food for the mind and spirit

**Learning**
- To broaden and deepen our understanding, standards, and tools for this work, each taking away his/her own learning

**Assessment of Our Environment**
- To identify the trends, challenges, imperatives, and opportunities that we collectively face

**Action**
- To build a foundation for action by identifying areas and activities that can strengthen our collective impact

². Due to budget constraints, scheduling conflicts, and the desire for a relatively small pilot gathering, it was not possible at this stage to invite every organization engaged in education organizing intermediary work. While organizations spanned the continental United States, there was a concentration of attendees from the San Francisco Bay Area.
Overview of Participants

The descriptions below detail how each participating organization works with education organizing efforts. Many of these organizations also engage in additional activities that are not discussed here.

- **Advancement Project** assists grassroots organizations with the development and implementation of legal, policy, and communications strategies. The staff of attorneys, researchers, and communications professionals assists with research, data collection, and analysis, providing insight into the legal context of education issues, litigation and communications strategies, and coalition-building.

- **Applied Research Center (ARC)** supports education organizing through the Expose Racism and Advance School Excellence (ERASE) Initiative. ERASE works with groups committed to framing issues through a racial justice perspective and provides these groups with research support, training on a wide variety of education issues, message development, and organizing technical assistance.

- **Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools’ (BayCES)** support of education organizing draws on its experience in coaching schools, community organizations, and districts through efforts to create small, equitable schools. BayCES aims to make educational reform resources more accessible and useful to community organizing groups by facilitating visits to exemplary schools; creating entrée for such groups into education reform circles; building organizational and personal alliances across role, race, language, and class; and collaborating in fundraising and joint efforts for creating small, equitable schools.

- **California Tomorrow** supports education organizing with its expertise in policies and practices that recognize racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity as assets in a fair and equitable society. California Tomorrow provides groups with policy support and capacity-building tools for individual and collective reflection, assessment, planning, and action.

- **Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform** is a network based in nine cities that provides training and technical assistance to education organizing groups. Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform has created opportunities for education organizers to visit other sites to learn from their peers and to network and learn at larger conferences and meetings.

- **Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access (IDEA) and Public Interest Law Program at the University of California, Los Angeles**, focuses on research, coalition-building, and planning work in support of an emerging California Campaign for Educational Adequacy and Equity. As an intermediary, IDEA provides applied research to support the Campaign and works with constituent groups to develop their research and communications capacities.

- **Justice Matters Institute (JMI)** provides research and policy development to education organizing groups with a concern for racial justice in education. JMI aims to develop research and policy that support the vision, values, and aspirations of communities of color for schooling.
- **National Center for Schools and Communities at Fordham University (NCSC)** focuses on equity issues of race and poverty as they relate to public education in the United States. NCSC provides research and policy backup to community-led efforts to win better schools for all children. In the last three years, NCSC has carried out quantitative analyses documenting inequities in distribution of educational resources for community groups in 10 cities across the United States.

- **New York University’s Institute for Education and Social Policy** provides organizing support to community-based organizations working for local school improvement and systemic policy reform in New York City and in other major cities in the Northeast. The Institute’s Community Involvement Program focuses on neighborhood-based organizing support that includes training, data analysis, strategy development and alliance-building, and cross-organizational support in the form of information-sharing and training.

- **Southern Echo** is a leadership development, education, and training organization that builds leadership and organizational capacity in the southern region of the United States. Southern Echo works with education organizing groups by providing leadership and technical assistance on education issues at the local and statewide levels and by serving as an Intermediary Support Organization (ISO) to re-grant seed funds to emerging organizations.
KEEPING EDUCATION ORGANIZING AT THE CENTER OF INTERMEDIARIES’ WORK

In their work as education organizing intermediaries, organizations see community organizing as central, and themselves as playing a supporting role. Although the gathering was intended to be a forum where intermediaries could talk to each other about matters that are of specific interest to them, participants also wanted to make sure that the voices of some of the community organizing partners could ground the discussion in the priorities of this sector, which intermediaries strive to support.

Accordingly, JMI extended an invitation to three Bay Area groups to participate in a panel discussion. Invited guests were Abdi Soltani of Californians for Justice, Ron Snyder of Oakland Community Organizations, and Doug Bloch of ACORN.

Panelists’ insights on collaboration between organizing groups and intermediaries resulted in what some participants described as their greatest learning during the event and shaped the course of subsequent discussions. What follows is a summary of the major points raised.

- **Respect What Each Partner Brings**
  Both intermediaries and education organizing groups should see themselves as learning from one another. Their differences will bring tensions, such as the tension between the “power of politics” and the “power of ideas.” Each party must strive to understand and respect what the other has to offer, and not stereotype what each will bring. For example, sometimes the organizing group supplies the “power of ideas,” and the intermediary brings the “power of politics.” Together, their charge is to establish a common vision, despite differences in how each group is structured and carries out its work.

- **Say What You Think**
  Intermediaries sometimes think it is inappropriate to share a differing analysis or offer criticism to their organizing partner. Where a relationship of respect and trust has already been established, community organizers may appreciate critical feedback and being pushed to think about things differently. (Note: One panelist suggested that to be able to “get in each other’s business,” a substantial amount of time—perhaps a few hours per week—must be invested in relationship-building.)

- **Do the Things You’re Good At, and So Will Organizers**
  Sometimes intermediaries direct too much of their energy to transferring skills, such as the collection and analysis of data, to community organizers. There are instances in which it is better for intermediaries simply to do the work themselves rather than dedicating limited resources to teaching organizers how to do it.
- **Help Organizing Groups Understand What You Have to Offer**
  Many groups are not clear about what specifically intermediaries can offer. An inventory of capacities, as well as case studies describing how the intermediaries have worked with groups in the past, would help organizers best use intermediaries’ resources.

- **Build Explicit, Shared Expectations**
  It is important for intermediaries and education organizing groups to clearly understand the kind of commitment expected, and whether or not it spans the duration of a campaign or some other benchmark. Clarity about time commitment, as well as goals and roles, enables organizers to plan the best use of intermediary resources.

- **Look Beyond Staff-to-Staff Relationships**
  Organizers expect that partnerships are deeper than staff-to-staff relationships. Intermediaries need to understand that they are not only working with staff, but also with the members and their leadership. This is especially important because members often outstay staff.

- **Expand the Access to Resources**
  Intermediaries should use their access with funders, the media, and others to raise awareness about the importance of education organizing and to increase the resources available for this work. Intermediaries should not be biased against working with particular groups—they should be equally available to all groups.
EMERGING THEMES:  
A SNAPSHOT OF WHAT’S ON THE MINDS OF TODAY’S INTERMEDIARIES

There are dilemmas about the interconnections between school reform and community demands that we talk about internally, but we rarely succeed in talking about them in other arenas. I participate in countless school reform gatherings. Oftentimes, I feel like I don’t belong in those gatherings, but I know I need to be there. I have rarely been in any rooms where I felt I belong. Today I found a room.

—Norm Fruchter  
New York University’s Institute for Education and Social Policy

Over the course of the two-day “Intermediary Exchange,” a number of themes emerged. Some of these topics repeatedly surfaced and represent issues around which participants coalesced, while others were raised as matters of pressing importance to one or two people. The conversation demonstrated that the work of intermediaries is not homogenous or interchangeable. While not representing uniform agreement, the themes that surfaced from these discussions illuminate where the work of intermediaries is today, and also sheds light on issues that will shape future directions of intermediary efforts to support the impact and potential of education organizing.

How Do Theories of Change Chart the Course for Intermediaries that Support Education Organizing?

The “Intermediary Exchange” created a forum for exploration in which those present began to glimpse the deep underlying assumptions that guide different organizations’ work, their theories of change. Even participants who knew each other and worked together were able to learn about each other in a new way, understanding more clearly why a particular organization does what it does, and how its activities fit into the organization’s overall understanding of what is needed to bring about meaningful change. While on the surface the work of many organizations might appear to be somewhat similar, a differing range of assumptions undergirds their work, and, in some cases, these assumptions directly clash with those of other organizations. Flushing these assumptions out into the open and testing them against those of others allowed the participants to reexamine their thinking in ways that are not possible when these conversations only take place within organizations.
Focusing on the State vs. the Local Level

One theory of change holds that communities need to push for decent and equitable schools at the state level because the state is the primary source of educational funding, and it creates a powerful legislative context for what happens at the district and school level. “We need to help disparate groups join forces to work for state-level change, because the state is the locus. The district can’t solve teacher shortages or carry out unfunded mandates,” commented Jeannie Oakes of the Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access at UCLA. Therefore, intermediaries should demonstrate to local communities in tangible ways that state-level decision-making shapes their local reality.

However, another line of thinking says that struggles directed at the local level are critical. They fundamentally alter the relationship between the community and its schools. Local struggles make community members feel more powerful and assertive in the place where they interface with the school system. This change in their relationship to the schools allows them to be genuinely engaged in the educational process as parents and students, and it gives them the confidence to hold their schools accountable on an ongoing basis. In turn, the community’s assertiveness “changes how a white teacher looks at a brown child,” said Olivia E. Araiza of Justice Matters Institute. The teacher knows that the child’s parents will take action if the child is treated badly. According to this perspective, it is the charge of intermediaries to support opportunities to transform the power relationship between the schools and local communities.

Resources vs. Knowledge

Some participants argued that the overriding thrust of educational change efforts should be to increase resources. “We need to begin with the resource problems because too often school change is posed narrowly as a cognitive problem (we don’t know what to do), when in fact the participants don’t have the resources to take action,” explained John Rogers of the Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access at UCLA. According to this point of view, an emphasis on such areas as increasing the knowledge base about educational change could actually divert energy from increasing resources, wrongly implying that with the right information, meaningful change can be made within existing resource constraints. Proponents of this theory of change believe that the knowledge to support educational change exists; the problem is the lack of resources.

Two other lines of thinking pushed for attending to the knowledge base, as well as resources. First, there was a con-

How Is the Larger Political and Economic Environment Shaping the Work of Intermediaries?

People attending the “Intermediary Exchange” wanted to take some time to step back from their immediate work and examine the political and economic environment in which it takes place. This broader context not only directly shapes intermediaries’ work, but it also affects their community organizing partners and the communities with which both sets of organizations are allied. In order to maximize their impact, intermediaries endeavor to understand the broader context and think strategically about how to respond.

Several features of the current political and economic environment were discussed: the “war on terrorism,” state budget crises, “No Child Left Behind,” and constant underlying systemic inequities. One organization, the Applied Research Center (ARC), presented a compelling example of work that reads and responds to the challenges of the times.

One Intermediary’s Response to the Challenges of the Times

In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, racial profiling has taken on new dimensions in the context of “homeland security,” creating an environment of fear and intimidation in communities of color. The ripple effects are numerous. For example, many immigrants are afraid to access social and educational services.

Jennifer Emiko Boyden described the Applied Research Center’s (ARC) extensive efforts to understand the consequences of this new political environment and to take action. Its new initiative, Justice is the Unifying Message Project (JUMP), produces tools and resources to assist organizations with post-September 11 organizing efforts. In addition to resources, JUMP is hosting a series of events called “The Public’s Truth” that expose people’s experiences with national security policies, and is also circulating information about model policies that address discrimination and racial profiling related to the domestic “war on terrorism.” ARC helps groups make connections between immigrant groups that are currently targeted and established communities of color. It also helps groups understand the historical context for the current political challenges by examining such events as the profiling and internment of Japanese Americans during World War II.
cern about the distinction between knowledge existing somewhere, and knowledge getting into the hands of the people who need it. As described by Olivia E. Araiza, “The reality is that there are local people—families, parents, teachers, administrators—who don’t know what works. So, the question is, how do we get that information from around this table to those people?” This theory of change suggests that intermediaries are responsible for transferring knowledge of what makes an equitable school to community organizing partners and larger audiences at the district and state levels.

Second, some questioned the idea that the knowledge needed to make fundamental, large-scale educational change does in fact currently exist. “I think we know a lot about a good classroom, a good curriculum, what a teacher should be doing, what a school should look like,” said Susan Sandler of Justice Matters Institute, “but I don’t think we know enough about how to bring all of that about on a large scale.”

**Democracy as a Key Driver of Change**

Several participating organizations believed that a strong democracy is fundamental to bringing about significant educational change. Through democratic processes, communities can reframe what it means for public institutions to be accountable and enforce standards that are collectively established. The school system must be “transparent” in allowing communities to understand what is going on, and communities must have the sense of power, the tools, and the support to hold the system accountable. Intermediaries with this focus emphasize developing an accountability system that will support democratic participation on education matters, as well as incorporating approaches that empower communities.

**The Role of Individual Transformation**

Do individual beliefs and attitudes need to be addressed when working for institutional change? Some participating organizations believe that although the goal is for change on the institutional level, effort must be devoted to transformation of individuals. This perspective suggests that the adults in schools—staff, administrators, and parents—need opportunities to explore their assumptions about race, class, and culture. Through a series of reflective and interactive experiences, individuals make major changes in their values and beliefs. Intermediaries that believe these changes are important push for school system stakeholders to participate in activities that will support individual transformation and may themselves develop the types of activities that can facilitate this individual change process.

**What Makes a Strong Partnership?**

Being an effective intermediary involves knowing how to build strong and productive relationships with community organizing groups. Throughout the two-day gathering, many elements of strong partnerships and lessons learned were shared.

**Awareness of Complex Power, Race, and Class Dynamics**

Intermediaries encounter a complex set of power, race, and class dynamics in their work. Commonly, intermediaries are more likely to have a more powerful social position in terms of race, class, education level, and status. They may be affiliated with a university, have staff with advanced educational credentials, and have strong relationships with some foundations. (Some-
times, however, the intermediary staff may be people of color and the community organizing staff may be white.) Some intermediaries are concerned about replicating institutional racism in their relationships, thereby becoming part of the same problem they are trying to address in their work for systemic change. If they are not mindful, certain dynamics can be created around “white academic types” trying to direct the efforts of low-income communities of color.

Thoughtfulness about negotiating power dynamics related to race and class must be combined with other factors that go into making a mutually respectful and satisfactory relationship. One participant described a situation where her organization assigned a staff member to work with a community group based on a shared race and class background. “The match was not there. She was perceived as arrogant.” This story illustrates how racial and class identities alone do not define a relationship. Rather, relationships are based on sensitivity to race and class dynamics, as well as on additional values and skills that enable respectful connections.

Beyond the power, race, and class dynamics particular to the organizing group/intermediary relationship, intermediaries must also learn about and work with these dynamics in the larger context. For example, their organizing partner may be perceived to be allied with one racial group within a multi-racial community or school setting. Frank Starks of the Bay Area Coalition of Equitable Schools talked about his efforts to help identify common ground. “Issues that the Black community is concerned about may be separate from Latinos’ concerns, but that doesn’t mean they can’t fight together.”

Each Party Has a Voice and Input

Strong partnerships are based on a commitment to authentic collaboration in which the perspectives of intermediaries and organizing groups are equally valued. Gary Blasi of the Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access at UCLA captured the nature of the relationship when he commented, “Issues and solutions must be developed organically.” In practice, this means that each partner pulls from its areas of knowledge to craft the direction of their joint work. Neither begins the conversation with the answers in hand.

A Focus on Adult Learning

At times, intermediaries’ role is to help an organizing group master a body of knowledge (about education policy, organizational development, etc.). To do this effectively, intermediaries must go beyond simply imparting information. Rather, they must create a learning environment where their organizing partners can interact with new information and perspectives and make it their own. This type of work involves drawing on principles of “adult learning” that provide guidance about the types of experiences that best enable deep and meaningful learning to take place.

Understanding Regional Differences

Intermediaries need to understand how the work of their organizing partners will play out differently in different regions. Nsombi Lambright of Southern Echo illustrated specific organizing needs of a region when she laid out several factors that affect community organizing in the South:

- A context of fear and overt racism results in youth needing more time and support to become ready to engage in organizing;
Rural areas with very small towns mean that the local populations to draw from in building a membership base are small; and

Fewer financial and other resources are available in the South than in other regions.

It is important for intermediaries not to over-generalize lessons learned in one region and instead to become dedicated students of new regions in which they are considering working.

**Accountability**

To respond to power dynamics and to make sure that relationships are mutually satisfactory and that the work is advancing the goals of each partner, it is important for there to be accountability within the partnership. How do intermediaries make sure they are working with their organizing partners in ways where the partners have a meaningful voice in the partnership, and where intermediaries are not inadvertently exploiting the organizing group’s grassroots credentials for ends that the group does not fully embrace?

Because the panel of community organizers proved to be a helpful way of seeing these relationships from the organizers’ point of view, one participant suggested that there be similar panels in other regions of the country to get additional perspectives. Others shared the procedures they have developed to get feedback from their community organizing partners on a regular basis, mechanisms that build in ongoing accountability.

Another perspective was that all real accountability is based on relationships; we are naturally accountable to those with whom we have an ongoing relationship. Steve Jubb of the Bay Area Coalition of Equitable Schools (BayCES) described how he feels most accountable to the group of parents that he met through BayCES’ organizing partner and whom he has now known for several years.

As one participant summarized, some of the overall lessons on building relationships with organizing partners were that “those of us who collaborate/support/intermediate/whatever need to be, and can be, much more explicit and transparent about what we are/are not able to do and can learn a lot from each other and from feedback from partners.”

**Should Capacity-building Be a Goal of Organizing/Intermediary Partnerships?**

“Capacity-building” is a commonly held value in the intermediary community. The idea is that work with education organizing groups should go beyond providing a service that is needed in the short term and leave the organization stronger and with more internal resources to draw on in the future. Through the collaboration between intermediaries and education organizing groups, the organizing group acquires new skills, tools, and strategies. Not only is capacity-building a benchmark that intermediaries strive to achieve, but funders also tend to emphasize this as an important outcome.

However, some people attending the “Intermediary Exchange” began to question whether or not capacity-building should always be a goal.

**Skills Transfer or Complementary Specialties?**

Participants asked themselves what it means if they have been working with the same organization over a number of years. Does this mean that they have failed to build the capacity of this
organization, because if they had effectively built the skills of their partner, they would no longer be needed? Perhaps such a situation indicates some type of methodological flaw, that in spite of the intermediary's best intentions to strengthen its partner, something about the way the intermediary works prevents this from coming to pass.

Or, perhaps lack of skill transfer is not a sign of failure and flawed methodology. “Sometimes we just want you to do the work,” commented Abdi Soltani of Californians for Justice. The notion here is that intermediaries and education organizing groups each carry out work in their own area of specialization, allowing the collective capabilities of both organizations to expand. Chris Brown of the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform noted, “Our partners have serious expertise regarding organizing. They see us there to help with education issues.” In this sense, intermediaries lend a skill-set to the effort, but are not working to teach those competencies to others.

The complementary specialties approach may in some cases be necessary because education organizing campaigns often operate within time constraints that prohibit the teaching and learning of skills not directly related to organizing. Beyond time pressure, limited resources may push community groups to choose to concentrate their energies on organizing people, not developing new skill-sets, such as the design of survey instruments.

Broadening Conceptions of Capacity-building

Defining capacity-building as the passing on of the intermediary’s skill-set may be an overly narrow interpretation. An alternative approach is to view capacity-building as being about what Steve Jubb referred to as “achieving a relationship in which honest dialogue takes place, and both organizations push each other to think and work in new ways.”

Notwithstanding all the above, capacity-building in the form of transferring skills may at times be a desirable outcome of organizing/intermediary partnerships. Learning new skills can provide strategic forms of empowerment to organizing group members, confer legitimacy on groups, and allow them to carry out needed work without having to locate outside expertise.

Network, Unaffiliated, and Fledgling Groups: With Whom Do Intermediaries Work, and What Are the Implications?

Intermediaries provide vital resources to education organizing, and how they allocate their efforts has a significant effect on the overall direction of education organizing work. Accordingly, intermediaries face both an ethical and strategic imperative to think carefully about which groups to partner with.

Types of Organizing Partners

Discussion about this question revealed three types of organizing groups:

- Organizing groups that are chapters of a “network,” such as ACORN and PICO
- Groups that are “unaffiliated” with a network
- Within the area of unaffiliated groups, “fledging” groups that have little or no staff and limited organizing experience
With Whom Are Intermediaries Currently Working?

A survey of the intermediaries present revealed that all of them worked with unaffiliated groups, while eight supported the work of network organizations. (The survey did not gather information about work with fledgling groups.) As Rubén Lizardo of California Tomorrow pointed out, “Currently, a lot of resources are going to a few areas.” Because many intermediaries work with the same network, there was a concentration of resources focused on some networks. Additionally, there was overlap with particular unaffiliated groups.

Considerations in Choosing Partners

Considerations that influence intermediary decisions about with whom to work include:

- **Capacity of the intermediary.** The capacity of an intermediary limits the number of groups it can work with, and also has implications for which types of groups it approaches for partnerships. Fledgling organizations require a much broader range of support than established groups do. Fledgling groups often have definite needs for capacity-building (as distinct from the argument made in the previous section that capacity-building is not necessarily a desired goal of organizing/intermediary partnerships). Fledgling groups may need help with some of the basic building blocks that are necessary for viability and success: organizing know-how, fundraising capacity, and organizational development. Intermediaries that have chosen to provide specialized types of support find that unless they broaden what they offer to address these basic building blocks, their work will not be of the right type to make a difference to fledgling groups. Policy research is of little use to a group that cannot build the power to have influence over policy decisions.

- **Theories of change about how to have an impact.** One approach to having an impact is to partner with what one participant called the “biggest, baddest” community organizing groups. These groups are most likely to wage successful organizing campaigns and to bring about more ambitious educational changes. Another line of thinking says that it is necessary to build the capacity of large numbers of community organizing groups to strengthen the field for victories over the long term and to build a movement. This approach would push intermediaries to support fledgling groups so as to increase the number of strong groups until they reach a critical mass.

- **Racial justice considerations.** Some participants described race-related dimensions to choosing organizing partners. In general, the staffs of network organizations are more likely to be white, whereas there are a number of unaffiliated organizing groups that are founded and staffed by people of color. Many of these unaffiliated groups are more likely to incorporate an analysis of racism into understanding problems communities face and to be explicit about race when framing issues, while there is less of an explicit emphasis on race in many networks. If intermediaries choose partners without taking race-related factors into account, they may inadvertently draw a color line in those with whom they work or favor a particular approach to analyzing and framing community issues, even though they don’t set out with these intentions.
Responding to Dilemmas About Whom to Work With

Deciding what types of groups to partner with can be an agonizing decision. As participants re-examined their choices, several questions and ideas emerged. Should intermediaries expand what they offer, loosening the boundaries of what they do, so they can meaningfully support fledgling groups? What are the pros and cons of breadth vs. depth in the types of work in which intermediaries engage?

Perhaps intermediaries can craft other options that do not involve a significant broadening of their own repertoire. Abdi Soltani of Californians for Justice advised intermediaries that provide education policy and research support not to expand into the areas of organizing technical assistance and organizational development (key areas of need for fledgling groups). There are other organizations that specialize in these areas, and it is easier to find this kind of expertise than support that is more specific to education issues. (There are two education organizing intermediaries with strength in organizing and organizational development support: Southern Echo and the Center for Community Change. Beyond this, there are a number of groups that support community organizing, but do not specialize in education issues.) Perhaps intermediaries that do not provide organizing and organizational development support should form strategic alliances with organizations that do, so they can jointly offer a range of support to fledgling groups. One participant speculated about whether there was a role for the organizing networks in building the capacity of fledgling groups.
How Do Funding Dynamics Affect the Field of Education Organizing?

The impact of funding dynamics was raised as a constant refrain throughout the event. The strongest theme emerging from these conversations was that funding patterns can fragment groups that should be united if they are to reach their full potential for social change.

Although intermediaries’ objective is to play a supportive role to the field of education organizing, they often find themselves in competition for funding with education organizing groups. How can they support the field if they are taking money away from it? Beyond the consequences of competition for funding between education organizing groups and intermediaries, efforts to unite the groups in a particular geographic community around a common agenda are seriously undermined by competition for funding.

As a result, groups that intend to support each other or that could potentially do so are threats to each other’s viability. This dynamic, in turn, creates additional problems, making it difficult to have open discussions about sharing lessons learned or coordination. As one participant put it, “The best way to undermine a movement is for groups to have to compete against one another for a finite set of resources.”

Working to Counter Fragmentation

Of course, none of the parties involved wants there to be fragmentation. Funders are often concerned about this problem, but as individual entities, they may have limited ability to address it.

Intermediaries can work to counter the fragmenting influence of funding patterns. They can engage in transparent, honest conversations with their peers and partners about funding and its impact. Intermediaries also need to be thoughtful about how they communicate with funders about their own work and its context. Intermediary support for education organizing is new to funders and needs to be better understood. As intermediaries educate funders about their own role, they need to stress the centrality of education organizing itself and engage in dialogue about how to increase resources for both types of activities and diminish dynamics that lead to fragmentation.
WHAT CAME OUT OF THE GATHERING

The “Intermediary Exchange” was structured so as to provide an opportunity for learning and exchange; bogging down the proceedings with planning and decision-making about next steps would have interfered with these goals. Nevertheless, participants began to identify a range of possible future activities that would strengthen the collective contribution to education organizing.

Enhancing Intermediary Support for Education Organizing

Continuing to Learn
Beginning to dig into the details of each other’s work and share common questions unleashed a slew of ideas about further joint learning that could raise the quality and effectiveness of intermediary work. These ideas ranged from using case studies of organizing/intermediary partnerships, to surfacing underlying frameworks and theories of change, to engaging in discussion on a number of topics that the group identified.

Mapping the Needs for and Availability of Intermediary Activity
Intermediary effectiveness could also be enhanced by assessing the types of support needed by education organizing efforts in different parts of the country, as well as by mapping which intermediaries offer what kind of support in which geographic regions and to which groups.

Complementing Each Other’s Work to Maximize Success of Change Efforts
One idea that cropped up repeatedly was finding ways for intermediaries to collaborate so as to enhance the overall power of education organizing efforts. Judith Browne of the Advancement Project asked the group, “How can we identify how groups’ work could complement that of other groups, so that one organization can take another organization’s work to a higher level? Where does the work of one group end and that of another begin?” For example, the Advancement Project was interested in learning what various groups with expertise in education policy had to offer that might enhance the advocacy and communications support that it provides. In order for groups to effectively complement each other in joint efforts, they need to understand each other’s work on a deeper level.

Funding that Supports an Education Organizing Movement
Given the urgent need to improve education, the needs of education organizing groups for funding, and these groups’ needs for the various kinds of support that intermediaries can only provide through funding, the group made it a priority to identify next steps related to funding issues. The goal was to work to help establish funding strategies that would build the unity and capacity necessary to support a robust education organizing movement. Specifically, this goal translates into increasing overall resources going into education organizing so as to expand and strengthen this work, while minimizing fragmentation caused by competition for funding between and within education organizing groups and intermediary groups. Participants discussed several activities they could undertake to move toward this goal.
How Should Follow-up Be Organized Geographically?

Geography surfaced as a major consideration in thinking about next steps. Currently, most education organizing work takes place on the local or state level. Accordingly, this is also where the work of intermediaries takes place. Yet the overall peer group of intermediaries is a national, not regional, one. Should follow-up work take the form of regional activities, in alignment with work that is going forward? One participant, for example, invited all those present to become involved in an effort to bring about statewide changes in California as an opportunity to learn more about each other by working together. Others suggested that only those intermediaries that currently work in the same region take follow-up steps together.

Another approach was to think about initiating activity on the national level. Although a great deal of education policy happens at the state level, the underlying issues are similar. “Ultimately, do we need to be thinking about how to elevate the work around these atomized but widely shared issues to a national movement?” asked John Beam of the National Center for Schools and Communities. “These issues are distributional, and the core of the distributional issue is about race and class. Do we need to develop a stripped-down national platform about the civil right of all children to high-quality public education, regardless of color, income, or language?” Stronger federal legislation could provide powerful tools for efforts at the state and local levels. (Of course, if work to develop such a platform went forward, intermediaries would be one sector of a broader range of groups.)

Next Steps

The most immediate next step to the “Intermediary Exchange” was clear: When asked how they expected to follow up on the experience, the most frequent response (eight out of thirteen) was that participants planned to contact representatives of other organizations they had met for collaboration or follow-up. Although many people had known of each other or perhaps had even worked together, the event created a forum for a deeper level of dialogue that enabled groups to learn about each other in new ways. This naturally led to a variety of ideas about how one organization's work could be enhanced through contact with another participating organization.

Beyond these collaborations, other steps will emerge as participants take what they learned from this first gathering of peers talking about their work as intermediaries, sift through the ideas generated for what might come next, and continue to reflect on how intermediaries can best support the education organizing movement.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many individuals and organizations generously contributed to the making of the event, Supporting the Education Organizing Movement: An Exchange Between Intermediaries, as well as the ensuing report.

Cyrus Driver of the Ford Foundation encouraged Justice Matters Institute staff to pursue and develop their thinking on what a gathering of groups that provide support to education organizing might look like. Ford Foundation support made both the event and this report possible. Those who attended this gathering (and some who could not make it) provided a great deal beyond their engaged and insightful participation during the event itself. Many individuals contributed a substantial amount of thoughtful time toward planning the agenda, and provided support for follow-up activities and editing of the report.

Lisa Russ and Taj James of the Movement Strategies Center helped turn the countless agenda ideas into a realistic plan and provided wise facilitating tips, as well as hands-on facilitation.

Rosanna Bayon Moore oversaw the extensive documentation of the event. Our diligent notetakers were Leena Her, Sara T. Mayer, Sheiba “Sumayyah” Waheed, and Xiajing Wang.

We would also like to thank the Center for Third World Organizing for providing a homey and congruent meeting space and María Martinez for the delicious food.

Finally, we want to thank Rosanna Bayon Moore, the outside writer who co-authored this report with dedication and meticulousness.
Appendix A: Agenda

Note: Some adjustments to this agenda were made during the gathering.

Friday, June 13, 2003

8:30 AM  Breakfast
9:00 AM  Welcome and Opening
  Introductions, purpose and overview, context and background
10:00 AM  Learning About Each Other’s Work: Going Deeper
  What we’re learning about each other’s organizations, questions for other organizations, common ground and differences
11:00 AM  Break
11:15 AM  Mapping and Analyzing Our Collective Work
  Understanding what we do collectively, using multiple perspectives to identify strengths, weaknesses, gaps
12:15 PM  Lunch
1:00 PM  Impact of Political and Economic Climate on Our Work
  Identifying the impact of the current political and economic climate on our constituents and on our own organizations, drawing out the implications for our work
2:00 PM  Break
2:15 PM  Panel of Bay Area Education Organizers that Work with Intermediaries
  ACORN, Californians for Justice and Oakland Community Organizations serve as panelists and engage in a conversation about their experiences working with intermediaries
4:30 PM  Summing Up, Evaluating the day
5:00 PM  Close
6:00 PM  Dinner at Le Cheval in Oakland

Saturday, June 14, 2003

8:30 AM  Breakfast
9:00 AM  Reflections on Previous Day
9:45 AM  Relationships Between Community Organizing Groups and Intermediaries
  Exploring various aspects of relationships, including roles of each entity, power dynamics, challenges, lessons, success (and how to measure it) and accountability.
12:30 PM  Lunch
1:15 PM  Continuation of Relationships Between Community Organizing Groups and Intermediaries
2:20 PM  Break
2:35 PM  Funding Climate
  Impact of funding climate, how to generate more resources for education organizing, how to think about competition for funding
3:35 PM  Next Steps
  Ideas that have emerged for increasing our collective impact and supporting each other’s work
4:20 PM  Closing
  Evaluation of “Intermediary Exchange”
Appendix B: Participating Organizations’ Contact Information

The contact information for each organization is listed below, along with the names of the staff members who attended the “Intermediary Exchange.”

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Frank Starks

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Nsombi Lambright

Digging into the details of each other’s work unleashed a slew of ideas about further joint learning.
Notes