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ABSTRACT

              Because the District of Columbia (DC) is a federal district,
its governance is peculiar. The DC public school system is plagued by poor
management, internal strife, unstable leadership, low student achievement,
shrinking enrollment, and declining community confidence. During the 1960s,
Mayor Barry and the civil rights-home rule movement brought community
organizing into DC. The two groups doing real organizing around educational
issues have only been active in recent years. The Washington Interfaith
Network is a citywide network that builds multiracial, multicultural
organization to empower parents and citizens to be major players in city
politics. Asian-American LEAD organizes and advocates for the local
Vietnamese refugee community. Both groups work to build the power and
influence of people who are poor, underserved, and ignored by the system.
They focus on developing local leaders who can organize others and bring
pressure to bear on public officials, the schools, and the school district.
They also work to make schools more accountable and responsive to families
and students. Both use ad hoc methods to evaluate their actions and impact,
and both have had some solid successes. However, challenges include poor
political accountability and difficulty working with the DC public school
system. A directory of organizations is appended. (SM)

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING FOR SCHOOL REFORM

Washington, DC: A Recovering Plantation

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July 2001

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THE CONTEXT

Think of Washington as a diamond, its top pointing North. The Potomac River cuts off the western point, which seceded to Virginia at the start of the Civil War. The eastern and southern points are separated from the rest of the city by the Anacostia River, which flows southwest into the Potomac. The Capitol building sits in the middle. From the Capitol grounds, North, South, and East Capitol Streets, and Independence Avenue, radiate out toward the compass points, dividing the city into its four quadrants.

Northwest contains the monuments, the business district, Embassy Row, Victorian row houses closer in, and "tall tree" residential neighborhoods further out. Northeast is residential with some light industrial areas, and is middle and working class all the way to very low income. Southwest, the smallest quadrant, redeveloped in the 1950's, is mostly federal buildings, newer apartment buildings and low-rise housing. Southeast, aside from close-in Capitol Hill, is the lowest-income and most isolated part of the city, especially the part across the Anacostia River. Washington is further divided into eight wards, about equal in population.

Setting

Washington, DC is really three cities. The first city lies west of Rock Creek Park in Ward 2 and Ward 3, and is overwhelmingly middle class and white. Shops and restaurants line Connecticut and Wisconsin Avenues, which cut through upscale neighborhoods like Georgetown, Cleveland Park, and Chevy Chase. While the majority of families place their children in the public elementary schools, more than half attend private high schools. These elementary schools are the highest-achieving in the city, with 70% or more of their children scoring at proficient or advanced on the SAT 9 assessment.

Washington, DC 61 sq. miles

1990 Population: 594,000
2000 Population: 572,000 (-5.7%)

African American	60.0%
White	30.8
Latino	7.9
Asian	2.7

	DC	USA
Homeowners	38.9%	64.2%
Median income	$34,980	$37,085

The second city is east of the park, in the remainder of Northwest and on Capitol Hill. Ward 1, north of downtown, is the most densely populated and culturally vibrant part of the city. Immigrants from Central American, South Asia, Africa, the Middle East have poured in over the past thirty years, coexisting uneasily with an old African American community and middle-class whites bent on reclaiming the row houses. Mt. Pleasant, Adams-Morgan and Columbia Heights are the center of the Latino and Vietnamese communities. A large African American community lives in Shaw, around the revitalized U-Street corridor, and LeDroit Park, next to Howard University. Ward 1 is full of clubs, churches, locally-owned businesses, and active community organizations.

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Ward 4, north of Ward 1, is where the city's largest middle-class African American population lives. It is almost exclusively residential, the row houses and apartment buildings closer to downtown giving way to handsome brick and stone houses further north. The area along 16th Street is known as the Gold Coast. Capitol Hill, which runs along East Capitol Street for 15-20 blocks, is the core of Ward 6. Near the Capitol, the area is gentrified. Heading east, it becomes more poor and African American. In Ward 5, east of North Capitol Street, there are also middle and working class neighborhoods, such as University Heights and Brookland, near Catholic University.

The third city, East of North Capitol Street, covers the outer northeast and southeast quadrants. It is the largest geographically, comprising most of Ward 5, and all of Wards 7 and 8. It is also overwhelmingly African American. In general, the further east, the more poor and dilapidated the conditions become. The infrastructure is crumbling and commercial development is limited.

Wards 7 and 8 are east of the Anacostia River, an area not developed until after the Civil War. Although it has many well-kept and tight-knit neighborhoods, and the historic town of Anacostia on the river front, this is the poorest and most neglected corner of the city. It has the most liquor stores per capita, but few other retail amenities, and not one movie theater. One-third of DCPS students live in these two wards.

The suburbs house 2.5 of the 3 million people in the metropolitan area. They lie in Northern Virginia, across the Potomac river, and in Maryland. The inner-ring suburbs, like Alexandria, Arlington, Silver Spring and Hyattsville, are increasingly diverse and lower income. In fact, the latest census figures show that the majority of Asian and Latino immigrant families lives in these suburbs, not in the city.

Prince George's County, Maryland, to the east of Washington, may be the largest majority African American suburb in the country. Black flight is a big part of the story of Washington's declining population.

The Political Context

Milestones in DC/DCPS Governance

1874 elections suspended. Congress sets DC government of three commissioners appointed by the President

1954 President Eisenhower orders "the great experiment," integrating the schools.

1964 23rd Amendment allows DC residents to vote for President

1967 Congress allows DC an elected school board

1970 Congress allows a non-voting DC delegate to US House of Representatives

1973 Congress passes DC Home Rule (elected mayor and city council)

1994 Mayor Barry elected for 4th term. Fiscal crisis. Congress appoints Control Board to take over city

1996 Control Board appoints a General superintendent, suspends school board.

1998 Anthony Williams elected Mayor. Control Board appoints Arlene Ackerman

2000 Control Board names Paul Vance Interim Superintendent

2001 New Elected/Appointed School Board resumes control of DCPS

Because Washington is the federal district, its governance is peculiar. The city is not part of any state. During the days before home rule, Congress ran the city like a plantation; residents had no voice at all in local governance. Even now, Congress sets the policy and government structure, and can overrule any law the City Council adopts. Local residents are still struggling to organize an effective self-government and find their voice.

Unlike other large cities, Washington is not a "real city," because it has no industrial base. The largest area employer is the federal government (over 350,000 jobs). The second largest is the DC government. The private sector is small and there is no history of union activity. The big law and accounting firms, communications companies, and public relations and research organizations are focused on national and international policy. They have little connection to or history of involvement with the city.

The Barry era The real story of home rule begins with Marion Barry, a gifted organizer and politician who had great rapport with the low-income community and the eastern half of the city. Barry was elected to the school board, to City Council, and then to Mayor in 1978.

Barry consolidated power adroitly by using the power of patronage and funding. The city taps opened to churches and community groups with leadership loyal to him. They run programs all over the city: after-school, early childhood, recreation, alcohol and drug rehab, arts, youth development.

On the whole, this was revitalizing, especially given the comparatively weak support for such programs provided by the city's limited corporate and foundation sectors. But over the long term, the groups have become dependent on city largesse. Although Barry is out of office, many still feel beholden to the city government and reluctant to criticize city leadership or agencies. Lack of oversight has bred corruption, as public

Marion Barry

"To understand the District of Columbia, one must understand Marion Barry. As a four-term mayor; civil rights activist; hero to the District's poor, black communities; tireless battler for District rights; convicted drug offender; or symbol of home rule, Barry has been at the center of the District's triumphs and troubles since the 1970s...

"Barry was a radically new kind of politician. Raised in poverty, he built a political base from Anacostia rather than through the traditional Black power brokers on 16th Street's Gold Coast. He embodied Black political aspirations."

Washington Post, May 1998

funds have sometimes been diverted to personal use. Because the private sector is small and professional, Barry knew that the District government would become a critical source of middle class jobs for the local community. The largest private employer in the city is Georgetown University, with about 6,000 employees. In contrast the number of DC Public Schools' (DCPS) employees is about 14,000. (1995 data)

The School System

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From 1968 until 1996, the DC public school system was governed by an elected board of education. It remains independent of the District government except in one important factor -- funding. The Mayor and City Council determine the total appropriation, subject to revision by Congress. Once the funds arrive, the allocation is controlled by the Superintendent and Board of Education. Until 1996, the board consisted of eleven members, one elected from each of the eight wards, and three at large. The board elected its President from among its members. The board was accused of many improprieties: parochialism, personality clashes, micro-managing, and incompetence. Several candidates used it as a stepping stone to council and mayoral races.

Both the Board and the school administration shared the attitudes and practices of the rest of the District government on the uses of jobs and funding. The primacy of patronage meant that funds were used to build up the central office staff, and start dozens of piecemeal programs and initiatives, neither of which improved educational quality. In "DC Public Schools: Learning the Hard Way" (1997), the *Washington Post* found that DCPS had a higher ratio of central administrators to teachers (1:20) than the national average (1:38). (This has declined substantially in recent years) Although DCPS currently budgets $7,500 per student for general education and overhead, well above the 1999 national average of $6915, its schools are dilapidated and students don't have basic supplies. Where do the several hundred million dollars the system spends each year go? As the Control Board auditor put it, "The money goes to create a middle class community. It goes to salaries."

DCPS Enrollmentg (2000-2001)
Number of schools: 148
Number of students: 79,157
    in DCPS   69,707
    in Charters   9,450
Number of Charter Schools   33

Source: DCPS/*Washington Post*

Another major development was the approval of charter schools in 1996, a measure instigated by the Republican-controlled Congress. Both the DCPS Board and a specially created charter school board can grant charters. There are now 33 charter schools, enrolling about 12% of public school students.

District leadership and school governance: Like many urban districts, DCPS has been plagued with high leadership turnover. In the past ten years (1990-2000), DCPS has had five superintendents. The longest-serving (1991-1996) was Franklin Smith, whose tenure produced no real improvement in student performance or district management. In 1995, the fiscal and political crisis of the city resulted in temporary take-over by a congressionally appointed Control Board. In November 1996, declaring the condition of the schools an emergency, the Control Board fired Smith, and appointed Julius Becton, Jr., a retired general, as Superintendent. The Control Board also suspended the elected Board of Education, which it replaced with an appointed "Emergency Board of Trustees."

Becton faced a huge task. For years, it had not been clear how many students attend the public schools, or how many people worked there. School facilities were in serious disrepair. Legal actions filed by Parents United for DC Public Schools, a parent advocacy group, over safety and fire code violations, had twice delayed the start of school. Although Becton came up with a plan to close some underused schools and

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repair others, the work was not well managed. As a result, the entire system opened three weeks late. "General Becton doesn't understand that this is not the Army. You can't just give orders and expect them to be carried out. There is no infrastructure here to manage a job of that magnitude," commented a knowledgeable observer.

Becton lasted about 18 months. His deputy Arlene Ackerman, an administrator in the Seattle public schools under a General appointed to clean up that system, became the new Superintendent. A top-down administrator with little patience for building relationships with the community, Ackerman made progress on putting standards and an accountability structure for student achievement in place. After an influential but stormy two-year tenure, she accepted the top job in the San Francisco schools.

ACKERMAN INITIATIVES	RESULTS
Adopting standards. The District had been about to adopt the New Standards program, but Ackerman substituted the Seattle standards.	Schools use a hybrid of standards. Teachers need staff development to implement them in the classroom
Offering summer and Saturday school. Students with low scores must attend, but classes are open to others.	This program is seen as offering students a much-needed additional opportunity to learn
Basing accountability on test scores. Principals were placed on one-year contracts and told their jobs were on the line if scores did not go up.	Scores went up the first year, but leveled the next.
Weighting the school formula more equitably. Schools receive more for students in early childhood programs, students with special needs, and low-income students.	Once funding was added to make up losses to high schools , funding has been considered more equitable.
Directing more money to the classroom. Under her predecessors, central staff grew despite board-ordered cuts.	Ackerman cut district staff and raised salaries for starting teachers.
Fixing special education. For years, parents able to afford legal counsel have been able to place children in private programs at district expense. Special needs students are 1/10 of all students, but account for 1/3 of the budget.	Much more needs to be done. The transportation system for these students is still in shambles. The new director is a well-respected principal.

Meanwhile, the Control Board was preparing to restore control of DCPS to the Board of Education. Mayor Anthony Williams, who wants more authority over education policy, proposed a new board structure, a measure requiring amendment of the Home Rule Charter. The City Council, interested in

change but sensitive to constituent concerns about reducing the number of elected offices in the District, approved a compromise measure to be submitted to voter referendum, which was held in June of 2000. The referendum called for a nine-member board, with four members elected from districts composed of two wards, the Board President elected at large, and four members appointed by the mayor. Many felt this would be a regression from home rule, but the measure passed narrowly. The PTA and many community groups campaigned against it. The vote split the city along race and class lines, and heavier turnouts in Wards 1, 2 and 3 provided the margin.

Paul Vance, the new interim Superintendent, had recently retired as the first African American Superintendent of the Montgomery Country, Maryland, public schools. Vance and the Control Board agreed to a one-year contract, with an option for another year's extension, but he has sent signals that he may be willing to serve longer. Pledging to continue Ackerman's initiatives, his first year on the job has focused on management systems (counting employees accurately, getting the payroll system under control, getting supplies to schools), school repairs, and bus service for special education students. He has been criticized for being slow to take action and make major appointments.

DCPS has a long-standing reputation as a fortress bureaucracy. Under Ackerman, local school restructuring teams (LSRTs) were continued and given a role in local school budgeting through the Weighted Student Formula process. The primary LSRT role is to develop, implement and assess a local school management plan and budget to improve student achievement. DCPS guidelines require the teams to have at least 13 members, elected by secret ballot of the group they represent. The LSRT's elect their own chairs. While some LSRT's are active, most are dominated by principals and teachers.

LSRT Composition:

- 1 Principal or principal designee
- 1 Teacher building rep (from WTU)
- 4 Teachers
- 4 Parents
- 1 Support staff
- 1 Community rep
- 1 Student (HS level; optional at others)

Major players: Education politics in the District are characterized by a power vacuum. The top officials, the Superintendent and School Board President, hold power, but their positions are not strong. Some compare DCPS to medieval France -- the superintendent occupies the palace, but there are powerful independent fiefdoms. The School Board is new and still feeling its way. The City Council's education committee is influential, but has only oversight authority. Its chair is seen as capable, but erratic, and he has undisguised mayoral ambitions. The Teachers' and Principals' Unions are weak. What power they once held was sapped by the financial crisis, which forced major concessions on salaries and working conditions. This led the Council, Control Board and Congress to reduce or eliminate the unions' power over tenure and evaluation.

Although the Control Board has nominally ceded control of DCPS back to the new board, inside observers say it is still calling the shots. The situation, at best, is one of transition. For example, the Control Board has

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drafted by-laws for the new school board. Board members are uncertain if they must accept the rules, or at what point they would have the authority to amend them.

The business community is represented by the Federal City Council, a group sometimes called "the shadow government." While the Federal City Council is influential on issues that affect development and the business district, it has not had much impact on the schools. From 1988 to 1998, it sponsored the DC Committee on Public Education (COPE), which issued a series of well-done reports that made substantive recommendations for change in DCPS. What momentum it may have gained during that initiative was lost when the Control Board took over. In any case, the consensus is that DCPS did not have the management infrastructure to implement the recommendations, and the Control Board did not see the report as part of its agenda. Frustrated by lack of accomplishment and financial support, COPE became the now-independent D.C. Public Charter School Resource Center in the late 1990s.

Who goes to public school and how are they doing? The statistics reveal a system in deep trouble. Since 1980, total enrollment in DCPS has dropped 30%, from 100,000 students in 1980 to 69,000 in 1999. Another 9,500 (12%) are in public charter schools.

At the same time, the population in DC dropped 10%, between 1980 and 2000. While crime, poor basic services, and dilapidated housing contributed to the decline, the low quality of the schools is a key factor. The exodus has flowed from all over the city, but the greatest declines are in the poorest wards. While Ward 3 gained 2,121 people between 1980 and 2000, Ward 8 lost 16,347.

As in most large cities, the students are overwhelmingly poor and of color. A substantial percent require special education services and English-as-a-second-language programs. Student turnover is high. Of the students who entered 1st grade in DCPS in 1995, 16% had left by third grade, and 35% by 5th grade. The dropout rate is even higher. In 1999, the attrition rate between 7th and 12th grades was 49.5%.

DCPS Students - Fall 2000	
Free/Reduced Lunch	63 %
Special Education	15.3
English not first language	12.4
Limited English Proficient	8.1
Race/ethnicity:	
African American	84.6 %
Hispanic	9.2
White	4.5
Asian/other	1.7

Source: Parents United for DC Public Schools

Achievement is low, and declines precipitously after elementary school. System-wide figures mask the huge disparities in achievement by race and income, but still are alarmingly low. Ackerman set achievement goals: move 10% out of "below basic," and increase the number scoring at "proficient" by 5%, each year.

The decline in test scores in part is caused by the high transfer rate. Higher-achieving students tend to transfer to private schools or out of the district from second grade through middle school, which

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exaggerates the decline in scores. Because the system does not track individual students, this effect is difficult to measure.

Education activism. In Washington, there are three major types of local groups active in education: advocacy groups, community-based service organizations, and policy and strategic planning organizations. In addition, the federal policy-making apparatus attracts national advocacy and policy organizations. Many of these national groups have some local focus or projects and provide significant technical resources. Examples are MALDEF (Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund), NECA (Network of Educators on the Americas), the Center for Community Change, the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights, the Institute for Educational Leadership, and the Center for Law and Education.

Percent of DCPS students scoring "below basic" on SAT 9 test, in 2000

Grade	Reading	Math
One	13%	11%
Three	26	19
Five	21	37
Seven	23	55
Nine	37	51
Eleven	48	75

Source: Parents United for DC Public Schools

Several local advocacy and service organizations are influential. For example, the 21st Century School Fund has developed a master plan and mobilized public and private resources to renovate DCPS facilities, beginning with Oyster, a popular bi-lingual elementary school. SHAPPE (Senior High Alliance of Principals, Parents and Educators) successfully fought to compensate high schools for funding lost because of the new weighted formula. SHAPPE is focused on upgrading and expanding high school programs and facilities.

Parents United for DC Public Schools, an important source of information and data on DCPS, is the lead voice of local education advocacy. Its newsletter is widely read, and its comments on local education issues appear frequently in the media. Parents United helps people with a problem deal with the system. For example, the group encourages and supports parents to get their concerns about schools across, by testifying at hearings, attending council meetings, visiting board and council members, and calling the mayor about the budget. It has no organizers on staff. In the past, Parent United worked with the Washington Parent Group Fund, now defunct, to engage parents. Currently, it works with local PTA presidents to turn parents out.

As Delabian Rice Thurston, the former director of Parents United, characterizes it, "We have to be careful not to compete with the PTA. They recruit within schools, we reach parents more generally. Parents United doesn't do in-school organizing, that would be seen as competing." This rivalry is rooted in a deep Black-white fault line that underlies all DC politics. "Parents United is seen as a Ward 3, white organization, and DC/PTA as a Black organization. We rely on the PTA presidents, but that's a weak link. Many are appointed by principals, and have no followers. We can count on 11 PTA presidents in Ward 3, but only about 15 in the entire rest of the city, to respond if a need arises."

The DC Congress of Parents and Teachers (DC/PTA) is now headed by Linda Moody, a former school board member. Moody has been working to revitalize the organization by creating new chapters across the

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city. She strongly defends the "mutually supportive relationship" between DC/PTA and DCPS. DC/PTA bitterly contested the mayor's new school board initiative as reducing the power of parents and citizens. Moody is also critical of the charter school law and other measures that she feels threaten public schools.

A new organization, DC VOICE (District Community Voices Organized and Informed for Change in Education), was formed three years ago. It is a collaborative of parents, activists, community members and educators, supported by the Ford Foundation. Recently, it became a Local Education Fund affiliated with the Public Education Network.. Its goal is to create a stronger public voice that can hold the school system and the city government accountable for providing a quality education for all DC children. Its three major areas of activity are staff development, constituency building, and research and data. Its seminars and book talks are well-attended, and always end with facilitated dialogue and networking among the participants. DC VOICE also publishes information on education reform including reports, a quarterly newsletter and an on-line e-mail alert.

DC VOICE strongly supports an organizing approach and is planning to mount a project to help selected groups develop their organizing capacity. As Erika Landberg, director of constituency-building, found, "our mapping shows groups with varying degrees of expertise and participation levels. Most CBO's provide services to children and adults; a few engage in advocacy. We need to help develop their organizing capacity."

DC VOICE research has identified several key supports that community groups will need to undertake organizing:
- Access to data, help to analyze the data, and skills at presenting data to the community
- Training in organizing methods and issue identification
- Capacity to set indicators of success and measure progress
- Understanding how to improve student achievement and commitment to focus on that goal
- Analysis of the school system to determine where it has the capacity for change, and where outside resources will be needed to assist with change.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING FOR SCHOOL REFORM

During the 1960's, Marion Barry and the civil rights-home rule movement brought community organizing into the District of Columbia. Once home rule was won, and the leaders moved into public office, the impetus went out of the organizing movement. The two groups that are doing real organizing around education issues have been active only for the past few years.

In the past few years, new organizing drives have sprung up in the immigrant communities, around housing and labor issues. Two examples are ACORN, which has had a presence in the District for about three years, and CARACEN (The Central American Resource Center), which organizes, serves, and advocates for the Latino community. There is also an important community organizing effort in Alexandria, the Tenants' and Workers' Support Committee, which began with housing issues, but has branched, with some success, into pushing the public schools for better service.

We found only two groups that do community organizing around education reform in a way that meets the study definition. The Washington Interfaith Network (WIN) is an IAF affiliate that works city-wide. Asian-American LEAD, a small group that is active in Ward 1, represents the Vietnamese refugee community. ACORN has a presence in Washington, but so far has not taken on education issues.

Many service organizations have a strong base in the local community and do some "under-the-radar" organizing. Some examples are getting the word out on a rally about housing evictions, letting people know when a key issue will be discussed at a board meeting (and providing transportation), and setting up community meetings with city officials to discuss problems in the neighborhood.

> **Study Definition of Community Organizing**
>
> 1. Building a base of parents, youth, and/or residents who engage in collective action to create excellent public schools for all children.
> 2. Focusing on winning concrete changes in school policy and practice strategies such as mobilization, training, direct action, and working in coalition.
> 3. Supporting democratic decision-making by members in all aspects of the organization.
> 4. Developing leaders from within the membership base.
> 5. Building a strong organization to alter the power relations that lead to failing schools.

These groups are not, however, engaging in collective action on education issues, actively seeking to change broad policy, or trying to alter the power relations between schools and families. Many do individual advocacy and may try to change the situation for a student or group of students. (Appendix A shows the groups interviewed for this study, classified by type, along with their major activities.) The reasons for this pattern are discussed in the conclusions of this report.

Asian American (LEAD)

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Asian American LEAD (AAL) organizes and advocates for the local Vietnamese refugee community. Its overall mission is to develop young people, strengthen families, and build community. There are about 5,000 people in this community, mostly low-income survivors of the war and emigration. Most live within a square mile area in Columbia Heights and Mount Pleasant (Ward 1), work in area hotels and restaurants, and occupy sub-standard housing. They fiercely support their children's advancement through education.

Sandy Dang is the executive director. There are five full-time, and three part-time, staff. No one is a designated organizer, but "all do some organizing." The 11-member board also helps with outreach and organizing. Young people serve as both board members and staff. In addition to offering a variety of family assistance services, the staff design and run after-school programs, English language instruction, and leadership training. They also organize cultural events. AAL's annual budget is about $300,000; 80 percent comes from private foundations, the rest from donations, special events, and the city government.

Dang's work began as the chair of an Asian-American task force. Complaints surfaced about a Vietnamese teacher at Lincoln Jr. High, who was abusive to children and parents. "Kids came to me and cried and complained, so did their parents. I had a meeting with the principal. The teacher was not even certified. It took years, but we finally got rid of her. AAL started out of this."

Other issues quickly become evident. "I was seeing too many children failing or coming to us with terrible stories. Students could be in school for five years and still not speak English – the ESL program does not work for them. Students could wait for years to be tested for disabilities."

Over time, a main focus has been Wilson High School. Although Wilson is the third highest-achieving high school in the city (after two selective, small schools, School Without Walls and Banneker), it is struggling. Asian American students are about 9% of the school population. AAL found a host of problems: lack of language access for parents; no bilingual counselor for Vietnamese students; and an inadequate ESL program for Asian students.

Woodrow Wilson High School

1510 Students:
African American	56%
Hispanic	17
White	18
Asian	9
Free/Reduced Lunch:	31%

1999 SAT 9 Scores:

	Below Basic	Basic	Advanced/ Proficient
Math	46%	26%	27%
Reading	35	38	28

Source: DCPS

Wilson also was not culturally sensitive and made little effort to know its Asian students. For example, Asian students did not take part in student government or enrichment activities. Their parents are not in the PTA. AAL has won several changes in policy and programs at the high school as a result of its activities.

Washington Interfaith Network (WIN)

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Affiliated with the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), WIN is an alliance of 45 religious organizations across the District, representing about 20,000 families. Its goal is to build a multi-racial, multi-cultural organization to give parents and citizens the power to be a major player in city politics. Martin Trimble is the lead education organizer. The two other organizers on staff focus on housing and other issues. Its first major action in education secured a $15 million fund for after-school programs across the city. WIN's annual budget is about $400,000.

In 1993, a group of clergy from the city approached IAF, which had been considering the District for years. IAF responded and sent in an organizer. After two years of groundwork, WIN came out in 1995, at a rally of 1,400 people held at the Israel Baptist Church. At the same time, Congress set up the Control Board to override the District government. WIN leaders wondered what the target of their organizing would be, given that the authority to make policy was in such turmoil. Member congregations urged making the restoration of home rule a key issue. In May, 1996, WIN held a major rally to announce its five-point agenda:

1. An affordable, owner occupied housing project in Southeast
2. $30 million for after-school programs citywide
3. 900 community police officers, deployed in neighborhoods across the city
4. A living wage ordinance ($8-11 an hour) on city-subsidized projects
5. Restoration of home rule

Then came the 1998 Mayoral election. WIN began a "sign up and take charge" drive. Member congregations collected nearly 20,000 signatures to demonstrate support for the WIN agenda. Next came a series of mass meetings with the candidates for mayor. Each session put

In a city that has the highest juvenile crime arrest rate (ages 10-17) in the country, with the number of children dying increasing by 91 percent from 1985 to 1994, to understand how these statistics have become so outrageously high, one only need look at the lack of heavy investment in youth programs and the lack of availability of after-school programs. The DC Office of Early Childhood Development estimates that only 4,500 of the District's 40,000-plus elementary school students – roughly one in ten – even have access to after-school programs.

Rev. Darrell Macklin, WIN Co-Chair, op ed page, *Washington Times*, 5/3/99

candidates on the spot to pledge support for the five key items. Anthony Williams, then the city's chief financial officer, said the events reminded him of the Star Chamber, but he went because the WIN rallies turned out the most voters. Williams endorsed all five items on the agenda.

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Summary of Findings

Asian American LEAD and the Washington Interfaith Network could hardly be more different. AAL is a small, service-oriented group focused on a very specific constituency, recent Vietnamese refugees. WIN is a city-wide organization composed of influential churches, schools, union locals, and some community groups, that is determined to shake up the entire system. Yet there are commonalities.

Both AAL and WIN aim to build the power and influence of people who are poor, ill-served, and ignored by the system. Both focus on developing local leaders who can organize others and bring pressure to bear on public officials, the schools and school district. Both are multi-issue organizations, and began with other issues before taking on education. AAL focuses on educational services and programs for students, while WIN took on after-school programs and facilities repair.

Mission and scope Like most IAF affiliates, WIN has an institutional and faith-based congregation membership, rather than individual members. Although most members are churches, some are schools, union locals, and community groups. AAL is not a membership organization; it is a service-provider that uses organizing to meet its goals.

Martin Trimble, the education organizer, says that WIN's goal is "to build a city-wide parents' organization, to give parents the power to be a player, district-wide and in schools. The focus of the organization should be driven by parents and teachers. We involve the salt-of-the-earth folks, the folks who clean buildings."

AAL's vision is to give disadvantaged kids an opportunity to move out of poverty, through education. As Sandy Dang, the executive director, says, "This is how we can help families and the community. We are refugees and minorities, the only way to gain economic power is through education. Through education, we can improve health, civic responsibility, social justice. It's important that citizens be more active in the political process, and it's rewarding to see this happen. We know that if the schools don't get better, our after-school programs won't work. They're just a drop in the bucket. We must hold schools accountable, press them to change; this is the only way to help our kids."

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	Asian American LEAD	Washington Interfaith Network
Mission	To help students and families move out of poverty through education.	To create a broad-based power organization that can use collective power to make the system work.
Focus	Youth services – mentoring, after-school, and youth leadership training Family Services-ESL program School reform	Community organizing: · convene leaders of member groups · identify shared initiatives · develop leadership
Constituency	Vietnamese refugees (5,000) Mt. Pleasant and Adams-Morgan Low-income and working class	Faith-based and other organizations city-wide working class and middle income 60% Black 30% White 10% Latino
Budget and staff	$300,000 Five full-time, three part-time staff 80% private foundations	$400,000 3 full-time organizers, plus office manager 20% dues, 10% national IAF, remainder from church grants and foundations.
Youth role	Three students serve on AAL Board Primary focus is on young people	No role for young people in leadership Goal is to have at least one house meeting with students per member congregation

Mission and scope   Both groups are working to make the schools more accountable and responsive to families and students. AAL has focused on the schools that serve its constituency, pressing them to become more culturally responsive and to offer better services to meet Asian students' needs. WIN has pushed for major, new programs. While AAL dug right in on educational quality issues, WIN took the more conventional approach of beginning with extra student support in out-of- school settings, and facilities. Both realize that teacher credentials, smaller classes, better programs, higher standards, and other issues around teaching and learning are the nut that has to be cracked.

Issues   AAL's issues surfaced out of the individual case work that has come to the organization, as well as meetings with students, parents and residents. In Dang's words, here is what AAL is trying to do:
1.   Get the schools that serve our kids (Wilson, Bell Multi-Cultural, and Cardozo senior high schools; Lincoln junior high; and Bancroft, Tubman, Meyer, Cook and Adams elementary schools) to develop communications with Vietnamese parents. The schools must notify parents if their kids are absent, welcome them to the school, and open up.

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2. Look at the number of staff who are responsive to Vietnamese children. There is not one Vietnamese counselor at any of these schools, and only one Asian teacher at Wilson.

3. Collect the data on how our kids are doing. We have to know their outcomes – their test scores (SAT 9 and the SAT), attendance rate, AP placement, and dropout rates.

WIN also picks its issues by consulting with its constituency, but it carefully guides the process. Concerns that people raise have to be "issuable" -- urgent, specific and winnable. "The issues are driven by what the people we are organizing say is important to them. We don't want to presume what the people want. We met with small groups and individuals all over the city, and they surfaced the need for after-school programs, safety, staffing, and facilities improvement. So that's what we're doing. It's a fragile base, but it's beginning to emerge."

Trimble considers the after-school programs a "presenting issue." That means it's both urgent to their constituency and "win-able." Creating a "story" of success with an early "win" is important to building momentum. "We need to create an institutional base over the long term, and it's growing out of the after-school programs. The money from the city to support these programs does not go to WIN -- WIN does not run programs. However, the programs are dues-paying units of WIN, and they give us a parent base."

The next issue WIN took on was facilities. For years, the crumbling state of DC schools has been front-page news: leaking roofs, flooding basements, asbestos, crumbling facades, lead in the drinking water, and pervasive fire hazards. The lawsuits filed by Parents United laid the groundwork for other groups to take on the issue. WIN member groups began doing research on problems at their neighborhood schools. Using this information, and working with the 21st Century Fund, a local organization that advocates for modernizing DC school facilities, WIN identified 25 schools with major repair needs.

Targets AAL began with problems at schools, working with the principals and teachers. Its attempts to gain support from the Superintendent have often been rebuffed, but the school board and city council members from Ward 1 have gone to bat for AAL. In addition, AAL has persistently advocated for Asian parents and students with the minority language office and the parent involvement office.

IAF began with top-level officials, mayoral candidates and the mayor-elect, and the Superintendent. At the same time, local members are approaching schools, as potential allies in the struggle to get resources from the school district.

Since home rule, African American parents and community members tend not to speak ill of school staff if student achievement is low. The feeling is, "the schools are ours now, why is this still a problem?" Instead, community groups have pushed to improve neighborhood conditions and create after-school and summer enrichment programs to help children develop their skills. More recently, blame is shifting toward the school district – why can't schools get materials, equipment, repairs, staff, training, and other support?

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Community groups, including SHAPPE (Senior High Alliance of Principals, Parents and Educators), the 21st Century School Fund, Parents United, and the PTA, ally with the schools and go to work on the district. AAL and WIN have also followed this pattern.

Organizing strategies Although both AAL and WIN work to build personal relationships and a sense of community among their members, their methods for outreach and engagement diverge. WIN enlists organizations with an interest in schools. This interest may derive from members' children attending the school, the importance of the school to neighborhood revitalization, or the faith-based mandate to serve others.

Martin Trimble, WIN organizer
"Issues come and go, so do organizers. But the personal relationships members build endure. First, this is a relational organization – we build relationships. Second, we organize around their self-interest. And third, we give them training on the universals of organizing."

individual meetings at the center and on the street, and cultural events. Staff also collect information through needs assessment surveys. The Mt. Pleasant Festival and other cultural and community events create further opportunities for interaction and relationship-building.

About ten parents form the core of the parent organization and sit on AAL's advisory board. In addition, AAL has a diverse board of directors, with eleven members, including two Vietnamese students, a Korean CPA, a Vietnamese attorney, a Latino educator, and a former South Vietnamese army officer and experienced community organizer. The parent board member, also Vietnamese, works with the parent group to organize activities, such as recruiting parents for meetings with principals.

AAL is service-oriented, and works both with individual students and families. It began with case work – students and parents coming through the door to seek help. The advisory committee and board members do outreach and make the community aware of the service available.

Because its target community is small and highly concentrated, AAL engages its constituency through home visits,

"We are small, so we try to get the schools to work with us. It's easier than trying to organize lots of parents. Our community has many problems -- low literacy levels, deep poverty. The system is hard to understand. We approach schools for them. "But we are firm. With schools, we try to get them to see AAL as a resource, then build a relationship with the principal. We say, 'You have a lot of pressure with all the different cultural groups in your school. We can help you serve this population. We are not here to make your life miserable; we want a win-win situation. But if you don't do what we ask, our parents will vocalize.' The message is, 'don't mess with us.' We can make you look good if you do a good job."

Sandy Dang, Executive Director, Asian American LEAD

AAL does not conduct actions. It negotiates with principals, then gains the support of the district through school board and city council members and other allies with influence. Its strategy is to be firm and persistent on all fronts.

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WIN follows the model developed by Saul Alinsky in Chicago 60 years ago. Following the IAF iron rule, "never do for others what they can do for themselves," WIN expects its 25 "top leaders," typically ministers, to select an issue and organize their constituencies. These leaders conduct individual meetings, set up house meetings, research and plan actions, meet with public officials, and run rallies and assemblies.

WIN works in neighborhoods citywide. "We go where there is openness to parent participation, at all levels of schools. We develop relationships with the principal and key parent leaders in the buildings, then build a team to do audits of the facilities. We meet with people anywhere they are comfortable: in the school, churches, people's houses, McDonald's...."

This is standard IAF organizing strategy: build a constituency, find and train leaders, and let them hold the house meetings and turn out the base for meetings and rallies. Trimble says that campaigns are built around 15 talented people. About three-quarters are parents and teachers, the other quarter are church members. Building these cadres creates the organizing structure. "Our success hinges on finding, developing, and deploying talent. We try to have one strong cadre per issue area (e.g. housing, jobs, education, safety). This is what drives the organization – people, not issues."

Once the issues are identified and researched, the rallies begin. Not many public officials will turn down an invitation to appear at a meeting with hundreds of voters, especially during campaign season. Follow-up accountability sessions are next. Some are concerned that WIN does not have the administrative staff and the managerial capacity to monitor the progress of an issue as complex as system-wide facilities repair. WIN acknowledges that it will need to work with others, such as the 21st Century School Fund and SHAPPE, to get the job done.

	AAL	WIN
Key issues in education	Cultural responsiveness of schools – ESL program, activities for Asian American students and families, counselors and teachers who understand Asian community	· Citywide after-school programs · Repair of school facilities · School safety and class size · Teacher quality and training · Art, music and vocational programs
Approaches	Individual meetings and home visits Leadership training Meetings with elected officials Meetings with principals Help to school in reaching families	Individual and house meetings training and leadership development research, direct action and negotiation large meetings and rallies proposals for policy changes electoral campaigns and media coverage
Active Core/ Largest	Parent advisory group (10) Board of Directors (11)	Strategy team (20) Action team (representatives from each

meetings	Meetings with principals (25-30)	organization) (175) Delegate association (800-1500) Rallies (300-2,500)

Organizing strategies While AAL works closely with the Columbia Heights-Shaw Collaborative, WIN tends to work alone. Trimble says, "What's our self-interest? We don't need you to get our voice. We don't join coalitions -- we are a coalition. You can join us." WIN enters an alliance only if it enhances their power. "We need union locals; that is power coming together. The Teamsters can get us 1,500 custodians."

Still, he concedes that others may have something to offer."We have a relationship with Mary Filardo (21st Century Fund) and Mary Levy (DC Parents United). Their information and data give us credibility. We're interested in SHAPPE and the DC PTA, because they have a base that may help. DC VOICE seminars have been good – a valuable offering for us."

In contrast, AAL is closely interconnected with other community groups that offer services. In addition to the Columbia Heights-Shaw Family and Community Support Collaborative, AAL networks with Calvary Multi-Cultural Learning Center, Latin American Youth Center, Sister-to-Sister, and DC VOICE. "My staff or I sit on their steering committees, go to their meetings, and ask them for help and advice," Dang says.

AAL also cultivates contacts within the system. These can confer both clout and legitimacy. The Mayor's Office of Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs is a natural ally. Greg Chen, the Asian staff member, attended a meeting at Lincoln during a dispute about after-school program space. Sandy Dang says, "We got legitimacy with the system after I brought 15 Asian parents to a meeting with General Becton on a snowy January night. Hardly anyone else was there. He didn't know there were so many Asians in DC. Then I got appointed to the Diversity Task Force, which helped me get some good contacts. When the principals saw that I was on the Task Force, they gave me more respect."

Legitimacy and access Being a closed system, DCPS is distrustful of outside organizations that claim to represent parents. The DC PTA, although not organized at every school, has automatic access, and tends to act as gatekeeper. At Wilson, Dang found that for Asian families, participation in the PTA and on the LSRT was "very hard." Dang says, "the PTA is mostly white women, and it's a big cultural gap. They sit in a panel up front and don't talk about things our parents can relate to. There is no effort to build relationships with parents. It's a corporate culture: 'we don't have much time, let's get some things done.' And it's boring."

AAL pressed for special events and services for Asian parents, as part of regular activities. "We pushed at Wilson to have an open house, then brought our parents to see the school. It was the first time they had ever been there. We also try to have a portion of time at all school events for Vietnamese parents." The

strategy of offering to help provide the services paid off. For parent-teacher conferences, AAL provided translators for parents. Wilson responded by paying for a translator at PTA meetings.

Dang sums up her strategy this way. "If we're not accepted, we have to take our request to the next level. We persist until we get what we request. If they ask who I represent, I give them a list of students we serve. Sometimes I bring parents with me."

WIN faces the legitimacy issue "all the time," says Trimble. "We address it by being there, by persistence." Aiton elementary school (Ward 7) was WIN's break-through school. "It has a remarkable assistant principal and some good teachers. We held a lot of individual meetings and built relationships. In our search for talent, we found people who respect parents and were willing to step out. Lottie Sneed (the other WIN organizer) is local and has a lot of credibility." Once the door opens, WIN begins building relationships and searching for talent. "A lot of it is just being there," Trimble concludes.

Placing sympathizers on the LSRT or other insider positions is "not a matter of WIN policy." If members do join, WIN supports them because the position provides a foothold in the school. Some WIN members are already insiders, such as teachers and principals. Others have joined the LSRTs and the PTA. Local churches can reach out to schools through their congregation. For example, a church in Ward 1 has a team active at Park View Elementary, because its members have children in the school. Other church members have "reached out cold" to local schools in their neighborhood.

"Once we're in the building, we do a power analysis," Trimble says. "If there is an active PTA, we work with them. This is about insurgency, changing the culture. If the LSRT is weak or inactive, we use a different approach. At Stuart-Hobson Middle School (Ward 6), a pretty good school with no tracking, African American boys are not being told about better high school programs, they are being encouraged to play basketball. One of our members works with the boys, encouraging them to go Wilson and School Without Walls. The LSRT isn't much there."

Leadership development Both organizations place heavy emphasis on developing leaders. WIN relies on IAF to train members and staff, while AAL has developed its own training for AAL leaders, parents, and students. "There are no funds for outside trainers," Dang says.

AAL leadership training covers group facilitation, group dynamics, and developing vision, as well as content of issues facing the community. Parent training covers their rights to ask for services, and how their participation can make a difference. Students learn how to push for accountability. Dang gives an example: if students have a substitute for three months who only gives out work sheets, they should go to the principal and complain.

For its local staff, WIN brings in other organizations to learn from their work. Staff also visit other places with organizing efforts. Recently, IAF held a national meeting in Texas where WIN staff heard a presentation on the Alliance schools. Trimble was enthusiastic about learning from others. "We need more

opportunities to break out of the box. Who are the other people doing this work, how can we meet with them? And who knows about this work?"

For its top leaders, WIN offers its own training, about power, self-interest, elements of broad-based organizing, the qualities and actions of a leader. They also role-play a relational meeting. In addition, national IAF has a ten-day training, and Ernie Cortes (Texas Interfaith Education Fund) has a 5-day training for teachers, to which WIN plans to send some teacher leaders.

Measuring impact and outcomes Both AAL and WIN use ad hoc methods to evaluate their actions and assess their larger impact. Periodically they gather staff and question themselves about how they are doing. They also keep data, such as how many people attend meetings, and files of their conversations with key people. They record their successes, whether these are positive changes in programs, policies, or practices, or negative actions averted, such as the retraction of space for an after-school program. But neither group feels it has the time or resources to do a thorough self-study.

AAL has staff discussions to review their actions, and asks parents and students what they think about where AAL is going. Sandy Dang admits: "We have no system in place. We do what's necessary." Dang says that in addition to getting data from schools to evaluate their after-school academic program, AAL asks itself:

> We look at our programs: how many people are going to PTA meetings (only three, that's not so good), to parent-teacher conferences (five, that's a little better), and to the principal breakfast (18, that's really good).
>
> Sandy Dang, Asian American LEAD

- How many people come to meetings and return?
- What happens after the meetings? Do parents ask us for help, like "come to the PTA meeting with us"?
- Is the principal responsive? Do we get what we ask for?

Dang comments that gauging their impact is hard. "We're not sure about our progress. We have a lot of conversations with school staff. At Wilson and Bancroft, we try to find out how much they know about our kids, then try to identify and deal with bias and racial attitudes." AAL also keeps a record of its "wins." For example, Bancroft pressed AAL to make its program serve all kids, not just Vietnamese children. AAL feels it was successful in explaining why its children need programs that serve their special needs.

WIN's procedures are similar. After every action, the key leaders gather. Trimble describes the scene: "We evaluate our actions by comparing what happened to what WIN wanted to happen. If 450 people came to an action, we ask who was there? Were there too many school folks? Did we get good media coverage? Did we build a public relationship with an important official?"

The most obvious way that WIN measures its impact is by the public commitments that it extracts from policy-makers and officials, and the new programs or changes that result. "City Council budgets $15

million for after-school programs, " a headline reads. Press coverage is a key indicator for WIN, because it documents WIN's "story"of strength and success.

WIN also gauges its success by the degree to which its organizing structure is in place. Martin Trimble says, "The most important thing is to build cadres of 15 key leaders. Our success hinges on deploying talent. We try to have one strong cadre per issue area. This is what drives the organization. We have active parents at some key schools – that's a success."

WIN is not yet in a position to measure its impact on schools and classrooms. As Trimble says, "We're not sure we're making progress, because we're not there yet." Yet WIN understands the importance of data: "We can go into a building and do an inventory. At Aiton Elementary School we know they have 12 water fountains that did not work, that work now." On the other hand, Trimble wonders how much that tells us. "We can measure all the repairs done, but not, what's the psychological effect? If a building looks like dirt, psychologically it says to students: you're not worth anything. The main thing is: does it look and feel different?"

Trimble is more interested in data and research that will document the district's progress in meeting its commitments. "On the facilities, the Superintendent has $800 million to spend. The question is how will it be spent? And over how long a time? Six years, ten years – that's too long to wait. In Montgomery County, they have a timetable. They say, in two years your school will be renovated and that's what happens. You can count on it. In DC, who knows?"

Successes Both groups have had some solid success. AAL has pressed for specific changes at its local schools, so that Asian students will be better served and their families welcomed and respected. WIN has sought sweeping, district-wide changes in after-school programs and facilities.

AAL works to help the area schools, especially Wilson, become more culturally sensitive. By this, AAL means that Asian students are understood well, and receive the programs and services they need to be successful academically, as well as that Asian families feel welcome, listened to and can be fully involved. As a result of AAL's activities, the schools have made some changes.

- **Data:** AAL is setting up a system to get student data from the two high schools: SAT 9 scores, attendance rate, SAT scores, numbers of students in the AP program, suspensions, drop-out rate, and behavior-discipline data. The principals are willing to sign a letter to the parents to ask for permission to share data with after-school program staff.

- **Cultural Understanding:** Conversations with school staff have helped to deal with bias and racial attitudes. The Wilson counselor comes regularly to the AAL center, and now has a list of Vietnamese psychiatrists to consult about students' problems. AAL also has an offer to do staff development with teachers about Vietnamese students at Wilson.

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- **Parent Activities:** There are now specific activities for Vietnamese parents. Wilson's principal has breakfast with AAL staff and parents a few times a year. New Asian families get a tour of the school. Wilson provides translators at PTA meetings.

- **Staff:** There is also a Vietnamese teacher at Wilson, whom the parents helped select. A hostile teacher at Lincoln middle school was removed at AAL's insistence.

- **Special Programs:** AAL just received a grant from the Office of Refugee Resettlement for $200,000 over three years to work with three elementary schools. With the funds, AAL will do home visits, and support a social worker and an education advocate.

These are examples of AAL's strategy to win changes at schools by raising concerns, then offering help to meet them. In some cases, AAL allies with the school against the district to get information and resources. At first the schools were reluctant, but the prospect of help reaching families and raising test scores is winning them over. In a few other cases, AAL went over the principal's head to the district and got a decision overruled. The new respect that unexpected clout engendered fueled a more productive relationship.

As Dang puts it, "parents now realize that they must (and can) hold the schools accountable. After the problems with the teacher at Lincoln middle school came to light, fifteen parents met with the principal. The teacher was not properly certified, and after a time, left the school."

WIN's successes have been more dramatic. Shortly after taking office, Mayor Williams made good on the after-school programs pledge to WIN. The City Council agreed to commit $15 million to a dedicated fund, to be administered by a new, independent Community and Youth Investment Trust. $15 million more will be committed by the end of 2002. In addition, four other city-funded after-school programs are administered by WIN member organizations.

The next step was an action with Superintendent Vance in October, 2000. WIN presented a five-point agenda:

1. Support building audits in up to 25 schools by WIN teams to identify priority repair and capital projects
2. Finish priority repairs no later than March 14, 2001, and top capital projects by September 1, 2001.
3. Attend Action Meeting on December 4 to receive team audits.
4. Start repairs in three schools immediately, and report status on December 4.
5. Meet with WIN leaders every 4-6 weeks to monitor completion and develop action plans by March 2001 to address school staffing and safety issues.

The next day, the *Washington Post* reported, "DC Superintendent Paul Vance last night promised hundreds of parents that he would complete repairs they identified at 25 schools across the city. The parents, organized by the Washington Interfaith Network, plan to complete audits of the school buildings and create lists of work that needs to be done. During last night's meeting at Asbury United Methodist Church in Northwest, Vance agreed to complete the work by March 15." (To date, work has begun at nine schools and is continuing).

Support for organizing Both AAL and WIN have received important support from other organizations. The Columbia Heights-Shaw Collaborative, run by Marian Urquilla, provided critical early support for AAL. The work of its Asian Task Force became AAL, and Sandy Dang received space, funding, advice and technical support during that transition.

> The community agencies in our area give us advice, information, and contacts. They helped me get started. It's important to be part of something bigger, a group of more powerful organizations that want good education for all kids."
>
> Sandy Dang, Asian American LEAD

Other members of the collaborative have also been helpful.
When a new principal at Lincoln middle school decided to take back the space AAL was using for its after-school program, Dang turned to Lori Kaplan, director of the Latin American Youth Center. Kaplan help Dang plot her course of action, and went with her to meet with the Assistant Superintendent. The principal was overruled, and the program continues at Lincoln.

When AAL looked for models, it discovered Asian Americans United in Philadelphia. Dang and staff have visited AAU for ideas and advice. Dang is now planning a trip to Philadelphia for the Wilson principal and parents to talk to AAU staff and see its work.

After WIN decided to tackle the facilities issue, it found that the 21st Century School Fund has valuable expertise to offer. Not only did the Fund have data on the state of DC schools, but it also had developed a master plan for renovation. Just as important, the Fund knew the building codes and other legal and administrative detail on renovation, construction and financing. WIN also needed more troops, particularly parents, teachers and administrators with connections to schools. SHAPPE and Parents United became another resource.

Now that WIN is considering its next moves, it plans to focus on teacher quality and other issues related to teaching and learning. Trimble acknowledges that it could use data on achievement from Parents United and resources on effective educational practice from DC VOICE.

Challenges In DC, the mechanisms for political accountability are weak. There is no higher level to which to appeal, no state education agency to provide oversight -- set standards for the schools, provide financial aid, conduct research and publish data, administer assessments, and take over failing schools. While the business community has influence over commercial policies, it does not have the clout or sustained interest to leverage real results from the school district. And residents are still learning how to build and use political power.

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Both groups have been frustrated by the difficulties of working with DCPS. Ackerman, like her predecessor, placed little priority on working with parent or community groups outside the DC PTA. She also exhibited little interest in Latino or Asian issues. "Working with Superintendent Ackerman has been a major obstacle. She has not supported AAL's goals," says Sandy Dang. Trimble agrees: "We have a public relationship with Vance, which is something we did not have with Ackerman. Her hostility made it impossible."

Not only is the system reluctant to share data, it does not have much sophistication in analyzing or using data. For AAL, one pressing problem is that schools do not have data broken down by type of student. When the number of students at issue is small, as it is with Asians, there are also confidentiality issues. Revealing the average test scores of Asian high school juniors, for example, could make it easy to guess how an individual Asian student had scored.

Furthermore, the district has been "a moving target – staff shifts, internal confusion and frustration." Once AAL builds a relationship with someone in the system, such as the principal at Wilson, that person is moved or leaves. There is no support for collaboration from the top. Dang concludes: "It's very important to have a strong parent organization."

Although Washington is not a huge city, it is highly fragmented. That makes it difficult to construct a common agenda. Dang says: "We need a bigger picture of what we're fighting for, a collective vision for the whole neighborhood. All of us must commit to a common agenda, good education for all our kids, Asian, Latino, African American. Now we're an individual effort, and we don't have time to find out what everyone else needs." She adds: "There is so much fragmentation. National advocacy work doesn't seem to connect to the local level. The national agenda on education is not coming together. We don't have any sense of help from that level."

Trimble says bluntly that DC is a "hostile culture." By that, he means that DC is a difficult environment in which to organize, especially around education issues. Many of WIN's member organizations are Catholic churches. As Trimble put it, "public schools are not their issue. St. Augustine, the largest Catholic church in the city, has its own school. Middle class whites are not into public education, either." Furthermore, the African American community is extremely reluctant to challenge the school system.

While AAL has a cohesive base of immigrant families with shared values, WIN faces a low-income population demoralized by years of poverty, marginalization, and despair. "Organizing parents is retail organizing, as opposed to institutional organizing. Parents are transient, their lives change, they aren't affiliated with churches or other institutions," Trimble comments. "There is no discipline they are part of." This makes them difficult to reach and engage in a group. Also, there are few organizations of any kind in DC's low-income neighborhoods, "so we're building from nothing."

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Prospects Both AAL and WIN admit they are struggling. Given the magnitude of what they are up against, their budget and staff are tiny. They need help tackling the educational quality issues. As Sandy Dang says, "we want to be more strategic, have a bigger vision, and build a common agenda with other community organizations. This system is so complicated and broken – how do we fix that? Where do we enter? How do we hold them accountable?"

Both groups would like more staff to do organizing, and more training to help them do it well. Dang wants AAL leaders to have training about developing a bigger vision and taking the steps to get there. Also, she says, they need training about the system, so they know how to help kids with disabilities, for example.

"How can we have a school system that swallows kids? I know a student who needed testing for disabilities in the 5th grade, and she wasn't tested until 11th grade. Six years of her life were wasted, she didn't learn anything in school. It is not empowering to have such a system. Vouchers are not the answer. We need a system that works for kids."

Trimble is searching for "discretionary dollars" to hire young organizers and train them to reach parents and do the door-to-door work. "We're going to deal with teacher quality and principal quality, and see what effect we can have on that. We have two choices, to get involved in operating programs, or to negotiate systemic changes and stay on top of the officials to implement them, assuming there is the capacity to implement changes."

Trimble is ambivalent about what to do if the system can't respond. "We may have to get involved like Ernie Cortes, and operate a program...But that (intensive work with local schools to improve teaching and learning) takes huge amounts of money. Besides, Ernie's dealing with a different culture in Texas – it's not really urban, there are no unions or huge, entrenched bureaucracies – and it's easier to change the culture."

Potential organizations

Vast tracts of the District of Columbia are not covered by any organizing effort. Just imagine if for every 5,000 low-income families, there were a group comparable to Asian American LEAD. Many community service groups now are active across the city, but they are reluctant to bite the hand that feeds them (the DC government). As Marian Urquilla of the Columbia Heights-Shaw Collaborative points out, "organizing is desperately needed, but it's hard for us to do. We would be organizing against our funding source."

Two categories of groups could be drawn into organizing. First is service and advocacy groups that have a large family base and are aware of the need for change inside the schools. The old analysis that the problem was deprived children, not poor schools, is no longer widely shared. The more these organizations tutor children from DCPS, the more they realize that these children are not learning even the most basic skills in school. Community groups cannot fill this gap; the schools must improve. As Connie Spinner of the Children and Youth Investment Trust put it, "our schools are going to have to face some very public

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questions if the Trust provides total coverage on out-of-school programs and kids still don't perform well in school...."

Groups such as the Latin American Youth Center, the Columbia Heights-Shaw Collaborative, and the Calvert Multi-Cultural Center, feel they need a sense of "permission" from their funding sources to move into organizing. Bebe Otero of the Calvert center expressed an additional reluctance: "To leap into organizing is an issue of resources. Public funding is not the whole issue. We get Department of Human Services and foundation funding, but not for organizing work. Our comfort level is not in organizing."

The Institute for Education and Social Policy at NYU has identified three ingredients for community service and development groups to become involved in organizing:
1. The director supports organizing and does not see a contradiction between organizing and the work of the group.
2. At least one person on staff, at least half time, is devoted to organizing.
3. The group understands that the agenda may be set outside the organization.

One approach would be to interview the most likely organizations and offer support for those willing to move ahead. Facilitating meetings with similar groups from other cities that are engaged in organizing would be one way to encourage the move. Another approach would be to enlist their support for an organizing effort that builds on their base, but is done by a separate organization, as part of a coalition effort. Bebe Otero likes that idea: "We could contribute an important base to a group that does organizing. No one is really doing this (organizing), and it's very important."

Another possible group is Parents United. It acknowledges the need to build a broader base, but has been reluctant to challenge the PTA. It also sees itself as an advocacy group and may not be able to accept the key ingredients listed above, especially #3. Still, this is worth exploring.

The second category of groups is those already organizing around other issues, like housing, a living wage, and safe streets. What would it take to add education to their agenda? Concern about organizing against the funding source does not trouble Raul Rodruguez of CARACEN, the Central American Resouce Center in Adams-Morgan (Ward 1). CARACEN began as a service provider, helping Latino immigrants find housing, obtain documentation, and get legal services. When gentrification began, many Latino families were threatened with eviction so landlords could sell or upgrade their buildings. CARACEN began organizing, pressing city agencies to enforce protections. Once Rodriguez began working with tenants, the quality of the schools came up as a key issue.

The Tenants and Workers Support Committee in Alexandria, Virginia, began organizing African American and Latino tenants about to be evicted from moderate-income apartments. After the tenants purchased the complex, they raised issues about the schools. TWSC organized meetings with local schools and the school board. As a result, there is a dual-language program and a Latina principal at Mt. Vernon

elementary, more bi-lingual staff at the three elementary schools serving the area, a progressive discipline policy at the middle school, and a new African American member of the school board.

CASA, a Latino organization in Montgomery County, Maryland, is also organizing tenants. Like CARACEN, it is hearing about problems Latino children experience in the local schools. These three groups are interested in working on a regional effort, because the Latino population is highly mobile, and some communities, such as Takoma Park, straddle the DC-Maryland line.

ACORN began working in Washington about three years ago. Its lead issues are lead poisoning and a living wage. Pat McCoy, who is acting director, is cautious but interested. The problem, he feels, is that education issues are so complex. ACORN would need help understanding the lay of the land in education, and policy expertise to come up with proposals. A new director will be taking over April 1, 2001.

There is potential among these various organizations, but each would need considerable encouragement and assistance. The infrastructure mentioned in the following conclusion to this report would be critical for any of these groups to enter education organizing and be effective.

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CONCLUSIONS

DCPS is a troubled system, plagued by poor management, internal strife, unstable leadership, desperately low student achievement, constant criticism from the press, and declining community confidence. The Black-White divide in the city has made public discussion of the problems painful and difficult. Since the advent of home rule in 1974, a majority of teachers, students, and administrators are African American. Reform proposals, blue-ribbon panel reports, and *Washington Post* stories of mismanagement and low achievement, are often seen as coming from hostile white interests bent on resuming control of the city.

Little accountability Because the District is not part of a state structure, and only recently gained the right to elect its local officials, there is not an effective accountability system. As Vin Pan, an activist who started a mentoring and tutoring program called Heads Up, puts it: "In DC, the public schools are the state education agency, the local education agency and the charters. Where is the accountability? They sub-grant to themselves and there is no competition." There is no state legislature, Governor or real members of Congress to appeal to or intervene. The middle class, both Black and White, have for the most part opted out of the public schools. The parents who remain often have relatives and neighbors who work for the city. They feel they are in no position to criticize the schools, which they perceive as being their own.

Lack of connective tissue As the Ford Foundation's report on the 21st Century School Fund noted, urban communities are what organizational theorist Karl Weick has called a "loosely coupled system." An effect in one part of the system will not necessarily be felt in another part. A single shooting at Wilson HS in Ward 3 galvanized parents and began SHAPPE. There was no such well-organized response to the many acts of violence at schools in Wards 7 and 8. Any systemic effect must be produced by activity in many parts of the system.

Cathy Reilly, founder of SHAPPE, comments: "We need a sounder, healthier process for resolving issues, based on relationships and experiences, and based on the habit of consulting each other. We should set up a process so that we're constantly examining whether things are working, and so we have the power to change it. If a decision doesn't work out, we need to change it. It's important not to polarize people, so they think it has to be this way or that way....Let's see what works."

Washington has many assets. It has universities, advocacy groups, think-tanks, and activists. It has the resources of the federal government and an expert policy community. It has a strong local economy and a growing sense of civic recovery. It has a strong early childhood program and many dedicated teachers, parents and administrators. What's missing are vehicles for pulling this together, developing consensus from the grass-roots, and creating cross-sector collaborations to redevelop the school system. DC VOICE was created to begin this process, but without a grass-roots movement, it will not gather steam.

Keys to recovery Community organizing must be a key part of the recovery. Not only will a strong, organized base of parents and community members put pressure on a system that has never been held accountable, such activity will help to build social, civic and political capital in depleted neighborhoods. If

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done well, it will also strengthen parents' capacity to understand standards, assessment, good teaching practice, and effective methods to improve student achievement. Unchecked power tends to corrupt; we see that in the government and school system. But lack of power corrupts, too. We see that in the cynicism and hopelessness of low-income neighborhoods.

Placing pressure on the system is not enough, however. As Lisa Sullivan, founder of the youth group Listen, Inc., says, "I'm not sure a system this broken can be fixed. There is no time to play around."

One group with long experience pressing the system is the 21st Century School Fund. "What the Control Board didn't understand is that there are so few structures, management systems, and guidelines in place. There is no real chain of command or decision-making processes. DCPS does not have the infrastructure to change and improve itself. In the transfer to home rule, the District rejected the old structures, but has not put new ones into place," comments Mary Filardo, the Fund's director.

> It's hard to get traction. We tried to get the Education Trust to show us what good student work looks like. We can't get benchmark examples from DCPS. Everywhere we look, there are huge issues: facilities, teacher quality, funding."
>
> Delabian Rice Thurston, former director, Parents United for DC Public Schools

Mary Levy, a lawyer and activist who analyzes DCPS data for Parents United, agrees. "Central services are bad, and after all the cuts, very lean, considering how poorly automated things are. Most work is still being done manually, like processing personnel actions. It can take years for a teacher to get a step increase. The information systems are not integrated, and there aren't any consistent definitions. The Control Board was supposed to fix all that, but DCPS is worse managed now than when the Board took over."

The 21st Century School Fund responded to the crisis by developing its own capacity to analyze the facilities problem, collect data, write policies, monitor the process, design a master plan, and broker public-private partnership funding. Now, the Fund consults to DCPS, and advises its staff. Filardo recommends that any organization seeking reform of the system follow suit. "It's all about the work. Someone has to set up a model that DCPS can learn from and follow. Begin by doing the work for them, develop standards, and then a process so they can take over. We did it for facilities, now someone has to do it for the education side," Filardo concludes.

Other pressures The charter school movement is placing serious pressure on DCPS. Next year, six more charter schools are scheduled to open. Existing charters are scaling up and increasing their enrollment. For community groups, the 1996 charter school law offers another way of working for school reform. Several have decided that the best way to serve their constituency is to start a charter school. For example, Associates for Renewal in Education (ARE), which is active in the North Capitol area of Ward 5, serves children who are neglected, abused or delinquent. Many have been suspended or pushed out of school. After years trying to get these students an adequate program and services in DCPS, ARE has decided to start a school for them instead. In Adams-Morgan, the Latin American Youth Center has founded the

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Next Step Public Charter School for students who have dropped out or been kicked out. Many are young parents.

As Lisa Sullivan of Listen, Inc., puts it, "The activists are in the charter school movement. A resource base is always an issue, and there is money to run charters." Listen, Inc. is also considering opening a charter school to serve young people who have dropped out. Connie Spinner, director of the Children and Youth Investment Trust, says, "The charter school movement is the logical response to a school system that has not responded to its community."

The next stage The work of WIN and AAL is a good beginning, but it is in its infancy, and leaves many areas of the city uncovered. Both groups need help to take on the next stage: grappling with what happens inside the classroom. The tasks of getting a facility repaired, or testing for special needs done promptly, are more concrete and far less complex than improving educational quality.

In addition, there must be pressure on DCPS and the city government, not just from the grassroots, but from above. The drain of staff and students to charter schools has alarmed DCPS more than any hard-hitting report or City Council hearing. The new "state education agency" office established by the Mayor has some potential. It will control the federal program resources and could use federal funds, regulations and guidelines as tools to build management and administrative structures and an accountability system. This is far more likely to happen if there is concerted, community-side political pressure. If it doesn't happen, charter schools and vouchers will be the wave of the future.

Recommendations

In some districts with low-performing schools, the system is capable of responding effectively when organized pressure is brought to bear. DCPS does not have this capacity to fix itself. The Washington community must develop the means and methods to help DCPS face up to and address its problems systematically. To do this, it must build the political will to face up to the magnitude of the task. This is why organizing is so critical. Without an organized, informed base of parents and community members in all areas of the city, nothing else will happen.

These recommendations, therefore, address two interrelated needs. Organizing in Washington, DC is seriously underdeveloped. The first need is to expand and support community organizing for school reform in Washington, DC. The second is to assist DCPS to respond effectively to community demands for improvement. This report recommends that funders seriously consider taking the following steps:

1. Recruit and fund at least one intermediary organization to support organizing. This organization should play a role similar to that of the Institute for Education and Social Policy in New York City and Designs for Change in Chicago:
    - Analyze DCPS data and present it in easily understandable terms and formats to the community.

- Recruit local groups now organizing on other issues, or groups working in education who are willing to add an organizing component. These may be community groups or groups already organizing around other issues. Special attention should be paid to the lower income and more politically isolated areas of the city, especially east of the Anacostia River.
- Offer training in organizing methods, education issues, political analysis, and effective approaches to education reform (at the school and district levels).
- Focus on improving student achievement, based on the data, and building a healthy balance of power between the schools and families.
- Develop indicators of success, then measure and report on progress.

2. Support the groups that are committed to organizing for school reform. They need longer-term funding (5-7 years minimum), to build their organizational capacity and have a sustained impact. This means more skilled organizers on staff (at a living wage), as well as space, equipment, and management improvements. They also need support to attend national conferences, attend training events, and take community members to visit other districts.

3. Support an independent organization, perhaps based in a well-established university, to assist DCPS to respond to community demands for school improvement.
   - Work with schools to analyze and apply student achievement data
   - Collaborate with intermediary organizations to analyze and present education data to the community and to community organizers.
   - Convene dialogs to facilitate interaction and develop consensus among the various "loosely coupled" sectors in DC -- grassroots organizations and city power-brokers, organizers and educators, business people and policy-makers, national organizations and parent groups.
   - Offer staff development, and work with DCPS to improve its staff development program, to build schools' capacity to improve.
   - Identify and draw in outside resources needed to assist DCPS with change.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING FOR SCHOOL REFORM
WASHINGTON, DC

Groups that are organizing a constituency and building a base independent of schools:

Organization/Contact	Primary Constituency	Activities/Issues/Services
Asian American LEAD Sandy Dang ph 238-0211 3045 15th St. NW WDC 20010	Asian American youth and families Mt. Pleasant and Adams-Morgan (Ward 1) Ties to Wilson, Bell, Cardozo High Schools	• after school programs • mentoring, tutoring • activities for families re DCPS, standards . • advocacy and press for better outcomes
Washington Interfaith Network (WIN) Martin Trimble ph 518-0815 1226 Vermont Ave., NW WDC 20005	250-500 parents and residents (middle-low income) in each of four school attendance areas (Wards 7,5,6,4)	• IAF community organizing on key issues, including school facilities, safety • Developing an Excellence in Public Education campaign

Groups that advocate for reform and serve as a voice for a city-wide constituency:

| Organization/Contact	Primary Constituency	Activities/Issues/Services
DC Appleseed Josh Wyner ph 393-1158 733 15th Street, Suite 330 WDC 20005	citizens citywide	• researches issues • newsletter • governance issue • study on charter schools
DC VOICE Erika Landberg 986-8533 1328 Florida Ave., NW, 3rd fl. WDC 20056	parent/citizen organization city-wide	• professional development • constituency-building • research issues/data
Listen, Inc. Lisa Sullivan 483-4494 1436 U St., NW #201 WDC 20009	Youth organization At risk young people, ages 14-19	• Youth leadership training • improving lives of young people • youth-run projects
SHAPPE (Senior High Alliance of Principals, Parents and Educators) Kathy Reilly ph 723-3310 1340 Ingraham St, NW WDC 20011	parent-educator organization, city-wide	• High school parents and educators • Press district for more high school resources • Improve HS programs and facilities
Parents United for DC Public Schools Delabian Rice Thurston 518-3667 11 Dupont Circle WDC 20036	parent + advocacy group (city-wide)	• advocacy for better public schools • develop policy positions • research and data

Groups that provide educational services to a neighborhood-based constituency:

Organization/Contact	Primary Constituency	Activities/Issues/Services
Associates for Renewal in Education (ARE) Brenda Nixon ph 483-9424 45 P St., NW WDC 20002	low-income families in North Capitol area (Ward 5)	• services for neglected, delinquent and needy children • running a charter school • after-school programs • program development for N. Capitol comm. collaborative
Calvary Bi-Lingual Multi-Cultural Learning Center Beatriz Otero ph 332-4200 1420 Columbia Rd., NW WDC 20009	Latino students and families in Columbia Heights (Ward 1) HS students (Bell SHS)	• Infant, early child care • after school programs
Columbia Heights/Shaw Collaborative Marian Urquilla ph 518-6740 1816 12st St., NW, 2nd fl. WDC 20009	Latino families in Columbia Heights and Shaw (Ward 1)	• Track school issues (IEP, ESL, discipline) • special ed advocacy • after school program • referrals to services
East River Collaborative Cecil Byrd ph 396-1200 Marshall Heights Community Development Organization 3939 Benning Rd., NE WDC 20019	Families and neighborhoods in Ward 7, East of Anacostia River	• community economic development • developing social and community skills • partnerships with schools
For Love of Children (FLOC) Rev. Fred Taylor/Carolyn Dupont ph 462-8686 1816 12th St., NW WDC 20009 (Shaw)	Low-income children and families in Shaw/Columbia Heights	• faith-based out-of-school programs • parent education • work with schools re achievement
Latin American Youth Center Lori Kaplan ph 319-2225 1419 Columbia Rd., NW WDC 20009	Youth organization in Columbia Heights (Ward 1): Latino youth, 12-21	• Teen Center, after school programs, • Ungraded charter school, ages 14-up, ca. 50 students • school-related social services
Martha's Table Jennifer Thomas/Timothy Jones ph 328-6608 2114 14th St. WDC	Low-income families in Shaw area (Latino + African American)	• feeding program • social growth for children • advocacy at schools • diversity workshops • college bound programs
North Capitol Collaborative Sheila Strain ph 898-1800 1112 First Terrace, NE WDC 20001	low-income families in North Capitol area (Ward 5)	• services for neglected, abused children • violence prevention • support family centers in schools . • grants to community partners

Shiloh Family Life Center Rev. Justice Reeves ph 232-4288 1510 9th St. WDC	low-income African American families in Shaw (Ward 1)	• Faith-based out-of-school programs
Sojourners Neighborhood Center Marian Brown ph 387-7000 1323 Girard St. WDC	Children 5-18; emphasis on African American boys in Shaw (Ward 1)	• Faith-based afterschool program • teen group • some family activities
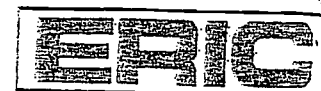
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