

Qualities of Successful Education Organizing (revised, 2/12/04)

In looking at school organizing in other cities – in an effort to see what we must create here in Baltimore to be successful, these are the qualities I believe we must strive for:

Organizing is not a service but rather based in what the group decides its issues are; it starts where the parents (or students) are. The initial action might be around conditions in the lunch room or a principal who doesn't welcome parents into the building or the lack of toilet paper in the bathrooms. Once the group works on its first issues and wins some victories, it readily develops an awareness of the larger issues of school reform. **[in a time of crisis, as this fiscal crisis, the slower process of getting groups started around very local issues takes a back seat – but for the long haul, to involve lots of parents, and to truly engage people organizing around each school, area, is important]**

The organizing has a **social justice perspective** which means that parents are mobilized along the lines of fighting for their children's future, insisting that the system treat city schools equitably, and that those in power are held accountable.

The organizations of parents are **internally democratic** and developed by the members themselves.

Large numbers of parents are engaged in defining their own problems, solutions and strategies.

- **Parents are not passively** receiving knowledge but are designing the organizing campaigns and developing the strategy.
- The work of organizing is much **more than getting parents involved in assisting** their own children.
- Parents usually undergo some type of **personal transformation** in the process of being involved in the organizing effort

The organizing is done by/through **organizations which are independent** of the schools. Thus the main work of the organizer is not to get parents onto committees that are part of the system. Once the parent/ school based independent organization is built, and support networks developed, having some of the members take on roles on the school committees is a decision to be made by the group.

The **organizations are local**, ie around a school. They can then be linked to others across the city, and can become part of ongoing or new coalitions.

Partnerships and alliances with like organizations and with others who will benefit from school reform are developed. It is not a given, however, that the principal or teachers will always be part of the partnership. This is naturally a hope but changes depending on local school conditions.

*Betty
presentation to
Ed organizing
work group*

The organization(s) built must keep all the tools in their tool kit, collaboration, ie negotiation AND confrontation.

Through the process of organizing, **relationships** are built which did not exist before; members & activists are responsible to each other and insist that the system be **accountable** as well.

[n.b. Feb 12, 2004 An assumption of this model is that each parent group will have an experienced organizer working with it (an organizer could work with several groups at a time) .

If the organizers are connected to neighborhood organizations, they must be **dedicated to school-based organizing**, ie not expected to get residents involved in other issues at the same time

There must be a component that **trains leaders** and gives them opportunity to experience their leadership where they pick their issues, design their own campaigns and strategies and come up with their own solutions. (Various tactics may be used including accountability meetings, rallies, pickets, educational events, door knocking, leafleting, etc)

Over time, **large numbers of people are mobilized** and the organizations involved gain power for their members -- not just access to officials which gives the illusion of power.

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