Building Partnerships to Reinvent School Culture
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Kavitha Mediratta

Seema Shah

Sara McAlister

Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University
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BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS TO REINVENT SCHOOL CULTURE
Accountability sessions, parent and community engagement in schools, and careful work to build trust with educators are some of the strategies used by Austin Interfaith to reinvent and reinvigorate low-performing schools in Austin, Texas.

As part of the statewide Texas Industrial Areas Foundation, Austin Interfaith organized low-performing schools on the city’s east side into a local network of “Alliance Schools.” During an eight-year period, this network grew to involve roughly a quarter of the Austin Independent School District’s elementary schools and half of the district’s high-poverty schools. In these schools, Austin Interfaith organizers provided leadership training to parents, teachers, and administrators and supported them in implementing reforms to improve student learning. The organization also developed an effective working relationship with Superintendent Pascal Forgione, whose leadership of the district brought a decade of stability and concentrated focus on improving low-performing schools.

This report shares findings from a six-year study of the impact of Austin Interfaith’s education organizing on East Austin schools. Drawing on a wide range of data, including interviews with district and school leaders, teachers, parents, and community members, as well as teacher surveys and questionnaires and publicly available school data, the study examines three questions.

**In what ways has Austin Interfaith’s organizing influenced school district policy?**

♦ Organizing yielded new resources for high-poverty, low-performing schools in Austin. In particular, new funding was allocated for parent support specialists, after-school programs, bilingual education services, adult ESL programs, and teacher and administrator professional development opportunities in East Austin schools.

**To what degree has Austin Interfaith’s organizing influenced the capacity of schools to educate students successfully?**

♦ Teachers in schools that were highly involved with Austin Interfaith report significantly higher levels of trust and parent involvement, and a stronger focus on learning, than teachers in low-involvement schools. Teachers also reported Austin Interfaith positively influenced the quality of principal leadership, teacher commitment, and teacher collegiality.

♦ Parents in schools that were highly involved with Austin Interfaith reported greater access to important information, more opportunities for communication, and more respect from school staff.

**Has Austin Interfaith’s organizing produced measurable gains in student outcomes?**

♦ Regression analyses of the relationship between Austin Interfaith’s involvement in schools and student performance on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) (1993–2002) show that deep involvement with Austin Interfaith predicted gains ranging from 15 to 19 points in the percent
of students meeting minimum standards on TAAS, while lower levels of involvement predicted gains of only 4 points.

Within Alliance Schools, Austin Interfaith engaged in a long-term process of helping parents and educators to view themselves as leaders and to work together to identify and resolve impediments to successful student learning. Organizers helped to build cohesion in schools and energize the school community with a new sense of shared purpose and potency. When the organizing efforts were sustained at a high level of intensity, this organizing contributed to notable gains in student learning.
The opening quote, a reflection from Barack Obama on the lessons he learned during his post-college stint as a community organizer, cuts to the core of why organizing matters. Even the most well-intentioned of policies (and politicians) are often insufficient to bring about desired outcomes. Political will and political power are necessary forces to carry those good intentions forward and to hold political actors accountable when those intentions go unrealized.

In low-income neighborhoods like the ones on the South Side of Chicago where Obama organized, political power is not attained through wealth or status. Rather, power comes from numbers — from bringing together ordinary people to identify critical community concerns and to act collectively and strategically for improvements to their communities, neighborhoods, and schools.

This research follows the organizing efforts undertaken by residents of low- to moderate-income communities throughout the country, specifically in the arena of public school reform. In addition to documenting their campaigns, we aim to get underneath the organizing process to assess the tangible impacts of organizing on students and their schools. In other words, does the political will generated by organizing — in the arena of education reform — ultimately enhance the capacity of schools to improve student learning?

**COMMUNITY ORGANIZING FOR SCHOOL REFORM**

Neither community organizing nor public education activism is new in the United States. But increasingly in the last fifteen years, community organizations have used organizing as a focused and deliberate strategy for school improvement, particularly within low- and moderate-income communities.

Instead of relying on more traditional forms of parent and community involvement (getting involved in school activities or serving on district-sponsored committees, for instance), organizing groups mobilize parents, youth, and community members for local school improvement and districtwide reform, often applying pressure from the outside to generate the political will necessary to adopt and implement reforms. In the process, these organizing efforts aim to equalize power dynamics between school and district administrators and low-income parents and communities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Organizing for School Reform . . .</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Brings together public school parents, youth and community residents, and/or institutions to engage in collective dialogue and action for change</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Builds grassroots leadership by training parents and youth in the skills of organizing and civic engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Builds political power by mobilizing large numbers of people around a unified vision and purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Focuses on demands for accountability, equity, and quality for all students, rather than on gains for individual students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Aims to disrupt long-standing power relationships that produce failing schools in low- and moderate-income neighborhoods and communities of color</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Uses the tactics of direct action and mobilization to put pressure on decision-makers when necessary</td>
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</tbody>
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*Organized Communities, Stronger Schools: An Introduction to the Case Study Series*

*Because good intentions are not enough, when not fortified with political will and political power.*

— U.S. President Barack Obama
community members, who may otherwise feel marginalized or powerless to challenge educational inequities.

Nationally, it is estimated that more than 200 community groups are engaged in organizing for better schooling (Mediratta & Fruchter 2001; Gold, Simon & Brown 2002). These organizing groups have responded to a variety of parental and youth concerns, including unsafe environmental and facilities conditions, overcrowded schools, dangerous school crossings, inadequate school funding, unresponsive administrators, and inexperienced teachers.

Many researchers have noted the failure of traditional approaches to education reform to bring about deep and lasting school improvement. Jeannie Oakes and Martin Lipton, for example, attribute the “sorry and familiar story of school reform gone awry” to educators’ singular focus on changing the internal “technical aspects” of schooling, without adequately attending to the political, social, and cultural dimensions of schooling. Oakes and Lipton argue,

> The logic and strategies employed in social and political movements – in contrast to those found in organizational change models – are more likely to expose, challenge, and if successful, disrupt the prevailing norms and politics of schooling inequality. ... Without attention to these dynamics, such reforms are abandoned entirely or implemented in ways that actually replicate (perhaps in a different guise) the stratified status quo. (Oakes & Lipton 2002, p. 383)

Oakes and Lipton’s analysis reflects an increased interest from both practitioners and researchers in understanding the potential role of community organizing in contributing to sustainable improvements in education.

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1. An eighth group, Milwaukee Inner-city Congregations Allied for Hope, was involved at the onset of the study. Because they did not participate in the study across the whole six years, we have not produced a case study of their organization.

2. The work described in this study was carried out by Chicago ACORN until January 2008, when the director, staff, and board left ACORN to start a new group called Action Now, which is continuing the education and other organizing campaigns initiated while they were affiliated with ACORN.

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**ABOUT THE STUDY**

To date, research on community organizing for school reform has been mostly qualitative and includes numerous reports (Gold, Simon & Brown 2002; HoSang 2005; Zachary & Olatoye 2001), as well as excellent and detailed book-length analyses of organizing efforts (Oakes, Rogers & Lipton 2006; Warren 2001; Shirley 1997). But comparatively few research studies examine the effect of these groups’ work on local schools and communities. How have organizing efforts influenced district policies and practices? In what ways does the culture of schools change because of involvement in organizing? And most important, are educational outcomes better for students when organizing is in the picture? This study, initiated in 2002 with funding from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, sought to address these critical questions.

The six-year, mixed-methods study – the first of its kind – followed the school reform campaigns of seven organizing groups nationally.1 The study examined the impact of organizing on the leadership development of those involved and also assessed the impact of organizing on three critical indicators of education reform: district-level policy, school-level capacity, and student outcomes.

*Organized Communities, Stronger Schools*, the report of preliminary findings released in March 2008, measured and linked the impacts of community organizing to specific performance indicators (Mediratta, Shah & McAlister 2008). We found that sophisticated organizing at the grassroots level can indeed make major contributions to improving student achievement. Across multiple data sources, we observed strong and consistent evidence that effective community organizing:

- stimulates important changes in educational policy, practices, and resource distribution at the system level;
- strengthens school-community relationships, parent involvement and engagement, and trust in schools; and
- contributes to higher student educational outcomes, including higher attendance, test score performance, high school completion, and college-going aspirations.
THE CASE STUDY SERIES
Following up on Organized Communities, Stronger Schools, we offer a case study series that presents an in-depth look at each of the organizing groups in our study. The study sites are:

- Austin Interfaith (Austin, Texas), affiliated with the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF)
- Chicago ACORN (Chicago, Illinois), affiliated with the national network Association of Communities Organized for Reform Now (ACORN)
- Community Coalition and its youth organizing arm, South Central Youth Empowered thru Action (Los Angeles, California)
- Eastern Pennsylvania Organizing Project and its youth organizing affiliate, Youth United for Change (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania); EPOP is affiliated with the PICO (People Improving Communities through Organizing) national network
- Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition and its youth organizing arm, Sistas and Brothas United (Bronx, New York)
- Oakland Community Organizations (Oakland, California), affiliated with PICO
- People Acting for Community Together (Miami, Florida), affiliated with the Direct Action and Research Training (DART) Center

Each case study traces the group’s education organizing campaigns and considers the impact of this work on promoting resource equity and district accountability for improved educational outcomes. In three districts – Austin, Miami, and Oakland – where the education reform strategy was in place at least five years, we also examine trends in school capacity and student educational outcomes. Though educators predicted gains in Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, and Philadelphia resulting from the organizing conducted by groups in our study, the reforms are either too new and/or do not integrate enough intensive school-based organizing for us to assess their school capacity and student outcome impacts through administrative or survey data. In these cases, we focus on documenting the group’s organizing efforts and examining preliminary indicators of impact.

The case studies in this series will be made available for download, as they are published, at <www.annenberginstitute.org/WeDo/Mott.php>.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
Our analysis of impacts both across sites and within sites is guided by a conceptual framework – or logic model – for how organizing leads to change in schools. The framework, presented in the 2004 publication Constituents of Change (see Mediratta 2004; Figure 1), provides a guiding theory of change for how community organizing stimulates improvements in both community capacity and district and school

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Figure 1
Theory of change
capacity. In the current series of case studies, we focus on how organizing influences district and school capacity and student learning.

We ground our assessment of district and school capacity outcomes in the existing educational change literature. We draw primarily from the seminal research on essential supports conducted by the Consortium on Chicago School Research, which outlines five broad dimensions of school capacity (leadership, parent-community ties, professional capacity, student-centered learning climate, ambitious instruction) that are associated with better student outcomes (Sebring et al. 2006). We also pull from Anthony Bryk and Barbara Schneider’s work on trust in schools (2002), Richard Elmore’s writings on teaching practice (1996; 2002; 2004), the National Center for Education Statistics’ articulation of school quality indicators (Mayer et al. 2000), and research on indicators of education organizing conducted by Eva Gold and Elaine Simon at Research for Action and Chris Brown at the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform (2002).

Based on the above conceptual framework, we would expect improvements on intermediate indicators of district and school capacity to produce a higher-quality learning experience. In turn, we would expect this stronger learning environment to result in improved student outcomes. Though changes in school and district capacity are important outcomes in their own right, they take on added significance because of their links to student achievement. Critical dimensions of district and school capacity are outlined in Figure 2.

**DATA SOURCES**

Our study uses a rigorous mixed-methods design to understand the impacts of organizing on district and school capacity and student outcomes. We collected 321 stakeholder interviews; 75 observations of organizing strategy sessions, campaign activities, and actions; 509 teacher surveys; and school demographic and outcome data for each of the seven school districts.

We used interviews and observational data with community organizers and adult and youth members to clarify the theories of action and resultant educational change strategies guiding organizing groups’ work, and to assess members’ knowledge about education policy and their sense of efficacy in generating change within their schools and communities. Publicly available school-level administrative data, interviews with district and school leaders, and teacher surveys were used to analyze district-, school-, and student-level outcomes. Impacts of community organizing were thus assessed in three ways:

- **District and school leaders’ attributions.** We examined district and school leaders’ perceptions of the impact of organizing groups on district and

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**FIGURE 2**

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DISTRICT CAPACITY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- District policies and practices</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Equity-oriented resource distribution</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Accountability to communities</td>
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<tr>
<th>SCHOOL CAPACITY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>School Climate</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Facility conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- School environment</td>
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<td>- Student and parent involvement</td>
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<td>- School-community relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Professional Culture</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Instructional leadership</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Teacher collaboration and collegiality</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Teacher morale and retention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instructional Core</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Teacher characteristics and credentials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Classroom dynamics</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Support for post-secondary goals</td>
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school decision making, capacities, and relationships with parent, youth, and community constituencies.

✦ **Teachers’ attributions.** We assessed teachers’ perceptions of a variety of school context indicators, and whether they believed that changes in school climate, professional culture and instructional indicators had been influenced by the groups’ actions.

✦ **Student outcomes.** We reviewed administrative data on student attendance, standardized test performance, graduation and dropout rates, and college aspirations in the schools targeted by groups in our study.

We also analyzed our data to understand how groups achieve their impact – that is, we identified the critical organizing processes and strategic choices that enabled organizing groups to effectively challenge the status quo and help improve schooling conditions and educational outcomes in their communities.

A detailed description of the data sources and methods of collection can be found in Appendix A.

**ANALYTIC STRATEGY**

Community organizing for school reform does not occur in isolation from the messy realities of communities, politics, and schools. Linking organizing strategies to change – either in the community at large or in complex institutions such as schools – poses critical challenges for research. Given the intricacies of schools, communities, and the dynamic contexts in which they are situated, it is neither feasible nor desirable to create an experimental research design from which causal inferences might be drawn between the activities of organizing groups and the schooling outcomes they hope to stimulate.

For example, because organizing groups make decisions based on the priorities of community members and the urgency of problems in their local schools, random assignment of schools as “treatment” and “non-treatment” is not a reasonable or appropriate strategy. Even if such a design were possible, it would be difficult to pinpoint organizing as the “cause” of these changes, given the high turnover among superintendents, principals, teachers, and students that characterizes large urban districts, the presence of other reforms at the school, as well as the ebbs and flows of organizing itself that occur over time (Connell, Kubisch, Schorr & Weiss 1995; Berliner 2002).

To assess the schooling impacts of organizing groups, then, we employed a complex, mixed-methods design that assumes that community change efforts are multi-dimensional interventions that are evolving in response to constant changes in context. By using multiple data sources and carefully examining points of convergence and divergence within the data, we can contextualize and explain conclusions the data suggest about impact. Our ability to draw inferences in support of our research hypotheses is based on the consistency of evidence across these multiple data sources and forms of analysis.

In carrying out this research, we engaged in a collaborative research process with our sites, sharing preliminary findings at each stage of our analysis, so that their intimate knowledge of the school, district, and community contexts informed our interpretation and understanding of the data.
In 1991, Lourdes Zamarron was an active parent at Zavala Elementary School on the east side of Austin, Texas. The mother of three children in the school, she did what was asked of her at school, helping with fundraising and volunteering in the classroom and at school events. Zamarron recalls the day she realized that all was not as it seemed at Zavala. At a PTA meeting, she was stunned to learn that Zavala students were not passing the state-mandated TAAS tests. Indeed, the school was the lowest performing in East Austin.

Parents were furious; some pulled their students from the school. Almost half of the school’s thirty-eight teachers left that year. As the climate at the school worsened, the principal reached out to Austin Interfaith organizers. With Austin Interfaith’s encouragement and assistance, the principal and a handful of teachers and parents, including Zamarron, began to talk — sharing their stories and concerns. They organized a “neighborhood walk,” going in pairs to visit students’ homes to talk with families about how things were going in the school and what needed to change.

Zamarron recalls the walk as a turning point for Zavala. The walk helped the school community to move beyond pointing fingers at each other — to see that Zavala’s problems could not be blamed on uncaring parents or callous teachers.

Working with the emerging core team of parents, teachers, and the school’s principal, Austin Interfaith organizers began analyzing the problems related to Zavala’s poor performance. The first issue the core team tackled was student access to health services, and after a year-long campaign, they succeeded in winning city resources for student immunizations and a new school-based health clinic. The victory solidified a sense of trust and shared purpose within the school, enabling the administration, teachers, and parents to face the much thornier problem of low test scores.

During the next year, the school’s core team helped to introduce a host of reforms: new language arts and mathematics curricula, a new policy to mainstream special education students into general education classrooms, joint instructional planning time for teachers, a new after-school program, and an accelerated science program. Within two years, student and teacher attendance had improved and TAAS scores had risen.

Austin Interfaith’s work at Zavala changed the lives of the people involved in the organizing. Zamarron learned that she did not have to accept things the way they were. It is a lesson she believes her children have learned as well. She remembers having a job and not getting a raise and it was OK with her. She remembers not having job benefits and that, too, was OK with her. Now she sees herself differently. “If you cannot see yourself differently, then you cannot see anyone else differently. … If I did not have higher expectations for myself, how could I have them for my kids?”
Known nationally as an affluent college town with a booming high-tech industry and robust service economy, the city of Austin has received accolades for its exemplary public schools. But not all of the city’s public schools are high-performing. Behind the city’s affluence lies a segregated city with persistent educational disparity.

ABOUT AUSTIN

Though Austin’s public schools have a larger percentage of White, middle-class students than many urban districts, these students live in wealthier enclaves on the west side of the district. The city’s low-income population – predominantly Latino immigrants and African American families – live largely in the former industrial core of the city, east of Interstate 35.

The district’s struggles to improve east side schools parallel the history of its struggles with racial and socio-economic integration. Following the end of mandated busing for desegregation in 1986, the district turned to a strategy of neighborhood schools. By the early 1990s, residential segregation in the city had effectively resegregated the schools, reinforcing the gap in performance between more-affluent and high-poverty schools. A geographic analysis of student performance on the state-mandated Texas Assessment of Academic Skills in 1995 showed that low-performing schools were concentrated in neighborhoods east of Interstate 35 (see Figure 3).

FIGURE 3
Geographic distribution of school performance: Percentages of students meeting minimum expectations on TAAS, 1995
AUSTIN INTERFAITH’S EDUCATION ORGANIZING

For more than a decade Austin Interfaith has organized public school parents like Lourdes Zamarron, along with clergy, congregation members, teachers, and administrators, to improve schools serving low-income communities in Austin. When Austin Interfaith began education organizing in the early 1990s, 48 percent of the district’s 69,827 students qualified for the federal free and reduced-price lunch program; 37 percent of students were Latino, 19 percent Black, and 42 percent White (NCES 1995). Districtwide, only 58 percent of the district’s Black students and 62 percent of Latino students met the minimum state standards (data provided by the Austin Independent School District).

Austin Interfaith is affiliated with the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), a national organizing network founded by Saul Alinsky in 1940 (see Appendix B). Following the IAF model of institution-based organizing, Austin Interfaith builds local networks of faith-based institutions and community members to improve local neighborhood conditions through community organizing strategies. The organization comprises twenty-six congregations of varied Judeo-Christian denominations, roughly a dozen public schools, the teachers union (Education Austin), and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local Union 520.

As part of the statewide Texas IAF, Austin Interfaith organized low-performing schools on the city’s east side into a local network of “Alliance Schools.” During an eight-year period, this network grew to involve roughly one-quarter of the Austin school district’s elementary schools and one-half of the district’s high-poverty schools. In these schools, Austin Interfaith organizers provided leadership training to parents, teachers, and administrators and supported them in implementing reforms to improve student learning. The organization also developed an effective working relationship with the superintendent, leading to a decade of stability and concentrated focus on improving low-performing schools.

This report examines the impact of Austin Interfaith’s education organizing on district priorities, school capacity for improvement, and student educational outcomes in East Austin. The findings emerged from a wide range of data, including interviews with district and school leaders, teachers, parents, and community members, as well as teacher surveys and questionnaires and publicly available school data.

The Alliance Schools Movement

Austin Interfaith’s education organizing evolved from the statewide efforts of the IAF in Texas to expand funding for high-poverty, low-performing schools. In 1992, the Texas IAF won a commitment from the Texas Education Agency (the state department of education) to direct new funds to low-performing schools through the creation of an Investment Capital Fund (see sidebar). Through this fund, low-performing schools could obtain grants for teacher professional development, parent leadership training, and after-school enrichment activities (Warren 2001; Murnane & Levy 1996; Gold, Simon & Brown 2002). Using these funds as an incentive, IAF affiliates assisted low-performing schools in applying for the state funds and in joining what the IAF called the Alliance Schools network.

The Alliance Schools concept drew largely upon the IAF organizing model, in which organizers used a process of individual meetings (called one-on-ones) to identify people with leadership potential who could mobilize others in efforts for change (see

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**Investment Capital Fund**

Created through a partnership between the Texas Industrial Areas Foundation and the Texas Education Agency, the Investment Capital Fund provides grants to schools to support teacher professional development, parent leadership training, and after-school programs. Schools receiving funds must partner with a community organization with a history of working with parents and community members, although membership in the Alliance Schools network is not a requirement. Since the program’s inception, Austin schools have received $1.9 million from Investment Capital Fund grants.
sidebar). These meetings, along with small-group sessions (house meetings), also served to build relationships among people based on a deeper understanding of each other and to identify issues of concern that could rally larger numbers of community members. Under the direction of organizer Ernesto Cortes, the IAF had used this model of organizing to build local IAF organizations across Texas. Through the Alliance Schools network, the IAF aimed to bring its model of organizing into schools.

Within the field of community organizing, the emergence of the Alliance Schools strategy was a watershed moment. At the time, organizing groups across the country were developing campaigns focused on school improvement (Zachary & Olatoye 2001; Mediratta, Fruchter & Lewis 2002). Many of these campaigns focused on schools as the target of change and, thus, applied external accountability pressure on educators within those schools to accede to community or parent-led demands for improvement. In the Alliance Schools strategy, organizers viewed educators as an essential constituency that needed to be brought into a trusting and collaborative relationship with parents and community members. (Since Texas is a right-to-work state, educator unions in Texas are relatively weak compared to their counterparts in other parts of the country. This context made the IAF an attractive partner to educators.)

IAF organizers introduced community organizing to parents, teachers, and administrators as a strategy for “reinventing” the culture of failing schools. Through training in the principles and practices of community organizing, the IAF aimed to transform the way in which parents, teachers, and principals understood their respective roles in school improvement and, consequently, the way they worked together – as a school community – to achieve shared goals. As Zavala parent leader Lourdes Zamarron put it, Reinventing the culture of schools was a radical idea. Before becoming involved in Austin Interfaith, the idea of neighbors changing schools did not make sense. The word power was not in my vocabulary.

Reinventing the culture of schools was a radical idea.

. . . The word power was not in my vocabulary.

— Lourdes Zamarron, parent leader, Zavala Elementary School

### The Alliance Schools Concept

Alliance Schools were created in 1992 through a partnership between the Industrial Areas Foundation and the Texas Education Agency. Alliance Schools “are not a one-size-fits-all academic program, but a strategy for getting parents and teachers deeply involved in the school and the community” (May 2003). The work evolved out of the experiences of an IAF-affiliate in Fort Worth with Morningside Middle School and has been described in books about the Texas IAF by Dennis Shirley (1997) and Mark Warren (2001).

Alliance Schools are supported by IAF organizers, who recruit parents and teachers, as well as local community members – often clergy or lay leaders from nearby congregations – to form a “core team” at the school. Core teams lead the organizing activities in Alliance Schools. Team members meet regularly to plan community-building activities such as “neighborhood walks” and “house meetings” to build and strengthen relationships between school faculty, families, and community members.

Core team members receive extensive support from IAF organizers through one-on-one coaching and formal leadership training. As members learn the organizing process, they conduct individual meetings with other parents, teachers, and community members to build their own networks of relationships within the school community and to recruit new potential leaders into the school improvement network. Core teams have led successful campaigns on a wide variety of issues, such as creating new academic enrichment programs, after-school programs, and new playground space for children; negotiating traffic and safety improvements to protect children walking to school; increasing student access to health services; and improving conditions in nearby housing developments.
Parent Involvement in Alliance Schools

Many Alliance Schools use weekly parent coffees as a chance for parents to discuss concerns with each other and the principal. With support from Austin Interfaith, parent support specialists conduct six-week parent academies focused on the question, “How do I know that my child is learning?” Parent academies introduce parents to the district’s principles of learning, key issues in public education such as standardized testing and bilingual education, and organizing skills. Parent leaders are then helped to take leadership roles in after-school programs and other academic support programs in their schools.

Alliance Schools in Austin
In Austin, the first school to enter into an Alliance Schools partnership was Zavala Elementary School. Austin Interfaith recruited the school principal, teachers, parents, and congregation members living in the surrounding community into a core team to work together on improving the school. Though the work was planned by the participants involved, it followed the broad contours of an approach developed by another IAF affiliate in Fort Worth:

+ leadership training to engage parents and community members in community organizing and school reform–focused activities;
+ individual meetings to cultivate leadership among parents, teachers, and the principal and to foster the development of new and deep relationships with each other;
+ training for the principal, teachers, and parents on how to recruit and support emergent leadership among their peers in the school community for the purpose of school improvement; and
+ ongoing support for a core team of parents, teachers, and the principal in identifying and organizing to address key challenges facing the school.

Core teams were helped to identify their own strategies for improvement. But these efforts, or “campaigns,” were not constructed in isolation from the school reform community. IAF leaders met with a wide variety of school reform experts, such as Richard Elmore and Lauren Resnick, whose ideas on instructional leadership and teacher professional development influenced the Alliance Schools approach.

Austin Interfaith leader Regina Rogoff described how this approach works in practice:

Through the house meetings, stories, and one-on-ones, we try to understand what needs to be changed. What are the problems that people face in their lives? How do we break those problems into issues that can be tackled? We don’t work on hunger per se, but we may hear an example, like our kids are unsupervised after school. You start studying that problem and the issue around after-school care. You develop an action team, you start teaching people how to politically address an issue, and you develop a strategy.

Scaling Up Alliance Practices
In 1992, when Austin Interfaith began working with Zavala Elementary School, the school ranked in the bottom half of district elementary schools in student attendance and was far below the district average in the percent of students who passed the TAAS tests. By the 1994-1995 school year, Zavala ranked first in the district in student attendance and surpassed the citywide average in reading and mathematics on TAAS.³

Zavala’s rising student attendance and test scores attracted local and national attention (Sommerfeld 1995; Hatch 1998). Newspapers and newsmagazines profiled Austin Interfaith’s education successes with stories of rising parent involvement (see sidebar), student attendance, and teacher morale as well as traffic and safety improvements in communities to protect children walking to school, increased access to health services, and improvements to local housing developments. These stories lauded Austin Interfaith and the IAF for their work to build a new sense of community in schools.

³ Austin Interfaith’s work to improve Zavala is well documented in a book by economists Richard Murnane and Frank Levy (1996) who describe the process that the IAF used to engage parents and build trust among teachers so that the school community could work as a cohesive unit to improve student learning. (See also Shirley 1997; Warren 2001; and Gold, Simon & Brown 2002.)
In one article, then–Austin Independent School District (AISD) school board member Geoff Ripps (1996) observed that the transformation in Alliance Schools was accomplished not by drilling children to pass the test. [It was] achieved by instituting a sea change in the schools’ very culture. Through door-to-door organizing, house meetings, block meetings, parish and school meetings, IAF leaders made many of these schools the centers of their communities and, in doing so, put the communities at the center of change in their schools.

As word of Zavala’s dramatic improvements spread through the district, other schools entered into partnerships with Austin Interfaith. (The total number of participating schools varied year to year, as schools entered and dropped out of the network.) The number of AISD elementary schools participating in the Alliance Schools network swelled to sixteen, roughly a quarter of the district’s elementary schools and approximately half the district’s high-poverty schools. These schools served higher percentages of Black and Latino students than the district as a whole. Figure 4 shows that elementary schools affiliated with Austin Interfaith have substantially higher percentages of economically disadvantaged students compared to the district. Figure 5 on page 14 shows that these Austin Interfaith schools also have substantially higher percentages of students designated limited English proficient compared to the district.

*Through the house meetings, stories, and one-on-ones, we try to understand what needs to be changed.*

*... You develop an action team, you start teaching people how to politically address an issue, and you develop a strategy.*

— Regina Rogoff, Austin Interfaith leader

![Figure 4: Percentage of economically disadvantaged students, Austin Interfaith schools vs. all district schools, 1989–2002](source: Texas Education Agency, Academic Excellence Indicator System, [www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis/index.html](http://www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aеi#)
To support new schools entering into the network, the Texas IAF created the Texas Interfaith Education Fund (TIEF) to provide training specifically geared to education reform. In these sessions educators, parents, and community members debated school reform strategies while learning the community organizing skills of public speaking and negotiation and how to conduct one-on-one meetings with other parents and teachers to “find out what makes them tick,” according to Amanda Braziel, a fifth-grade teacher at Maplewood Elementary School. She continued:

One of the big things we did was organize a potluck, and in the potluck we presented the questions: What do you see as barriers to your child’s education? What do you think Maplewood is doing right and how could we change? A lot of issues arose from those questions, and so when we would meet as a core team, we would talk about how we could work on those issues. And then we organized the neighborhood walk so that we could get more one-on-one time with some of the parents who had attended the potluck. So, we would, in our core teams, identify what we needed to work on, and we would delegate responsibilities and plan together.

Braziel recalled her first experiences with Austin Interfaith:

During my first year, all of the Alliance Schools in AISD had a teacher in-service day, and we got together in vertical teams, pre-K through high school, and we met at a high school and we just really talked and got to know each other and brainstormed issues that we needed to deal with and that kind of thing.

As a member of her school’s core team, Braziel became involved in fighting district cuts to art and music teachers at the school. She helped stage a protest outside of the school that drew media cover-
age and worked with Austin Interfaith organizers and leaders to raise the issue with the school board. Braziel explained:

We just started doing all these things, and it really fit in with my core beliefs about what school and teachers and parents in the community should be about and how we should all work together. [The Alliance Schools model] was just such a neat concept and I loved it.

District Organizing

At the district level, Austin Interfaith exerted advocacy pressure for additional resources to support the Alliance Schools, while engaging the superintendent, school board, and municipal leaders in learning about the IAF approach to organizing. The organization staged regular “accountability sessions” in which public officials were asked to respond to reform proposals in front of Austin Interfaith members, ranging in number from several hundred to several thousand. At the same time, the organization held individual meetings with school board members and district staff to cultivate them as allies and recruit them to attend the TIEF training sessions and regional conferences. Participation in these sessions helped to build greater understanding among public officials of the organization’s goals and methods and built support for the organization’s reform proposals. As John Fitzpatrick, former school board member, said:

Austin Interfaith has been very effective at lobbying for additional resources for public schools, particularly low-income schools and schools in East Austin. You can point to things like line-item funding, additional funding for low-income schools, additional dollars for parent outreach and parent support, additional focus on things like bilingual education and equivalence for immigrants.

Through its district-level organizing, Austin Interfaith worked with district and municipal leaders to create:

✦ a new teacher pipeline program to address shortages in bilingual and special education teachers;
✦ a new parent support specialist position for high-poverty schools;
✦ after-school and summer school programs and adult ESL programs.

Austin Interfaith also helped to protect and increase resources earmarked for low-performing, high-poverty schools and assisted schools in applying for Investment Capital Fund grants, helping to bring an additional $1.9 million in funds to district schools between 1998 and 2008.

Adding to these district-level impacts, Austin Interfaith’s school-level work influenced parent and community engagement practices in other low-performing schools in the district. The diffusion of these practices was facilitated in part by administrator mobility: assistant principals appointed to principal positions took their experience from Alliance Schools into new schools. The spread of Alliance Schools practices was also fostered by a series of decisions by Superintendent Pascal Forgione, who was appointed in 1999 and with whom the organization had forged a strong working relationship.

Formerly U.S. commissioner of education statistics, Forgione was a strong proponent of educational standards and the use of assessment data to align standards and instruction in schools. He was impressed

One of the big things we did was organize a potluck and in the potluck we presented the questions:

What do you see as barriers to your child’s education?
What do you think Maplewood is doing right and how could we change?

— Amanda Braziel, teacher, Maplewood Elementary

✦ a new parent support specialist position for high-poverty schools;
✦ after-school and summer school programs and adult ESL programs.
Austin Interfaith has got to be my critical friend.
They’re not my best friend. They’ve got to be critical.
They’ve got to be the conscience of my community.

— Superintendent Pascal Forgione

by the IAF’s approach to organizing, which emphasized adult learning and leadership development. In Austin Interfaith, Forgione saw a partner that could educate parents about their school’s performance and generate demand and support for improvement. Forgione said:

Austin Interfaith has got to be my critical friend. They’re not my best friend. They’ve got to be critical. They’ve got to be the conscience of my community. Sometimes I don’t want to hear it; most times I don’t mind because we have such shared values. But whether I like it or not, that’s their job.

Forgione mandated professional development for administrators and teachers in Alliance Schools community engagement practices as part of his “blueprint” (Austin Blueprint for Learning) for improving low-performing schools. The district also hired a former Alliance Schools principal and Austin Interfaith organizer, Claudia Santamaria, to train parent support specialists. “The neighborhood walk has become a generalized good practice in my district, and Austin Interfaith was the one that brought that to us,” Forgione observed. “When I interview principals, I ask them about parent involvement, and I’m listening for Interfaith best practices.”

Forgione further commented:
I went into a school recently and I showed them the data: reading down, math down, writing down. And guess what they told me: “We love our school. We don’t want you to send our teachers away.” Well, everyone wants to love their teacher, but if the teacher is not getting the kids to learn to read, that’s not a good teacher. I don’t care if she hugs you all day. That’s where you’ve got to build capacity, and that’s where Austin Interfaith is good. They bring extra resources, and they bring parent involvement. I think it’s a healthy thing.

Entering the Era of High-Stakes Testing

By the end of the 1990s, the Alliance Schools movement was in full swing, and Austin Interfaith had gained districtwide recognition, along with the support of many school and district administrators. But the work faced a new challenge in the rise of high-stakes testing.

Galvanized by the standards-based reforms of the early 1990s, the use of standardized tests for accountability had become a national passion, and nowhere more so than in Texas, which sent a new president to the White House in 2000 on a tide of good-news stories of the state’s miraculous educational improvement. In 1993, the Texas state legislature developed a high-stakes accountability system requiring districts to administer and report scores on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) and mandating that students pass the TAAS in order to graduate (“Timeline of Testing in Texas,” n.d.).

AISD’s scores improved steadily across the decade, as did scores for the state as a whole (some controversy surrounded this claim – see sidebar). In 1999, following allegations that local districts were deliberately excluding the test score results of low-performing students, the Texas legislature mandated inclusion of special education and third- and fourth-grade scores on the Spanish TAAS. The legislature also directed the Texas Education Agency to create a new assessment program, the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS).
Passage of the federal No Child Left Behind Act in 2001 instituted more stringent test-score reporting requirements for student performance. Two years later, TAKS rolled out across the state, accompanied by new and higher benchmarks for student performance, replacing TAAS. In Austin, the school district expanded its testing regimen to include beginning and mid-year diagnostic assessments, in addition to the annual exam. The expanded testing aimed to provide teachers with timely and accurate information on student performance and to counter the effects of high student mobility in district schools. As Forgione put it:

There are so many kids changing schools that you can’t just use the data from last year because you’ve got about 30 percent of your kids who weren’t in your school last year.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Testing Controversy</th>
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The rise of test scores across the state – known as the Texas Miracle – brought national accolades for the state’s public schools. But the practice of exempting limited English proficient and special education students from the test raised suspicions locally and nationally about how schools and districts were achieving these gains. In the late 1990s, a number of districts faced allegations of test score manipulation. In a high-profile case, senior AISD district officials (prior to the Forgione administration) pleaded no contest to charges of criminal tampering with test scores between 1996 and 1998. Two schools involved in the investigations – Travis Heights and Brown Elementary – subsequently became involved in Austin Interfaith; data from the years under investigation were not included in our analyses.

Sources: Kantrowitz & McGinn 2000, Associated Press 1999

The parent conference time that we used to spend getting to know parents and talking about what we knew about their kids, from their progress in previous grades, turned out to be talking about taking a test and then talking about the results of that test.

—Claudia Santamaria, former principal and Austin Interfaith organizer

The resulting pressures were particularly acute for Alliance Schools, which served some of the highest numbers of struggling students in the district. As educators focused on assessment, they had less time for relational practices. The emphasis on testing changed schools practically overnight, organizer Rebecca McIlwain recalled. “The time, space, and encouragement for teachers and principals to do neighborhood walks and other organizing work ended abruptly.”

Claudia Santamaria, former principal and Austin Interfaith organizer, said:

The parent conference time that we used to spend getting to know parents and talking about what we knew about their kids, from their progress in previous grades, turned out to be talking about taking a test and then talking about the results of that test.

By 2004 the overall number of Austin public schools participating in the Alliance Schools network had decreased from sixteen to eleven elementary schools, and the implementation of Alliance Schools practices within these elementary schools had diminished considerably. In practical terms, this meant a decline in participation on core teams, as well as in community walks and IAF training sessions and organizing activities. (Ironically, this decline coincided with AISD’s adoption of Alliance Schools community engagement practices in the Blueprint school improvement plan.)
A New Campaign
In early 2004, with eleven elementary schools in Austin involved in the Alliance Schools organizing, Austin Interfaith and the statewide IAF network initiated a new campaign to challenge the statewide use of test scores as the primary accountability measure of student learning. Through a series of meetings with teachers, administrators, and parents in the Alliance Schools, as well as consultations with education researchers, Austin Interfaith developed a proposal to create a subdistrict in which schools would be freed from administering periodic diagnostic tests in exchange for demonstrating their capacity to meet district performance goals. The organization also

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeline of Austin Interfaith's Education Organizing</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
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<td>SY2004-2005</td>
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<td>SY2005-2006</td>
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began working with local and national educators and researchers to define a new performance-based assessment system.

Despite strenuous advocacy from Austin Interfaith during the 2004-2005 school year, the school district declined to release Alliance Schools from the assessment tests, citing concerns about the difficulty of constructing an alternative assessment to the statewide test, as well as the external political pressures on the district. One district administrator recalled telling Interfaith organizers:

We cannot ignore the state system. We cannot act to opt out of it, but you can go to the legislature and see if you can get somewhere with alternative assessments. Now, if you get somewhere with the legislature, then we can talk.

Two years later, in 2006, Austin Interfaith and the Texas IAF succeeded in building political support for a state-level commission to study the expiry of the TAKS. At the local level, Austin Interfaith began to expand its education organizing to include congregation-based outreach strategies. Lead organizer Doug Greco explained:

Now that it's harder to work in schools, we're reaching out within congregations, where we have more space to do the house meetings and parent academies that build the Alliance work.

For a complete timeline of Austin Interfaith's education organizing, see the sidebar.

**ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF AUSTIN INTERFAITH’S EDUCATION ORGANIZING**

What is the impact of Austin Interfaith's work? Parents and community members, as well as district leaders, argue that the organization played a critically important role in bringing long-invisible constituencies into the public arena and developing their skills, confidence, and power to fight for their children's needs.

Schools serving low-income communities typically have fewer resources, less-experienced staff, less parent and community involvement, and less-welcoming school environments. Yet teachers and administrators in Alliance Schools consistently described their schools as affirming and participatory places, which they contrasted with other schools in the district that they had experienced. These educators reported greater parent and community involvement and a new sense of trust and shared purpose within their schools. Veteran Alliance Schools principal Joaquin Gloria explained:

Because we've talked so much to each other, we don't need to write so many memos for this or that. The parents know that it's safe to talk, to ask questions, and to probe and push the teachers' thinking. And vice versa – parents know that it's OK for the teachers to push their thinking because that's the environment that we've set up.

Austin Interfaith has drawn considerable local and national media attention, and its work at Zavala Elementary School has been profiled in several books and reports on the Texas IAF's work by Dennis Shirley, Richard Murnane and Frank Levy, and Mark Warren. A 2002 case study by Elaine Simon and Eva Gold at Research for Action, in collaboration with Chris Brown at the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform, provides an in-depth analysis of the organization's education organizing in four key areas: leadership development, high-quality curriculum and instruction, public accountability, and school-community connection (Simon, Gold & Brown 2002).
Building on prior research, we examined how Austin Interfaith’s organizing influenced the capacity and outcomes of East Austin schools. We focused on three core questions:

✦ To what extent has Austin Interfaith’s education organizing influenced district policy and resources in support of low-performing schools?

✦ In what ways has Austin Interfaith’s involvement in schools influenced the capacity of schools to educate students successfully? How do schools that are more actively engaged with Austin Interfaith compare on core dimensions of school capacity relative to schools that are less involved with Austin Interfaith? How do teachers and administrators perceive this impact?

✦ Have Austin Interfaith’s efforts produced measurable gains in student standardized test scores?

Data Collected

To address these research questions, our analyses drew on a variety of qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative data included interviews and archival documents produced by Austin Interfaith and the local media. Quantitative data were derived from an Annenberg Institute–administered survey of teacher perceptions of school capacity and questionnaire on how much teachers attribute school capacity to Austin Interfaith, as well as publicly available administrative data. Figure 6 summarizes the data sources. See Appendix E for sources and reliabilities of survey and questionnaire items.

FIGURE 6
Summary of data sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Sources</th>
<th>Period of Data Collection</th>
<th>Scope of Data</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>2003–2006</td>
<td>46 interviews</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 14 interviews with school- and district-level leaders and local education experts</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 32 interviews with Austin Interfaith staff and members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Perceptions Survey</td>
<td>Spring 2006</td>
<td>144 teachers at 6 elementary schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 95 teachers in 4 schools with high involvement in the Alliance Schools model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 49 teachers in 2 demographically similar comparison schools with low involvement in the Alliance Schools model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Attribution Questionnaire</td>
<td>Spring 2006</td>
<td>65 teachers who reported familiarity with Austin Interfaith’s work in their schools, past or present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 49 in high-involvement schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 16 in low-involvement schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Data</td>
<td>1998–2006</td>
<td>• Demographic data for all schools in the district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Student outcome data for all schools in the district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document Review</td>
<td>2002–2006</td>
<td>• Documents produced by Austin Interfaith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Media coverage</td>
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</tbody>
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Note: In addition to these data sources, we also examined survey data collected by the school district in its annual School Climate Survey. A description of these data is provided in Appendix E.
Analytic Approach

To assess the full range of Austin Interfaith’s influence on district policies, school capacity, and student outcomes, the study team used both qualitative and quantitative data sources with an eye toward identifying points of convergence and divergence within the data. When possible, longitudinal analyses were conducted to understand trends over time, particularly for student achievement. Survey data, which were collected at one point in time, rather than across time, required a cross-sectional analysis. Although Austin Interfaith has worked closely with two middle schools and one high school across the past decade, analyses for this study focused on the sixteen elementary schools with which AI had a sustained relationship over a substantial number of years.

Analysis of influence on district capacity

To address the first research question, about the district-level impact of Austin Interfaith’s organizing, we relied primarily on educator interviews and archival data. In addition, several measures from the teacher survey and items from the attribution questionnaire were used to understand the ways in which Austin Interfaith’s organizing influenced district supports for schools.

Analysis of influence on school capacity

Data from the Annenberg teacher survey and attribution questionnaire, the district’s school climate survey, and interviews were used to analyze school capacity. The rising popularity of the Alliance Schools community engagement practices in the district created a challenge for defining a comparison group for the analyses. Across the past decade, Austin Interfaith has had a presence in many of the district’s high-poverty schools, either directly or as a result of the district’s adoption of Alliance Schools parent and community engagement practices. Because we had no way to measure the extent to which other district schools were using Alliance Schools practices, we chose not to use an external comparison group in the analyses. Instead, we assessed how schools with greater implementation of Alliance Schools practices fared relative to those with less implementation.

Thus, the teacher survey analyses compared schools that were highly involved with the Alliance Schools model and those that were less involved with the model. By categorizing the schools in this way, the study team was able to consider the effects of intensity of implementation on school capacity outcomes.

To analyze results from the Annenberg Institute–administered teacher survey, t-tests were conducted to compare differences between perceptions of school capacity at high-involvement schools and the comparison (low-involvement) schools. In addition, effect size calculations were computed to assess the magnitude of the difference between the means. Analyses of t-tests tell us whether or not there is a statistically significant difference between two means. Effect size computations give us information about the size of the difference (small, medium, large) between the two means.5

To supplement these quantitative analyses, we also examined interview data from educators to understand how school-level educators experienced the impact of Austin Interfaith’s involvement on their school’s capacity to educate students. For complete results of the teacher perceptions survey and the teacher attributions questionnaire, see Appendix D. For sources and reliabilities of the items used, see Appendix E.

Analysis of student outcomes

Trends in student educational outcomes were assessed through a year-to-year comparative analysis of changes in student performance on TAAS and TAKS. Hierarchical regression analyses were also conducted to assess the relationship between Alliance

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4 A review of archival documents, including news media reports, suggests that Alliance Schools practices were spreading to other schools as early as 1999.

5 On a t-test, a p-value of less than .05 indicates statistical significance—in other words, a p-value of less than .05 means that there is a less than 5 percent chance that the difference between the two means is due to chance.
Schools implementation and student outcomes during the eight-year period (1994–2002) when Austin Interfaith’s Alliance Schools organizing was strongest. These analyses drew upon the universe of elementary schools involved in Austin Interfaith’s education work (n=16). For complete results of the regression analyses, see Appendix F.

To guide our outcomes analysis, we created an index of involvement to account for variation across the sixteen schools (schools varied in when they joined the network and when their involvement tapered off). This index of involvement was based on an implementation rubric of core elements of the Alliance Schools model. Using the rubric, a value was assigned on a five-point scale to each participating school for each year, based on the qualitative data we collected regarding Austin Interfaith’s school-level activities. An average intensity value was then computed for each school (see Figure 7) by calculating the sum of the involvement for each school divided by the number of years of the intervention.

Our regression model tested the effects of intensity of involvement on student test-score performance. Demographic variables (free/reduced-price lunch, limited English proficiency) and baseline scores were entered into the model in step 1 as covariates. Each school’s intensity value was entered into the model in step 2 as the independent variable. Test scores were entered as the dependent variable.

Caveats

Our analysis explores how school capacity and student educational outcomes were changing in schools targeted by Austin Interfaith’s education organizing. As this was not an experimental study, the findings must be interpreted as illuminating a phenomenon, rather than as providing a causal explanation of effects that might be generalized to other schools and communities. Though efforts were made to construct as close a comparison as possible in our analyses of school capacity and student outcomes, we do not know what other reforms were occurring in the schools that may have influenced the reported findings. Changes in school leadership and district priorities and the presence of other school reform programs are potentially confounding factors. In light of these limitations, the inferences presented here are argued on the consistency of evidence across multiple data sources, as well as on their congruence with the theory underlying Austin Interfaith’s reform strategy.

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5 We found a statistically significant difference between teacher survey responses in schools that were highly involved with Austin Interfaith compared to schools with low involvement with the group on the five-item scale Creating Local Accountability. See Appendix D for a table of survey findings and a description of school capacity measures used in the surveys.
FINDINGS

Influence on District Capacity
Educators believe the Alliance Schools organizing increased awareness among district leaders of the needs of low-income African American and Latino communities by, as a district official noted, giving “vision and strategy to voices that weren’t heard as much.” Austin Interfaith gained influence with public officials from its roots in the communities it advocated for and its capacity to bring these constituencies into the political process. Several district leaders noted the congruence between their personal beliefs and Austin Interfaith’s emphasis on democratic engagement and equity. John Fitzpatrick, a former member of the school district’s board of trustees, explained:

When you’re going to accountability sessions, it’s not because there’s fear Austin Interfaith is going to turn out 10,000 people to vote against you; it’s because this is a big group that you can work with. We care about their values, we care about who they’re serving, and they’ve got a track record of accomplishments. They’ve been more successful than any other group I know, or than we as a district [have been], in getting parents from often-disenfranchised communities involved in their kids’ education.

Participation in IAF training sessions and regional conferences enhanced district officials’ understanding of the district’s diverse communities, helping them to become more effective. Fitzpatrick said:

They’ve been a guide into a community that I do not belong to and that I do not come from. It’s been extremely helpful to have them show me what’s going on for over half our kids and families and to expose me to a very different world than the one I grew up in.

In the study of 144 teachers in six schools with varying degrees of involvement with Austin Interfaith, teachers in schools that were deeply involved rated their school highly on the scale Creating Local Accountability. This scale asked teachers to rate whether or not they agreed with statements such as “This district encourages schools to be accountable to their local community.”

Angela Baker, a congregation leader within Austin Interfaith, offered a supporting view of the accountability relationship that Alliance Schools developed with families and community members.

I picked up the school newspaper and saw an article about how the teachers and the principal could call parents to accountability if they weren’t doing what they felt was their job with their children. . . . But the parents also could call the principal and the teachers to accountability. And I thought, “Oh, that is a refreshing change.”

— Angela Baker, congregation leader, Austin Interfaith
Influence on School Capacity

Teacher surveys show a consistent pattern of statistically significant differences in the mean scores for teachers in schools that were highly involved with Austin Interfaith and those with low involvement. These data suggest that schools with higher levels of involvement with the organization built greater capacity than schools with lower levels of involvement. In addition, when asked to assess the degree to which Austin Interfaith had influenced their schools, teachers reported a high degree of influence on the climate and culture domains.

School climate

Survey and interview data suggest that Austin Interfaith’s impact is particularly strong in the school climate domain, which we specify as facilities conditions, overall school environment, student and parent involvement, and school–community relationships.

Teachers in schools that were highly involved with Austin Interfaith rated their school’s climate more highly than teachers in low-involvement schools, with statistically significant differences on six measures related to trust, parent involvement, and a focus on student learning (see Figure 8).

FIGURE 8
Teacher perceptions of school climate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Capacity Measures</th>
<th>High-Involvement Schools Mean (n=95)</th>
<th>Low-Involvement Schools Mean (n=49)</th>
<th>p-value</th>
<th>Effect Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School environment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher–parent trust</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>.000***</td>
<td>large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of school community and safety</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>.000***</td>
<td>large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement-oriented culture</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>.000***</td>
<td>large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of students’ culture</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>.193</td>
<td>small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent roles in the school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher outreach to parents</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>.000***</td>
<td>large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent influence in school decision making</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>.001**</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent involvement in the school</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>.001**</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent involvement in student learning</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>.076</td>
<td>small</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Sources and reliability data for subscales are provided in Appendix E. Complete results for the teacher perceptions survey are summarized in Figure 14, Appendix D.

An explanation of t-tests and effect sizes can be found on page 21. Values in bold represent p-values that are statistically significant, as follows:

- *** p < .001
- ** p < .01
- * p < .05
Teachers in high-involvement schools credited Austin Interfaith’s work with “some” to “very much” influence on six of ten school climate items related to parent involvement, trust and collaboration, and school–community relations (see Figure 9). Even in low-involvement schools – where Austin Interfaith no longer maintains an active presence – teachers perceived the group as having influenced parent and community relationships. Statistically significant differences were evident on three school climate items.

Parents in high-involvement schools reported greater access to important information, more opportunities for communication, and more respect from school staff. Our analysis of the Austin school district’s School Climate Surveys (2004 and 2005) found statistically significant differences between high- and low-involvement schools on these items.

**FIGURE 9**

Teacher attributions of Austin Interfaith’s influence on school climate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Capacity Area</th>
<th>High-Involvement Schools Mean (n=46)</th>
<th>Low-Involvement Schools Mean (n=16)</th>
<th>p-value</th>
<th>Effect Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent involvement in the school</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>.006**</td>
<td>large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of community and trust in the school</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>.012*</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School’s relations with the community</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>.015*</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How teachers get along with parents</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>.050</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School’s relations with parents</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>.074</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical condition of the school building</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>.125</td>
<td>small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety and discipline in the school</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>.177</td>
<td>small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How students get along with other students</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>.197</td>
<td>small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared decision making between students, parents, teachers, and administrators</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>.244</td>
<td>small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in school overcrowding</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>.954</td>
<td>negligible</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Teachers were asked if they were aware of Austin Interfaith’s organizing in their schools. If they answered yes, they were asked to rate Austin Interfaith’s influence in a variety of areas on a 3-point scale: 3 = very much influence, 2 = some influence, 1 = no influence. Means between 2.1 and 3.0 indicate a high degree of influence. Because Austin Interfaith had previously been involved in low-involvement schools, teachers in those schools had some familiarity with their work. Complete results of the teacher attribution questionnaire are summarized in Appendix D, Figure 15. For more information about the items, see Appendix E.

An explanation of t-tests and effect sizes can be found on page 21. Values in bold represent p-values that are statistically significant, as follows:

- *** p < .001
- ** p < .01
- * p < .05
Professional culture

Professional culture refers to the way in which teachers and administrators work with, learn from, and help each other develop more effective schooling practices. Teachers in high-involvement schools rated their school’s professional culture more highly than teachers in low-involvement schools on six measures most directly related to teacher collegiality, morale, and joint problem solving; these differences were statistically significant (see Figure 10).

Interviews with administrators suggest that the strong professional culture is directly related to the “relational” strategies that Austin Interfaith teaches school staff. Principal Gloria observed:

All of the teachers in our school practice Alliance Schools principles because we incorporate them into our day-to-day routine, into the staff development and faculty development that we do. We do individual meetings; we do house meetings; and that’s how it works.

Teachers in high-involvement schools credited Austin Interfaith with a high degree of influence on the quality of principal leadership, more so than on culture items related to teacher relationships, school

FIGURE 10
Teacher perceptions of professional culture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Capacity Measures</th>
<th>High-Involvement Schools Mean (n=95)</th>
<th>Low-Involvement Schools Mean (n=49)</th>
<th>p-value</th>
<th>Effect Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher collegiality and engagement</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer collaboration</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>.000***</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective responsibility</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>.000***</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher–teacher trust</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>.000***</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher influence in school decision making</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>.021*</td>
<td>small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher morale and retention</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School commitment</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>.000***</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Professional development</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality professional development</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>.411</td>
<td>negligible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instructional leadership</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint problem solving</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>.002**</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher–principal trust</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>.122</td>
<td>small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal instructional leadership</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>.837</td>
<td>negligible</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Sources and reliability data for subscales are provided in Appendix E. Complete results for the teacher survey are summarized in Figure 14, Appendix D.*

An explanation of t-tests and effect sizes can be found on page 21. Values in bold represent p-values that are statistically significant, as follows:

*** p < .001
** p < .01
* p < .05
commitment, and professional development opportunities (see Figure 11). In Austin Interfaith’s organizing model, principals receive extensive training and support in implementing Alliance Schools practices. While the organization’s involvement in schools may have generated new opportunities for professional development and new norms of collegial interaction, it is possible that teachers perceive these changes as the result of principal or district leadership, rather than the group’s efforts.

Principal support for Alliance Schools practices is a precondition to Austin Interfaith’s entry into schools. Therefore, high-involvement schools may be characterized by more-enthusiastic and more-supportive principals. Indeed, teacher respondents on the district’s 2005 school climate survey gave a higher rating to principal leadership in high-involvement schools than in low-involvement schools.

**FIGURE 11**
Teacher attributions of Austin Interfaith’s influence on professional culture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Capacity Area</th>
<th>High-Involvement Schools Mean (n=46)</th>
<th>Low-Involvement Schools Mean (n=16)</th>
<th>p-value</th>
<th>Effect Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional culture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment to the school</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>.016*</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of principal leadership</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>.026*</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How teachers get along with other teachers</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>.053</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development opportunities</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>.910</td>
<td>negligible</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Teachers were asked if they were aware of Austin Interfaith’s organizing in their schools. If they answered yes, they were asked to rate Austin Interfaith’s influence in a variety of areas on a 3-point scale: 3 = very much influence, 2 = some influence, 1 = no influence. Means between 2.1 and 3.0 indicate a high degree of influence. Because Austin Interfaith had previously been involved in low-involvement schools, teachers in those schools had some familiarity with their work. Complete results of the teacher attribution questionnaire are summarized in Appendix D, Figure 15. For more information about the items used, see Appendix E.

An explanation of t-tests and effect sizes can be found on page 21. Values in **bold** represent p-values that are statistically significant, as follows:

- *** p < .001
- ** p < .01
- * p < .05
Instructional core

In our school capacity framework, the instructional core domain encompasses teacher characteristics and classroom dynamics. Though the instructional core domain is less directly targeted by Austin Interfaith’s organizing, we found statistically significant differences between high- and low-involvement schools on teacher influence in classroom decision making (see Figure 12). This finding is consistent with Austin Interfaith’s emphasis on fostering participative norms in schools. Indeed, as Amanda Brazel observed, Austin Interfaith’s work challenged school faculty to see themselves as learners, leaders, and as “part of a democracy and that we can do something about the problems we see.”

On the attribution survey, however, we found no statistically significant differences between high- and low-involvement schools in how teachers rate the effect of Austin Interfaith on instructional core items (see Figure 13).

Influence on student outcomes

Because the goal of Austin Interfaith’s organizing is to transform the long-term achievement outcomes for students and families who rely on AISD schools, the question of impact on student learning is ultimately the most crucial. Austin Interfaith argues that test scores alone should not be the primary measure of student learning and that cultural norms such as engagement and collaboration are essential components of a successful learning environment. Our research suggests that, within Alliance Schools, voice, engagement, and learning appear to be mutually reinforcing. Analyses of school administrative data show a significant positive relationship between the level of a school’s involvement in Alliance Schools activities and student performance on standardized tests.

FIGURE 12
Teacher perceptions of instructional core

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Capacity Measures</th>
<th>High-Involvement Schools Mean (n=95)</th>
<th>Low-Involvement Schools Mean (n=49)</th>
<th>p-value</th>
<th>Effect Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Classroom characteristics and effectiveness</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher influence in classroom decision making</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>0.111*</td>
<td>small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coherent curriculum and instruction</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>0.061</td>
<td>small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom resources</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>0.069</td>
<td>small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional focus</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>0.575</td>
<td>negligible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational practices and beliefs</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>0.747</td>
<td>negligible</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Sources and reliability data for subscales are provided in Appendix E. Complete results for the teacher survey are summarized in Figure 14, Appendix D.

An explanation of t-tests and effect sizes can be found on page 21. Values in bold represent p-values that are statistically significant, as follows:

*** p < .001
** p < .01
* p < .05
Our regression model assessed the relationship between each Alliance School’s “intensity” of involvement in organizing and the change in the percent of students meeting minimum expectations on TAAS between 1994 and 2002 and controlled for the percent of students receiving free or reduced-price lunch, the percent designated limited English proficient, and student test scores in the baseline year (1993). In other words, we looked at how variation in the level (or “intensity”) of a school’s involvement with Austin Interfaith influenced gains on student test scores, above and beyond the effects of known predictors — poverty, language proficiency, and previous performance on tests.

The study team drew two important conclusions from the regression analyses.

✦ Intensity of involvement in Alliance Schools activities predicted increases in TAAS scores, ranging from 4 percentage points in schools with minimal involvement to between 15 and 19 percentage points in schools with high involvement.

✦ Length of time of involvement in Alliance activities was not a statistically significant predictor of improved student performance. That is, high level of involvement was a stronger predictor of student performance gains than a low level of involvement, even when this low level of involvement was sustained across a number of years.

Details on these analyses, including regression tables, are provided in Appendix E.

FIGURE 13
Teacher attributions of Austin Interfaith’s influence on instructional core

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Capacity Area</th>
<th>High-Involvement Schools Mean (n=46)</th>
<th>Low-Involvement Schools Mean (n=16)</th>
<th>p-value</th>
<th>Effect Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instructional core</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of curriculum and instruction</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>.266</td>
<td>small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher expectations for student achievement</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>.156</td>
<td>small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom resources (e.g., textbooks and other supplies)</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>.429</td>
<td>small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching effectiveness</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>.910</td>
<td>negligible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student learning</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student academic performance</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>.334</td>
<td>small</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Teachers were asked if they were aware of Austin Interfaith’s organizing in their schools. If they answered yes, they were asked to rate Austin Interfaith’s influence in a variety of areas on a 3-point scale: 3 = very much influence, 2 = some influence, 1 = no influence. Means between 2.1 and 3.0 indicate a high degree of influence. Because Austin Interfaith had previously been involved in low-involvement schools, teachers in those schools had some familiarity with their work. Complete results of the teacher attribution questionnaire are summarized in Appendix D, Figure 15. For more information about the items used, see Appendix E.

An explanation of t-tests and effect sizes can be found on page 21. Values in bold represent p-values that are statistically significant, as follows:

*** p < .001
**  p < .01
*  p < .05
REFLECTIONS ON FINDINGS

Austin Interfaith’s signature effort, the Alliance Schools organizing, carried out for more than a decade, yielded new resources for high-poverty, low-performing schools, as well as new skills and relationships among core schooling constituencies, both of which contributed to substantial gains in student learning. The study team’s data show that Austin Interfaith’s organizing led to a host of changes inside schools that helped to improve student learning. The organization’s work produced:

✦ new funding for parent support specialists, after-school programs, bilingual education services, adult ESL programs, and teacher and administrative professional development opportunities in East Austin schools;
✦ increased parent and community involvement, which and led to higher levels of trust, collaboration, and morale among teachers in schools that were highly involved with Austin Interfaith;
✦ improved student performance on the state-mandated TAAS; regression analyses of the relationship between Austin Interfaith’s involvement in schools and student performance on TAAS (1993–2002) show that deep involvement with Austin Interfaith predicted gains ranging from 15 to 19 points in the percent of students meeting minimum standards on TAAS, while lower levels of involvement predicted gains of 4 points.

Austin Interfaith’s success underscores the growing consensus among education experts regarding the role of trust in schools. Researchers at the Chicago Consortium for School Research, for example, found that elementary schools in Chicago with a high degree of relational trust were more likely to embrace reform initiatives and to show improvement in academic productivity. In their book Trust in Schools, Anthony Bryk and Barbara Schneider (2002) assert:

We view the need to develop relational trust as an essential complement both to governance efforts that focus on bringing new incentives to bear on improving practice and to instructional reforms that seek to deepen the technical capacities of school professionals. Absent more supportive social relations among all adults who share responsibility for student development and who remain mutually dependent on each other to achieve success, new policy initiatives are unlikely to produce desired outcomes. Similarly, new technical resources, no matter how sophisticated in design or well supported in implementation, are not likely to be used well, if at all. (p. 144)

Within Alliance Schools, Austin Interfaith engaged in a long-term process of recruiting and training parents and teachers to view themselves as leaders and to work together in a participatory and action-oriented problem-solving process. Organizers helped to build cohesion in schools and energize the school community with a new sense of shared purpose and potency. When the organizing efforts were sustained at a high level of intensity, this organizing contributed to notable gains in student learning.

Yet, the work in Austin has many challenges, not only those brought on by the rise of standardized tests. Parents, teachers, and district officials consistently noted the disruption that principal turnover created in their schools; in some cases, a change in school leadership was accompanied by extensive staff turnover. In addition, new principals, in particular, struggled to prioritize the “soft fuzzy stuff” of relationship building in an overall context in which they feared being “kicked out of here if reading scores don’t go up,” as Superintendent Forgione put it.

Community organizing is inherently labor-intensive and messy, requiring patience, perseverance, and a high tolerance for ambiguity. But school-based organizing demands a higher level of content expertise than organizing in neighborhood arenas such as housing or environmental conditions. Education organizers must understand the schooling context and be able to build effective relationships with a wide range of stakeholders – district officials, school staff, parents, and community members – who bring divergent priorities, expectations, and cultural
norms. Austin Interfaith maintained a stable core of staff organizers for much of the past decade, and this stability undoubtedly influenced the team’s documented results.

Though an intense focus on reinventing the culture of schools was the cornerstone of the Alliance Schools strategy, it was not the only focus for reform. Austin Interfaith pursued district- and state-level funding opportunities and regularly engaged district officials in learning about the Alliance strategy. This district- and state-level organizing played a crucial role in generating resources to initiate and support the Alliance Schools work and in building educators’ investment in and support for its success.

District leaders’ involvement in the initiative also expanded their capacity to address the needs of constituencies that, historically, were less well served by district politics. As former school board member John Fitzpatrick noted:

I make better decisions on behalf of the entire district because I know a little more about communities of color and low-income communities. Austin Interfaith helped me understand something I wanted to understand, but I didn’t have a lot of practical hands-on experience with.
APPENDIX A

Data Sources for the Case Study Series

Over the six-year study, the study group collected and analyzed a total of 321 stakeholder interviews; 75 observations of organizing strategy sessions, campaign activities, and actions; 509 teacher surveys; and school demographic and standardized test score data.7

INTERVIEWS

Our research team conducted 321 open-ended, semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders across the seven sites. Between January 2003 and September 2006, we conducted 160 interviews with organizing staff, 77 interviews with parent and youth leaders, 56 interviews with educators, and 28 interviews with allies. We also conducted 15 interviews with national network staff.

In the initial phase of the study, we interviewed organizing staff and leaders and focused on organizational characteristics – including each group’s mission, theory of change, strategy, capacity, and leadership development activities. Early interviews also aimed to understand the impetus for and strategies underlying groups’ campaigns for school improvement. To follow campaign developments, we interviewed organizing staff multiple times over the course of the study.

Interviews with allies, principals, teachers, district administrators, superintendents, and other key stakeholders elicited perceptions of the groups’ power and reach and the ways in which the groups’ organizing efforts may have impacted school, district, and community capacity.

OBSERVATIONS

During multiple site visits to each of the groups, we observed committee meetings, trainings, negotiation sessions, and public actions. More than seventy-five field notes written by research team members document these observations.

DOCUMENT REVIEW

We reviewed documentation and archival materials produced by the groups, including newsletters, organizational charts, and training materials, across five years of the study.

CONTEXT REVIEW

In addition to conducting extensive background research on the local and state context for each group (e.g., defining the critical policy reforms, state-level issues, governance structure for each school system, political landscape), we followed the local media coverage of education issues in all of our sites. Our database includes more than 1,700 articles. These articles, combined with the interview data, provide a picture of the shifting context for reform in each site.

TEACHER SURVEYS

We administered online teacher surveys in three sites – Austin, Miami-Dade, and Oakland – where organizing groups had used an intensive, school-based strategy of organizing and had mounted signature campaigns for several years. The survey explored four critical areas of school capacity: district support, school climate, professional culture, and instructional core. Survey questions were drawn from a variety of established measures, but primarily from scales developed by the Consortium on Chicago School Research. Appendices in the Austin, Miami, and Oakland case studies include a description of survey measures and their psychometric properties.

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7 We also collected 241 adult member surveys and 124 youth member surveys to understand how involvement in community organizing influenced members’ leadership skills and their community and political engagement. However, the case studies focused on school and district outcomes and do not include analysis of these parent and youth survey data. Results of these surveys will be presented in future publications.
Surveys were administered to teachers at schools where the group was highly engaged in organizing efforts, as well as in a set of comparison schools. A total of 509 teacher surveys were collected from the three sites.

**ADMINISTRATIVE DATA**

We also examined publicly available teacher and student data from all districts. Data vary from district to district but include measures of teacher and student race/ethnicity, years of teaching experience, dropout rates, graduation rates, student performance on standardized tests, and a range of other variables. To assess indicators that did not have corresponding data for publicly available download, data requests to the district were made. In Austin and Oakland, these publicly available data included district-administered parent and teacher surveys.
APPENDIX B

The Industrial Areas Foundation

Austin Interfaith is a member of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), a national organizing network founded by Saul Alinsky in 1940. According to the IAF, the network has fifty-seven member affiliates in twenty-one states, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Germany (“About IAF,” n.d.).

The IAF’s approach to organizing grew out of Saul Alinsky’s work in Chicago in the 1930s and 1940s. Drawing on the experiences of the American labor movement, Alinsky united local institutions into neighborhood organizations focused on expanding the influence of their constituencies in local politics. Through this early work, Alinsky evolved many of the foundational principles of community organizing today:

✦ a belief that power lies in numbers and is mobilized through issue campaigns utilizing direct action tactics to pressure decision-makers;

✦ a commitment to acting on the self-interests expressed by constituents, rather than on organizational ideology;

✦ a focus on “building organizations of poor people that can challenge the existing balance of power,” rather than focusing solely on short-term gains in neighborhood services (Alinsky 1989; Delgado 1994).

As the IAF spread nationally, organizers adapted Alinsky’s methods to meet the needs and opportunities of local contexts. Working in immigrant Latino communities in Texas, IAF organizer Ernesto Cortes created a faith-based, relational organizing model for recruiting and developing new members. Cortes’s model relied on individual meetings (called one-on-ones) through which organizers identify potential leaders from within congregations and help them to “talk among themselves to identify their concerns and find a basis for cooperative action” (Warren 2001). From this work, Cortes evolved a streamlined organizational structure in which a small staff of professional organizers works to develop networks of relationships within church congregations that they can mobilize to produce large numbers of indigenous leaders (Delgado 1994).

Cortes’s work in Texas began in San Antonio, where he built Communities Organized for Public Service in 1974. Across the next quarter century, he helped initiate almost a dozen IAF organizations in Texas, including Austin Interfaith, and, in 1990, united these organizations in a statewide network called the Texas Industrial Areas Foundation. Following IAF’s entry into school reform issues, Cortes founded the Texas Interfaith Education Fund to create opportunities for IAF leaders and organizers to learn about school reform (Warren 2001).
APPENDIX C

Data Sources for the Austin Interfaith Case Study

INTERVIEWS
Beginning in January 2003 and September 2006, the study team conducted thirty-two interviews with Austin Interfaith staff and members to understand the organization’s theory of change and to document the trajectory of Austin Interfaith’s education organizing. Beginning in 2004, we interviewed eleven educators at the school and district level to learn their perspective on the impact of Austin Interfaith’s organizing. We also interviewed three local education experts to gain their perspective on Austin Interfaith’s work in the district and schools.

TEACHER PERCEPTION SURVEY
Between March and April 2006, 144 teachers in the Austin Independent School District (AISD) from six elementary schools responded to an Annenberg Institute-administered survey. The survey included multiple measures of school climate, professional culture, and instructional core and assessed teachers’ perceptions of their school’s capacity on these dimensions. (A complete list of measures used in the teacher survey and their psychometric properties can be found in Appendix E.) The sample consisted of four schools with high involvement of Austin Interfaith and two demographically similar schools with low involvement of the group. High involvement indicates an active core team, with leaders from the school participating in Austin Interfaith training activities and events related to organization-wide campaigns. Low involvement denotes schools where core teams met infrequently or where few or no leaders participated in organization-wide events. The survey response rate was approximately 63 percent, with 95 teachers (of a total of approximately 140) responding in four high-involvement Alliance Schools and 49 teachers (of a total of approximately 88) responding in two low-involvement schools.

ATTRIBUTION QUESTIONNAIRE
Embedded within the teacher survey administered by the Annenberg Institute was a series of attribution questions to assess the extent to which teachers in Alliance Schools believed there was a relationship between their school’s internal capacity and the actions of Austin Interfaith. Of the 144 teachers in the sample, 65 answered this questionnaire. In high-involvement schools, 52 percent of respondents (49 of 95 respondents) were familiar with Austin Interfaith’s work in their school; in low-involvement schools, 33 percent (16 of 49) of respondents were familiar with Austin Interfaith’s past work in their school. Using a 3-point scale, teachers rated Austin Interfaith’s influence on twenty-two items relating to different areas of school capacity (e.g., safety and discipline in the school, professional development opportunities, quality of curriculum and instruction). These items were used across three survey sites in the study, and not all items were relevant to Austin Interfaith’s work.

8 Three of the schools classified as high involvement had active relationships with an Austin Interfaith organizer and high degrees of organizing activity at the time of the survey (March and April 2006); one did not have an active relationship with an organizer but had been a highly active Alliance School in the years preceding the survey and had institutionalized the practices and culture of the model. The two low-involvement schools had low Austin Interfaith involvement prior to 2003. We were not able to survey teachers in the two schools where Austin Interfaith has maintained the highest levels of organizing activity.

9 There were no significant differences in teaching experience or demographics between the two sets of schools. Roughly half of teachers in both sets of schools were White, with Latino and African American teachers as the next largest populations; about 90 percent of teachers in both sets of schools were female. Teachers at both sets of schools had equivalent teaching experience – high-involvement school respondents had on average 10.7 total years of experience and 5.0 years in their current schools, and low-involvement school respondents had on average 8.9 total years of experience and 5.2 years in their current school. The vast majority of teachers in both sets of schools held regular teaching certificates.
PARENT/STAFF SURVEYS
To supplement our survey of school capacity, we also examined responses from teachers and parents on the AISD’s School Climate Survey, administered annually to parents and staff in all AISD schools since 2004. These surveys consisted of subscales, but since data were provided only for select items, we were limited to item-level analyses related to instructional leadership, school climate, and external influences.

ADMINISTRATIVE DATA
The study team obtained student demographic data (enrollment, race/ethnicity, free/reduced-priced lunch eligibility, limited English proficient status) and student attendance data for all Austin schools from 1994 onward.

To assess trends in student outcomes, we examined student performance in reading and math on statewide standardized tests between 1994 and 2006. These data were obtained from the Texas Education Agency (TEA). We used raw test score data on the English version of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills, rather than data derived from the TEA’s Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS), in order to include students who may have been excluded by the statewide accountability formula. Changes in the percent of students meeting the standard on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills between 2003 and 2006 was also examined.

DOCUMENT REVIEW
The study team reviewed documents produced by Austin Interfaith and monitored local newspapers to keep abreast of events in Austin and in Texas overall.

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10 For the parent survey, we obtained school-level summary data from 2004 to 2007. Survey items changed from year to year, precluding a longitudinal analysis. Survey items from 2004 and 2005 focused on parent–school communication and children’s academic support. The district expanded the survey in 2006, and survey questions in 2006 and 2007 were relatively similar, permitting year-to-year comparisons. The 2006 and 2007 surveys consisted of twenty items that focused on: parents’ experiences with school staff, opportunities for involvement and participation in campus activities, school safety, parent–school communication, and parents’ educational goals for the child. Factors or scales were not reported for any of the surveys, so we were limited to item-level analyses.

11 The TEA’s AEIS reports typically exclude students who have not been in the school for the entire year; a percentage of students designated LEP or receiving special education services were also excluded prior to 1999.
APPENDIX D

Teacher Perceptions and Attributions regarding School Capacity

The study team conducted an online survey of teacher perceptions of their school’s climate, culture, and instructional core. The survey also included a questionnaire to examine teacher perceptions of the relationship between their school’s internal capacity and the actions of Austin Interfaith. Survey data were disaggregated into two discrete sets – high involvement and low involvement. The intensity of Austin Interfaith’s involvement in schools related positively with teacher perceptions of school capacity.

Researchers conducted t-tests for statistical significance in the difference between the average ratings of the two sets of schools. To further distinguish patterns of difference, effect sizes were calculated for the difference in means between the two sets of schools on each measure. The team used Cohen’s benchmarks for interpreting effect-size calculations because they are the accepted standard used across disciplines, though the effect sizes registered in educational change efforts tend to be smaller than those observed in other fields (Henson & Smith 2000; DeVaney 2001).

For teacher perceptions of school capacity, high-involvement schools showed statistically significant differences on fourteen of twenty-four measures of school capacity from low-involvement schools (see Figure 14 on page 38).

For teacher attributions of Austin Interfaith’s influence on their school, high-involvement schools showed statistically significant differences on six of twenty-two measures (see Figure 15 on page 39).12

For a description of the sources and reliabilities of the measures used, see Appendix E.

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12 Note that this instrument was used across research study sites and, therefore, includes items that were not the direct focus of Austin Interfaith’s organizing.
### Teacher perceptions of school capacity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domains</th>
<th>Category/Measures</th>
<th>High-Involvement Schools Mean (n=95)</th>
<th>Low-Involvement Schools Mean (n=49)</th>
<th>p-value</th>
<th>Effect Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>District and community influences</strong></td>
<td>Creating local accountability</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>.023*</td>
<td>small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community support and accountability</strong></td>
<td>Partnering with non-system actors¹</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>.307</td>
<td>negligible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School environment</strong></td>
<td>Teacher–parent trust</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>.000***</td>
<td>large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sense of school community and safety¹</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>.000***</td>
<td>large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Achievement-oriented culture³</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>.000***</td>
<td>large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knowledge of students’ culture³</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>.193</td>
<td>small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent roles in the school</strong></td>
<td>Teacher outreach to parents</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>.000***</td>
<td>large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parent involvement in the school</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>.001**</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parent influence in school decision making</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>.001**</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parent involvement in student learning¹</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>.076</td>
<td>small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher collegiality and engagement</strong></td>
<td>Peer collaboration</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>.000***</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collective responsibility¹</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>.000***</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher–teacher trust</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>.000***</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher influence in school decision making</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>.021*</td>
<td>small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher morale and retention</strong></td>
<td>School commitment</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>.000***</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Professional culture</strong></td>
<td>Quality professional development</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>.411</td>
<td>negligible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Professional development</strong></td>
<td>Joint problem solving</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>.002**</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher–principal trust</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>.122</td>
<td>small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Principal instructional leadership</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>.837</td>
<td>negligible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instructional leadership</strong></td>
<td>Teacher influence in classroom decision making</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>.011*</td>
<td>small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coherent curriculum and instruction¹</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>.061</td>
<td>small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Classroom resources</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>.069</td>
<td>small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instructional focus¹</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>.575</td>
<td>negligible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Educational practices and beliefs</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>.747</td>
<td>negligible</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The majority of measures were scored using a 4-point scale, with a higher score indicating a more positive response. A dagger (¹) denotes measures that were scored on a 5-point scale.

An explanation of t-tests and effect sizes can be found on page 21. Values in bold represent p-values that are statistically significant, as follows:

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

¹ Travis Heights: n=32; Ridgetop: n=17; Govalle: n=13; Norman: n=33
² Andrews: n=31; Pecan Springs: n=18
### How much do you think that working with Austin Interfaith has influenced...<br><br>**District and community**<br>Atraction of community and financial resources to school | 2.13 | 1.79 | .043* | medium<br>**School organization (e.g., small schools/smaller learning environments)** | 1.69 | 1.60 | .641 | small<br>**Student readiness to learn (e.g., access to pre-K programs)** | 1.59 | 1.50 | .669 | small<br><br>**School climate**<br>Parent involvement in the school | 2.31 | 1.80 | .006** | large<br>**Sense of community and trust in the school** | 2.26 | 1.75 | .012* | medium<br>**School’s relations with the community** | 2.41 | 2.06 | .015* | medium<br>**How teachers get along with parents** | 2.07 | 1.64 | .050 | medium<br>**School’s relations with parents** | 2.29 | 2.00 | .074 | medium<br>**Physical condition of the school building** | 1.56 | 1.27 | .125 | small<br>**Safety and discipline in the school** | 1.87 | 1.60 | .177 | small<br>**How students get along with other students** | 1.70 | 1.43 | .197 | small<br>**Shared decision making between students, parents, teachers, and administration** | 2.12 | 1.94 | .244 | small<br>**Changes in school overcrowding** | 1.59 | 1.60 | .954 | negligible<br><br>**Professional culture**<br>Commitment to the school | 1.76 | 1.33 | .016* | medium<br>**Quality of principal leadership** | 2.10 | 1.57 | .026* | medium<br>**How teachers get along with other teachers** | 1.81 | 1.40 | .053 | medium<br>**Professional development opportunities** | 1.58 | 1.60 | .910 | negligible<br><br>**Instructional core**<br>Teacher expectations for student achievement | 1.66 | 1.40 | .156 | small<br>**Quality of curriculum and instruction** | 1.65 | 1.40 | .266 | small<br>**Classroom resources (e.g., textbooks and other supplies)** | 1.58 | 1.43 | .429 | small<br>**Teaching effectiveness** | 1.56 | 1.53 | .910 | negligible<br><br>**Student learning**<br>Student academic performance | 1.68 | 1.46 | .334 | small

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**Note:** Teachers were asked if they were aware of Austin Interfaith’s organizing in their schools. If they answered yes, they were asked to rate Austin Interfaith’s influence in a variety of areas on a 3-point scale: 3 = very much influence, 2 = some influence, 1 = no influence. Means between 2.1 and 3.0 indicate a high degree of influence. Because Austin Interfaith had previously been involved in low-involvement schools, teachers in those schools had some familiarity with their work.

An explanation of t-tests and effect sizes can be found on page 21. Values in **bold** represent p-values that are statistically significant, as follows:<br>*** p < .001<br>** p < .01<br>* p < .05
## APPENDIX E

### Sources and Reliabilities of Survey and Questionnaire Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category/Measures</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Sample Item</th>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Reliability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>District Support</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating Local Accountability</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>To assess the district’s efforts to foster local accountability</td>
<td>This district encourages schools to be accountable to their own local communities.</td>
<td>5-point</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community Support and Accountability</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnering with Non-system Actors</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>To measure partnerships with non-system actors</td>
<td>District staff make an effort to reach out to individuals and organizations outside of the school district.</td>
<td>5-point</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School Environment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher–Parent Trust</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>To assess parent-staff relationships</td>
<td>At this school, it is difficult to overcome the cultural barriers between staff and parents.</td>
<td>4-point</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of School Community and Safety</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>To assess facility conditions and school environment</td>
<td>Please rate the sense of safety in the school.</td>
<td>5-point</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of Students’ Culture</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>To measure teachers’ efforts to understand their students’ culture</td>
<td>How many teachers at this school talk with students about their lives at home?</td>
<td>5-point</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement-Oriented Culture</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>To measure the extent of an achievement-oriented culture within the school</td>
<td>Students are well aware of the learning expectations of this school.</td>
<td>5-point</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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13 One item, “Please rate the sense of safety in the school,” was added to LAAMP’s original six-item scale.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category/Measures</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Sample Item</th>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Reliability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent Roles in the School</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>To measure parent participation and support for the school</td>
<td>For the students you teach this year, how many parents volunteered to help in the classroom?</td>
<td>5-point</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent Involvement in the School</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>To assess the extent to which teachers involve parents in a number of schoolwork-related activities</td>
<td>How often do you involve parents in judging student work?</td>
<td>5-point</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent Involvement in Student Learning</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>To assess the school’s efforts to work with parents to develop good communication and common goals and to strengthen student learning</td>
<td>Parents are greeted warmly when they call or visit the school.</td>
<td>4-point</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher Outreach to Parents</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>To assess parents’ influence in school decision-making processes</td>
<td>Please indicate the amount of input or influence that the parents have in the decision-making process affecting this current year for establishing or improving the curriculum.</td>
<td>4-point</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14 Two items were omitted from the original scale.
15 This measure was modified to inquire about the efforts of all teachers in the school to involve parents, rather than the respondent’s own efforts.
16 This scale is identical to the American Institute for Research Teacher Survey “School Decision Making” scale but has been modified to apply to parents rather than teachers.
# Category/Measures | Items | Objective | Sample Item | Scale | Reliability
--- | --- | --- | --- | --- | ---
Teacher Collegiality and Engagement | Peer Collaboration  
(Consortium on Chicago School Research, 1999 Teacher Survey) | 4 | To assess the extent of a cooperative work ethic among staff | Teachers design instructional programs together. | 4-point | 0.82
Teacher Influence in School Decision Making  
(The American Institute for Research, “High Time for High School Reform: Early Findings from the Evaluation of the National School District and Network Grants Program,” Teacher Survey 2003. Prepared for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation) | 6 | To assess teachers’ influence in school decision-making processes | Please indicate the amount of input or influence that you have in the decision-making process affecting the current school year for choosing school programs or reforms. | 4-point | 0.85
Collective Responsibility  
(Consortium on Chicago School Research, 1999 Teacher Survey) | 7 | To assess the collective commitment among faculty to improve the school so that all students learn | How many teachers in this school feel responsible when students in this school fail? | 5-point | 0.94
Teacher–Teacher Trust  
(Consortium on Chicago School Research, 1999 Teacher Survey) | 5 | To assess the extent of open communication and respect among teachers | Teachers respect other teachers who take the lead in school improvement efforts. | 4-point | 0.91
Teacher Morale and Retention | School Commitment  
(Consortium on Chicago School Research, 1999 Teacher Survey) | 4 | To assess the extent of teachers’ commitment and loyalty to the school | I would recommend this school to parents seeking a place for their child. | 4-point | 0.91
Professional Development | Quality Professional Development  
(Consortium on Chicago School Research, 1999 Teacher Survey) | 8 | To measure the quality of professional development | Overall, my professional development experiences this year have included opportunities to work productively with colleagues in my school. | 4-point | 0.93

---

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

18 One item from the original scale was omitted.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category/Measures</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Sample Item</th>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Reliability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instructional Leadership</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Principal Instructional Leadership  
(Consortium on Chicago School Research, 1999 Teacher Survey) | 7 | To assess the extent to which teachers regard their principal as an instructional leader | The principal at this school understands how children learn. | 4-point | 0.92 |
| Teacher–Principal Trust  
(Consortium on Chicago School Research, 1999 Teacher Survey) | 7 | To assess the extent to which teachers feel that their principal respects and supports them | It's OK in this school to discuss feelings, worries, and frustrations with the principal. | 4-point | 0.92 |
| Joint Problem Solving  
(Consortium on Chicago School Research, 1999 Teacher Survey) | 5 | To assess the extent to which teachers maintain a public dialogue to address and solve problems | Many teachers express their personal views at faculty meetings. | 4-point | 0.86 |
| **Classroom Characteristics and Effectiveness** |       |           |             |       |             |
| Teacher Influence in Classroom Decision Making  
(The American Institute for Research, “High Time for High School Reform: Early Findings from the Evaluation of the National School District and Network Grants Program,” Teacher Survey 2003. Prepared for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation) | 6 | To assess teachers’ influence in decisions affecting classroom practices | Please indicate the amount of input or influence you have in the decision-making process affecting the current school year for determining the goals and objectives for student learning. | 4-point | 0.87 |
| Coherent Curriculum and Instruction  
(Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, 2001-2002 Teacher Survey) | 9 | To assess the degree of coherence in the school’s curriculum and instruction | The curriculum is planned between and among grades to promote continuity. | 5-point | 0.89 |
| Classroom Resources  
(Los Angeles Annenberg Metropolitan Project, 1997 Teacher Survey) | 4 | To assess school resources | Basic materials for teaching (e.g., textbooks, paper, pencils, copy machines) are readily available as needed. | 4-point | 0.52 |
| Educational Practice and Beliefs  
(Consortium on Chicago School Research, 2005 High School Teacher Survey) | 4 | To assess the degree of importance teachers place on student learning about social and political issues | In your classes, how much emphasis do you place on having students learn about things in society that need to be changed? | 4-point | 0.82 |
| Instructional Focus  
(Consortium on Chicago School Research, 2003 Teacher Survey) | 3 | To examine the school’s instructional core | The school day is organized to maximize instructional time. | 5-point | 0.81 |

---

19 One item from the scale was omitted, and another was modified from “To what extent do you feel respected by the principal?” to “I feel respected by the principal.”

20 Two items from the original scale were omitted.

21 Two items were taken from LAAMP’s “Instructional Materials” scale and two items from LAAMP’s “Student Assessment” scale.

22 One item was taken from the CCSR 2003 Teacher Survey “Focus on Student Learning” scale and two from the CCSR 2003 Teacher Survey “Program Coherence” scale.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category/Measures</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Sample Item</th>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Reliability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organizing Attribution Questionnaire</strong></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>To assess the extent to which teachers believe that working with Austin Interfaith has influenced changes in various domains of school capacity and school climate</td>
<td>How much do you think that working with Austin Interfaith has influenced changes in safety and discipline in the school?</td>
<td>3-point + “don’t know”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence of Organizing (Annenberg Institute generated)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(not a scale)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher Characteristics</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>To collect demographic and professional information about respondents</td>
<td>How long have you been teaching in this school?</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>(not a scale)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Demographic Questionnaire (Annenberg Institute generated)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(not a scale)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Readiness</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>To assess the extent to which students are prepared for grade-level material</td>
<td>About what portion of your students have serious reading difficulties?</td>
<td>6-point</td>
<td>(not a scale)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Readiness (Consortium on Chicago School Research, 2003 Teacher Survey)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(not a scale)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

23 The questionnaire was based on similar items from the Consortium on Chicago School Research, 2003 Teacher Survey, elementary edition.
**Regression Analyses of Student Outcomes**

Hierarchical regression analyses were used to examine the relationship between the intensity of Austin Interfaith’s involvement and the percent of students meeting minimum expectations on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) during the eight-year period of Austin Interfaith’s most concentrated Alliance Schools activity. To conduct this analysis, we first assigned an average intensity value for each school, based on a five-point scale of involvement for each year. The average intensity value was computed for each school by calculating the sum of the involvement for each school divided by the number of years of the intervention (see Figure 16).

**Figure 16**
Intensity of Austin Interfaith’s involvement in schools over time, year by year

<table>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Walnut Creek</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>2.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zavala</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL SCHOOLS</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
We conducted regressions for the data as a whole (all students, all grades, and all tests), by sub-population (economically disadvantaged, Hispanic), by grade level (grades 3, 4, 5), and by test (reading, math). These analyses controlled for the percent of students receiving free and reduced-price lunch, percent designated as limited English proficient (LEP), and one-year-prior (baseline) test scores. The test of statistical significance was set at 0.1 because of the small sample size.

Analyses of all students on all tests (reading, writing, and math) for all grades (3, 4, and 5 combined) indicated that for every unit increase in the intensity of Austin Interfaith’s involvement on a five-point scale, the percent of students meeting minimum expectations on TAAS rose by 3.82 points (see Figure 17).

FIGURE 17
Summary of hierarchical regression analysis for all students, grades 3, 4, and 5 combined, meeting minimum expectations in all subjects on TAAS, 1994–2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SEB</th>
<th>Beta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>STEP 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>47.621</td>
<td>20.87</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All students, percent that met minimum expectations at baseline</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td><strong>.58</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average percent of LEP students</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td><strong>.48</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average percent of economically disadvantaged students</td>
<td>−.02</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>−.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>STEP 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>33.551</td>
<td>18.09</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All students, percent that met minimum expectations at baseline</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td><strong>.52</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average percent of LEP students</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average percent of economically disadvantaged students</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austin Interfaith intensity averages (until 2002)</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td><strong>.50</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Data from 1993 were used as a baseline; n=14.
R Square = .518 for step 1 (p<.055**)
R Square Change = .190 for step 2 (p=.039**)
Values in **bold** are statistically significant, as follows:
** p < .05
* p < .10

In a multiple regression analysis: ‘B’ refers to the b-coefficient, which indicates the size of the effect that the independent variable (in this case, the intensity of Austin Interfaith’s organizing) has on the dependent variable (test scores), controlling for the influence of the other variables in the model. The sign of the coefficient indicates the direction of the effect, whether it is positive or negative. In Figure 17, the b-coefficient indicates that the percent of students who met minimum standards on the TAAS can be expected to increase by 3.82 points for every unit of increase in the intensity of Austin Interfaith’s organizing.

SEB refers to the standard error of the b-coefficient, or the amount that the b-coefficient varies across cases. Beta is a standardized form of the b-coefficient that facilitates comparison across multiple analyses. The p-value indicates the probability that the effect between the independent variable and the dependent variable is due to chance.

R Square indicates the variance in the percent of students meeting minimum standards on TAAS explained by the variable. R Square Change indicates the additional variance explained by adding a new variable to the model. In Figure 17, an R Square Change of .190 at Step 2 indicates that 19 percent of the variance in test scores was accounted for when the Austin Interfaith Intensity score was added to the regression model.

24 All tests include grade 5 scores on writing, in addition to reading and math.
All grades refer to grades 3, 4, and 5 combined.
Intensity of Austin Interfaith’s involvement also predicted a 3.17 percent increase (for each unit increase in intensity on a 5-point scale) in students meeting minimum standards in math for all grades (3, 4, and 5 combined). (See Figure 18.)

Regression analyses on the performance of subpopulations from 1994 to 2002 show positive effects for Hispanic and economically disadvantaged students on all tests, as well as for reading and math separately, for all grades (3, 4, and 5 combined). These findings were statistically significant for economically disadvantaged students in math for all grades (3, 4, and 5 combined) and show that for every unit increase in the intensity of Austin Interfaith’s involvement, the percent of economically disadvantaged students meeting minimum expectations on TAAS in math rose by 3.34 points (see Figure 19).

Regression analysis of data for the following years (2003–2006) on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills, with a smaller sample, show a positive but non–statistically significant relationship between the intensity of involvement with Austin Interfaith and improved test scores. The decline in the number of participating schools reduces the interpretability of regression results. We found no difference in the performance trends between schools that continued to implement the Alliance Schools model and those that dropped off. However, schools that dropped off tended to be high-scoring schools.

FIGURE 18
Summary of hierarchical regression analysis for all students, grades 3, 4, and 5 combined, meeting minimum expectations in math on TAAS, 1994–2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SEB</th>
<th>Beta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>56.69</td>
<td>16.86</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All students, percent that met minimum expectations at baseline</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.64**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average percent of LEP students</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.44*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average percent of economically disadvantaged students</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Note: Data from 1993 were used as a baseline; n=14.

R Square = .485 for step 1 (p=.074*)

R Square Change = .203 for step 2 (p=.039**)

Values in **bold** are statistically significant, as follows:

** p < .05

*p < .10

In a multiple regression analysis: ‘B’ refers to the b-coefficient, which indicates the size of the effect that the independent variable (in this case, the intensity of Austin Interfaith’s organizing) has on the dependent variable (test scores), controlling for the influence of the other variables in the model. The sign of the coefficient indicates the direction of the effect, whether it is positive or negative. In Figure 18, the b-coefficient indicates that the percent of students who met minimum standards on the TAAS can be expected to increase by 3.17 points for every unit increase in the intensity of Austin Interfaith’s organizing.

SEB refers to the standard error of the b-coefficient, or the amount that the b-coefficient varies across cases. Beta is a standardized form of the b-coefficient that facilitates comparison across multiple analyses. The p-value indicates the probability that the effect between the independent variable and the dependent variable is due to chance.

R Square indicates the variance in the percent of students meeting minimum standards on TAAS explained by the variable. R Square Change indicates the additional variance explained by adding a new variable to the model. In Figure 18, an R Square Change of .203 at Step 2 indicates that 20.3 percent of the variance in test scores was accounted for when the Austin Interfaith intensity score was added to the regression model.
### FIGURE 19

Summary of hierarchical regression analysis for economically disadvantaged students, grades 3, 4, and 5 combined, meeting minimum expectations in math on TAAS, 1994–2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SEB</th>
<th>Beta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>STEP 1</strong>&lt;br&gt; (Constant)</td>
<td>42.17</td>
<td>15.43</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economically disadvantaged students, percent that met minimum expectations at baseline</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.51**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average percent of LEP students</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.56**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average percent of economically disadvantaged students</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>STEP 2</strong>&lt;br&gt; (Constant)</td>
<td>29.81</td>
<td>14.11</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economically disadvantaged students, percent that met minimum expectations at baseline</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.43**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average percent of LEP students</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average percent of economically disadvantaged students</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.37*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austin Interfaith intensity averages (until 2002)</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>.45*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Data from 1993 were used as a baseline; n=14.<br>

R Square = .589 for step 1 (p=.026**)<br>
R Square Change = .148 for step 2 (p=.051*)

Values in **bold** are statistically significant, as follows:<br>

**  p < .05<br>
*  p < .10

In a multiple regression analysis: 'B' refers to the b-coefficient, which indicates the size of the effect that the independent variable (in this case, the intensity of Austin Interfaith's organizing) has on the dependent variable (test scores), controlling for the influence of the other variables in the model. The sign of the coefficient indicates the direction of the effect, whether it is positive or negative. In Figure 19, the b-coefficient indicates that the percent of students who met minimum standards on the TAAS can be expected to increase by 3.34 points for every unit of increase in the intensity of Austin Interfaith's organizing.

SEB refers to the standard error of the b-coefficient, or the amount that the b-coefficient varies across cases. Beta is a standardized form of the b-coefficient that facilitates comparison across multiple analyses. The p-value indicates the probability that the effect between the independent variable and the dependent variable is due to chance.

R Square indicates the variance in the percent of students meeting minimum standards on TAAS explained by the variable. R Square Change indicates the additional variance explained by adding a new variable to the model. In Figure 19, an R Square Change of .148 at Step 2 indicates that 14.8 percent of the variance in test scores was accounted for when the Austin Interfaith Intensity score was added to the regression model.
References


The Annenberg Institute for School Reform is a national policy-research and reform-support organization, affiliated with Brown University, that focuses on improving conditions and outcomes in urban schools, especially those serving disadvantaged children.

In pursuing its mission, the Institute collaborates with a variety of partners committed to educational improvement – school districts, community organizations, researchers, national and local reform support organizations, and funders. Rather than providing a specific reform design or model to be implemented, the Institute’s approach is to offer an array of tools and strategies to help districts strengthen their local capacity to provide and sustain high-quality education for all students.

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