KEEPING STUDENTS FIRST:

Building Community Labor Partnerships

for Strong Schools

Schott 25 FOUNDATION *for* PUBLIC EDUCATION *years*

Building Movement Project

ABOUT THE SCHOTT FOUNDATION AND BUILDING MOVEMENT PROJECT

This report is a collaborative effort of the Building Movement Project (BMP) and the Schott Foundation for Public Education. BMP develops research, tools, training materials and opportunities for partnership that bolster nonprofit organizations' ability to support the voice and power of the people they serve. The Schott Foundation is dedicated to equity in public education and creating the healthy living and learning communities that allow students to learn. Together, we believe that alliances between labor and community groups have the potential to build shared power to defend public education and better serve the needs of students, teachers and families.

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INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the 2012 school year, the nation was watching as the Chicago Teachers Union went on strike for the first time in 25 years, after months of attempted contract negotiations with the city. The city's public school system, the nation's third largest, had become an experiment in the corporate privatization of public schools.

In the years preceding the strike, longstanding internal frustration within the teachers union resulted in numerous changes in elected leadership but no significant shifts in the union's response to privatization efforts, school closures, and the strains on teacher benefits and school conditions caused by continued funding cuts. In 2010, members of a progressive, grassroots group of teachers—the Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators (CORE)—organized to win elected leadership positions in the union. The platform of CORE members called for the union to more aggressively challenge the city government's accommodation of privatization efforts and accompanying school closures.[1] The leadership of CORE had evolved from collaboration between teachers frustrated with the union's tepid response to threatened closures and community groups mobilizing to defend the targeted public schools in communities of color.[2] When the caucus won a sweeping victory of union leadership positions, an integral component of its platform was to engage the community in collaborative efforts to defend the city schools and fight for the needs of teachers and students.[3]

Empowered by its decisive victory, the new union leadership took an assertive stance in contract negotiations. The issues on the table when the union voted to strike in 2012 were much broader than a traditional labor negotiation and informed by the years of work between union leaders and the community. The negotiations covered not only pay and benefits, but also a range of attempts to defend teachers and the school system against privatization, including pushing back against evaluation, and pay and termination based on student performance on standardized testing.

Union leaders shared their strategy with the community in anticipation of the potential strike. During the strike, polls showed more support for the teachers than the mayor, despite the seven lost school days for the city's 350,000 public school students.[4] When the union accepted a proposed contract and returned to the classroom, it had won concessions from the city on teacher raises and procedures for identifying new placements for teachers from closed schools.[5] And it had sent an unambiguous signal to Chicago and the rest of the country that a teachers union could take on expansive ambitions to protect public education from privatization and top-down reform through effective internal organizing and the support of community partners.[6]

More than 4,000 teachers and other Chicago Teachers Union members gathered inside Chicago's Auditorium Theater on May 23, 2012, for the massive rally.
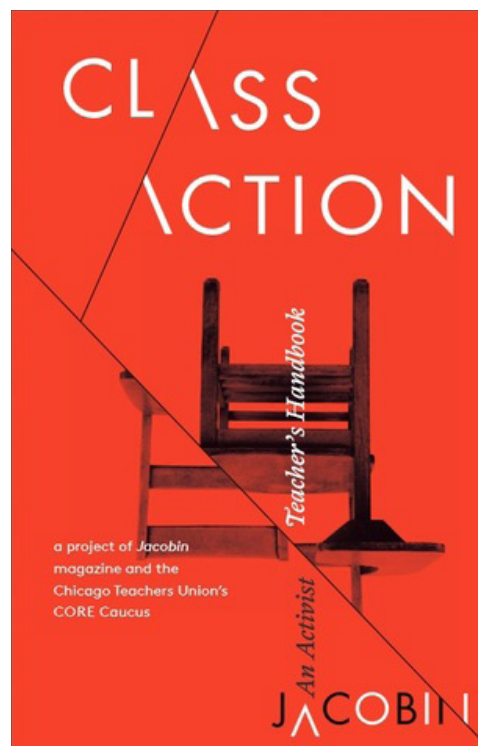**Photo:** *Howard Heath*

KEEPING KIDS FIRST

This report explores what happened in two cities—St. Paul, Minnesota and Austin, Texas—where unions have established partnerships reminiscent of the alignment between labor and community groups in Chicago in 2012. Also, this report provides analysis and tools for labor and community groups nationwide that hope to overcome historical and systemic barriers in order to build trusting partnerships and shared power.

A collaborative partnership in which teachers' unions pursue community-defined priorities for education through contract negotiation requires an expansive view of the role of labor that extends beyond traditional union activity. In more traditional relationships between labor unions and community organizations, engagement can often be limited to financial sponsorship for local events, or contractual relationships in which unions pay community groups for local organizing to support the union's campaigns. In our research, we have found that a shift toward more collaborative community/union partnerships generally requires the affirmative support of the union. This support can come from new union leadership—as occurred in Chicago, where CORE members ran a campaign to take over the elected leadership of the union—or a proactive push by rank-and-file members in this direction—which can come slowly or haltingly. Increasingly, however, both teachers' unions and community groups have come to realize the strength that comes from partnering with each other, and are looking towards new collaborative models for ensuring the best education and schools for students, that include fair working conditions for teachers and staff.

While we found that community organizations may have limited ability to transform or re-balance the power dynamics at work in their relationships with labor until there is momentum from inside the union, education organizing and advocacy groups can be attuned to potential areas where union and community interests overlap and

Resource: *For more analysis of the Chicago strike, read this collection of essays compiled by Jacobin magazine and the Chicago Teachers Union's CORE Caucus. https://www.jacobinmag.com/2014/02/class-action-an-activist-teachers-handbook/*

On May 23, 2012, a sea of red-clad teachers marched through downtown Chicago during rush hour and met with a contingent of supporters organized by Stand Up Chicago at the Board of Trade.
Photo: *Isaac Steiner*

focus on the potential to make meaningful connections and demonstrate the power and value of local organizing. For those community groups that want to prioritize building relationships with labor partners, stepping back from more traditional and transactional engagement can illuminate which partnerships have the potential to evolve into something more. Dan McGrath, Executive Director of TakeAction Minnesota in St. Paul traces the roots of their organization's successful collaborative partnership with the teachers' union to TakeAction's decision to step back from relying on union contracts for funding. They believed the organization would not be perceived as a peer of labor until TakeAction had their own financial support and base that wasn't so closely tied to the union's funds. "The unions that only looked at community groups as a transactional partner and a means to an end, largely they just left," he said. "The unions that hung around respected us and then we respected them. That made a difference."

Still, in Chicago and in the case examples featured in this report, the breakthrough in changing community/labor relationships resulted from a conscious shift on the part of the union. It takes leadership from teachers unions to invest in stronger relationships with community partners, make it clear that these partnerships are welcome and valued, and signal that community partners are critical to future union strategy. Because of this, the stories in this report delve more deeply into the perspective of the teachers' unions and focus on the shifts that led unions to establish new community relationships.

We hope these stories help illustrate not only what teachers' unions stand to gain—particularly as public sector unions and the number of public sector jobs in education and other sectors continue to shrink nationwide—but also why these partnerships strengthen the power of community groups as well. Community labor partnerships build the voice and power of all parties, and make it harder for officials to ignore the arguments

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coming from a strong united front fighting for excellent public education that all children deserve. As Ken Zarifis, President of Education Austin said, "We have to look outside of our strict membership as our allies. We have to find common cause outside."

KEY THEMES

The insights in this report offer snapshots of the evolution of partnerships between teachers unions and community in St. Paul and Austin. The full stories of the cities, communities and relationships featured in brief here are far richer and more complicated than a case example allows. We don't endeavor to capture every nuance of the events described; rather, we hope to offer some insight for how community and labor partnerships can be established and nurtured, with the acknowledgement that the story is complex and ever-evolving.

Every partnership is unique, but some themes emerged through a series of over thirty interviews with labor and community leaders nationally, as well as in St. Paul and Austin, that have worked to build meaningful collaborations:

Move Beyond the Transactional
Successful collaboration does not rely on transactional exchanges that are limited to the campaign at that moment. Building meaningful relationships and trust requires open communication and frequent engagement over time.

Expand the Issue Lens

The alliances that were successful over time were not restricted to traditional school issues: they took an expansive view of what affects the community and thus, its students, engaging on policy issues including immigration, home foreclosures, police violence, local wages, and child care and early childhood resources outside of the school day. Union strategy development must be reflective and responsive to the needs of parents, students and teachers in order to truly make the partnership collaborative and meaningful.

Engage, Even when Difficult

Establishing new collaboration and taking on challenging issues often requires difficult conversations. In many of the large cities and jurisdictions where unions hold significant power, the teachers' union membership includes proportionally fewer teachers of color than the communities they serve. Addressing issues like school discipline and safety, which are common challenges for teachers and students both, requires engaging with difficult issues of structural racism and implicit bias. Tensions over these issues can make partnerships falter. To find common ground and sustain the partnership through difficult conversations, all parties must approach the conversations and the language used to describe the issues with care.

Be Patient

Although building meaningful community/labor partnerships takes time, they build the power of all parties, and make it harder for officials to ignore. "It's tough for those in power to penetrate these alliances," one interviewee told us.

We hope this report advances your education justice organizing efforts. We also invite you to join our national network of education advocates at Schott's Opportunity to Learn Network via *www.schottfoundation.org*.

WHAT YOU'LL FIND IN THIS REPORT

This report is designed to support community and labor groups that are ready and willing to engage in meaningful relationship building and collaboration. The case examples of union/community collaboration in St. Paul and Austin highlight two state capitals with distinctly different labor climates and educational challenges. Nonetheless, both unions succeeded by bringing the community into strategy development and partnership in a meaningful way.

This report also contains two sample exercises designed to support labor and community groups beginning to work together to explore how to better support students. "Building Our Schoolhouse" encourages parents, teachers, students, and other allies to find common ground for a vision for the schools students deserve, and identify plans for working together to create these environments for students. "Network Mapping" will help teachers, parents, and others consider the influences that affect students both in their academic success and in their overall well-being, with the goal of identifying both allies in supporting students and challenges that need to be addressed.

We hope these case examples and exercises help provide a road map of the initial steps for labor and community organizations to begin the work of increasing trust and collaboration to build their collective power to fight the corporate privatization of public education in the nation.

CASE EXAMPLE 1:
St. Paul, Minnesota

BACKGROUND

St. Paul, Minnesota has a history of active labor organizing and collective bargaining. The St. Paul Federation of Teachers (SPFT)—an affiliate of Education Minnesota, the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association—is a powerful union that regularly negotiates its contract with the school district, and had, in earlier years, focused those negotiations primarily on the traditional purview of pay, benefits, and working conditions for their members. However, over the past decade, and under the leadership of multiple union presidents, the St. Paul Federation of Teachers expanded its community engagement far beyond financial support of local charitable efforts and events, or paying local groups to participate in union-driven campaigns that needed additional people on the ground, canvassing or voter engagement.

The union sought meaningful relationship and understanding with the community, and adopted an expansive approach to using its contract bargaining process to incorporate the concerns of students and community outside the realm of the classroom. Mary Cathryn Ricker, the president of the union from 2005 to 2014 and now Executive Vice President of the American Federation of Teachers, described the approach this way: "Using the power of your negotiating table not just for traditional wages and benefits of working conditions—which of course it's built for, so you should use it to get regular raises and make sure your health benefits are still affordable and those sorts of things—but actually using the power you have at the negotiating table to negotiate for the sorts of tools children deserve, the sort of community those children deserve to live in. It's the one time you have the attention of people in power so you might as well use it."

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> [The negotiating table] is the one time you have the attention of people in power so you might as well use it.

St. Paul teachers at a listening session in 2012 heard from Dora Jones of Mentoring Young Adults. Teachers are including parents and community members in study groups and in bargaining. Community witnesses have even kept management from acting up at the table.
Photo: *Janet Hostetter*

Twin Cities Art Build for Public Education
Photo: *Robin King*

LEADERSHIP CHANGE AND NEW COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

When Mary Cathryn became president of the St. Paul Federation of Teachers in 2005, she heard from members that they wanted the union to take on a broader role. Members wanted the union to address "working conditions and professionalism" while also tackling issues that would improve student's lives. "Again and again and again, it would come up that our educators wanted to do both. We looked for opportunities where we could be working on moving our profession forward, working on high-quality teaching and learning at every turn, and at the same time, not ignore some of the most vulnerable positions our students found themselves in."

One of the initial community/union collaborations after the union's leadership change concerned a bill that proposed providing health care for all children in the state of Minnesota. School nurses and teachers who saw the effects of limited health care access on children in their schools made the connection between health and school attendance, quality of attention, and learning capacity. When the union decided to support the legislation, school nurses—who were also members of SPFT—testified in support of the measure at the State Capitol. Community groups working on the issue saw the effectiveness of the testimony on legislators, and began reaching out to the union to encourage their continued participation in the effort. From the union's perspective, "It was a super organic partnership. It's not like we sat at a table and devised this really intricate coalition ... We just organically showed up on their side and they kept inviting us to planning meetings and strategy meetings." Community groups were proactive about responding to indications that the union was interested in supporting efforts outside its traditional purview, and this helped lay the groundwork for more sustained relationship and partnership.

It was equally vital that union and community leaders earned each other's trust by cultivating their personal relationships. In the case of one community partner in St. Paul who works with youth of color, the personal relationship cultivated with SPFT leadership allowed the community partner to act as a mediator between the union and representatives from the Black community, who had felt historically shut out from a relationship with teachers in the schools and who, in many cases, were hesitant to hear what the union leadership had to say. The community leader acknowledged the real and historical barriers between mostly white teachers and students of color, but also emphasized the necessity of building relationships since, "These are teachers that are in the classroom overseeing our children."

The expanded set of relationships and attempts at outreach to the community nurtured union activity on issues facing students and the community outside of schools. In conjunction with community partners, SPFT has worked on issues including ending winter foreclosures on families with children, raising the minimum wage (which affects students' families), and increasing funding for childcare. In the process of taking on a wider range of issues, the union had natural opportunities to partner with SEIU and local groups organizing around racial and economic justice, including Neighborhoods Organizing for Change and TakeAction Minnesota. Many of the local organizations included parents of students, which the union saw as a natural route to build relationships, and common ground. "The more our members listened to families, listened to students, listened to community members, the more our members realized that we were very natural allies," said Mary Cathryn. "We wanted a lot of the same things for kids."

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS

As the SPFT made increasingly intentional efforts to engage the community and build new relationships and partnerships there, the union brought the community into its contract negotiation process. By law, contract meetings with the district were "open," allowing parents and community members to watch negotiations, but neither the union nor the district had actively promoted this policy in any systemic way. Mary Cathryn saw an opportunity to develop a more robust role for parent and family concerns in the teachers' contract. Initially, the union established priorities in advance and then invited parents and community groups to come watch the negotiation. However, the union realized that deeper partnership was possible.
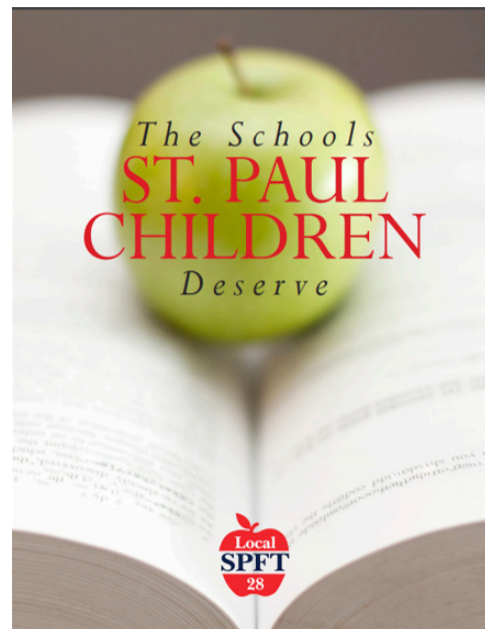
Beginning in 2012 during the lead up to the 2013-15 contract negotiations, union leadership decided to ask community members what should be in the teacher contract instead of coming up with the platforms solely through an internal process. Over five months, they worked with an outside facilitator to lead community listening sessions around three questions:

1. What are the schools St. Paul children deserve?
2. Who are the teachers St. Paul students deserve?
3. What is the profession those teachers deserve?

At the same time the union was gathering feedback and priorities from the community, it was internally discussing the emerging themes to find out what resonated with members. Eventually seven priorities emerged that both the community and the union could get behind:

1. School environments that address not only education but the health, relationships and environments of students by providing support services including counselors, nurses, and social workers;

2. More authentic engagement between teachers and families;
3. Smaller class sizes;
4. A reduction of classroom time dedicated to standardized testing and test preparation;
5. Effective professional development for teachers;
6. Expanded access to preschool; and
7. Assuring that teachers are equipped to meet the needs of a culturally diverse student population, a goal that later evolved to include an explicit commitment to advancing racial equality and social justice within the school system.

Resource: *For more details on how these priorities were developed, see this report from the SPFT about the process. https://spft.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/The-Schools-Saint-Paul-Children-Deserve-.pdf*

The union developed negotiating proposals based on these priorities. The district initially refused to negotiate on the grounds that these issues fell outside the mandatory subjects for contract negotiations. Because the community had helped shape the union's priorities for the contract and was invested in their success, the union had support from parents and students throughout the months it took to bring the district to the table to negotiate. Community members supported the union and its priorities through appearances at public meetings, signature drives, and directly contacting the district to push it to deliver for both teachers and community. The union ratcheted up the pressure on the district, including authorizing a vote on whether to strike. The fact that the community remained invested in the jointly developed proposals and felt its own sense of ownership in their success—not solely for the union, but for the community and students as well—helped to eventually bring the district to the negotiating table.

This process accomplished a number of important outcomes that laid the groundwork for deeper partnership moving forward. Trust was built between community and teachers, helping to demystify the union and counter negative stereotypes about its purpose and intentions. Community concerns were directly addressed in the teachers' contract itself, and the resulting programs—such as expanded training and support for parent/teacher home visits—both addressed community needs and assured that community/educator relationships and understanding continued to develop. All of this was key when the community and the union worked together to address school safety, an issue that has strained relationships between teachers, students, parents, and community members across the nation.

KEY STEPS TO COLLABORATION

› Create safe spaces to bridge the experiences of teachers and community members.

› Look to community practice and experience to approach and deal with specific issues (e.g. restorative practice model).

› Take the time to build individual relationships between parents and teachers responsible for rolling out programs.

PARTNERSHIP IN FOCUS: SCHOOL SAFETY

Issues of school safety surfaced when the union and community partners were working on the community provisions secured in the 2013-15 contract and preparing for the next round of negotiations. According to Nick Faber, the current President of SPFT, "we recognized that we were dealing with this crisis, or at least in the media, around school climate." Teachers had been assaulted, and at the same time the St. Paul school district was trying to address a major racial discrepancy in suspensions. "We knew we needed some sort of radical change around that."

It was important that teachers and parents were able to hear from each other about their experiences. The union hosted small group discussions facilitated by trained leaders from the union's bargaining team. Through these discussions, parents and community members heard what teachers experience in the classroom, and members learned about what parents and students face in the community. The goal of these efforts was to "build the capacity of understanding" that was essential to bridging divides and enabling people to hear each other's concerns in a meaningful way.
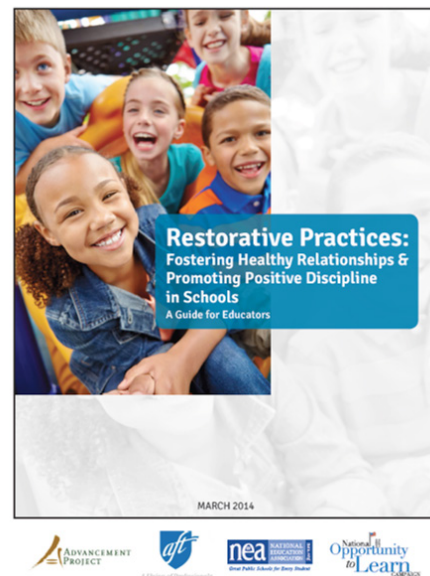
What emerged from these discussions was an agreement to address school climate and discipline issues through restorative practices, which create structured community space for mediated discussion between people on different sides of a conflict to reach resolution and healing. Some St. Paul schools had racial equity teams in place as part of existing district efforts to address disparities in school discipline and achievement, and members of these teams were included in exploring how the next contract negotiation process could help attain funds for restorative practices to move racial equity work forward. The resulting contract language funded a three-year pilot study at schools where 75% of staff approved implementing a "restorative practices" program, as well as evidence of parent and community support for the idea.

The six pilot sites (selected from 18 applicants) got underway during the 2016-2017 school year. There has also been a residual effect among the twelve schools that didn't get selected, several of which have started restorative practices using their own funds. "With their own building funds, [schools] were saying 'Let's go down this path,'" said Nick. "And it was because we used the high-profile nature of our contract campaign to elevate that conversation about that in ways that involved our members and community and the district, and it was really powerful." In the second year, three additional sites were selected from 13 applicants.

The pilot program is led by a district employee and union member, and community leaders with expertise in restorative practices informed its design and application. The community leaders who are engaged in shaping the restorative programming have also led professional development in restorative practices for teachers outside of the program, which helped deepen teachers' investment in the community's role in shaping the program. "Oftentimes we are educated by people who have more education than us, or have a very prescriptive kind of education that is more

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> I think the educators really beautifully responded to being taught by community.

Resource: *For more information, this toolkit from the Advancement Project details how to use the "restorative practices" model to build healthy relationships between students and adults in educational settings. https://advancementproject. org/resources/restorative-practices-fostering-healthy-relationships-promoting-positive-discipline-in-schools/*

than what we have," said Becky McCammon, Restorative Practice Program Coordinator for SPFT. "For [educators] to sit with folks that aren't every day in classrooms or that have been working in community specifically, or have been working in justice, or have been working in all sorts of different ways—I think the educators really beautifully responded to being taught by community."

The work of repairing harm and building new relationships between schools and communities remains challenging, but the commitment to the process continues to open spaces that facilitate better understanding and communication that had not been present before. Moreover, from the perspective of Becky, the very fact that the union and community were able to formalize the commitment to the work through the contract negotiation process highlights the overall potential for the union to reflect the community's needs in its bargaining and strategic priorities.

SPFT successfully negotiated to increase funding to their restorative practices work, and have continued to use the bargaining table to address issues facing students and families, including a recent proposal for the school district to engage in responsible banking and contracting, including not working with banks that foreclose on families during the school year and only contracting with companies that pay at least a $15.16 minimum wage and provide specific benefits to their employees.[7] According to Becky, approaching the union's bargaining power this way serves to expand "the spirit of what we can do and what we can innovate to be better stewards of [our community]."

KEY LESSONS

Think Differently about which Partnerships are Natural

SPFT built some of its initial community partnerships by connecting with other organizations that serve the same constituents, including local organizations serving immigrants, low-wage workers, people experiencing homelessness, and more. "The people they're advocating for were the parents of our students," Mary Cathryn said, which made it seem natural to reach out and cultivate partnership.

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The people they're advocating for were the parents of our students.

Transparency and Listening

Mistakes will be made as relationships of trust are built, and it's crucial to allow tensions to surface without jumping to blame or shutting each other down. For example, the initial rollout of the restorative practices didn't include sufficient community input, and the union and program worked to meaningfully acknowledge community frustration and allow its input to shape revisions to the program and application process. Meaningful partnership depends on all parties believing that they'll be heard. "Our parents, and particularly our parents of color, were not afraid to speak up and push back," said Nick Faber about a recent training in advance of the next contract negotiation. "When they didn't agree with something they let us know. They didn't just not show up at the next thing … I think a lot of that is just in being in relationship and being really intentional about building those relationships."

Build Out Leadership

Both internally and externally, it is important to develop leadership that can continue the work beyond one dynamic leader at the top. Embedding the lessons and practices of community labor partnership ensures that the impact of the work will be lasting. For SPFT, that meant building beyond traditional union leadership structure to empower more members with negotiating skills to engage in the bargaining and serve as leaders in structured conversations with the community, as well as cultivating member's leadership within the union by providing opportunities for them to take initiative in areas of expertise.

CASE EXAMPLE 2:
Austin, Texas

BACKGROUND

Public education is under attack throughout the United States, but the situation is particularly dire in Texas. The overall state education budget is in perpetual crisis as a result of the legislature's focus on cutting taxes and reducing public spending. The state has an unusual means of allocating tax funding for schools. After a prior system of basing school financing on property taxes was ruled unconstitutional because it fell so dramatically short at providing low-income students with effective public education, the state created a new mechanism of distributing taxes from property-rich districts to less wealthy areas throughout the state. The policy is a particular challenge for districts like the state capital Austin, which has significant wealth and revenue from property taxes but also faces the profound challenges present in many urban school districts with significant low-income communities, and desperately needs revenue for education. The city prides itself on being a progressive environment in the midst of a deeply conservative state, but it bears the legacy of systemic racial housing discrimination and remains profoundly segregated. Rapid growth and gentrification are pushing students of color out of Austin schools entirely, and immigrant students face great uncertainty as the city anticipates reprisal for its position at odds with the state and federal government's aggressive immigration enforcement policy.

Created in 1999 from the merger of the NEA-affiliated Austin Association of Teachers (AAT) and the AFT-affiliated Austin Federation of Teachers/Allied Education Workers (AFT/AEW), Education Austin is the first merged local in Texas and is affiliated with the NEA, AFT, TSTA, Texas AFT, and the AFL-CIO.[8] As the labor union for certified and classified employees of the Austin Independent School District, it faces significant challenges in both advocating for teachers and serving students. Texas is governed by "right to work" labor laws that bar

The proud Norman ES community speaking to the school board in Feb. 2018, asking that their beloved school not be closed.
Photo: *Education Austin*

unionized workplaces from compelling employees to join the union, and makes it illegal for public sector unions to collectively bargain. In just four school districts in Texas—including Austin—a "meet-and-confer" process has been written into district policy,[9] giving the union a path to enter into discussion with district officials, but overall blocking much of what traditionally gives labor power. In spite of the legal barriers, Education Austin has built its power by cultivating alliances with community groups, engaging in issue organizing, and showing up to support community priorities even outside of the school settings. As Education Austin president Ken Zarifis describes it: "What we've been able to do, because we don't have collective bargaining, we've been able to amass a considerable amount of power within the district, and respect, because people know that Education Austin means something, and that we will stand up, and that they need to listen."

LEADERSHIP CHANGE AND NEW COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Just months after Ken Zarifis became president of Education Austin in 2010, the Texas State Legislature cut $5.4 billion from the state's public education budget, eliminating more than 1,100 teaching positions in Austin alone, 10% of the total number statewide.[10] As a new president, he felt unprepared for such an extraordinary loss for the district, but the crisis did encourage him to engage with members of the community in a way the union hadn't done before. Ken had become union president after resisting the state and national mandates for student testing and their interference with instruction time, and had developed a good relationship with community groups that supported his efforts in this process. Now, the scope of seeking partnerships and relationships expanded. "I began to learn very quickly how to identify the constituents, the key players to organize, rally around an issue, mobilize, put pressure on those who need to be pressured on," he said. "Be it the school district, the school board – do we have partners?" In particular, he realized that parents opposed the layoffs, and saw the potential for collaboration around that shared concern. The union started making connections to groups of parents that had expressed opposition to cuts in the district that preceded the state cuts, including efforts to close numerous schools. District employees and parents both engaged with the school board to lobby against the layoffs. "We were able to save a lot of positions, we were able to save a lot of programs in the district because of this," he said. "While it was a great loss with all the people that were terminated, it was also a great win in that people found a voice – people stepped forward."

Following the layoffs, and still only about a year into his role as union president, Education Austin faced another crisis. The union discovered that the school board was planning a vote to allow a charter network that was not based in Austin to take over a low-performing local elementary school. The union worried that the takeover of the lower school would lead to a subsequent characterization of the struggling high school in the same community, given that the elementary school was the feeder to the high school. The school board had yet to have a public meeting on the proposed plan and was just seven weeks away from the scheduled vote when the union learned of its intentions.

Education Austin opposed allowing an outside charter network to take over a local school and impose an education model that had not been developed in partnership with the community. The union began cultivating relationships both with allies established during the layoff and school facility closure debates, as well as with other parent and student activists who sought the union out to join in opposing the plan. In the weeks before the vote, the union and community partners—including students, parents, community organizing groups and local political organizations—mobilized to protest at the school board meetings, culminating in hundreds of members of the union and community watching the board vote to allow the charter takeover.
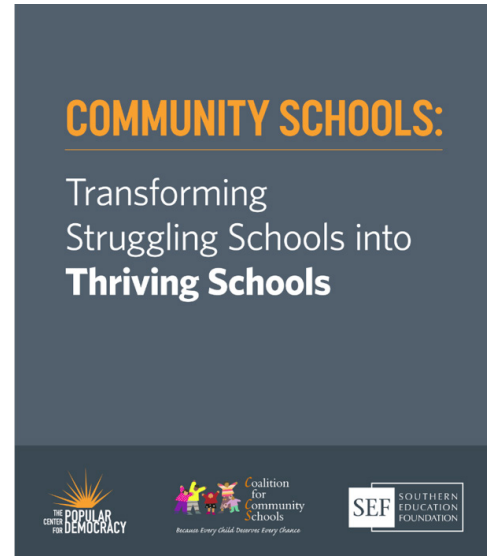

From left to right: Trasell Underwood (Vice President for Classified of EA), Ken Zarifis (President of EA), and Montserrat Garibay (Vice President for Certified of EA)

Despite the loss, the galvanizing effect of the vote on the community and its relationship with the union was clear to the union president, "[I] went up to the superintendent and said, 'You won tonight, congratulations, but you don't know what you just woke up here.'" The union continued organizing with the community allies that had opposed the takeover, developed a shared agenda for the district's schools, and identified people who wanted to run for school board. The next election flipped the school board from 6-3 against the coalition of Education Austin and its parent, student and community allies to 5-4 in favor of it.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS IN COMMUNITY SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL SAFETY

Because the commissioner still insisted that the elementary school either close, charter, or partner in order to stay open, Education Austin and its community partners had been simultaneously working to create a neighborhood-based charter school that would have the autonomy to shape a curriculum and school structure in response to community needs, but without the selective admission and restrictive attendance rules of many charters that the union and community opposed. In conjunction with their partners, they identified a community-responsive charter network that they could support to work with the elementary school that had been slated for takeover. The new charter used a community school model that utilizes the school as home base to provide wraparound family and community services integrated with the traditional academic setting. The very night that the newly constituted school board eliminated the outside charter's contract, it approved a new charter for the same elementary school for the network supported by the union and community.

In the course of this work, Education Austin connected with Austin Voices for Education and Youth, an

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS:

Transforming Struggling Schools into **Thriving Schools**

THE CENTER FOR POPULAR DEMOCRACY

Coalition for Community Schools
Because Every Child Deserves Every Chance

SEF SOUTHERN EDUCATION FOUNDATION

Resource: *To learn more about the impact of the community school model, this report profiles community schools across the country, all which demonstrate consistent improvement in a wide range of indicators of student success. https://populardemocracy.org/sites/default/files/Community-Schools-Layout_e.pdf*

organization that had stopped the threatened closure of other struggling middle and high schools in the district by organizing a community school model. They also built a relationship with the Austin Project, a community development organization that had piloted school-based family resource centers in Austin two decades earlier. Together, these partnerships were instrumental in the creation of the Greater Austin Community School Coalition, which includes the city, county, school district, non-profits and the union working together to provide resources and support to create more community schools in and around Austin.

Education Austin also worked with Texas Appleseed, a statewide organization, to shape policy for the district to address the school-to-prison pipeline by advocating a ban on school suspensions for students in second grade

and below. Reaching consensus between the union and community groups required lots of internal discussion and candid communication, and building authentic personal relationships was critical.

Morgan Craven, director of the School-to-Prison Pipeline Project at Texas Appleseed, described how vital it was to intentionally cultivate understanding to bridge the different perspectives that each group brought to the table. This was essential to push through those moments when the community group perceived a lack of alignment between the union's stated goals of protecting the wellbeing of children and assuring that teachers have what they need to feel supported if discipline policies changed. For advocates, this meant "accepting that there were other goals on the table," besides following the lead of three decades of research showing that suspensions undermined child wellbeing. Morgan had to make sure that Education Austin also received "what their teachers needed to successfully implement the ban was going to be given to them by the district. It's not that anyone said 'we really want to suspend these kids'… It's just that they wanted to make sure that everyone, including teachers, felt supported." Because the union and community groups committed to building a relationship that included communicating through these tensions and building understanding between educators and advocacy organizations, the union and community partners were able to agree on policies to improve both teacher and student support for new discipline procedures.

KEY STEPS TO COLLABORATION

› Meet regularly, regardless of whether there is a campaign.

› Get to know key partners individually and collectively outside of formal meetings.

› Identify shared issues and interests that impact students and families broadly.

Resource: *To find out more about how school boards can support these efforts, this policy guide details how school board members can lead the way in securing a high-quality education for each and every student in their district. http://schottfoundation.org/sites/default/ files/2014-122_POPGuide_DIGITAL.PDF*

PARTNERSHIP IN FOCUS: IMMIGRATION POLICY

Education Austin's work with partners to encourage the implementation of community schools helped sharpen the union's perspective on how to engage the entire community to better serve students. "I see virtually everything we need to deal with in this model," Ken Zarifis said. "We were addressing these issues separately. Now we have this framework to bring everything together. When you see a good community school working, it's got all these components – it understands their community; it has ways of adjusting behavior and discipline in a very different way; it has strong academics; the teachers and the parents are involved. It helps us in thinking, how do you coordinate all these efforts together?"

This broad view of the union's responsibility to its students, families and community shaped its efforts on immigration policy, an issue that impacts daily life for many Austin students, families and teachers themselves. Montserrat Garibay, who was elected Vice President for Certified Employees with Education Austin in 2012. In her teaching career, she saw families deported and when she called her union and the district, she was always told that immigration was too political and they couldn't get involved. When she and Ken were running for election, they knew they wanted to change this approach and incorporate immigration into the work of Education Austin.

When Montserrat and Ken won election in 2012, she knew that not everyone in the union would support work on immigration, so she began laying the foundation with the executive board. It took three meetings that involved intense sharing and discussion to pass a resolution. There were vocal opponents, and at one point Montserrat revealed that she had been undocumented herself in response to one board member's insistence that this matter didn't affect teachers. Ultimately, according to Montserrat, "we were able to talk about misconceptions,

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>
> ... we were able to talk about misconceptions, and eventually were able to pass a resolution.

and eventually were able to pass a resolution." Once the resolution passed, they hosted an immigration forum and connected with United We Dream—a national network of immigrant youth fighting for reforms to the nation's immigration system—to channel their resources into Know Your Rights trainings for parent support specialists, school leaders, and social workers.

In November of that year, the Obama administration implemented the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, which offered temporary work permits and reprieve from the threat of deportation to qualifying undocumented immigrants who entered the United States as minors. Education Austin officers saw an opportunity for schools to provide information and support with applications for students, as well as safe spaces for immigrant parents and community members to learn more about the program and their rights. They began integrating information about the DACA program and enrollment process into the Know Your Rights trainings.

In order to leverage the union's access to large numbers of young people and their families in support of enrollment in DACA, Education Austin sought out partnerships with local social justice organizations. The union created new partnerships with groups like the Equal Justice Center and pro bono lawyers that were supporting immigrant communities and coordinating information about the DACA program. What began as help to students and families with DACA applications grew into a fuller scale engagement with families on an even broader set of

immigration issues, including citizenship drives for eligible permanent residents – including union members. The union's Know Your Rights clinics supported hundreds of people in applying for DACA permits or citizenship.

The relationships built in this process became long-lasting, multi-issue partnerships. For example, the union built a collaborative relationship with a student group at the University of Texas called University Leadership Initiative, which was affiliated with United We Dream, and worked in collaboration with the union's teachers, counselors and social workers to share resources and provide guidance on how to advocate for undocumented youth served by both organizations.

This work took on a new urgency with the election of Donald Trump and the accompanying threat of more aggressive and punitive immigration enforcement, as well as state-level "show your papers" legislation that sought to empower local police to demand proof of immigration status and punish so-called "sanctuary cities" like Austin that limit coordination with federal immigration enforcement. In this tense environment, the union's immigration efforts came under heightened scrutiny from both the school district, which initially offered very restrictive guidance on how teachers and the union could support undocumented students and families, and local media, which drew public attention to the content of Know Your Rights materials the union had distributed for years. Facing this pressure head on, the union worked with community partners, faith organizations, and supporters on the city council to reaffirm that their support for undocumented students and families was unwavering.

From the union's perspective, establishing and maintaining a clear commitment to support the immigrant community was critical to both serving the full needs of students and to maintaining its organizational power to serve its teachers in the future. "If we want to grow our union it needs to be about social justice, because that's the way that we're

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If we want to grow our union it needs to be about social justice, because that's the way that we're going to be able to touch younger teacher and younger members, because they want to be part of the change.

going to be able to touch younger teachers and younger members, because they want to be part of the change," said Montserrat. "They want to help Austin to be better."

Overall, one of the things that made all this work so successful is that Education Austin was led by a diverse group of individuals who were able to connect with their community in a personal way. As Montserrat put it, "sympathy isn't the same as having lived experience on staff." She went on to say, "When unions can build diverse leadership and provide members with tools and training to lift people of color up, then this is what happens – you develop a powerful union that leads on the issues because they understand the issues personally."

KEY LESSONS

Build Relationships Outside of Campaigns and Formal Meetings

Campaigns often provide the impetus to recruit partners and allies, but it's crucial to cultivate relationships even when not working toward a specific goal together and to spend time with partners in settings where there isn't urgent pressure to resolve or accomplish something. Many interviewees described how frequent communication between the union and its partners makes it possible to extend trust and reach resolution when differences or misunderstandings arise.

Unlikely Partners

In Austin, the union took action to support issues that weren't explicitly related to the school environment. A campaign to ensure better wages for district construction projects, for example, wasn't directly related to either Education Austin members or students, but it allowed the union to build trust and accountability with student's families and communities – who in turn showed up to support the union and joint efforts to assure that teacher and student needs are met. The union connected to the Workers Defense Project, an advocacy organization for low-wage workers, including many immigrants with children in Austin public schools. The union supported the Project in campaigns for better workplace protections, and in turn, the Workers Defense Project supported the union's organizing on issues such as teacher salaries.

Acknowledge the Complexities of Challenging Issues

The effort to ban suspensions of young children involved discussions about structural racism and implicit bias that sometimes made teachers feel defensive and left the community feeling unheard. Community groups found that conversations were more effective when grounded in the acknowledgement that the situation involved systemic problems that no one person or group created or could

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> I acknowledge that [teaching] is a hard job, and there are challenges that they are experiencing that I don't quite understand.

solve alone. "We have allowed, essentially, a terrible, punitive system to be created in our schools, and since it is there it is being used," said Morgan Craven of Texas Appleseed. "But I also acknowledge that [teaching] is a hard job, and there are challenges that they are experiencing that I don't quite understand." A commitment to understand the experiences of all parties and the complexity of issues at play helped make progress possible. In addition, it's important to learn how and when to challenge people's understanding of an issue in order to be the most effective and keep conversation going.

EXERCISE 1:
BUILDING OUR SCHOOLHOUSE

PURPOSE OF THIS TOOL:

When addressing problems in schools, teachers and parents often share a common interest: the academic success and general well-being of the students. This tool allows participants to explore their vision for how their schools can be their best, and surfaces the commonalities shared between parents, teachers, students, and other community activists and leaders.

HOPED-FOR OUTCOMES:

› Parents, teachers, and students discover their common vision for their schools

› Establish a shared goal to plan around

HOW TO PREPARE

This tool is for meeting organizers and can be used on its own, as an icebreakers for another partnership-building gathering, or preceding the Network Map.

Below you'll find suggestions for preparation, which vary slightly depending on whether you are part of a labor union or a community group. Feel free to use anything that is helpful in putting together this exercise, and leave out what is not. You'll also find different sets of suggested questions based on how ready your group is to have discussions about race and class. If you need additional support in guiding those discussions, you will find suggested resources at the end of this toolkit.

It is important to consider carefully who will facilitate this meeting. If you choose not to have an outside facilitator, we highly suggest having a team co-facilitate so that all groups—teachers, parents, community leaders and students—are represented in the planning process and in front of the participants.

Building a Planning Group:

☐ It is important to ensure that representatives from each invested group are part of the process from the beginning. If you decide to do this exercise internally first, it can still be useful to get input from outside representatives.

☐ **For community groups, parents, or outside facilitators:** Begin by identifying either a teacher, school staff member, and/or a student.

☐ **For union members:** Begin by identifying a community member, parent, and/or a student who would be willing to co-plan this meeting with you.

☐ The goal of this meeting is to bring together stakeholders from the school/community (parents, teachers, students, and other community activists and leaders) who will have different perspectives on how we can best improve our schools. With that in mind, and together with your planning partners, identify who would want to participate in an exercise such as this, and who "needs" to participate.

› Who would most benefit from hearing from other participants in the group?

› Alternatively, who does the group need to hear from to fully understand the vision and challenges that exist for the school/community?

› Strive to get as representative a group as possible that includes all those involved in the school/community.

☐ Talk about the roles that each of the planners will play. This could include:

› Recruitment
› Logistics
› Agenda Development
› Facilitation or Securing Outside Facilitation

Planning the Meeting:

☐ Identify what you'll need for the meeting logistically (including space, food, and supplies) and figure out who will be responsible for each piece.

☐ Plan out the meeting itself. Remember to pay attention to who traditionally holds power in these spaces and make sure that everyone is represented and feels fully able to participate in the experience. This may include setting ground rules with the group during the introductions.

☐ You'll also want to think about what the next steps will be coming out of this meeting. It's most important to establish a common goal, but also important to ensure a continuation of the process for those interested in working together. Possibilities include:

› Establishing working groups;

› Setting up a series of planning meetings; or

› Creating a steering committee.

Note: We encourage you to use the Network Map exercise as an initial next step following this meeting. It will allow for some tactical planning around the shared goals.

☐ Schedule the meeting and reach out to participants.

What You'll Need:

☐ Flip charts, white board, or chalkboard

☐ Pens, markers, dry erase markers, or chalk

☐ Glue sticks   ☐ Scrap paper

☐ Printed/cut copies of the exercise, one for each table (see instructions below)

☐ Cards with the three discussion questions (see next page) written/printed on them, one for each table

Preparing the Exercise:

☐ Print out copies of the tool, cut the pieces along the solid lines, and place one set on each table you'll be using. During the activity, participants will fold along the dotted lines and glue the pieces together.

☐ Place one card or piece of paper with the three discussions questions written or printed on it at each table.

☐ Assign each table a number and clearly indicate it using a large card or sign.

☐ To ensure mixed groups, write the table numbers on slips of paper (one for each person who will be at the table) and distribute them evenly into three containers (i.e. baskets, bags, envelopes, etc.): one for teachers and staff, one for parents and community members, and one for students.

☐ As participants walk in, ask them to select a table number from the container that corresponds to their identity within this context (i.e. teachers and staff, parents and community members, or students) and take a seat at that table.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The following questions should be written or printed out and placed at each table. Select 3-4 questions total that feel most relevant or helpful to your group, based on where your work together is most focused: the local, district, or state level.

Note: If you/your group has less experience navigating discussions involving race and class, you might want to use an outside facilitator to guide this discussion. There are also helpful resources at the end of this report.

Level	Discussion Questions
LOCAL LEVEL	1. What is your favorite memory from school?
	2. What is your biggest concern for your school right now?
	3. What is your vision for what your school could be?
	4. How do you think the race and class makeup of the school might impact that vision?
	5. How does your school deal with issues of racial inequality and racial justice?
	6. When was the first time you saw or experienced racism/classism in your school?
DISTRICT LEVEL	1. What is your favorite memory from school?
	2. What is your biggest concern for your school right now?
	3. What is your vision for what your school could be?
	4. How do district policies or regulations impact that vision?
	5. Who do you think the district does a good job serving? Why?
	6. What are some examples of economic/racial inequality you have seen in your school district?
	7. How would you address inequality in your school district?
STATE LEVEL	1. What is your favorite memory from school?
	2. What is your biggest concern for your school right now?
	3. What is your vision for what your school could be?
	4. Do all your students get what they need from the state to succeed in school? Why or why not?
	5. When was the first time you realized that not everyone has an equal chance to succeed in school?
	6. How does systemic/structural inequality in your state laws and policies prevent every student from having an equal chance to succeed in school?
	7. What is your vision for true education equity in your state?

SAMPLE AGENDA

The following agenda is an example of how you might set up a gathering centered on this exercise. You'll want to plan for anywhere from 2 to 2.5 hours for completion.

10-20 MIN.

Welcome and Introductions

- Start by welcoming people into the space and explaining the purpose of the gathering.
- Then, as a large group, begin a round of introductions where people say where they're from, their relationship to the school, and respond to the following question(s):
  › What is one thing you would like to see happen at your school?
  › [If this is your second meeting together]: What was one takeaway you had from our last discussion together and why was it important to you?

Note: The facilitator should adjust according to the number of people in the room. For larger groups, consider having folks introduce themselves to the person on their left and right. Then, invite four or five people to introduce themselves to the entire room.

5 MIN.

Introduce the Tool

- Explain that the goal of this exercise is to help participants consider their vision for their school, what they have in common when it comes to improving things, and the role they can play in making sure those things happen. Be sure to note that there will also be things you don't agree on, but that there will be space to discuss that.

10 MIN.

Individual Reflection

- Ask participants to take 10 minutes to reflect individually on the questions at the table.
- They can use the provided scrap paper to jot down some ideas.

20-35 MIN.

Small Discussion Groups

- Give participants 10-15 minutes to discuss the questions and their individual answers as a small group. If groups are larger, add more time for discussion.
- Give participants 10-20 minutes to identify key takeaways/themes from the groups and to represent those takeaways/themes, through drawings, words, or in any way they choose, on their schoolhouse walls and roof.
- Once they get their "answers" onto the walls, ask them to glue the walls and roof together to build their schoolhouses.

15 MIN.

Vision Sharing

- Once everyone is finished, ask participants to walk around the room and look at all the schoolhouses.
- As they walk, ask them to think about the following questions (Note: you can write these up on a flip chart/white board/chalkboard or hand out paper with the questions printed on them to take notes as they walk):

Vision Sharing (cont.)

  › What are some of the shared visions you see?

  › What would be needed to support students, teachers, and families?

  › What can you offer in support of this work?
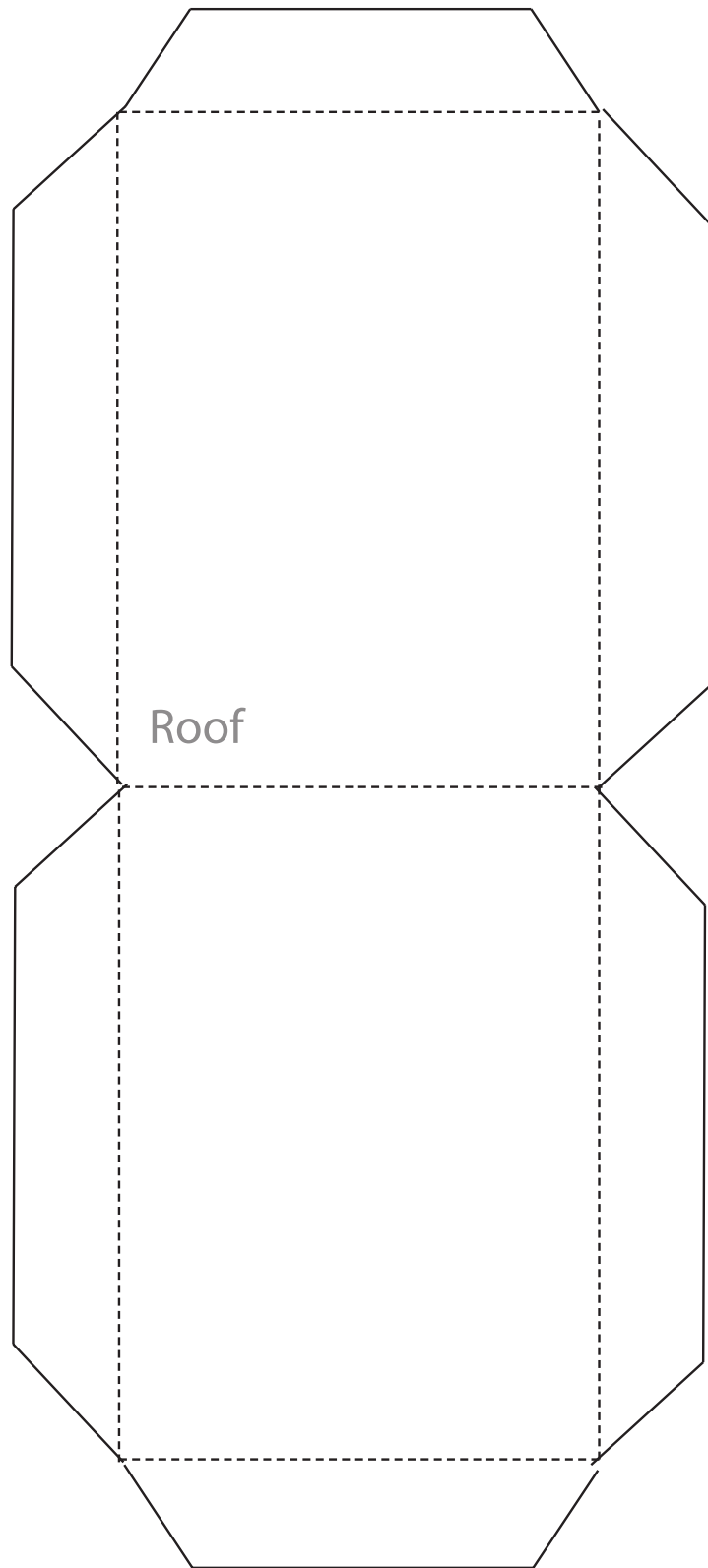

Full Group Discussion

25-50 MIN.

- [15-20 minutes] Once everyone has finished walking around, ask the whole group to come together and share their thoughts, in particular:

  › Any 'A-ha!' moments

  › Where people struggled

- As people talk, have the facilitator note key takeaways on a flip chart/white board/chalkboard. Note areas of agreement or disagreement.

- [20-30 minutes) As a group, discuss:

  › What are some common themes and places we all agree on? What surprised you?

  › Where there are differences in vision, what are some ways we can address those? What tensions exist?

  › What are some initial steps we can take towards working together?

  › What are some of the challenges ahead?

  › What are some of the roles we see for ourselves?

- Collect suggestions from the group about what they're seeing as shared goals and vision, and propose an overall goal for the group. Allow participants to discuss, amend, and ultimately agree on a shared vision or goal.
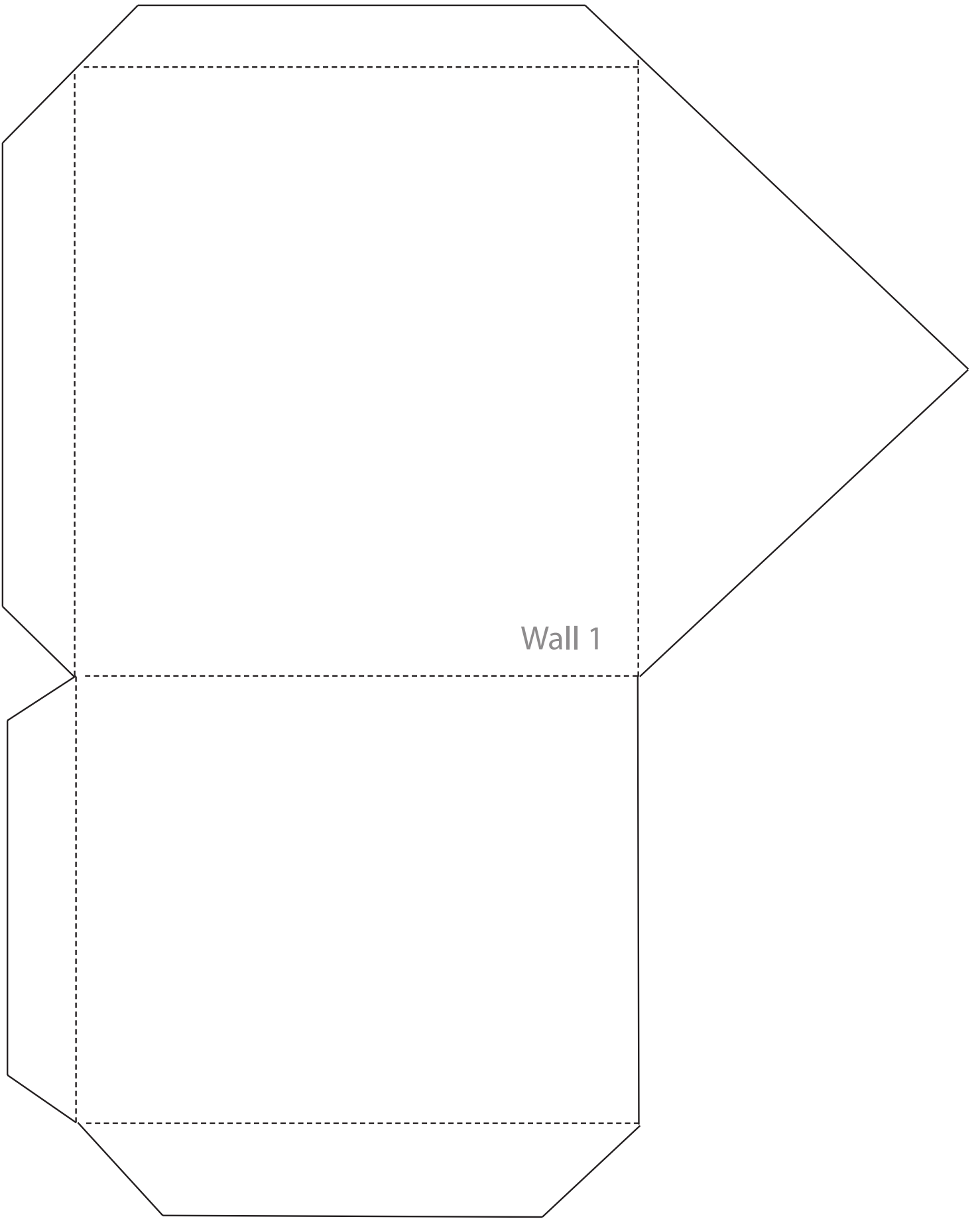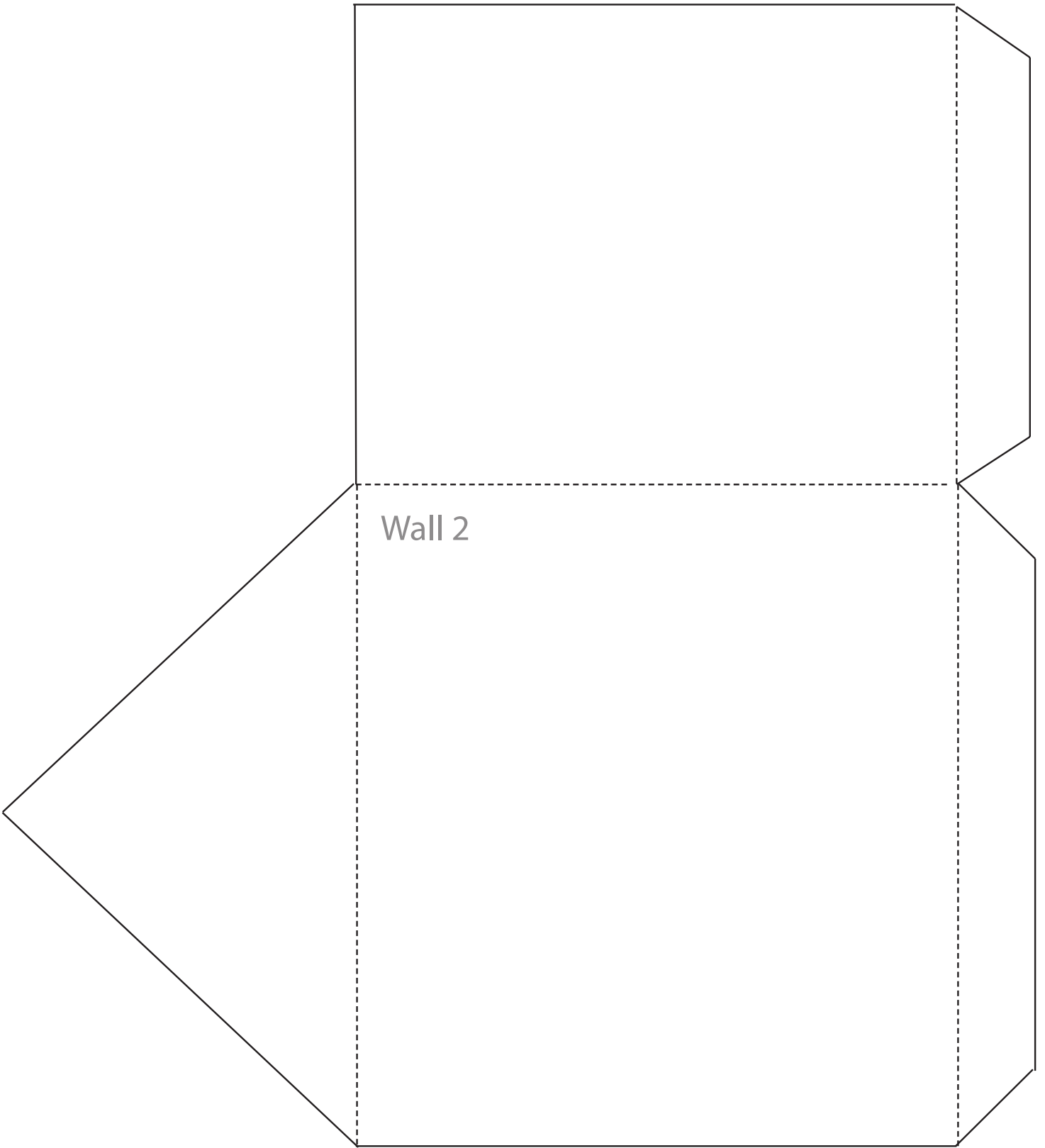

Closing and Evaluation

15 MIN.

- Ask people to share:

  › Something they can offer moving forward.

  › One thing they liked and one thing they would change about the conversation.

- Close the discussion and thank people for their participation. Let them know what the next steps will be and how they can be involved.

Roof

Wall 1

Wall 2

EXERCISE 2: NETWORK MAPPING

PURPOSE OF THIS TOOL:

This tool is based on a method developed to conduct ethnographic research in the field. It allows researchers to understand the networks surrounding an individual and the influence that network has. Here, we've positioned a student at the center in order to help participants identify their own role in a student's life, as well as the other players who impact the student.

HOPED-FOR OUTCOMES:

› Establish goals and next steps towards a shared vision

› Identify allies and partners who can be a part of this work

› Identify targets that need to be moved or overcome in order to reach the shared vision

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HOW TO PREPARE

The hope is that this tool will not only allow teachers, students, and parents to identify networks surrounding students and understand their role(s) within these networks, but also allow them to identify and discuss potential allies who support students' academic progress and overall well-being, as well as people or groups who impede students' progress and well-being and can become "targets" to be moved or addressed in some way.

It's important to keep in mind that depending on which community members are invited into the space, their motivation might not be solely the enrichment of students. Schools may just be seen as sites of democratic practice or a place to start advancing a larger vision for the community (i.e. more community empowerment, greater racial equity, increased commitment to fair labor practices, etc.) and some people may view the school as the entry point because it is an organized institution. While most people will be committed first to children, consider the larger motivations that might be at play if you are trying to build larger alliances.

This tool can be used on its own. However, we recommend using it as a follow-up to the Schoolhouse exercise.

Below you'll find suggestions for preparation, which vary slightly, depending on whether you are part a labor union or a community group. Feel free to use anything that is helpful in putting together this exercise, and leave out what is not. You'll also find different sets of suggested questions based on how ready your group is for discussions about race and class. If you need additional support in guiding those discussions, you will find suggested resources at the end of this toolkit.

It is important to consider carefully who will facilitate this meeting. If you choose not to have an outside facilitator, we highly suggest having a representative from the community in addition to a teacher or school staff member and/or a student co-facilitate so that all groups are represented in the planning process and in front of the participants.

Building a Planning Group:

☐ It is important to ensure that representatives from each invested group are part of the process from the beginning. If you decide to do this exercise internally first, it can still be useful to get input from outside representatives.

☐ **For community groups, parents, or outside facilitators:** Begin by identifying either a teacher, school staff member, and/or a student.

☐ **For union members:** Begin by identifying a community member, parent, and/or a student who would be willing to co-plan this meeting with you.

☐ The goal of this meeting is to bring together stakeholders from the school/community (parents, teachers, students, and other community activists and leaders) who will have different perspectives on how we can best improve our schools. With that in mind, and together with your planning partners, identify who would want to participate in an exercise such as this, and who "needs" to participate.

  › Who would most benefit from hearing from other participants in the group?

  › Alternatively, who does the group need to hear from to fully understand the networks that exist around students?

  › Strive to get as representative a group as possible that includes all those involved in the school/community, as well as potentially those outside the community who still impact students.

Building a Planning Group (cont.):

☐ Talk about the roles that each of the planners will play. This could include:

  › Recruitment   › Agenda Development

  › Logistics   › Facilitation or Securing Outside Facilitation

Planning the Meeting:

☐ Identify what you'll need for the meeting logistically (including space, food, and supplies) and figure out who will be responsible for each piece.

- -

☐ Plan out the meeting itself. Remember to pay attention to who traditionally holds power in these spaces and put in place methods and practices to make sure that everyone is represented and feels fully able to participate in the experience. This may include setting ground rules with the group during the introductions.

- -

☐ Because this exercise is centered around students, it is helpful to think about which students in particular you'd like to focus this meeting on. You will want to describe this group of students during the exercise. For example:

  › Are you talking about students from families with lower incomes, recent immigrants, students learning English as a second language, or students of color?

  › Is there a particular group that is facing elevated levels of scrutiny of difficulty in the current system?

- -

☐ Schedule the meeting and reach out to participants.

What You'll Need:

☐ Flip charts, white board, or chalkboard

☐ Pens, markers, dry erase markers, and/or chalk

☐ Post-it notes in three colors (optional)

☐ Printed copies of the exercise for all participants

☐ Large-scale version of the network map for facilitation (optional)

SAMPLE AGENDA

The following agenda is an example of how you might set up a gathering centered on this exercise. You'll want to plan for anywhere from 2 to 2.5 hours for completion.

The version below assumes a low level of exposure to facilitated discussions around race and class. You will find additional discussion questions that you can use if your group is more ready for those discussions, or if you have an outside facilitator whose purpose is to lead you through this process.

Welcome and Introductions

10-20 MIN.

- Start by welcoming people into the space and explaining the purpose of the gathering.

- We strongly suggest doing this exercise after going through the Schoolhouse exercise in order to establish a shared vision or goal. If you have done this, make sure to write up that vision/goal at the front of the room and review it with participants.

- Then, begin a round of introductions where people say where they're from, their relationship to the school, and respond to the following question(s):

  › Who had/has the biggest impact on your education?

  › [If this is your second meeting together]: What was one takeaway you had from our last discussion together and why was it important to you?

Note: The facilitator should adjust according to the number of people in the room. For larger groups, consider having folks introduce themselves to the person on their left and right. Then, invite four or five people to introduce themselves to the entire room.

Introduce the Tool

15 MIN.

- Explain that the goal of this exercise is to help participants identify the networks surrounding students and understand not only their own role, but also potential allies who can be partners in this work, as well as people or groups who impede students' progress and are potential "targets" to be moved or addressed in some way.

- Also explain that the student is at the center of this map because it reminds parents, teachers and community members about who is at the core of all our efforts around improving and reforming schools. It is helpful to think about the various people and systems that they come in contact with every day, and the effect and impact that has on students' lives and experiences with education.

- While introducing the exercise, pass out a copy of the network map tool to each participant. Describe who the student is in the center of the map based on what you've decided at your pre-meeting planning sessions.

- Point out that the rings around the student represent how direct an influence or impact people have on those students' academic progress and overall well-being – the closer in, the more direct the impact. Remind them that this can be either a positive or negative impact.

- Ask participants to take a couple minutes to think of the students you've described and reflect on their current role in those students' lives, then write their own name where they think it goes on the map.

Small Group Work

25 MIN.

- Once people have had a chance to reflect, ask them to form groups with similar participants. In other words, a group of teachers and/or staff, a group of parents and/or community members, and a group of students if they are participating.
- Give participants 15-20 min to fill out the network maps, adding as many people and groups as they can think of who impact students and writing the name of each person or group in the appropriate quadrants and rings.
- Remind participants that it is important to keep real students in mind and try not to make assumptions.
- As they work, ask them to think about the following questions:
  › How much contact does a student have with each of the people and groups listed?
  › What type of impact does each of these people or groups have on students' academic progress and overall well-bing? Positive? Negative? Neutral?
  › Is it a relationship of trust? What would be needed to make it one?

Full Group Discussion

40-45 MIN.

- Ask everyone to come together as a group to share their responses. Ask a representative from each group to share their network maps.
- As they present, have a facilitator note key takeaways on a flip chart, white board, or chalkboard. Note areas of agreement or disagreement, including:
  › Any 'A-ha!' moments from the group discussion
  › Where the group struggled
  › Any discrepancies between groups. For example, what's missing from some groups? And where are there similar answers, but in different rings.

Optional Facilitation: Alternatively, here you can print an enlarged version of the Network Map to hang in front of the room and ask people to place post-it notes on the map. This allows the facilitator to move and group the responses on the post-it notes as people place them on the map. If you decide to include the Barriers and Opportunities section below, the post-it notes can be three colors based on whether the impact on the student's academic progress and overall well-being is positive, negative, or neutral.

- As a group, discuss:
  › What are some common people/groups and placements we all agree on? What surprised you?
  › Where are there differences in our answers? What are some of the misconceptions we have?
  › What are some ways we can address those misconceptions? What tensions exist?
  › Who isn't here and why is that? *(Note: As a facilitator, you might need to be prepared to point some of these out for the group if they can't think of any.)*

Barriers and Opportunities - Optional

20 MIN.

Note: If you decide not to do this portion of the exercise, it is important to mention that not all the impacts on students' lives are supportive ones. When there are pieces of the system impeding students' growth or harming their potential, then it is important to recognize those influences and either steer students around them, or target those influences as people and groups to be shifted or moved toward s your greater shared goal.

- As the large group is speaking, one of the facilitators should list on a flip chart, white board, or chalkboard the people or groups who were noted as positive impacts in one column and negative impacts in another.

Barriers and Opportunities - Optional (cont.)

- Beginning with the positive list, as a group, discuss:
  - › Who on this list are we not yet connected to? Who could be an ally in this work?
  - › Who are we already connected to who we can involve more deeply?
- Then, looking to the negative impacts, as a group, discuss:
  - › How can these impacts be counteracted?
  - › How do we want to address those having negative impacts on students?
  - › What would an alternative to those negative impacts be?

Closing and Evaluation

10 MIN.

- Ask people to share:
  - › Something they learned, or a moment in the discussion that surprised them.
  - › One thing they liked and one thing they would change about the conversation.
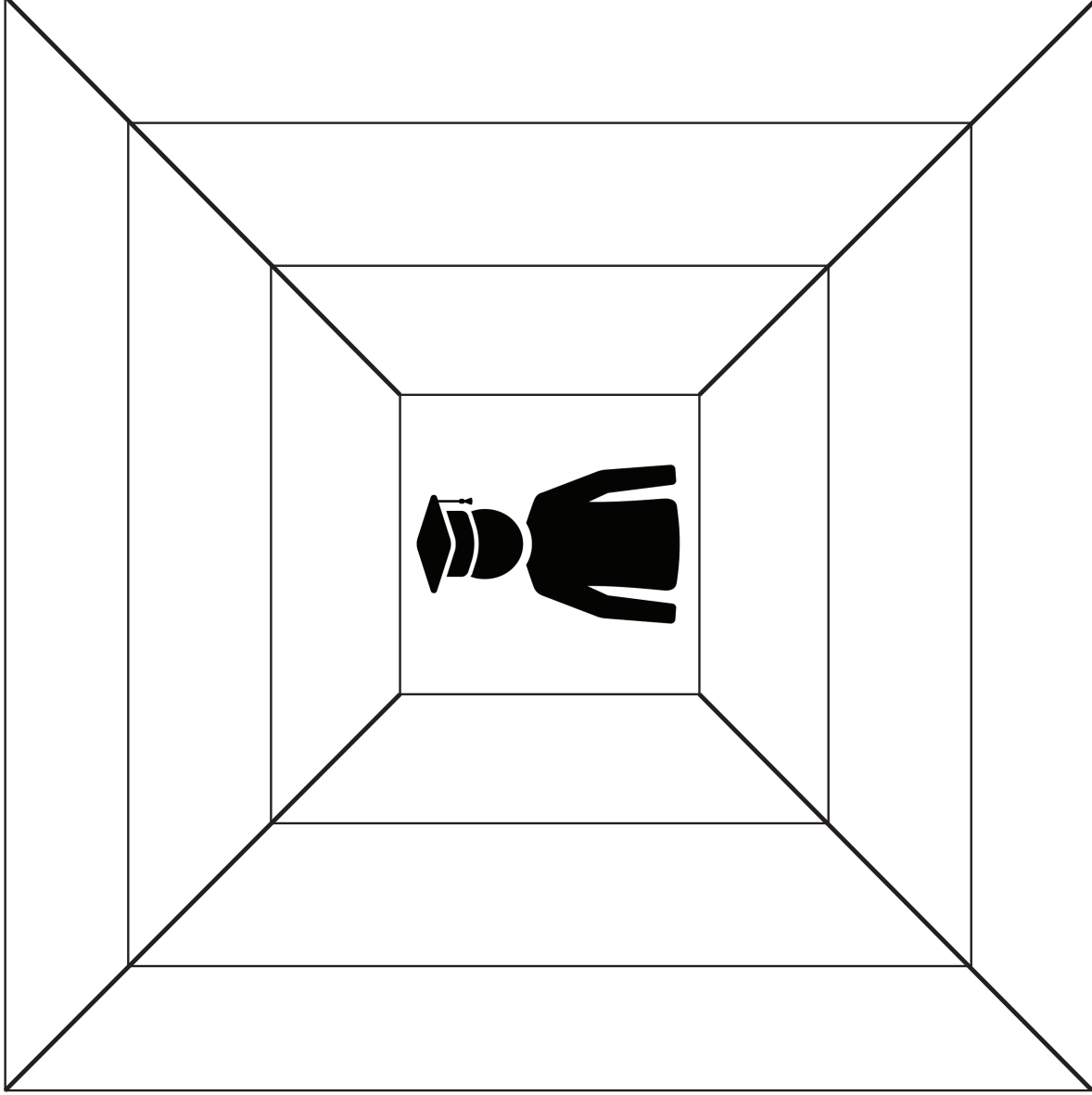- Close the discussion and thank people for their participation.

Note: *If there was energy about continuing to work together, invite people to volunteer to participate in a planning group or a follow-up meeting.*

ALTERNATIVE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The following questions can replace or be added to those in the sample agenda above in either the small group or large group discussions for those groups that are more familiar navigating discussions involving race and class:

1. What can we do if one of the people listed in the negative holds institutional power?

2. What can we do if their influence is a result of negative systemic oppression? How can we neutralize this person or make them a positive influence.

3. How could race and/or economic status change this student's relationship to any of these people listed?

Family/Individual Supports

Community Organizations/Leaders

Policy Makers/Institutional Figures

Educators

Note: The closest ring to the student = the most direct impact on the student's life
         The furthest ring out = the least direct impact

FURTHER RESOURCES

ORGANIZATIONS AND NATIONAL NETWORKS

The Alliance to Reclaim our Schools (AROS)
http://www.reclaimourschools.org/

The Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools (AROS) is an unprecedented alliance of parent, youth, community and labor organizations that together represent over 7 million people nationwide. AROS is fighting to reclaim the promise of public education as our nation's gateway to a strong democracy and racial and economic justice. The website also includes resources on community labor partnerships and other topics.

American Federation of Teachers (AFT)
https://www.aft.org/

An affiliate of the AFL-CIO, AFT was founded in 1916 and today represents 1.7 million members in more than 3,000 local affiliates nationwide.

Education Austin
http://www.educationaustin.org/

Created in 1999 from the merger of the NEA-affiliated Austin Association of Teachers (AAT) and the AFT-affiliated Austin Federation of Teachers/Allied Education Workers (AFT/AEW), Education Austin is the first merged local in Texas and is affiliated with the NEA, AFT, TSTA, Texas AFT, and the AFL-CIO. It is by far the largest organization for AISD employees. Education Austin was first elected the consultation agent for AISD employees by the employees themselves in 1999, and was re-elected as consultation agent in 2003 and 2007.

Massachusetts Education Partnership (MEP)
http://www.renniecenter.org/initiatives/labor-management-collaboration

The Massachusetts Education Partnership (MEP) works to improve student learning and success through collaborative labor-management-community relations in school districts. Since its founding, the MEP has directly engaged 131 school districts, almost half of all public school districts in the Commonwealth, as well as numerous regional and national partners.

National Education Association (NEA)
http://www.nea.org/

The nation's largest professional employee organization committed to advancing the cause of public education. NEA has affiliate organizations in every state and in more than 14,000 communities across the United States.

ORGANIZATIONS AND NATIONAL NETWORKS (CONT.)

National Opportunity to Learn Network
http://schottfoundation.org/our-work/otl-network

The Schott Foundation's Opportunity to Learn Network (OTL) unites a nationwide coalition of Schott grantees and allied organizations working to secure a high quality public education for all students.

St. Paul Federation of Teachers
https://spft.org/

The St. Paul Federation of Teachers (SPFT) is made up of over 3,400 licensed staff, Educational Assistants, and School and Community Service Professionals who work at over 65 sites in St. Paul Public Schools. SPFT is an affiliate of Education Minnesota and our two national teachers' unions: the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association. We are a member of the St. Paul Regional Labor Federation and the Minnesota AFL-CIO.

COMMUNITY LABOR PARTNERSHIPS

Class Action: An Activist Teacher's Handbook
https://www.jacobinmag.com/2014/02/class-action-an-activist-teachers-handbook/

A project of Jacobin magazine and the Chicago Teachers Union's CORE Caucus, this collection of essays examines the movement against corporate education reform and what can happen when teachers and their allies unite to resist this agenda and present visions of an alternative.

Family-School-Community Partnerships 2.0: Collaborative Strategies to Advance Student Learning
http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/Family-School-Community-Partnerships-2.0.pdf

As part of the Priority Schools Campaign, NEA affiliate members and leaders are working closely with parents, families, and community members to close achievement gaps, improve low-performing schools, and transform relationships between schools and their communities. This report identifies and describes key partnerships that Association members have forged in 16 communities and includes the Association perspective on these efforts.

Loving Cities Index and Report
www.lovingcities.org

The Loving Cities Index and report help cities begin the kinds of conversations and collaborations needed to adopt a comprehensive system of supports that provide all children with an equal opportunity to thrive and succeed. The Index measures access to 24 community and school-based supports in four areas of impact.

COMMUNITY LABOR PARTNERSHIPS (CONT.)

Partnerships, Not Pushouts. A Guide for School Board Members: Community Partnerships for Student Success
http://schottfoundation.org/sites/default/files/2014-122_POPGuide_DIGITAL.PDF

Developed by the Alliance for Excellent Education, American Federation of Teachers, CASEL, Coalition for Community Schools, National Education Association, National School Boards Association, Opportunity Action, Opportunity to Learn Campaign, and the Rural School and Community Trust, this policy guide details how school board members can lead the way in securing a high quality education for each and every student in their district.

The Power of Family-School-Community Partnerships: A Training Resource Manual
http://www2.nea.org/mediafiles/pdf/FSCP_Manual_2012.pdf

Coming out of NEA's Priority Schools Campaign, this manual provides simple, but provocative, strategies for uncovering what gets in the way of partnering and outlines clear paths for creating partnerships that support student and school success.

When Community and Labor Join Forces: Parent, Student and Teacher Partnerships
http://schottfoundation.org/blog/2017/04/14/when-community-and-labor-join-forces-parent-student-and-teacher-partnerships

A webinar that highlights lessons from the successful Chicago Teachers Union Strike in 2012, and the partnerships that carried the movement to victory.

RACE AND CLASS DISCUSSIONS AND FACILITATION

Race Matters: How to Talk About Race
http://www.intergroupresources.com/rc/RaceMatters.pdf

This document from the Annie E. Casey Foundation is part of the foundation's Race Matters Toolkit.

Race Talk: Engaging Young People in Conversations about Race and Racism
https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/race-talk-engaging-young-people-in-conversations-about

Guidance on leading discussions on race, particularly for young people, from the Anti-Defamation League.

Race to Equity: Toolkit for Conversation
http://www.ywcamadison.org/atf/cf/%7B2487BD0F-90C7-49BC-858D-CC50637ECE23%7D/Race-to-Equity_Discussion-Guide.pdf

This discussion guide from the YWCA in Madison, WI offers sample agendas and tools for preparing to participate in and lead conversations about race and equity.

RACE AND CLASS DISCUSSIONS AND FACILITATION (CONT.)

Talking about Race Resource Notebook

http://www.intergroupresources.com/rc/TARnotebook.pdf

This Kirwan Institute publication covers topics such as framing and the strategic elements of a transformative dialogue on race.

Ten Tips for Facilitating Classroom Discussions on Sensitive Topics

http://bento.cdn.pbs.org/hostedbento-prod/filer_public/SBAN/Images/Classrooms/Ten%20Tips%20for%20
Facilitating%20Classroom%20Discussions%20on%20Sensitive%20Topics_Final.pdf

These tips developed to accompany the film Slavery by Another Name also include an extensive list of additional resources.

Understanding Implicit Bias: What Educators Should Know

https://www.aft.org/ae/winter2015-2016/staats

This article by Cheryl Staats sheds light on the dynamics of implicit bias with an eye toward educators.

What's Race Got to Do With It? Ten Tips For Effective Facilitation

http://www.whatsrace.org/pages/tips.html

These tips developed to lead discussions around the film What's Race Got to Do With It? Social Disparities and Student Success are helpful in establishing guidelines for discussions around race.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Community Schools: Transforming Struggling Schools into Thriving Schools

https://populardemocracy.org/sites/default/files/Community-Schools-Layout_e.pdf

This report from the Center for Popular Democracy, the Coalition for Community Schools, and Southern Education Foundation profiles community schools across the country, all which demonstrate consistent improvement in a wide range of indicators of student success.

Going on Offense During Challenging Times: Marilyn Sneiderman and Secky Fascione

http://newlaborforum.cuny.edu/2017/12/05/going-on-offense-during-challenging-times/

This article from the New Labor Forum examines Bargaining for the Common Good (BCG) campaigns around the country.

The Schools St. Paul Children Deserve

https://spft.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/The-Schools-Saint-Paul-Children-Deserve-.pdf

In 2013, the St. Paul Federation of Teachers outlined their seven top priorities for creating racially-equitable public schools in St. Paul.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES (CONT.)

Progress Report: Schools St. Paul Children Deserve

https://spft.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Progress-Report.pdf

In 2017, the St. Paul Federation of Teachers revisited The Schools St. Paul Children Deserve to update their progress and outline next steps.

Restorative Practices: Fostering Healthy Relationships & Promoting Positive Discipline in Schools

https://advancementproject.org/resources/restorative-practices-fostering-healthy-relationships-promoting-positive-discipline-in-schools/

This toolkit from The Advancement Project focuses on strategies to build healthy relationships between students and adults in educational settings. The "restorative practices" model includes addressing and discussing the needs of the school/community, resolving conflict, holding individuals and groups accountable, repairing and restoring relationships, and reducing and preventing harmful behavior.

Transforming Teacher Unions: Fighting for Better Schools and Social Justice

https://www.rethinkingschools.org/books/title/transforming-teacher-unions

This 144-page anthology (available for purchase) looks at exemplary practices of teacher unions from the local to the national level. The 25 articles weave together issues of teacher unionism, classroom reform, working with local communities, and social justice. Contributing authors include Howard Zinn, Dan Perlstein, Robert Lowe, Herbert Kohl, Ann Bastian, and many classroom teachers and union activists.

ENDNOTES

1   http://labornotes.org/2010/01/reform-caucus-jolts-chicago-teachers-union

2   https://www.jacobinmag.com/2014/03/uncommon-core-chicago-teachers-union/

3   Ibid.

4   https://www.jacobinmag.com/2013/04/the-industrial-classroom

5   http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/19/us/vote-scheduled-on-chicago-teachers-contract.html

6   https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/after-chicago-success-union-leaders-spread-their-message/2012/09/21/cad16290-0424-11e2-9b24-ff730c7f6312_story.html

7   https://spft.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Union-6-Racial-Equity-and-Social-Justice.pdf

8   https://www.educationaustin.org

9   https://www.austinchronicle.com/news/2012-02-17/austin-education-vs-education-austin/

10   https://www.texastribune.org/2012/09/27/report-examine-budget-cuts-affected-texas-schools/

Building Movement Project

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