Building Schools and Community Connections:

Outreach and Activism for New Schools in Southeast L.A.

by

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the family and friends who have loved, supported, and diverted me as I have travelled down this long and winding road…
And especially for my love, Bradley, who has promised to continue the journey with me.

Acknowledgments

Abstract

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This dissertation examines the district initiated community outreach and grassroots activism that occurred around the development of new schools in Southeast Los Angeles as part of Los Angeles Unified School District's (LAUSD) multi-billion dollar new school construction program. By examining the process by which local communities were involved in this significant public infrastructure program, I explore whether and how community involvement in new school planning informed the development of new school facilities and built a foundation for sustained parent and community engagement in schools. I look at Southeast Los Angeles, where chronically overcrowded campus conditions, and the concomitant need to return schools to two-semester calendars and students to neighborhood schools, necessitated construction of a number of the first new schools under LAUSD's ongoing facilities development program. This qualitative study examines, in particular, LAUSD's Local District 6, which encompasses six small Southeast cities, as a case study to critique the District's outreach practices and to examine the importance of community involvement in schools in underserved immigrant communities. Data was collected from interviews, public meetings and events, school site visits, newspaper articles, websites, and published reports.

This research is framed by two areas of literature, which together, characterize the primary realms within which civic engagement around new school development in Southeast Los Angeles has occurred: participatory planning and community organizing for school reform. In conversation with advocates of a "community approach" to school reform, I contend that parent and community engagement in schools is of the utmost importance in improving urban public schools, and that if building schools is to be integrated into the larger mission of optimizing educational opportunities for all students, school development should authentically capture and address local knowledge and concerns, and capitalize on stakeholder support for new schools to foster sustained engagement. In the context of LAUSD's Local District 6, I argue that despite limitations in institutional and civic capacities, public engagement in the process of new school development has resulted in benefits to school and neighborhood communities, and has established a foundation for sustained parent and community involvement in schools.

Chapter One
Introduction:
LAUSD, Local District 6, and the Need for New and Better Schools

I know our job is to build schools, but we sometimes think very narrowly about
education. Kids live in a community; they live with their families…everything is
connected. (LAUSD School Board Member)

Ten years ago, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD/District) embarked on
the largest public school construction program in U.S. history. Conceived as the major
component in the District's undertaking to relieve classroom overcrowding and return students to
neighborhood schools operating on traditional calendars, the program is valued at more than
$12.5 billion and set out to deliver approximately 167,000 new classroom seats by 2015
(LAUSD, November 2009). Throughout the course of program implementation, community
participation has occurred both by District invitation and through grassroots grit. With an eye
toward building sustained school-community connections, this research looks at LAUSD's
community outreach efforts in L.A.'s Southeast cities in order to explore in specific terms how
and to what end urban public school districts might invite and engage public participation in the
process of school facilities development.

My research in the L.A. context was guided by the following primary questions: to what
extent has LAUSD employed its Community Outreach program to inform the development of
educational facilities and to foster long-term community[1] engagement in new schools; and, in
what ways have outreach process outcomes been constrained or enabled by institutional and
community capacities? These questions emerged out of my sense as both an urban planner and a
student of education that the siting and design of school facilities is most optimally undertaken
within the context of pertinent community and educational issues. In other words, if building
schools is to be integrated into the larger mission of optimizing educational opportunities for all
students, school development should be undertaken in such a way that it captures and addresses
local knowledge and concerns, and then capitalizes on stakeholder support for new schools by
fostering sustained engagement in schools.

This research agenda led me to spend many months traveling between Oakland and
Southeast L.A. to visit schools, attend community meetings, and interview stakeholders and
District staff in settings ranging from high-rise conference rooms to authentic Mexican
restaurants. In this dissertation, I recount my observations in these settings and offer
interpretations of the ways in which LAUSD has seized upon this moment of action and attention
around building new schools in some of L.A.'s neediest neighborhoods - noting that the
District's engagement of its public at this time is of paramount importance for the future of both
school and community improvement. In addition to examining LAUSD's process for community
engagement, I explore the grassroots response not only to new school construction, but also more

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[1] Herein, when I refer to "the community, I do so as a reflection of how the District considers it – primarily a
neighborhood area that will be served by an incoming school. However, I, along with the District, by no means
perceive such neighborhoods to be comprised of one unified "community" of residents. Rather, the community is a
complex grouping of multiple perspectives, shaped by a combination of factors, such as one's relationship to and
expectations of the proposed school, racial/ethnic identity, language, socioeconomic status, and citizenship status.

generally to the need for school improvement in Southeast Los Angeles, where families have for decades endured some of the most overcrowded and decrepit schools in the nation. By contextualizing the people and cities of this vibrant region, lying just 20 minutes south of downtown Los Angeles, I employ this research to illuminate the importance of authentic community engagement in schools, which done well, can foster community ownership of schools that are "central to the life and learning of the entire community"(KnlowedgeWorks Foundation 2005).

The lens through which I conduct my analysis consists of two areas of literature, which together, characterize the primary realms within which civic engagement around new school development in L.A. has occurred: participatory planning and community organizing for school reform. In conversation with those who advocate a "community approach" to school reform, I contend that parent and community engagement in schools is of the utmost importance in lifting the quality of urban public schools. In contrast to "technical" or "institutional" approaches that tend to treat schools as isolated institutions, disconnected from communities and insulated from the local political realities, the "community approach" promotes an emphasis on helping students by fostering school community connections that strengthen the capacity of families to prepare children for school and the capacity of communities to act on education (Baum 2003).

This is not to say that parental and community involvement should be held up as a panacea for languishing urban schools. Rather, the implication is that students can benefit most from other types of school improvement measures, like improving the quality of instruction, providing teachers and students with adequate supplies and resources, and increasing rigor and accountability, when parental involvement and community connections are present. This contention is corroborated by a recent body of research by the Southwest Educational Development, which found a positive relationship between family and community involvement and benefits to students, including academic achievement. More specifically, Henderson and Mapp's "A New Wave of Evidence – Impact of School Family and Community Connections on Students Achievement", finds that parent, family, and community involvement impacts student achievement, and that parent and community organizing improves schools (Henderson and Mapp 2002).

Some might argue that while school improvement strategies incorporating parent and community collaboration may hold proven potential, the ability of educators and by extension, school districts, to foster such partnerships is inherently limited by the rigors of high stakes testing, prescribed curricula, and of course, the perpetual overarching constraint of funding. I would counter, however, that given the complex demands being placed on urban schools, it may be that there is no other option. As Arlene Ackerman, former superintendent of San Francisco Unified School District has articulated, "Since public schools have been and are asked to solve complex problems of the larger community or the larger society, it is critical, I believe, that cities and schools together find ways that they can create partnerships that can address those issues" (McKoy and Vincent 2005, 13). And, according to Mark Warren, insofar as many school leaders, despite the pressure of testing regimes, are beginning to see their schools as one of a set of institutions that can anchor poor neighborhoods in partnership with other community organizations, where there is a will, there is a way (Warren 2007).

Given these findings, and my own assumptions about the symbiotic relationship between school and community, it is my contention that concern for how and to what end urban districts engage communities in the process of new school development is important for reasons beyond the need to ensure that the public is kept informed and cooperative. First, community outreach

around new school development presents an opportunity to engage community stakeholders in the process of visioning and debating what they want their schools to be – both for their children and for their neighborhoods. Additionally, the process undertaken by an urban school district to invite and engage public participation in new school development provides a window into the dynamics of district/community relations and reveals the possibilities and limitations for parents and other community members to contribute in authentic ways to the dialogue around what new schools should look like, both physically and programmatically. Lastly, community outreach around school planning and development presents an opportunity for urban public school districts to help address a broader problem: parent and community participation in schools.

For LAUSD, the ability to access and potentially even help foster the development of local civic capacity, such that parent and community engagement in new schools is sustained over time, may ultimately go a long way toward promoting a community approach to school reform. So, how can a large urban district serving such a broad array of communities, endeavor to open the door for parents and other community members concerned about school and neighborhood improvement? One way, I contend, is to begin at the beginning: when a new school is but a perceived neighborhood need.

New schools have long been needed in the neighborhoods of Southeast Los Angeles. And, albeit decades late, their delivery has already brightened a number of neighborhoods and provided a fresh start for many students and teachers. Yet, even as new schools are becoming a reality, the challenge of fostering parent and community connections within those schools remains. Barriers to family and community involvement in schools in general, and in Southeast Los Angeles in particular, include: school cultures that place little to no value on the views and participation of parents; a misguided perception among educators that parents are neither interested in advocating for their children nor qualified to do so; a lack of time or understanding of how to participate on the part of parents; language barriers; and distrust of government.

Compounding these barriers is the fact that any effort to improve urban schools is inherently hindered by structural inequalities affecting both school and community life, along with the inherent imbalance of power that is ever-present between many poor and minority communities and the institutions that are in place to serve them. Such inequalities and power differentials can only be addressed, scholars such as Jean Anyon argue, through a movement for educational reform rooted in a broader social agency for improving the lot of urban families (Anyon 2005). Mark Warren similarly advocates that partnerships between community organizations and the schools their constituents attend can go along way toward advancing the political effort and will necessary to address school and community inequality (Warren 2007). But, in the communities of Southeast L.A., before there could be parent and community participation and mobilization in and around schools, there first had to be new schools. And, having been chronically and disproportionately affected by severe overcrowding and dilapidated facility conditions, the communities of the Southeast were among the first in LAUSD to benefit from the construction of new, neighborhood schools.

The Southeast Cities

Situated within an expanse of flat land in the floodplains of the lower Los Angeles and San Gabriel rivers, the Southeast area proved ideal for industrial development and large-scale urbanization. As early as the turn of the 20th century, development in the Southeast area was characterized by the rise of residential districts alongside industrial areas. Vernon, for instance, was developed as the nation's first purely industrial city and grew immediately adjacent to the residential suburb of Huntington Park. With the opening of a major General Motors plant in 1936, South Gate too contributed to the area's thriving mix of industrial and suburban development, helping to transform the Southeast into the Detroit of California.

Yet, while these cities played a pivotal role in the development and prosperity of the entire Los Angeles region, their eventual loss of tax base as a result of deindustrialization led to their subordination to the larger, politically dominant City of Los Angeles. After decades of steady growth, the populations of the Southeast cities began to decline; and, before long, the industry that had spurred development began to leave as well – either closing plants altogether, or transporting production to factories overseas. With shrinking options for economic prosperity, local government leaders turned to extractive industries, such as gambling enterprises and recycling companies, to sustain tax revenues. The prevalence of racism that led to white flight from the Southeast during the early to mid 20th century also contributed significantly to the economic and political decline of the area. White flight accelerated during the mid-1960s, and with the Watts riots in 1965, fears intensified among whites about living in the "inner city".

In stark contrast to the waning populations of manufacturing workers between the mid 1950's and the early 1970's, the mid-70's brought marked growth in the area due to immigration. Between 1975 and 1980, the population of the Southeast cities (including the adjacent cities of Bell Gardens and Commerce) grew from 180,000 to 222,000, almost five percent a year. This demographic explosion occurred when these cities were already almost completely built-out, and it occurred with little new residential construction (Fulton 2001). Density therefore ballooned along with population growth.

Most of these new residents came to the Southeast from the historically Mexican-American neighborhoods of East Los Angeles or directly from Mexico and other Latin American countries. The new wave of Latino arrivals was part of a larger occurrence of immigration during the 1970s and 1980s that dramatically changed the face of many parts of the greater Los Angeles area. Latinos had become the majority in the City of Los Angeles by the late 1970s, and it was only another 20 years before they outnumbered Anglos by more than a million (Davis 2000). Absent new housing, this boom in population also resulted in larger households on average; whereas household size was typically below two persons on L.A.'s Westside and in the San Fernando Valley, it approached four persons per household throughout the Southeast during this period (Fulton 2001). Along with population growth and increasing densification came growing and increasingly unmet demands for social services. Not the least of these was the need for more schools. By the late 1990's, many LAUSD schools enrolled five times more students than they were originally designed to serve.

As mentioned above, a significant proportion of the most severely overcrowded schools were located within Local District 6, where during one recent school year, more than 4,200 children attended South Gate Middle School, a campus designed to serve 800 (Oakes 2003, 19). Figure 1 shows the boundaries of LAUSD and its division into local districts, and Figure 2 provides a focused view of Local District 6. Prior to building new schools, LAUSD addressed overcrowding problems by placing portable classrooms at schools, busing students across the District, and instituting multi-track calendars. Through 2005, about 25,000 children were bussed out of Downtown L.A. and the Southeast cities each day to attend less crowded schools in other parts of the District, often spending three hours a day in freeway traffic. Additionally, students attending more than 100 L.A. schools participated in multiple track schedules. The multi-track calendar employed by LAUSD is the Concept 6 calendar, a year-round school operation that divides the student population into three tracks, two of which attend the school at any one time. The Concept 6 calendar provides the maximum increase in the number of students that can attend a school, but limits the number of instructional days to 163 days instead of the traditional 180 days (California Education Code Section 37670).

The Concept 6 calendar has long been a source of ire in the Southeast, in part because of its effect of robbing students of instructional days; and, common-sense concerns about its effects have been substantiated repeatedly by educational research. For example, Oakes found that students who attend schools operating on Concept 6 calendars suffer marked disadvantages over students attending traditional calendar schools (Oakes 2003). These disadvantages include: attending overcrowded and large schools, truncated and lost instructional time, limited access to courses and specialized programs, ill-timed breaks, less access to extracurricular activities and enrichment programs, and poorer academic performance. Oakes also found disadvantages associated with involuntary busing, including "impediments to parental involvement, limited access to after-school activities, disincentives to enroll children in kindergarten, and poorer achievement" (Oakes 2003, p. 39).

Importantly, Concept 6 also has been a source of controversy because schools operating on a Concept 6 calendar historically have tended to disproportionately enroll low-income students of color. In California's year-round schools, students predominantly are Latino, low-income, and English Learners – characteristics that typify the student populations of the public schools in the Southeast. These are precisely the students who make up the bulk of the student population attending schools in Local District 6.

Comprising approximately 8 percent of LAUSD's total student enrollment, Local District 6 is reflective in its ethnic make-up of the predominantly blue-collar, Latino, and immigrant character of the Southeast area. According to the 2006 American Community Survey, 96 percent of the approximately 278,620 residents of Southeast L.A. were Latino[2]. And while the racial and ethnic make-up of the area generally matches that of the District as a whole, Local District 6 contains higher concentrations of Latino students. For the 2007-08 school year, about 73 percent of LAUSD students were Latino; whereas, Latino students comprised 98.5 percent of the student population in Local District 6 (LAUSD 2009). Latino students were primarily of

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[2] This total is based on population estimates by Service Planning Area, and includes the unincorporated area of Walnut Park, which had a 2000 Census population of 16,180. Two Service Planning Areas cover the southeast cities – the first containing the cities of Maywood, Huntington Park, Bell, and Vernon, and the second encompassing South Gate, Cudahy, and Walnut Park.

Mexican and Central American descent, and almost half were English Language Learners. Table 1 shows the breakdown of LAUSD's student population for the 2007-08 school year, both for the District as a whole and within Local District 6.

Table 1: *Students Attending LAUSD Schools: Racial/Ethnic Breakdown*

Race/Ethnicity	Percent Student Population: LAUSD	Percent Student Population: Local District 6
Latino	73.3%	98.5%
African American	10.9%	0.4%
White	8.7%	0.6%
Asian	3.7%	0.2%
Filipino	2.3%	0.1%
Pacific Islander	0.4%	0.0%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0.3%	0.2%

Source: *LAUSD, 2009*
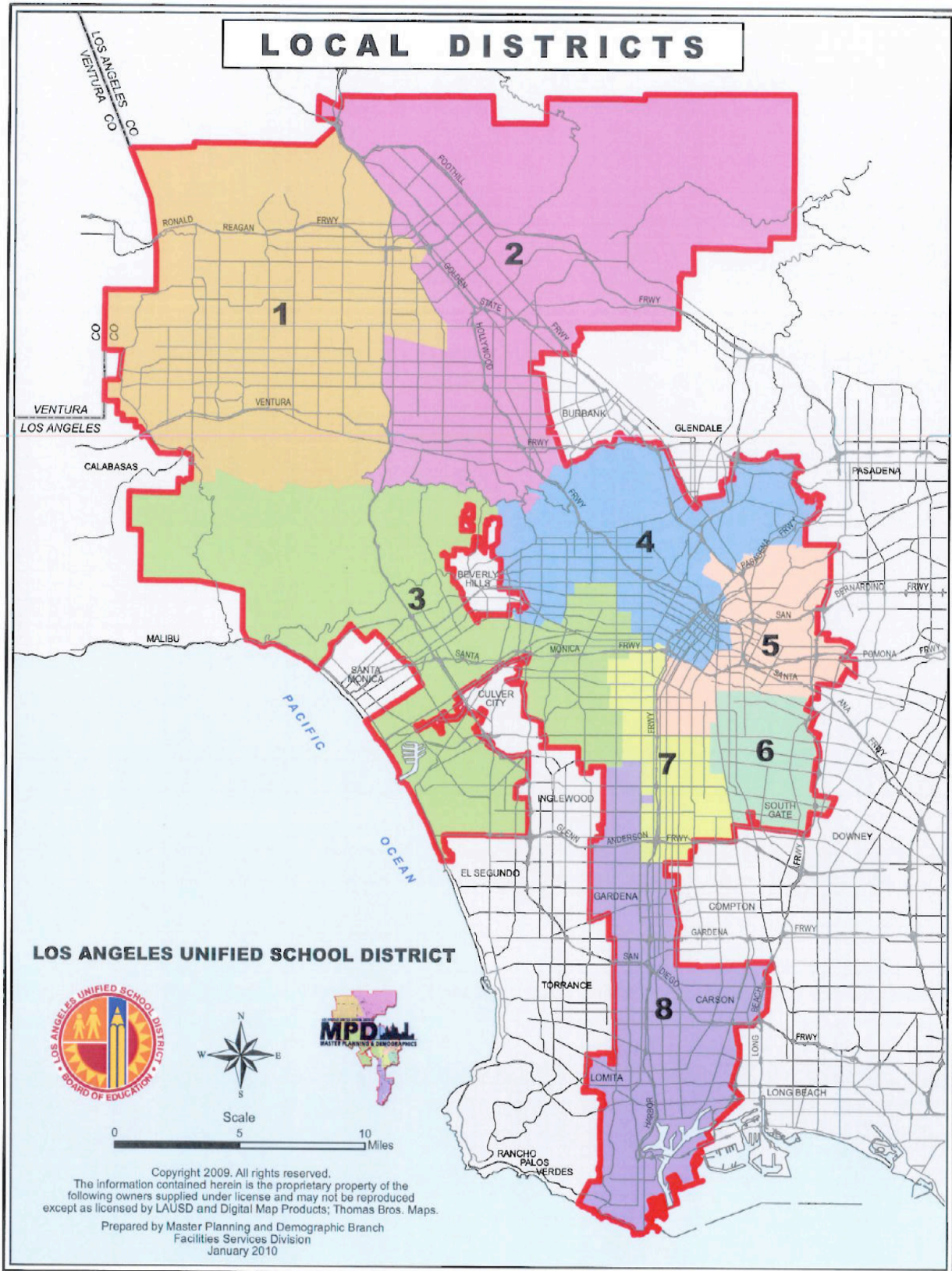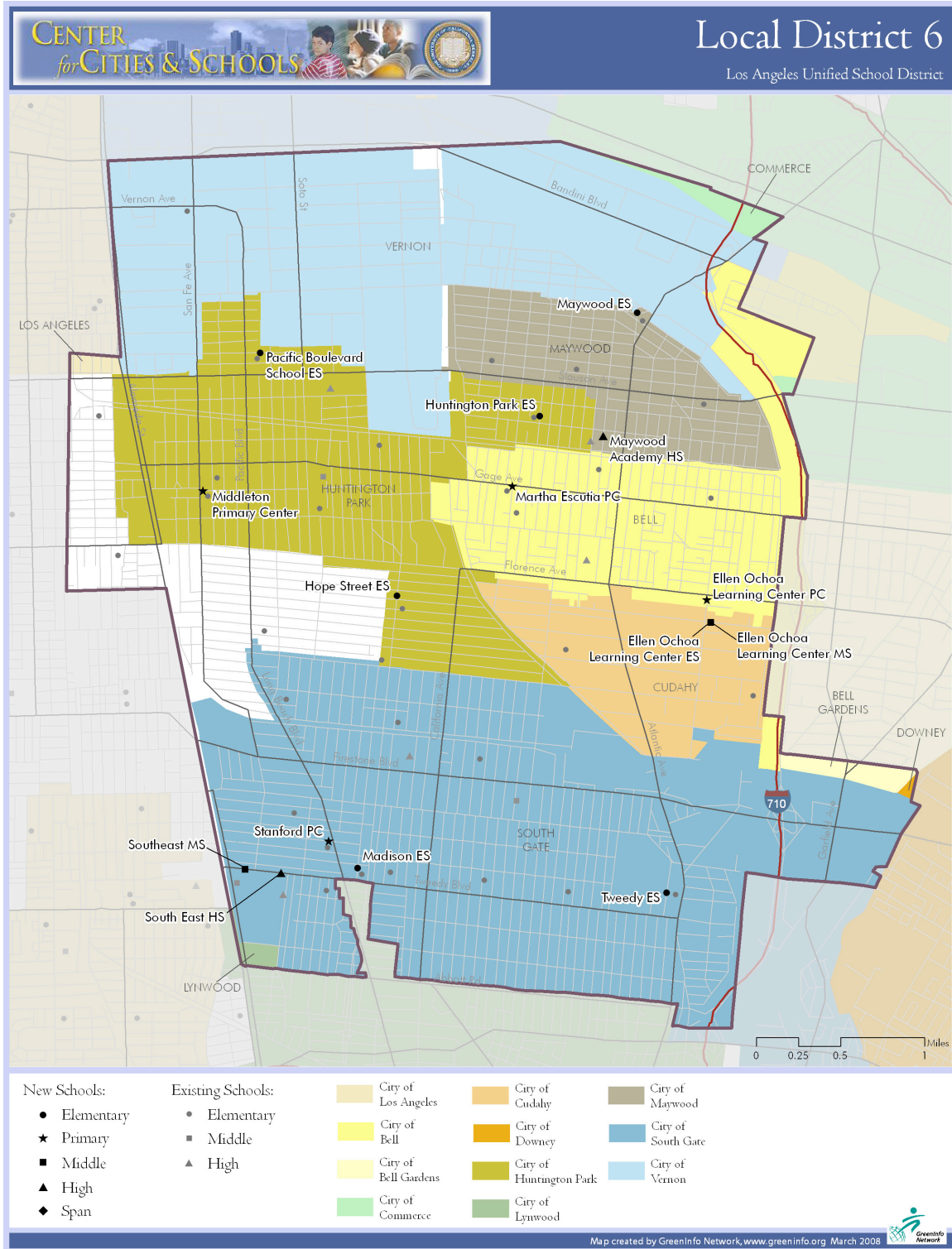
Figure 1 Local District Boundaries

Figure 2: Local District 6

Local District 6 also contains relatively high poverty rates: 30 to 40 percent of persons live in poverty in many sections of the Local District. And, while median household incomes are as high as $84,000 in some areas, they top out at $22,000 in some pockets. The bulk of households in Local District 6 fall within the $21,095 to $42,189 range. All of the cities, with the exception of Vernon, which has remained a predominantly industrial city with few residents, have substantial immigrant populations. Forty-two percent of Maywood's 28,083 documented residents are characterized as foreign born, non-citizens. All of the other cities, again with the exception of Vernon, have documented foreign-born populations of between 33 and 42 percent.

These trends have significant implications for instruction and for communication between teachers, principals, students, and parents. For instance, that District parents are unfamiliar with the structure of schooling in the U.S. affects their ability to participate in their children's education. Further, parental and community involvement in schools may be limited because parents tend to feel alienated from District processes, often due to language or cultural barriers, or because they believe they lack the time, financial resources, or expertise needed for meaningful involvement. It is for these reasons that the Southeast L.A. is particularly fertile ground for an investigation of a school district's community outreach process, which while undertaken for the express purpose of new school development has, in my opinion, important implications for the future of parent and community engagement.

The scenario described above – of overcrowding, busing, and sub-par schools - is not unique to the communities of Southeast L.A. Across the nation (and certainly in other areas of L.A.), it is urban, minority communities that not only have endured both the physical and programmatic decay of their schools, but have also lacked the financial and social capital to remedy their plight. Research has shown that school facilities spending is unfairly tied to the wealth or poverty of families served among local districts. In California, districts serving the poorest children, with 75 percent or more qualifying for lunch subsidies, spent about $3,000 per student on new or renovated facilities over the 1995-2004 period, compared with $7,300 spent by districts with fewer than 10% of their pupils qualifying for free lunches (Vincent and Filardo 2008). Furthermore, it is within under-resourced, urban communities, where the political connections and knowledge of public process needed to effect institutional change is often lacking.

Given these realities, I find it crucial to look to the process by which community stakeholders are engaged in new school development in an area like Southeast L.A., as an opening to a broader conversation about community-based school reform. As alluded to above, such a view of school reform envisions schools not just as shells for teaching and learning, but as "sources of social stability and support for families and children by developing their potential to 1) serve as sources of intra-community integration, and 2) to provide resources for extra-community linkages" (Noguera 1999, 11). Importantly, this vision necessitates a sound approach to building the relationships that will make it succeed. One place to begin this work, I propose, is prior to the construction of new schools – when they can be shaped according to the needs of local communities, and neighborhood collaboration can begin to take root.

Why, one might ask, look at community involvement in school development, when decisions about where, when, and how to undertake new construction and renovation projects ultimately fall to District bureaucrats and outside contractors? And, even if comprehensive public outreach around the siting and design of new schools *could* lead to sustained community engagement in schools, why should urban public school districts care? I respond to each of these questions below, as I explain the significance of the school construction program for many L.A.

neighborhoods and recount what I have learned about the role both the District and the communities it serves have played in making the most of the new construction dollars.

<p style="text-align:center;">LAUSD's New School Construction Program</p>

Like many urban districts across the U.S., LAUSD had long been overdue in updating and expanding its facilities to accommodate growing student populations and to address the decline of aging buildings. At the inception of its new school construction program, most of LAUSD's schools were over 55 years old, with its last new comprehensive high school dating back to 1973. And, facilities investments that were made over time tended to be disproportionately applied to wealthier areas of the District due to regulations and practices that favored distributing school bond monies for new construction on a first-come first-served basis, rather than based on a school district's need or priority (Godinez v. Schwarzenegger 2005). Thus, in LAUSD's Local District 6, which encompasses the Southeast cities of Bell, Cudahy, Huntington Park, Maywood, South Gate, and Vernon, exceedingly crowded neighborhood campuses continued for decades to be relieved with portables and bussing programs, in lieu of building new schools.

The recent influx of funding for school construction in the Los Angeles area began in 1997 with the passage of Proposition BB, through which voters allocated $2.4 billion for the modernization of facilities and the addition of classroom space. In subsequent years, voters approved six additional local and State measures to fund school construction and improvement, the latest of which was Local Measure Q, passed in 2008, which provided $7 billion for repairs and upgrades, creating additional capacity, promoting a healthier environment, and ensuring transparency and accountability. To date, LAUSD has completed construction of 84 new schools, including continuation high schools, early education centers, elementary schools, high schools, middle schools, primary schools, and K-8 span schools (LAUSD 2010).

In 2006 alone, LAUSD opened 13 new schools, eliminating involuntary bussing for all elementary school students and returning 98 schools to a 180-day, full-year calendar. The original goal set forth by the District was to build more than 150 schools by 2012 under the New School Construction Program. And, while the schedule and total number of schools and seats to be provided remain in flux, the scale of the program still qualifies it as the largest-ever single-district new school building program in the United States. Insofar as new school construction in California, both by law and by policy, must involve some form of public participation, the magnitude of this project has far-reaching implications and holds enormous possibility for the engagement of communities in school improvement and community development efforts.

The New Construction Branch within LAUSD's Facilities Services Division[3] was created in response to the influx of funding for school renovation and construction, and is comprised primarily of long-term consultants to the District – planners, architects, construction managers – who are charged with meeting the program's goal of building new schools, additions and other projects in the areas of greatest need throughout the District. Yet, while these consultants are employed by an urban school district whose overall structure is geared toward operating schools, the mission of the New Construction Branch is to site, design, and build schools. When the ribbon is cut, their job is done, hence complicating the question of what the outreach they

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[3] When I began this research, the Community Outreach Department was a department within the New Construction Branch of the Facilities Services Division. I routinely refer to the Facilities Division, or "Facilities" to differentiate between Outreach and the remainder of LAUSD's school planning and construction apparatus. Since the completion of my research, the structure of facilities planning has changed somewhat. This is addressed in the concluding chapter.

undertake should look like, and what it should set out to achieve. In a context in which District-community relations have been strained, and where parents often have felt their participation was unwelcome, this is an important consideration. For, as stated previously, involving community stakeholders from the inception of local schools presents an opportunity for sustained engagement, not just in individual schools, but also in broader school reform efforts.

Paving the way for the bricks and mortar construction program implemented by the New Construction Branch, LAUSD's Community Outreach Department has been charged with building "greater public understanding, broader participation, and productive partnerships for new school construction throughout all sectors of the community" (http://mo.laschools.org/fis/nc/co/). To forward this mission, Outreach has sought to develop participation, support, and trust between LAUSD and its communities, to work with community members as active partners in solving overcrowding conditions in schools, and to establish the foundation for ongoing community participation, beyond the completion of schools. And, in a district wherein relations between communities and school bureaucrats historically have been strained, building trust is paramount – both to mitigate for past District blunders, and to establish a foundation for ongoing community participation in its schools.

Research Focus

This research looks at LAUSD's efforts, through Community Outreach, to reach out to its public and examines the net effect of those efforts, in combination with grassroots organizing around building and improving schools in Southeast L.A. It does so by exploring how this urban district chose to invite and engage public participation in its process of facilities development, and what implications the process has had for sustained community engagement in schools. Evading the assumption that community stakeholders needed an invitation from the District to get involved, I examine not only the types of engagement that have emerged in the context of the Community Outreach process, but also the grassroots community activism that has surfaced in conjunction with District process. For as one District official acknowledged, "we have seen what the District can do by itself, and it clearly is not enough".

This line of inquiry is in keeping with scholars of education and community development who, as described above, advocate for a community approach to school reform, which includes not only parent and community organizing and involvement, but also institutional evolution. In other words, the answer to transforming urban schools is not a top-down OR a bottom-up approach, but a process whereby institutional relationships are altered to converge with the development of civic capacity. For as Stone, et al point out in their study of schools and community development in disadvantaged neighborhoods, "leaders are important, but not if they are cut off from networks of relationships within a community"(Stone et al 2001, 2). In a district like LAUSD, this means that institutional structures must be altered, if not to create community capacity, then at least to find ways to activate that which already exists. I demonstrate herein that in Los Angeles, stakeholder participation in the development of new schools has been part-and-parcel to activating the civic capacity needed to successfully demand from LAUSD better schools and a better educational future for all of the District's children. I also stipulate, however, that in order to reap the benefits of this process, the District must engage in an ongoing process of working with, not around, community participants.

Given the underlying assumption that sustainable educational reform necessitates public involvement in schools - from their inception as projects into their daily operation - the heart of this inquiry is an examination into how participation occurs: how it is initiated, who participates,

and what forms participation takes. In Los Angeles, a primary driver of public participation around new school construction has been the District, through the Community Outreach program referenced above. However, at its inception, the Outreach program was not merely an internally devised process for soliciting public input. Rather, it emerged in part as a reaction to public outcry over a lack of District transparency regarding new school planning. Groups and individuals involved represented both long-time school activists and newly engaged parents and other community members concerned about the ability of the District to make sound decisions on their behalf, many of whom remained active both in individual Southeast schools and around broader school quality concerns.

It is the intersection of the LAUSD's efforts with such community-based activism, whether in response or in reaction to District activities, that is of concern with regard to the sustainability of engagement in Local District 6 schools. At this juncture, it may be that participation is actively encouraged, but ultimately truncated by politics or process. However, it remains important to question the role the District *should* take in soliciting not only short-term involvement in the school development process, but also in establishing "the foundation for community participation beyond completion of new schools" (LAUSD, 2005).

Overview of Dissertation

The issue of what, if any, responsibility a school district should assume for fostering parent and community engagement in schools has been a central consideration throughout this research. That the District *should*, in fact, assume such responsibility has been my underlying assumption from the inception of this project; and, the question as to whether it *could* is implicit within my primary research questions. Finally, after gathering my data and examining my findings, this question emerges again to inform my overall argument: that despite limitations in institutional and civic capacities, public engagement in the process of new school development in Southeast L.A. has resulted in benefits to school and neighborhood communities, and has established a foundation for sustained parent and community involvement in schools.

As described in Chapter 2, this exploration into the expected and actual outcomes of stakeholder participation in Southeast L.A. is grounded in two distinct but related bodies of literature: participatory planning and community organizing for school reform. In a global sense, each of these perspectives is concerned with how people engage themselves in civic life, either due to their own self-interest, or in the name of a larger cause. And, more specifically, each relates to how public involvement has unfolded throughout the course of the new school construction process.

Participatory planning is concerned with the mission and method employed by public agencies in soliciting public involvement. Pervasive debates within this body of work center around the influence of the participatory process on the quality of plans, the ability of participatory planning processes to represent diverse opinions, the effectiveness of participatory planning as a means of community empowerment, and the capacity of local government agencies to develop and implement programs that authentically engage participants. The literature on community organizing, on the other hand, explores a more bottom-up approach to civic engagement. And, as it relates to school reform in particular, it provides insight into how and under what circumstances communities engage around schools, and how such engagement can engender public schools that are not just sites of educational achievement, but "institutional sites for strengthening and revitalizing urban communities" (Warren 2007a, 16). Ultimately, the

explanation of these realms of engagement is intended to provide background on my research and to help the reader understand how the outreach process is shaped from the outset by governance goals and structures, mediated throughout by outreach objectives, and challenged by community activism.

Chapter 3, *Change on the Ground*, is the first of three chapters that present the findings of my research. The findings presented herein are based primarily on data gathered over a period of approximately one year during visits to the Southeast Los Angeles area. During my visits I toured ten new schools, conducted 50 interviews, and attended a number of community meetings and events. Interviews were conducted with various stakeholders in the school development process, including parents and other community members who are residents of Southeast Los Angeles, teachers, principals, local government officials, and LAUSD staff and leadership. Additionally, I reviewed transcripts of approximately 10 public meetings conducted by LAUSD Community Outreach staff regarding site selection and design of new schools in the Southeast. To gather background information on the context of my research, I also reviewed local and regional news sources, finding dozens of articles, in both English and Spanish publications, related to new school construction in the Los Angeles area, and collected contextual information, including demographic data for Los Angeles County, the Southeast Cities, and LAUSD. A more complete description of the methods employed in this research is provided in an appendix to this dissertation.

Chapter 3 argues that despite some shortcomings in how LAUSD gathered and incorporated local knowledge, Community Outreach has successfully engaged of an array of community stakeholders with the effect of rebuilding trust in the District, influencing school siting and design, and contributing to the development of schools as neighborhood assets by presenting findings that show how without implementation of the Outreach process, these outcomes would have been unlikely.   More specifically, this chapter outlines the ways in which Community Outreach has helped to build trust and harness political capital among Southeast stakeholders, which in turn enabled the District to successfully fulfill its mission to build new schools, and influenced the location and configuration of numerous new schools in the area. This chapter also offers student and educator perspectives on the ways in which outcomes might have been improved had input from facility end-users been more heavily weighted in the design process. Finally, this chapter supports the overall argument of this dissertation by demonstrating where the District's participatory process has succeeded and where it has failed to benefit school and neighborhood communities through the solicitation and incorporation of public input during the school planning process.

Chapter 4, *The Politics of Participation*, attempts to problematize the participatory process by exploring in greater depth who "the community" is, the nature of its response to LAUSD, and how the agenda of advancing participatory power among community stakeholders has been constrained by a host of political factors. Such factors include a relative lack of civic capacity, differences in District versus local government agendas, and conflicting purposes and power differentials, both between LAUSD staff and higher-ups, and between the community and District as a whole.   This chapter ultimately argues that the ability of Community Outreach to engage community in a way that "establishes the foundation for ongoing community participation, and that concomitantly lays the groundwork for joint school and community improvement, is inherently constrained by limited institutional and civic capacities and by divergent District and community goals. Hence, this chapter explains the limiting factors on the process, that have kept communities from being fully empowered, and the District from

maximizing its collaborative capacity.

Chapter 5, *Sustained Community Engagement,* presents findings that address the question: to what extent have the District's attempts at stakeholder participation fostered sustainable ways of engaging the community in schools? This question is addressed through an assessment of outcomes with respect to specific District-articulated goals related to community involvement, both during and after the process of new school development. Ultimately, this chapter argues that despite the types of limiting factors described in Chapter 4, a combination of intended and unintended consequences of the outreach process have had the collective effect of fostering community mobilization around schooling in Southeast L.A. By describing a range of openings for long-term parental and community engagement in schools, this chapter advances my overall argument by providing the most direct evidence that community engagement around new school construction has, in fact, established a foundation for sustained parent and community involvement in schools.

Together, the evidence and arguments advanced in the chapters described above support the overarching argument that while both the District and the communities it serves have exposed some limitations in their respective capacities for orchestrating school improvement in Southeast L.A., public engagement in the process of new school development in Southeast L.A. has resulted in a number of actual and potential benefits to both school and neighborhood communities. As described in Chapter 3, the District's re-engagement via Community Outreach with the cities of the Southeast set up the potential for positive outcomes by building trust and buy-in among stakeholders, and provided tangible benefits in the form of new neighborhood schools, sited and designed with community input. Chapter 4 then explains how the political context within the communities of Southeast L.A. and within the District itself, both shaped and limited the transformative process that outreach had the potential to become. Chapter 5 then describes how, ultimately, a foundation for sustained parent and community involvement in schools has been built, despite limitations in the framework and execution of LAUSD's outreach process, and in the community's capacity to demand and deliver a deeper level of participation.

Finally, the *Conclusion* describes developments that have occurred, both within the District and the community, that have had an impact on the educational landscape of Southeast L.A., especially with respect to community involvement. This chapter also considers what more would need to occur, both within LAUSD as an institution, and within the fabric of Southeast communities, to promote a more community centered approach to school reform. Given the primary argument advanced herein, I ultimately conclude that the District should seize this moment of heightened community concern and engagement in Southeast L.A. by implementing District-centered efforts at sustaining community involvement in schools that will support community oriented school reform. And, in a larger sense, beyond the cities of the Southeast, or even the whole of LAUSD, I advocate that authentic community planning at the school development stage can and should be employed as a means of building and sustaining community involvement and activism in and around schools.

This story, which so clearly relates not only to building *new* schools, but also to building *better* schools, is one of possibility; and, to me, is quite personal. As a product of LAUSD, and an individual for whom the system somehow *worked*, I am forever interested in how we can create school environments that that serve *all* students well. I grew up on the Westside, which in the context of L.A.'s sociogeography, is worlds away from the Southeast Cities. The schools I attended were among the best in the District at the time, and as a kid, I knew that. I also knew that they were somehow inferior to the private schools that many of my friends went off to as

soon as bussing came to town. Because the elementary school I attended became a magnet while I was still a student there, I was well aware that there were other areas of the city where students didn't have great schools, and that it was somehow better for them to leave their neighborhoods on buses every morning to come to the school that was walking distance from my home. In this vein, I saw the difference that proximity, among other factors, made when it came to who volunteered in our classrooms and in our schoolyard.

For decades, those students in LAUSD who were not lucky enough to attend either a neighborhood school or another school of their choice have been forced to attend severely overcrowded schools and/or travel long distances to school, foregoing family time or extracurricular activities, or both, to schools often offering inferior educational opportunities. From an equity perspective, the ramifications have long been clear for residents of the Southeast. As George Cole, former Mayor of the City of Bell simply put it, "Overpopulated schools put the students at a disadvantage compared to students in the western region of Los Angeles, who attend more numerous and better quality schools" (Infante 2000). Now, by mandate and by design, LAUSD is attempting to create enough capacity within the District whereby all students have the opportunity to attend two-semester neighborhood schools. This research endeavors to understand the participatory road travelled by the District and its communities to arrive at that end.

Chapter Two
Framing Community Engagement:
The Intersection of Participatory Planning
and Community Organizing in the School Planning Context

There are two faces of civil society…today. The first is civil society in its everyday social maintenance roles…The second has to do with civil society's projective role as a generator of social movements. (John Friedmann, 1995 address to the UC Berkeley School of Public Health)

Participation

This research is about participation. More specifically, it is about how people participate in the process of building and improving schools. The following chapters in this dissertation will present findings specific to new school development in Southeast Los Angeles, and related to who has participated in LAUSD's community outreach process and how that process and its outcomes have been affected by community activists organizing for new and better schools. This chapter anchors this examination of the expected and actual outcomes of stakeholder participation in Southeast L.A. in two distinct but related bodies of literature: participatory planning and community organizing for school reform.

Each of these theoretical perspectives is concerned with how people engage themselves in civic life, either due to their own self-interest, or in the name of a larger cause. And, each is intended to help frame the expected and incidental goals and outcomes of community involvement in new school development. Described in chapters 3 through 5, the findings of this research tell the story of parents and other community members getting involved in building new neighborhood schools, and in a larger sense in improving educational opportunities in their communities. Some got involved because they wanted to see their own children escape from overcrowded, underachieving schools, and others because they saw the school construction program as an opportunity to improve their communities in a broader sense. But, in one way or another, they got involved; and, the ways in which community stakeholders chose to participate can be framed either through a lens of participatory planning or community organizing, or both.

The primary difference between these two ways of framing the community involvement that takes place around new school construction is their inception. Whereas participatory planning, in this case guided by LAUSD's Community Outreach program, is a top-down endeavor, community organizing generally starts from the bottom up. One views the potential for participant empowerment as the bi-product of an institutionally, usually government, driven process; and, the other sees such empowerment as an essential outcome derived from the grassroots. What makes them similar is that they are both concerned with civic engagement and civic capacity among members of "the community". Yet, as described below, notions of community and who comprises it are hardly uniform, and generally highly contested.

For the sake of discussion, I refer to "the community" herein as a reflection of how the District considers it – primarily as a neighborhood area that will be served by an incoming school, but also including other interested parties with a vested interest in the school. By no means, however, do I perceive such neighborhoods to be comprised of one unified "community" of residents. Nor do established community groups always present a unified voice. Rather, the

community is a complex grouping of multiple perspectives, shaped by a combination of factors, such as one's relationship to and expectations of the proposed school, racial/ethnic identity, language, socioeconomic status, and citizenship status. Within this context, this research is concerned with the ways in which "the community" informs, partakes in, and in some cases, opposes and transforms, public process and its outcomes.

Another similarity between these two strains of theory and research is that while each is acutely relevant to public school planning, neither considers adequately, if at all, the relation between the parent and community engagement that occurs before a school is in operation to what occurs within the school and neighborhood communities after the planning and building is done. Participatory planning theory considers the importance of the process by which participation occurs, both for public buy-in and for the quality of a resultant project; but, it pays little attention to school planning, per se. And while existing literature on organizing for school reform is devoted to the contribution of community organizing efforts to school and community improvement, little if any of this work if focused on how grassroots organizing might impact school planning and design. Furthermore, in a broader sense, and as applied beyond school building and improvement, neither body of literature adequately theorizes about how institutions engaging in formal participatory processes can not only accommodate, but encourage and incorporate, the energy and ideas that come out of bottom-up organizing efforts – or, for that matter, how communities could push on institutions to do so.

Hence, beyond engaging in conversation about the relationship between social and physical school-community connections, the intent of this research is to build upon the bodies of work that simultaneously acknowledge the importance of community input in public projects, and of parent and community activism around public schools, but that fail to recognize the possibilities that come with community involvement specific to new school renovation and construction. A great deal has been written, for instance, on how to best involve the public in planning projects – for the sake of buy-in as well as input – and what sorts of public processes constitute "authentic" engagement. This latter concept is of great importance, especially in the realm of school planning; for, truly authentic engagement, as opposed to pro-forma public outreach, involves not only identifying stakeholder needs and concerns, but also honoring community history and vision, and acknowledging and negotiating disparate perspectives. As Forester explains in his analysis of participatory planning processes, "When planners and policy advisers hope to encourage productive and well-informed deliberative discussion – at a city council meeting, a local planning board, a state legislative subcommittee – they need to anticipate the plural and conflicting stories of differently affected citizens and stakeholders" (Forester 1999, 12).

What Forester does not mention, and what many planners disregard, is planning specifically for schools. "Community school" advocates – who tend to encompass both planners and scholars of community organizing - have begun to forge the crucial connection between what we want schools to be and how we involve neighborhood stakeholders in their planning and operation, by studying how community engagement in schools helps to re-establish the connections between schools and communities, thus creating more effective schools and healthier neighborhoods (Baum 2003, Blank et al 2003, Dryfoos 2002, KnowlegeWorks Foundation 2005). And, more and more, architects and designers theorize and examine in practice ways to design and equip schools that will maximize students learning (Bingler 2003, Dyck 2002, Lippman 2007). Yet, while some of these works do acknowledge the relationship of

school facilities to the surrounding community, few discuss processes by which the public could shape schools, from the outside in, through the process of school planning and development.

There are also those theorists and practitioners, particularly in the field of education, who illuminate in their works examples of parent and community participation in local schools through grassroots organizing. These works advocate not only the importance of ground-up school change, but also the value of sharing the successes and challenges of community organizing for school reform (Anyon 2005, Mediratta et al 2008, Oakes et al 2006 Stone et al 2001, Warren, 2005). They also go a long way toward demonstrating what empowered stakeholders are capable of, when it comes to fighting for their neighborhood schools. What theories of school change via community organizing fail to do, however, is provide much in the way of empirical studies looking at participatory school planning, and its implications for community engagement in schools that is both sustainable and multifaceted. This research aims to augment these areas of work, all of which maintain a vision of building schools that are productive centers both of student learning and community vitality.

Public Participation in Planning

In planning, "the public" is generally defined as those stakeholders who are not part of the decision-making entity or entities. So, if planning is the guidance of future action, then public participation in planning is the engagement of stakeholders in the process of understanding potential future actions in the context of past and present physical, social, and economic realities, such that appropriate guidance can inform said actions. And while public participation in planning is fundamentally a pragmatic problem solving exercise, it holds broader and grander implications for civic engagement in democratic process. Hence, of great importance to the results of a planning process is the way in which it is undertaken – which stakeholders are involved, how their input is solicited and received, and how (if at all) stakeholder input is integrated into the final decision making process.

The notion that it is both desirable and necessary for ordinary "citizens" to participate in planning process is rooted in the evolution of the concept of civic engagement and the relative importance over time of civil society in shaping pubic life. Over time, important works on civic engagement have included theoretical writings that built on the philosophical ideals of civil society, participation, and civic capacity. These help to form the foundation for an exploration of the key threads of inquiry that are weaved throughout this and the other theories and perspectives that aid my analysis. For instance, how do government institutions seek public input and accommodate civic needs and desires? What is the responsibility of public agencies to assist communities in building the capacity they need to ensure the fruitfulness of their participation in the public realm? And, finally, when institutions fail to be inclusive of the civic realm, how do communities mobilize to ensure that their interests are served?

In the ancient Greek understanding of politics, the private household realm served only as a means to public life - participation in which involves taking action to influence collective decisions that affect one's interests. However, as opposed to participation based solely on self-interest, engagement in civil society implies that actors also extend their efforts beyond self-interest through reciprocity, cooperation, sharing in a common experience, and trust (Torney-Purta 2000). More narrowly, the concept of participation in civil society refers to "citizens acting collectively to exchange ideas and information, bound by shared and often implicit rules" (Torney-Purta 2000, 5).

The term civil society first was used in its modern sense by Hegel in his *Philosophy of Right* (1921) and by Alexis de Tocqueville in *Democracy in America* (1931). Most current characterizations of the related concepts of civil society and civic capacity are drawn from Tocqueville's observations of the propensity of Americans to unite public and private interests through participation in voluntary civic associations. Yet, long before Tocqueville famously wrote about the nature of participatory democracy in America, political philosophers like Aristotle and Plato theorized about the role of the citizen in the governance of the state.

Thomas Jefferson and John Stuart Mill too devoted much attention to the notion that an active citizenry could benefit both individual and national character. The engaged citizen, Mill proposed, would be required to "weight interests not his own", and thus would be "made to feel himself one of the public, and whatever is for their benefit to be for his benefit" (Mill 1861, 79). The need for civic engagement or association in a democratic society also has been reinforced by thinkers like James Madison, who characterized the freedom of association (which I would argue includes spontaneous associations of all types, from sports leagues to neighborhood groups lobbying for specific policy changes) as a necessary safeguard against the tyranny of the majority (Gunier 1994). In other words, the right of citizens to participate in civil society by forming associations served as a necessary intermediary in the "interplay of a multiplicity of groups defending their diverse interests…"(Tamir 1998, 223)

Janet Abu-Lughod too presents a helpful framework for understanding the evolution of the concept of civil society. She describes the conceptualization of civil society as having evolved in two strains over time: one that aligns with the teachings of Adam Smith, and one that is closer to the civil society characterized by Alexis de Tocqueville. According to Abu-Lughod, the evolution began initially during the mid 18th to the mid 19th century, with a conception of civil society as conterminous with the state. As a justification of the American and French Revolutions, civil society began to morph into something that necessarily defends itself against the state. Subsequently, for a time, the anti-statist impulse was weakened, until the final, modernizing phase, during which civil society came to be seen as something being encroached upon by new regulatory forms of state power. This last phase, in which civil society came to be seen as a counterforce to the abuse of state power, and wherein efficacious community life is defined by effective joint problem solving (Briggs 2008, 8), is closest to Tocqueville's conception, and is also the most analogous characterization to planners' current usage of the term.

The current planning ideal that those impacted by publicly sanctioned projects should be invited to participate in the city building process dates back to the turn of the 20th century, with the reaction of early planning visionaries, such as Howard, Geddes, and Wright, to the plight of the urban poor in the newly industrialized cities of Europe and the United States. However, despite the emergence at the time of utopian visions of urban reform, those meant to benefit from various approaches to improving living and working conditions in crowded cities were seldom if ever asked for their perspectives. Through the 1940s and 1950s, the notion of involving civil society in matters of physical and social planning remained limited by the assumption of a beneficent and even enlightened state. Planners, as agents of the state, simply were expected to rise above the backstage dealings of the vested, corporate interests that usually prevailed, to articulate, defend, and uphold a public interest" (Friedmann 1998, 19).

As such, community input in local land use planning has been a common practice only since the 1960s, when in the context of numerous social struggles, social planners, led by Paul Davidoff, "turned from being advocates of a presumptive public interest to advocacy of the

disempowered sectors of our cities" (Friedmann 1998, 19). This was also a time during which the federal government took an active role in supporting participatory planning through urban renewal, anti-poverty programs, and the Model Cities project. And since the 1960s, numerous state and federal legislative requirements have required participatory processes under the guise of encouraging public disclosure and more democratic processes.

Today, some form of public involvement generally occurs, and often is required, with the development of schools and other publicly funded or permitted projects. Opportunities for public participation typically take the form of attendance at informational meetings around local development projects or neighborhood-initiated uprisings over undesirable plans or concerns regarding hazardous materials. Public involvement also occurs as part of formal design processes, usually in the form of design charrettes conducted by architects and planners charged with the design and implementation of local projects. LAUSD included, few school districts choose to engage local stakeholders at this level of collaborative design. What LAUSD *has* taken to a higher level is their community outreach. And, whether by will or by force, the degree to which the District has engaged in a form of participatory planning (which critics claim falls far short of community planning) is uncommon, even for a large school district.

Public Participation versus Participatory Planning

Endeavoring to engage the public in matters of physical planning and development, participatory planning seeks to incorporate civil society into public process by creating a forum in which tensions between the economic forces that drive development, the political functioning of governing institutions, and the needs and desires of the individuals and communities that comprise civil society, are negotiated. Hence planners, as mediators in the realm of economic, social, and political conflict, typically are concerned with the way in which resources are distributed through the development of land and the allocation public services (Marris 1998). As such, they are charged with articulating the source of conflicts and with finding ways to resolve, or at least minimize them, to the extent that publicly sanctioned, permitted, or funded projects may move forward. Through its own participatory process, LASUD has sought to develop participation, support and trust between the District and its community stakeholders by work with community members as active partners in solving overcrowding conditions in schools, develop a support base for new schools, and establish the foundation for ongoing community participation, beyond the completion of schools.

It is important to note that while "public participation in planning" and "participatory planning" often are used interchangeably, there are distinguishing aspects between the two. For instance, public participation often implies a process led by a planning authority, in which planners seek input from the public on stakeholder needs and desires, and then attempt to synthesize such input into a plan that meets the needs of everyone, while also conforming to applicable (in this case, District) policy. Participation fits a timetable that is set, but not necessarily adhered to, by the planning authority. It involves a series of formal stages beginning with exploration of issues and ending with a plan; and, the flow of information is mainly from the planners to the public, who are given opportunities to comment.

In contrast, participatory planning often is seen as a consensus-building process, wherein stakeholders with diverse interests come together to form and implement a plan. A governing body does not necessarily initiate participatory planning; as such, its form and timetable may be negotiated and agreed upon amongst participants. Further, the process is rooted in the

recognition that society is pluralist and there are legitimate conflicts of interest that have to be addressed by the application of consensus-building methods. Participatory planning is meant to be culturally aware and sensitive to differences in power, and seeks to ensure that these do not pre-determine outcomes (Kurian 2003, 70-87). Another common theme in the literature on participatory planning is the notion that it should generate a two-way learning process between government and community, that in the short-term shapes project interventions to local needs, opportunities and constraints, and in the long term leads to community empowerment and support at the institutional level (Platt).

Complicating this definition even further is the fact that planning theorists and practitioners often use the term "consensus-building" interchangeably with "consensus-seeking". Yet, whereas "consensus-building" increasingly is used for processes that have the goal of reaching full agreement, "consensus-seeking" is akin to a collaborative approach, whereby a public agency seeks as high a level of consensus as possible, but reserves the right to make a final decision if consensus is not reached. As Creighton describes in *The Public Participation Handbook*, "When the process is over, the public has usually influenced the decision even if there is not final agreement and the agency retains the ultimate authority to act. The public's influence may have helped to determine how the problem was defined, the range of alternatives that were considered, the evaluation criteria that were applied, and the process by which the decision was made, even if there is not agreement on the final result" (Creighton 2002, 10).

Given these ambiguities, it is difficult to fit LAUSD's participatory process squarely into one discreet category. Insofar as the District sets the agenda and timetable for its projects and associated public interactions, the nature of its public process is largely top-down, and hence more "participation" than "participatory". The end project also is largely the District's by design, though the public to a limited extent may shape it.

However, even as LAUSD's processes and project outcomes are largely administered from above, there are elements of the District's structure and approach that allow new school development to be somewhat participatory in nature. LAUSD's process, for instance, was designed and implemented in its early stages by Community Outreach staff that came from community organizing backgrounds. Early on, many even came from the communities they would later enter as District employees to collaborate with neighborhood stakeholders in building schools. As such, their collective view of what community outreach should entail weights heavily the idea that participation on the part of the community does not simply entail showing up at meeting to receive information from the District. Rather, they saw, and continue to see, the process as an exchange, whereby LAUSD benefits from the community's perspective and local expertise, and community stakeholders emerge by virtue of their participation more empowered to effect change in their schools and in their communities.

Thus, whether by design or accident, the District's process has resulted in a two-way learning curve, whereby LAUSD has gleaned valuable information from the communities it serves, and community stakeholders have learned the ropes of school construction in particular, and participation in public process in general. Given this orientation, and for the purpose of discussion, I refer hereafter to LAUSD's outreach process as one of participatory planning. In doing so, I acknowledge that the enactment of LAUSD's Community Outreach process is largely an institutionally driven planning process, wherein the District has the final say, barring citizen and local government lawsuits, as to what projects are built and where.

Whatever the specific form or forum through which planners seek to engage the public, the common denominator generally is the desire to solicit stakeholder participation in the decision making process around physical development projects. Out of this has arisen a long-standing debate within planning literature on the role of community input. This debate centers on the influence of the participatory process on the quality of plans, the ability of participatory planning processes to represent diverse opinions, the effectiveness of participatory planning as a means of community empowerment, and the capacity of local government agencies to develop and implement programs that authentically engage participants (Arnstein 1969, Beatley et al 1994, Hibbard and Lurie 2000, Innes 1996).

Advocates of participatory planning claim that it not only leads to greater consensus around decision-making and approval processes, but that it fosters more empowered communities (Arnstein 1969), whose civic capacity is heightened and available for future mobilization. Some planning scholars also claim that participatory processes result in higher quality plans (i.e., designs that maximize usable space, are well suited to their prescribed use and surroundings, and serve an array of users), because a plurality of community opinions and concerns can be solicited and incorporated. Furthermore, some argue that participatory planning is more efficient than top-down planning processes, because rather than waiting for members of the public to react in opposition to a project, planners can gain a sense of a community's interests, and allow members of the public to come to terms with opposing views through sanctioned public participation (Innes 1996, Hibbard and Lurie 2000).

In practice, participatory planning is rife with challenges regarding the range of stakeholders one can and should include in the process, the practicality of soliciting all possible opinions around a given proposal, and how to reconcile the imperfection of representative participation – especially given that even similar demographics do not necessarily translate into similar perspectives. This dynamic is being played out within many Los Angeles area neighborhoods, as divergent and divided communities strive to find consensus about where schools should be sited and whose needs their facilities and programs will serve.

Defining Community

In addition to looking at the ways in which government entities engage "participants" in the planning process, participatory planning literature also grapples with who is engaged. Who, in other words, comprises the "community" when we speak of "community outreach" in the practice of planning? Whether explicit or implicit, the defining and redefining of "community" is important in the context of any type of planning process, first because the practice of planning necessitates deliberately deciding whom to engage around any given project, and also because both process and outcomes are largely a result of whose input is solicited and whose is not.

In participatory planning practice, defining community is largely a place-based exercise. And, while LAUSD has sought to be as inclusive as possible in their outreach efforts, theirs is still largely a geographically based approach to soliciting public opinion. Such an approach arguably is the one that makes most practical sense to ensure that the input of those who are directly impacted by the construction of a new school is collected and taken seriously.

Community based planning also often draws on input from issue-based communities, wherein people come together around particular problems or debates. This method of defining community may overlap with geographical groupings; for instance, neighborhood residents may come together around a specific local issue, such as the location of a new school facility.

Communities also may define themselves exclusively in issue-based terms, such as a community concerned with environmental conservation, or by virtue of identity, such as a Korean or African American community. Authors like Gregory and Rose, who view communities more as socially constructed and politically negotiated, as opposed to static and necessarily place-based, highlight the importance of moving beyond simple geographic definitions as a way of understanding the power-dynamics involved in the very process of defining community. Gregory, for instance, describes community as "a power-laden field of social relations whose meaning, structures, and frontiers are continually produced, contested, and reworked in relation to a complex range of sociopolitical attachments and antagonisms" (Gregory 1998, 11).

In the context of school planning it is also useful to consider non-place based approaches to defining community, given that some legitimate stakeholders, such as teachers, may be excluded from the community process because they are not part of the geographic school community. This is an important consideration, in that even though teachers are often in a prime position to weigh in on issues of schools design, their input may not be sought out. Students are also among those generally left out of community outreach efforts, even though their input as to how schools should be designed arguably should be among the most informed by experience and therefore equally as, if not more, legitimate than their adult counterparts.

<div align="center">Consensus vs. Conflict</div>

No matter how careful planners are about how they define "the community", who is entitled to participate and how disparate views among participants will be resolved is always a point of concern. The dominant characterization of planners (or other public agency representatives) and their role in participatory processes portrays them primarily as consensus builders and advocates, whose role is to represent the needs of that part of civic society which is traditionally underrepresented in American society, and therefore, most vulnerable. Such a view aligns with Habermas's theory of communicative rationality, which not only assumes a certain degree of civic capacity on the part of participants, but also idealizes the struggle over access to the public sphere as a matter of rational discourse, minus historically based power dynamics (Marris 1998). While Habermas does acknowledge certain limits of his supposition that participants in public discourse are universally both able and willing to overcome their subjectivity in favor of a rationally motivated agreement, he is steadfast in his claim that "'the unconstrained, unifying, consensus building force of argumentative speech'" is central to the human experience (Habermas in Flyvbjerg 1998, 90).

Aligned with this perspective are scholars like Judith Innes, who has advocated consensus building as a method of public deliberation that enables the consideration of complex and controversial issues where multiple public interests are at stake (Innes 1996). According to Innes, these methods, like the types of community organizing endeavors described below, build on the theories and practice of American pragmatism, as well as on the educational theories of Dewey and others that emphasize the importance of learning communities and empowerment. Innes presents several examples of participatory planning processes that have employed consensus-building techniques successfully toward the end of soliciting meaningful public input on complex and controversial matters of urban growth and environmental policy and management. This approach is very much in line with the way LAUSD's Outreach staff characterize their endeavor to solicit public input on new school construction.

Rhetoric, however, is often somewhat divorced from reality. And, in the case of LAUSD's school construction projects in Southeast L.A., the ideal of consensus has repeatedly

given way to conflict management. Hence, to understand the participatory planning that has occurred around new schools it is useful to note the perspective of those planning theorists, who in contrast to the consensus-minded focus fore grounded by Innes and championed by others inspired by Habermas, place more emphasis on the conflict and power dynamics inherent within the process of soliciting community input. In planning theory, this point of view adheres more to a power-centered conception of public life representative of the thinking of Foucault, who found the notion that the authorization of power by law would lead to neutral consensus building to be inadequate given the "methods that are employed on all levels and in forms that go beyond the state and its apparatus (Foucault in Flyvbjerg 1998, 201).

As it applies to the interaction between school planners and the communities with whom they interact, this perspective illuminates the existence of unequal power relations (i.e., between LAUSD and its Southeast communities, as well as between employees in various District positions), and proposes to first acknowledge that they exist and to then "allow these games of power to be played out with a minimum of domination" (Gaulthier 1988, 18). For Foucault, the "real political task" for society is not to create utopian models of political engagement in a just society, but "to criticize the working of institutions which appear to be both neutral and independent; to criticize them in such a manner that the political violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight them" (Foucault in Rabinow 1984, 6). In this vein, accusations from Southeast residents and public officials alike that LAUSD has historically ignored or undervalued its communities have played an important role in forcing a more normalized, and in some ways, democratic process. However, in this conflict-oriented view, increased rationalization of civic engagement can have consequences of its own as to the legitimacy of the exercise overall. As participatory planning around development projects has become more institutionalized, for instance, the danger has emerged that government agencies (and the planners that represent them) may set up participatory processes as means to an end, rather than authentically seeking input from local participants.

This conflict-oriented analysis of participatory process in planning is particularly useful as a critical lens for this research, because it highlights the tensions between consensus and conflict that inevitably emerge within the context of civil society, and that are almost certain to surface around any debate relating to schools and education (Dean 1999, Flyvbjerg 1998, Rabinow 1984, Rose 1999). Further, the acknowledgement of power relations as inherent to civic engagement in any realm is important in considering how to garner a broad and fruitful representation of the public interest in school facilities planning. For, it highlights the challenge of identifying and overcoming longstanding power relationships that ultimately affect who comes to the negotiating table and whether or not their voices will be heard once they arrive. Beyond stifling the scope of a conflict through concrete institutional practices, power dynamics also can compromise civic engagement around planning and other public processes by attempting to preclude the emergence of conflict in the first place. Invoking Lukes' third-dimensional view of power, Handler explains the way in which power can effect even the conception of grievances. "The absence of grievances," he explains, "may be due to a manipulated consensus". Furthermore, the dominant group may be so secure that it is oblivious to anyone challenging its position. As Handler articulates, "the most effective and insidious use of power is to prevent conflict form arising in the first place'" (Handler 1996, 120).

Participatory planning around new school siting and construction may at times limit public debate through the control of information and process, such that conflict around particular issues (e.g., educational quality and equity), along with certain inherently disempowered groups,

are excluded from the conversation. Public debate in L.A. also has been limited by incorporating, or as some claim, co-opting, oppositional community stakeholders into the District's fold, by bestowing upon them titles like Community Representative. The supremacy of the process itself also can intensify power differentials. For instance, community members can demand and recommend all they want, but at the end of the day, Community Outreach staff are accountable to the larger school construction program, the program to the District as a whole, the District to the publicly elected School Board, and so on.

Thus, even if District staff have the best interest of communities in mind, the lengths they can go to in order to satisfy community needs are constricted by their positionality within the larger District, city, and regional context. Similarly, there are limits to the supremacy of public opinion when it comes to siting and designing new schools, given the lack of "expertise" and/or political clout individuals and the communities they comprise may or may not possess. Members of the public, for instance, may or may not be aware of all of the issues that must be considered when making decisions about where and how to build a new school; and, even if they are largely aware of the pertinent issues, their opinions may be trumped due to larger political considerations.

Community Organizing for School Reform

As with participatory planning, organizing, or action, for school reform represents a form of participation in public life that occurs within the space of civil society, and presumes a certain degree of civic capacity - the ability to build and maintain a broad social and political coalition across all sectors of the urban community in pursuit of a common goal (Stone, et al 2001). Yet, whereas participatory planning tends to favor institutional bias in defining who comprises "the community", community organizing represents a more ground-up, activist means of participation. And, as opposed to the type of participation by invitation that is embodied by traditional forms of participation in planning, this strategy for improving urban schools generally involves the development of what Handler terms "participatory competence" empowerment through conflict (Handler 1996, 123). As is the case in Southeast Los Angeles and elsewhere, grassroots participation *can* be initiated or influenced from "above", by more powerful individuals and entities, such as government officials, foundations, and the like. Participatory discourse around organizing, however, is largely shaped by community-fueled, conflict-oriented debate.

Whether driven by conflict or consensus, bureaucracy or community, empowerment as participatory competence involves "the development of a sense of self-competence, a more critical or analytical understanding of one's social and political environment, and individual and collective resources for social and political activity" (Handler 1996, 123). The difference is that in institutionally initiated participatory planning, resources (i.e., knowledge, procedural control) are held by the stronger parties themselves; whereas, when outside actors (i.e., community members) are initiating participation by contesting institutional plans, procedures, or policies, the weaker parties obtain the resources they need from the larger community (Handler 1996). In the case of grassroots activism around schools in Southeast L.A., the "larger community" has included everyone from experienced activists to local and national government representatives.

Activism for Education: The Literature

A growing body of work has emerged that examines community organizing as it occurs specifically around school reform (Baum 2004, Mediratta 2008, 2002, Stone et al 2001, Warren 2005), and that positions public schools not just as sites of educational achievement, but as "institutional sites for strengthening and revitalizing urban communities" (Warren 2007). This perspective is of particular significance for the purpose of understanding the process and outcomes of LAUSD's Community Outreach process, because it provides insight into how and under what circumstances communities engage specifically around schools, and how such engagement leads to outcomes that are beneficial for both schools and the communities in which they are situated. Further, in parallel to the literature on participatory planning summarized above, these works examine how power dynamics within and between communities and the institutions with which they engage.

While this research is largely institutionally focused, it draws also on the literature on community organizing as a means of understanding how and under what circumstances people mobilize around issues of collective concern, and of getting at how grassroots efforts intersect with officially sanctioned opportunities for participation. Theories of organizing generally examine the conditions under which grassroots activism can effectively demand power and results from state or corporate entities. And, many focus in large part on the ability of racially and economically marginalized groups to empower themselves by organizing around social interests and values (Piven and Cloward 1979, Castells 1983). Where and how collective action occurs is also a point of focus; and, as such, a healthy segment of the community organizing literature centers on the circumstances under which shared consciousness and civic capacity foster neighborhood mobilization.

This area of inquiry is of particular importance for understanding the types of participation that have emerged around LAUSD's school construction initiative for two primary reasons. First, the elaborate structure of the District's Community Outreach department may never have been erected but for the grassroots activism around schools in the Southeast that was escalating at the time the first school construction and modernization bonds were passed. As described in Chapter 1, the scope of outreach undertaken by LAUSD only in part reflected a philosophical perspective on how public input on new school construction projects should be sought; primarily, it was a reaction to growing mobilization on the part of parents and other community stakeholders who were fed up with business as usual.

Second, and the reason it is not surprise that staff members within Outreach are called "organizers", is that many Outreach staff members came to LAUSD from community organizing background. In fact, as mentioned above, many of the initial Outreach staffers who now hold positions of leadership within the department, were organizers within the very communities in which they have overseen LAUSD school projects. So, in their daily work, these staff members bring to their jobs a sense of responsibility to not only tap into existing community networks, but also to assist in the development of local civic capacity.

The Roots of Contemporary School Related Organizing

Contemporary community organizing has its roots in the sociological theories and methods of the Chicago School of Pragmatism, an intellectual and activist movement of the late

19th and early 20th centuries. Among those affiliated with the movement was the "dean of modern community organizing", Saul Alinsky. Alinksy's work has influenced numerous labor and community activists, including the co-founders of the United Farmworkers Association, Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta, both of whom were affiliated with the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), the Chicago-based community organization started by Alinsky in 1940. Using the IAF as a vehicle, Alinsky sought to identify key community stakeholders and power brokers, to build consensus among diverse local institutions such as churches, unions, and civic groups, and to challenge directly the authority of municipal agencies and politicians (Heathcott 2005). Alinsky and other adherents of the Chicago School also contributed greatly to the fields of community organizing and related social research through their development and employment of novel empirical methods of research, such as personal documents and field observations, which often focused on immigrant communities and their need to gain political and economic power by forging strategic relationships.

Influenced by these origins, organizing efforts around school improvement have expanded in recent years most rapidly in low-income neighborhoods and communities of color, wherein groups often raise equity issues, such as whether schools address the needs of immigrant youth or whether students of color are provided with adequate educational opportunities. Organizers under this model generally consist of members of formal community-based organizations working with educators, parents, and other community members who emerge as what Gramsci would term "organic intellectuals" from within the ranks of their communities. "Reformers" can also include local business leaders, as was the case in Chicago when a coalition of community leaders, business elites, teachers, and parents worked together to enact the Chicago School Reform Act of 1988.

Regardless of who is spearheading the work, the emphasis of community organizing for school improvement is on enlisting residents as partners and leaders in the development of collaborative efforts to promote educational equity. Both school-based organizing itself, and the documentation of such efforts has expanded in recent years. According to a report prepared by the Institute for Education and Social Policy at the New York University Steinhardt Schools of Education, in 2002, there were at least 200 community groups across the country organized around efforts to improve local public schools (Mediratta 2002). This rise in community generated civic engagement in school improvement can be categorized as a symptom of what John Friedmann identified as a sea change in the role of government planning. As opposed to relying on a benevolent government to mitigate the fallout of the market economy, a plethora of local community-based organizations are now augmenting, if not replacing, the government's role as a "guarantor of the public weal" (Freidmann 1998).

In the realm of education, this organizing approach has stimulated important changes in educational policy and practices. Community organizing has helped, for instance, to expand school-level capacity by improving school-community relationships, parent involvement and engagement, sense of school community and trust, teacher collegiality, and teacher morale. As a result of organizing groups' efforts, successful reform initiatives also have contributed to increased student attendance, improved standardized-test-score performance, and higher graduation rates and college-going aspirations. Further, participation in organizing efforts appears to be increasing civic engagement, as well as knowledge and investment in education issues, among adult and youth community members (Mediratta 2008).

Empowering Communities: Key Organizing Philosophies

Central to the organizing approach, and in line with the community approach to school reform, is the assumption that in order to address the issues commonly associated with struggling urban schools, such as low student achievement, poor teacher training, and degraded schools facilities, schools and communities must work together to develop the relational power necessary to foster change. Emphasized is relational power, as opposed to unilateral power, as a means of building the capacity to get things done collectively (Warren 2005). Hence, education oriented community organizing groups are actively and intentionally engaged in "building relationships, skills and organizing power among parents, young people, and community residents to transform local conditions and create new opportunities" (Baum 2003).

This intentional fostering of intersecting sets of relationships among community members often is referred to as building social capital. The concept of social capital has been used liberally in social science literature in recent years to describe the benefits associated with membership within interpersonal networks, and is key to understanding how marginalized communities organize around all manner of social issues and causes, including school reform. Popularized in large part by Robert Putnam, social capital generally is perceived to be both a private and a public good, because as a by-product of social relations, its benefits reach both individuals and the social networks they create. The origination of the concept is generally attributed to Pierre Bourdieu, whose notion of social capital is widely cited by social theorists in general, and educational theorists, in particular, as a means of interpreting the nature and value of social interactions. As defined by Bourdieu, social capital describes the ability (based on social and often economic circumstance) to utilize one's social networks and membership within groups to secure benefits. One can acquire social capital through interactions, social obligations, connections and networks. In the case of communities and schools, quality education as an individual benefit can be used to promote larger social gains.

Some scholars have invoked the concept of social capital more specifically around issues of school improvement, both as an explanation of how collaboration between schools and communities can take place, and as an example of a positive residual effect of community collaboration for minority or low income parents and their children, who do not necessarily have access to expansive, influential social networks. As Warren explains, the concept of social capital "provides a useful framework to think about overcoming both the external and internal isolation of public schools in order to reweave the social fabric of schools and urban communities" (Warren 2005, 136). Further, Noguera articulates that social capital can be used to describe the way in which the development of social networks around school improvement can provide a potentially powerful catalyst for transforming inner-city schools into genuine assets for the communities they serve (Noguera 2003).

More specifically, Noguera adopts the idea of social capital in his discussion of urban school improvement by suggesting that key to making the types of investments in urban public schools that address larger "urban" issues such as poverty, social isolation, and economic marginalization, is the development of positive social capital among inner-city residents. For Noguera, the development of social capital and relational power represents the primary goal of urban school improvement. True reform must transform urban schools into sources of social stability and support for families and children by developing their potential to 1) serve as sources of intra-community integration, and 2) to provide resources for extra-community linkages

(Noguera 1999). Thus, the end result of school-based community organizing efforts is twofold: parents are empowered to act on behalf of their children, and schools can realize benefits that have a positive ripple effect outward into the community at large.

Organizing for School Improvement: Local Strategies and Stories

Community organizing for school improvement utilizes numerous strategies, depending on the specific community and educational context. According to research conducted by the Institute for Education and Social Policy at New York University's Steinhardt School of Education, grassroots groups working for educational improvement share the following characteristics (Mediratta, 2002):

1. They are community-based organizations with histories of working to improve their communities.
2. They are intentionally building relationships, skills, and organizing power among parents, young people, and community residents to transform local conditions and create new opportunities.
3. They are independent of the school and school system, though some may have developed relationships with schools through other service or development activities.

As is mentioned above, schools and local residents generally partner with community organizations that are already well established before engaging in school improvement efforts. These organizations often have been engaged in organizing around other issues within the community, and are thus well suited as builders of social capital. As Warren explains, autonomous community organizations can serve as mediators between families and schools that can focus on building relationships while school staff continue to work on improving instruction. Further, they can alter the power dynamic that often exists between school professionals and parents of color by creating a foundation from which parents can enter into collaboration on a more equal footing (Warren 2005).

In New York City, much of the organizing around school improvement has evolved from neighborhood efforts to improve housing and the general quality of community life. The organizing effort undertaken by New Settlement Apartments (NSA), a housing development of nearly l900 families in the Mount Eden section of the southwest Bronx, represents one such case. As NSA was spearheading its community building efforts, the condition of the local schools was dim. In fact, the focal point of these efforts, Community School District 9, had earned a reputation as one of the most corrupt and poorly performing districts in the entire city (Mediratta et al 2002). In 1996, amid widespread concern regarding issues of educational equity and corruption in the South Bronx neighborhood schools, NSA was approached by members of the local school board to discuss approaches to school improvement. In 1997, NSA began organizing parents, helping them to form the NSA Parent Action Committee (PAC).

The PAC was born out of a voter registration drive led by a small group of parents, and supported by NSA, around school board elections. The drive lasted only a few months and had little impact on the election in the District. However, it did lead to NSA's involvement with the School Board Election Network, a citywide effort to support the engagement of local constituencies in school board elections, and piqued NSA's interest in playing a role in the improvement of public schools. After prioritizing the issues of importance to them, the PAC decided to focus on the district's efforts to promote literacy. And, as a bi-product of their

research and mobilization around this issue, they were able to force the resignation of the local school's principal, whom parents and teachers perceived as a barrier to their efforts.

While the removal of the school principal did not result in immediate or vast school improvement, it did represent a successful effort to strengthen community capacity. Organizing around literacy promotion, and ultimately forcing out an ineffective school leader, helped to create a base of local leadership capable of building an organizing base and of navigating the school system. Importantly, these leaders came to "feel they have the right and the responsibility to contest the prevailing distribution of power in their community as well as their own organization" (Institute for Education and Social Policy, 2001).

In Chicago, the Logan Square Neighborhood Association (LSNA) in Chicago began organizing for school improvement in the early 1990s. Organizing began after a citywide movement culminated in the devolution, through the passage of the Chicago School Reform Law, of decision making powers to elected local school councils at each Chicago public school. In the wake of this new legislation, local community groups employed a variety of strategies to working for school change. Recognizing the overcrowding effects that a new wave of Latino immigrants was having on local schools, LSNA decided to focus on school construction. And, through organizing around school overcrowding, LSNA was able to bring together school principals, teachers, and parents in a collaborative effort to make schools the centers of community.

Out of the social capital built through the initial stages of this effort came the implementation of several school improvement initiatives, which according to anecdotal and some statistical evidence have done much to improve educational outcomes. One such initiative was the adoption by LSNA of a "Holistic Plan", intended to build on trust established with local principals to advance organizing work not just around schools, but within them. Guided by this plan, LSNA developed a successful Parent-Teacher Mentor Program and raised funds to hire parents in local schools to work two hours a day in classrooms. The establishment of the Mentor Program represented a deliberate effort by LSNA organizers to involve parents in local schools, and to develop a leadership base among parents, allowing them to become not only volunteers, but also active participants and decision makers (Warren 2005). To assist them in developing their capacities for school and community leadership, parents who participated in the Parent-Teacher Mentor Program attended educational workshops on a range of educational and social issues.

It is important to note that much of LSNA's success at organizing must be attributed not only to its ability to forge relationships between local actors such as parents and teachers, but also by its ability to build alliances with public officials outside of the school/neighborhood context. Working to build alliances within the larger political arena, LSNA has worked with public officials in the City of Chicago as well as with state senators. This approach has made LSNA successful at building both social and political capital within the neighborhoods they represent. This context is not dissimilar to Southeast L.A., where parent activists have found power through their own collective organizing, and by forging relationships with elected officials holding similar objectives with regard to improving the local educational landscape.

Other examples of community organizing for school improvement can be found in local educational foundations (LEFs), a model for garnering community support for educational improvement initiatives. While this approach has gained some popularity in poorer urban areas like Southeast L.A., it is most commonly utilized in relatively affluent suburban locales. LEFs are 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations whose boards represent local community and education

leaders and who are financially accountable to their communities. Each LEF is unique in its operation, its programs, and the resources it provides to its community, but all share a common commitment to improving education at the local level. In general, educational foundations are created to:

- Serve as conveners with non-profit agencies to address community issues relating to education;
- Link people and organizations in their communities with public schools, developing awareness and resource support;
- Increase teacher morale by making direct financial grants to teachers and by recognizing their importance in the community; and
- Broaden support for public education and local schools with greater community awareness.

In 2000, California education foundations raised more than $50 million for public schools throughout California, impacting nearly 4.6 million children. LEFs sponsored programs as diverse as the communities they represented, ranging from grants to teachers to purchases of instructional technology. Some 10,000 community volunteers served on the boards of LEFs, bringing new ideas and perspectives to educational issues.

Many LEFs in California sprung up after Proposition 13, which placed limits on local property taxes, significantly limiting the local funding available to all public school districts. Because of the degree to which property taxes had soared, cuts were most severe in wealthier districts, where wealthy parents and community members could afford to supplement funding by making private contributions. And, it remains primarily these types of districts that have found ways to elevate to a level above mere adequacy the quality of their children's public school education.

As is evidenced by the examples presented above, the notion that educational equity and community development cannot be divorced from one another is central to the organizing approach to school improvement. For, schools cannot be "fixed" in isolation from the economic and social forces that shape the environments in which they are situated. According to Noguera, one of the reasons this connection is so important to make is that schools have a potentially powerful role to play not only in educating students, but also in either perpetuating social ills and inequities or in transforming urban environments into arenas for community collaboration toward positive social change.

As described above, many adherents to an organizing approach to school reform cite the development of positive social capital as one of the ways in which schools can be shaped into social assets within a given urban community. The argument can be made, however, that as powerful as building social capital can be for individual school and neighborhood improvement, a broader solution requires creating the political capacity to address issues of structural inequality (Warren 2005). Such a remedy would require local organizers and their potential allies to overcome multiple practical and ideological barriers to organizing around school improvement. For example, reformers may be loathe to collaborate with community activists, for fear that they will interfere with their agendas, creating a climate in which community activists are discouraged from stepping into a domain traditionally reserved for educators and academics by structures not designed for the inclusion of outside actors. Schools and school reformers also may fail to see the value of investing time and resources into engaging parents,

connecting with community organizations, and addressing the broader needs of children, in the context of enormous pressure to raise achievement immediately. Furthermore, even if organizing victories are able to create significant improvements in local schools, victories can be fleeting, and accomplishments can be reversed or diminished within a short time (Baum 2003).

Another question that emerges from the consideration of this approach to school improvement and reform concerns the role of government in creating educational equity. In general, social policy responses grounded in organizing theory have focused on civic regeneration, volunteering, and community self help - the aim being to organize for change by building social capital and strengthening local community networks. What this means in the realm of educational reform is that when most of the responsibility is placed on individual schools and community organizations, the government is, to some extent, released from its responsibility to ensure that all children are provided with equitable educational opportunities. In short, while a policy-driven reliance on local actors can provide ground up, organic community and school change, it can also serve as a justification for a retreat from educational spending.

Despite these tensions, several clear benefits of the organizing approach to school improvement emerge. One important effect is that community organizing around educational issues can do much to strengthen school-community links. When relationships between school and community actors are strategically built and maintained, the likelihood increases that the community's stake in the school, and the school's in the neighborhood community, will stand the test of time.

Another potential benefit is that when school improvement efforts grow organically out of the interests and ideas articulated through interactions between parents, teachers, and concerned community members, they tend to be more strongly and enthusiastically supported than improvement projects imposed from outside. Moreover, many community-based organizations engaged in school improvement link their school-by-school endeavors to broader initiatives, thus enabling them to engage in more far-reaching community development efforts. And, even more important, by building the local leadership base, community organizing for school improvement teaches local actors to develop skills and capital that will allow them to engage in future efforts for school and community change. Local organizing for school improvement ultimately represents the antithesis of top-down, generic approaches that often fail to address either the physical manifestations of neglect, or the underlying structural factors that create and reinforce educational inequality.

Conclusion: Contributing to the Literature

The goal of this research is not to decipher whether collective action around schools is best initiated from the top-down or from the bottom-up. For, as Briggs notes, "In particular places and times, efforts to lead significant change can be either "top-led" or "bottom-led", and both can achieve defensibly democratic results, as long as leaders on either end focus fairly consistently and pragmatically on the other's motivations to achieve purpose" (Briggs 2008, 308). Rather, the intent is to understand what possibilities for change arise when institutional process meets grassroots organizing in an evolving and dynamic participatory landscape.

As described in this chapter, research and writings on various forms of public participation in planning do an excellent job of articulating how various mechanisms for government initiated participatory processes can be designed and implemented to maximize the

breadth of stakeholders who participate, to mitigate for inequities (both in the process itself and in the sociopolitical realm in which it is undertaken), and to improve project outcomes by virtue of having sought the local expertise of "the community". This literature also successfully demonstrates what can happen when preferred practices are not employed, and/or where participation becomes ritual rather than meaningful.

On the other hand, research on community organizing, or action, for school reform demonstrates how and under what circumstances community groups organize to improve public education in low-performing schools and districts. This literature articulates well how community empowerment within the context of collective action is necessary to effectively access and build upon civic capacity for use in future problem-solving endeavors. It also demonstrates how such empowerment can be disabled by political and economic dynamics. But, what each body of literature fails to adequately explain is what happens after institutionally initiated participatory process and grassroots action collide spontaneously, leaving both possibility and the potential for regret in their wake. In other words, how, after an important moment of mobilization, can communities themselves help to the reshape district governance structures such that they do not simply accommodate, but authentically incorporate organizing approaches and initiatives?

In recent decades urban communities like Southeast L.A. have encountered vast changes, including shifting demographics, economic decline, and shifting local, state and Federal government capacities and priorities, that have altered the rules and requirements for civic life. Said another way, who is responsible for initiating change in local communities, and how it should be implemented, is continually being reshaped. As Briggs notes in *Democracy as problem solving: Civic capacity in communities across the globe,* "debates about participatory governance capture one side of the sea change – the expectation of wider stakeholder participation in decision making that matters – and the 'new public management' emphasizes a different expectation, centered on whether and how public institutions, which depend on our formal and informal 'authorization' to be effective, deliver acceptable results" (Briggs 2008, 10).

The other side is captured by the community organizing literature, which accounts for the ways in which grassroots collective action has emerged to make up for what government (or the private sector) cannot or will not do in the way of solving public problems. But, again, how government and the grassroots will come together to address the pressing issue of urban schools and schooling, appears to be inadequately explained by current research. The following chapters of this dissertation intend to employ and build upon the current literature in both planning and community organizing, to understand how outreach and activism around new schools in Southeast L.A. has and may continue to affect the level of parent and community participation in schools.

Chapter Three
Change on the Ground:
The Physical and Relational Effects of Community Stakeholder Involvement

This money is essential for guaranteeing that tens of thousands of children receive an appropriate education in the LAUSD. The money will help the schools like those in my district, that face severe problems of overpopulation, so that they can participate in the state programs directed to improve teaching. (Assemblyman Tony Cárdenas on the passage of Proposition 1A, *La Opinion*, 9/23/99)

Introduction

By the time the first school bond monies began to trickle into the communities of Southeast L.A., local and state leaders like Cárdenas had long expressed outrage at the state of education in the area. As alluded to above, overcrowding in many areas of the District had become both a symbol of neglect and a limiting factor in the ability of schools to improve teaching and learning opportunities. Amidst the anger that emerged at the beginning of the new school construction program, Cardenas' sentiment represented a sense of hope.

In the ten years since the initial sense of hope was cast by the prospect of new schools, the District has constructed 82 new schools. Yet while the communities like Southeast L.A. would be among the first in LAUSD to see new schools on the ground, it would take years after the construction program's inception, given the time consuming nature of siting and design. As explained in this chapter, the development of new facilities has resulted from of years of planning and community involvement of various forms, including participation in District-sponsored community meetings, grassroots organizing, and voter support of local and state bond initiatives.

This chapter explores the process and outcomes of LAUSD's community outreach efforts primarily through a lens of participatory planning, a discipline concerned with why, how, and to what end public involvement in planning projects occurs. It is intended to explain what the District's construction process and associated public participation has accomplished on the ground, so that subsequent chapters can look both to the limits of and the possibilities arising from community participation in new school planning in Southeast L.A. I argue herein that Community Outreach has successfully engaged an array of community stakeholders in the process of soliciting community involvement with the effect of rebuilding trust in the District, influencing school siting and design, and contributing to the development of schools as neighborhood assets, despite the somewhat delayed and/or incomplete incorporation of local knowledge, including educator and student perspectives, into the process.

More specifically, this chapter outlines the ways in which Community Outreach has helped to build trust and harness political capital among Southeast stakeholders, enabling the District to successfully fulfill its mission to build new schools. This chapter also demonstrates how public input has influenced the location and configuration of numerous new schools in the area, and highlights how voter support for school bonds, which was strong initially and has been sustained across an increasingly Latino electorate (Fuller et. al 2008), has been critical in maintaining momentum behind the District's efforts to relieve overcrowded schools, end multi-track schedules, and eliminate busing. Lastly, this chapter offers student and educator perspectives on the ways in which facility designs might have been improved if input from

facility end-users been more heavily weighted in the design process.

To illuminate how public input has affected District decisions as to where and how new schools were built in the Southeast, this chapter draws on data gathered from a variety of settings and sources, including interviews with educators, community members, and LAUSD staff, as well as local newspaper articles. It also draws heavily on the work of Innes and Booher, among others, to explicate the commonly stated purposes of participatory planning, and to explore how those purposes have (or have not) been fulfilled by LAUSD's Outreach program. Further, this chapter illuminates the importance of community organizing in the Southeast, as a means of pushing the District toward a more collaborative approach to school planning.

While my findings cannot demonstrate a causal linkage between LAUSD's Community Outreach process and the positive effects associated with its newly constructed schools, I have observed a strong relationship between public engagement in school development and a number of measurable outcomes related to new schools in Southeast L.A. For instance, while the degree to which public input into the design or location of new schools ultimately impacted District decisions is impossible to pinpoint, my data does illuminate how community participation did generally influence District decisions in ways that resulted in facilities that are more beneficial and appropriate to local neighborhoods than they otherwise would have been. Further, participation by community stakeholders, both at public meetings and as advocates for local school bonds, both escalated and sustained momentum for bringing new schools to the Southeast. And, finally, stakeholder participation in all forms – from demonstrations, to meetings, to voter campaigns – clearly has fostered both a sense of community ownership over the new schools themselves, and a sense of responsibility for engendering change within a challenged educational landscape.

This chapter sets forth an argument, bolstered by these claims and the evidence that supports them, that is intended to illuminate the types of outcomes associated with community outreach that both the District and community stakeholders have thus far enjoyed. This then sets the stage for a discussion in furtherance of my overall argument of the types of social and political dynamics that will either help or hinder the realization of the goal of building sustained community engagement in schools. Ultimately, this chapter supports the notion that in order for the Outreach process to contribute to the larger goal of sustained community engagement, it must first accomplish the more immediate endeavor of building understanding, participation, and partnerships to further the Facilities mission of building new schools.

Building Consensus about Building Schools

In line with the consensus building charge of participatory planning, LAUSD Community Outreach staff were dispatched into the communities of the L.A. to "build greater public understanding, broader participation and more productive partnerships for new school construction throughout all sectors of the community" (LAUSD, PowerPoint Presentation on Community Outreach Process, 2007). As well, the District's public process has attempted to address a few of the other purposes, as described by Innes and Booher, for incorporating public participation into planning process. One such purpose is for decision makers to learn about the public's preferences so these can play a part in their decisions. A second is to improve decisions by incorporating citizens' local knowledge into the decision making process. Another relates to advancing fairness and justice, and a fourth relates to legitimizing public decisions. And, lastly, participation is something planners and public officials do because the law requires it (Innes and

Booher 2004). The discussion that follows explains how LAUSD's Community Outreach process relates to each of these purposes, and describes the physical results that outreach has (and has not) helped to engender in Southeast L.A.

As is typical of public institutions implementing outreach programs, LAUSD's Community Outreach process has involved project-centered public engagement, primarily in the form of public meetings. The overall program was planned and executed in phases, beginning with Phase I in the late 1990s. Phase I projects were defined using criteria established by the June 2000 Priority Plan, which identified schools that required the most significant relief based on two primary factors: 1) the number of students that would not be able to attend their resident school on a multi-track calendar; and 2) the number of years the school had been on a multi-track calendar. Beginning at site selection, community outreach for Phase I enabled the selection of 76 sites, each of which was identified with the support of community members. However, since Phase I of the school construction program was driven by the need to meet a June 2002 funding deadline to qualify for state matching funds, stakeholder involvement in project definition during this initial phase was limited.

As the construction program progressed, a Citizens Oversight Committee was formed to oversee the expenditure of money for the construction, repair, and modernization of schools by LAUSD and to communicate its findings to the Board and the public so that school bond funds would be invested as the voters intended and projects completed wisely and efficiently. The Quarterly Report for the 2004 School Construction Bond Citizens Oversight Committee found four primary areas over which communities wanted to have influence on new school projects: project definition, site selection, school design and school operation. The Phase II Community Outreach process was developed to facilitate this level of involvement. In Phase II, outreach was designed so that the community would be engaged as a participant earlier in the new school planning process, and would thus have the opportunity to help develop new school projects that will meet the needs of their community.

To keep the community informed and engaged during each phase of the school building process, a sequence of meetings spanning the life a project were held on project definition, site selection, relocation, design, environmental health and safety, and construction issues. At these meetings, experts in demographics, real estate, environmental health and safety, design, and construction management presented information, answered questions and obtained feedback. Outreach typically also included presentations and briefings to "key stakeholders", distribution of notices to student families, distribution of notices to homes, businesses and community locations, and a community event organized around the ribbon-cutting ceremony at each new campus. The number of meetings sponsored (or attended) by the District for any given project varied depending on the complexity of the project and the level of controversy surrounding it.

As suggested above, LAUSD's approach to engaging community stakeholders in the process of siting and designing new schools has by no measure been groundbreaking. Yet, the sheer scale of the construction program, along with the initial level of public doubt about the District's ability to rise to the occasion, necessitated a degree of process normalization that had not previously been undertaken in L.A., and that is not generally pursued by large urban districts undertaking school building or renovation projects. Summarizing the perceived importance of public participation to the District's mission of building schools and sustained community involvement around them, Luis, a young, enthusiastic Community Outreach organizer recalled,

We understand that we were pioneers with this type of school construction program; we were also pioneers with this type of public engagement. We obviously wouldn't be here if it weren't for the citizenry that continually backed the numerous bond measures that were passed…they are the key stakeholders in the process. (Luis, LAUSD organizer)

Among the "organizers" who staff the Community Outreach Department, Luis's perspective is fairly typical. He is clear that the mission of public outreach should be to find ways to better serve LAUSD's clients – members of the local community who will use, and ultimately fund, proposed new schools. As will be discussed in the following chapter, the purpose of community outreach from the perspective of organizers like Luis has often been at odds with that of Facilities Division leadership. Regardless of such discrepancies, however, Outreach has managed to enable several tangible outcomes, which are discussed below in the remainder of this chapter.

Overcoming a Legacy of Distrust

Among the most direct effects of the community outreach associated with LAUSD's new school construction program has been to help accomplish the District's primary goal: to get schools built. This is no small feat considering the lingering distrust that had built up over time among members of many underserved communities, including those of the Southeast. For decades prior to the late 1990s, when the first of many school construction bonds were passed, growth within LAUSD had left many of its facilities in disrepair and over half of its school campuses overcrowded (LAUSD 2009). And, early attempts to relieve existing campuses and to return students to neighborhood schools spurred doubt in the District's ability to respond to the need to build capacity.

In particular, fallout from the Belmont Learning Center project left many community stakeholders skeptical about LAUSD's ability to successfully execute new school projects. The Belmont public relations debacle occurred when the District began construction at Belmont (or the Edward R. Roybal Learning Center, as it was finally called) without required environmental reviews or professional managers, ultimately building a $160-million high school that the state declared unsuitable for children. A scathing audit subsequently concluded that the project had violated environmental and public safety laws, and that the uninformed District had "tolerated a culture remarkably indifferent" to standards or accountability. The audit referred several of its findings to the district attorney for criminal investigation (Rice 2009).

While Belmont often is invoked as a primary cause of public malaise with the District, it is only one particularly egregious demonstration of the ineffectiveness that fed into public distrust and dissatisfaction. In addition to project related missteps, LAUSD also had exhibited over many years an apparent lack of public accountability, demonstrated by a failure to communicate to or with the public, as well as an overall dismissal of school conditions in many neighborhoods. As one educator recalled, regarding two of the more overcrowded L.A. area schools,

At schools like Union and Hoover, we were warehousing kids. (Principal at a local high

school)

As conditions worsened over time, public awareness of school overcrowding and decay expanded substantially. And, after the passage of local Proposition BB in 1997, voters across the District's reach mobilized around school construction and renovation issues by working for the passage of additional local and state bonds to fund new school construction. Reflecting on the importance of public support for local bond measures, Estrella, a founding member of LAUSD's Community Outreach staff member recalled,

> *A lot of people were already involved at their schools…Then the bonds came up. There was an opportunity to build some schools, get these other ones fixed. These are the people that helped pass the bonds – canvassed the streets, made phone calls to pass those bonds. And it's been like that ever since. (Estrella, LAUSD organizer)*

As Estrella described, the interest in schools and education was already in place in Southeast L.A., with the escalation of community mobilization sparked by the glimmer of new facilities on the horizon. Such mobilization took many forms, including, as mentioned above, pounding the pavement to raise money through state and local bonds. Such activism grew over time, and as described in Chapter 5, eventually manifested itself in broader and more sustained efforts to improve local schools.

With the influx of new funds also came the establishment of a framework by the School Board for the new school construction program, which set forth Facilities Goals and Guidelines prioritizing that: 1) students should attend a neighborhood school; 2) schools should provide space for growth; and 3) class size should be reduced. The Board subsequently adopted a Master Plan for school development and established a list of priority projects for new school construction. Over successive years, the Board would continue to refine the scope of the program, while preserving the primary goal: to enable operation of all schools as neighborhood schools on traditional two-semester calendars.

Unfortunately, this influx of funding for new schools did not immediately translate into District competence or accountability. In addition to the fact that many communities were still anxiously awaiting new facilities, further ire was raised over concerns during the late 90s that LAUSD might fail to receive its fair share of State construction funds under the Proposition 1A, a State school bond with over $4 billion in new construction funding, set to expire in 2002. So, in the face of these challenges, LAUSD re-organized the Facilities Services Division in 1999, creating the School Building Planning Office. This reorganization brought together an internal real estate development function that included managers and staff charged with property acquisition, facilities design, and construction management. Integrated into the New Construction Branch of the Facilities Division, the Community Outreach Department was created in 2000 to help the District to move forward with its plans for new school construction - with the support and participation of the community. Articulating the importance of LAUSD's new approach, Estrella explained,

> *Aside from having the architects, environmentalists, and developers, you really needed to*

have the community's buy-in and expertise. (Estrella, LAUSD organizer)

As an original member of LAUSD's Outreach team, Estrella provided perspective not only into the underlying goals of this new approach, but into what spurred the District to formalize an entire department devoted to interfacing with the community. LAUSD's outreach efforts prior to the creation of the Community Outreach Department, Estrella explained, had been sparse. In fact, because the District lacked the funds for so many years to provide communities with new schools, there was virtually no facilities planning for decades prior to Proposition BB. This lack of community investment arguably was also due to the lack of a perceived need to engage communities in the development process.

Over time, LAUSD's lack of communication with the public only intensified the tensions that had been created by Belmont and other compromised projects. Describing the tone at some of the initial public meetings, Luis also helped illuminate the impetus for the formation of Community Outreach as a discrete department within the Facilities Division:

When we first started, it was surprising to me that the District didn't have a community relations team or group that was out there in the community. So, in the beginning, aside from site selection and aside from NIMBYism, and build it anywhere you want except my front or my back yard, we would get just everything, everything. Where you were the meeting facilitator, but also the piñata at the party, and everyone would just take your stick and go after the facilitator, right? (Luis, LAUSD organizer)

Luis's sentiment illuminates how for so long before LAUSD again became a presence in the communities of the Southeast, there had been no outlet for public concern. Thus, as Luis illuminated, when Community Outreach staff emerged as the face of the District, they became a target of public outrage and animosity at LAUSD's failure to adequately serve the students of Southeast L.A. Quoted for a 1999 article in La Opinion, a regional newspaper catering to the Latino community, Marco Antonio Firebaugh, then California State Assembly member representing the Southeast, characterized the situation plainly,

I work with many districts, and many of them confront important challenges, but some succeed and construct schools and take the responsibility that they have to the children and their families seriously, but here in Los Angeles the district has failed completely…It has been eleven years since we were promised a high school and an elementary school, but up to this very moment we still do not have plans for either. (Marco Antonio Firebaugh, La Opinion, October 29, 1999)

This sentiment echoes concerns among other local leaders, as well as among the public at large, that the conditions students were being subjected to as a result of LAUSD's failure to build new schools was simply unacceptable. As Estrella put it,

The first challenge we had was to get the community to believe it could be done – dealing with frustration. (Estrella, LAUSD organizer)

Over time, the frustration identified by Estrella morphed into distrust. Summed up by one community member, "there was a culture of institutional distrust". It was largely this pervasive culture that necessitated much repair work on the part of the District toward convincing the public that LAUSD was capable of delivering long-needed new schools and that the District was interested in soliciting the public's input in doing so.

Diego, another LAUSD organizer who spent years interfacing with the communities of the Southeast, also emphasized the dearth of prior outreach by the District,

Definitely around facilities there was never, like well, how would you like this new school to look? Or, where do you think it should go? I don't think there was any of that. The school district just came and said, we're gonna put a school here, and here's the paper that you need if you want to go to court and fight us. There was no community meeting – like everybody come and hear about this new school. (Diego, LAUSD organizer)

Diego also described the difficult position that Community Outreach was in from the outset. Not only were they required to represent an institution that had lost its favor with the public, but they also had to find a way to balance the need to accommodate community concerns with the requirement that projects stay on schedule and on budget.

The reason Community Outreach was brought in was to balance the internal forces of the developers and construction minded people that are on a timeline and on a budget, and just will bulldoze anything else that gets in the way…I feel like our department was set up to help balance that. They just put us right in the middle of the bulldozer, and the homes and the community, the parks, and whatever else we were going up against…(Diego, LAUSD organizer)

The balancing that Diego referred to, between the perspectives of "construction minded people" and the Community Outreach department, was successful over time in fostering an understanding within other New Construction departments of the importance of community involvement. However, despite such gains, what Outreach staff generally perceived as a "bulldozer" mentality ultimately impacted the degree to which outreach efforts were able to mitigate for past District practices, such as LAUSD's tendency to insulate itself from its client communities. This tension and the impact it had on the outcomes of the outreach process is discussed further in the following chapter.

The Emergence of Community Outreach

The inception of the Community Outreach Department occurred amidst, and largely in response to, a great deal of community agitation around one proposed new school site in South

Gate. In 1999, LAUSD found itself at the design stage for another new high school, with a 40-acre contaminated site. In the wake of Belmont, the District had been proactive about ensuring the cleanliness of the site, and had consulted the Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC), the state agency responsible for assessing, investigating, and cleaning up proposed school sites. Logically, when it was discovered that the property was contaminated, LAUSD decided to shut the project down. This decision was made, however, without any prior notification to the community.

What ensued was a near-riot at the existing South Gate High School, where the newly elected president of the LAUSD School Board had decided to hold a press conference to explain the District's decision. As Estrella described,

> *The press conference was a fiasco. (There were) people protesting, a lot of shouting, promises again being broken. The school principal shut the conference down because school was about to get out, and he was afraid he would have a riot on his hands. There were a lot of unanswered questions. All of the elected officials were screaming at LAUSD, telling them, you're not informing us! What's going on? It was really chaotic. (Estrella, LAUSD organizer)*

Soon after, local members of Congress began holding community meetings to address the issue of the need for schools in the Southeast. The new District Superintendent, along with members of the LAUSD School Board, was invited to come to these meetings and provide answers to the community. Local organizers also called each school in the area, asking principals for the names of vocal community leaders. These leaders were invited to attend a breakfast, along with the Congresswoman and other local, elected officials, where they would have a forum for expressing their frustrations with the District.

Within two weeks of this initial meeting, parents packed the auditoriums at 13 additional Southeast schools. Estrella described the awakened sense of openness and opportunity felt at the time,

> *The timing was perfect. Everyone was fed up. There were not gates or guards saying you can't come into our school. It was more like, hey, anyone that's willing to hear us, come in. Today, principals run away from anything that's politicized. It's a different day. Then it was like, finally, you're paying attention! (Estrella, LAUSD organizer)*

The outrage Estrella described soon turned into momentum. And, as momentum among local residents and elected officials continued to grow, the District finally acquiesced to the need for a formal public process; hence, the creation of Community Outreach.

Building Trust, Building Schools

Multiple bond measures and dozens of schools later, LAUSD seems to have proven its ability to plan and deliver schools. And, with the help of Community Outreach, LAUSD has, trial-by-fire, gotten more proactive in its communications with the communities it serves. As Theresa, a local city council member put it,

For the last five years, LAUSD has done a better job of communicating. Early uprisings within communities forced this. Also, distrust resulting from past practices, including Belmont, made it so the District had to reach out to communities. (Theresa, City Council member for one Southeast city)

As Theresa emphasized, Outreach was born largely out of necessity, and not necessarily out of a desire on the part of LAUSD to involve community in the early stages of school planning. Yet, while some criticize the District's outreach efforts for falling short of the "community planning" approach that they would like to see, it is clear that during the course of the construction program LAUSD legitimately attempted to reach out to the public, and has gotten better at doing so in the process. Estrella provided the following observation on the changes in the District over time,

We (LAUSD) have sustained if not gained intangibles like trust because of our transparency about our process. (Estrella, LAUSD organizer)

Estrella's emphasis on transparency is not incidental, given the sharp contrast between LAUSD's current process for public engagement and its former, behind the scenes approach to making decisions affecting students, educators, and communities alike. Clara, another long-time District organizer, emphasized just how impressive the gains in public trust are, given how far Outreach had to come.

People who are newer to the District, including Board members, don't have the benefit of knowing how far we have come in winning back community trust and maximizing participation. (Clara, LAUSD organizer)

The trust-building that Estrella and Clara have alluded to is important not simply for LAUSD's public relations status. Rather, it illustrates that for productive collaborations between districts, schools, and communities to occur, that trust must be built and if necessary rebuilt when it is allowed to lapse. In Southeast L.A., the rebuilding of faith and collaborative potential began not just with massive protests, but also on the ground, one school at a time.

<div align="center">The Story of Tweedy</div>

Among the schools LAUSD developed in the early stages of the construction program are several in Southeast L.A.: Tweedy Elementary School, Maywood Elementary School, Maywood Academy High School, and South East High School. The first among these is an example of a school site whose development was influenced, if not instigated, by community involvement. I provide some detail here into the story of Tweedy, because the school is somewhat emblematic of the fight for new schools in the Southeast. Nearly every community member and Outreach organizer interviewed referred to it as an early focal point of recent activism around schools in the Southeast. And, its new campus was among the first schools in the area to receive funding as part of the current new school construction program.

Tweedy's South Gate campus was closed in 1987 in response to health concerns caused by nearby industrial sites. According to a 1990 L.A. Times article, the school was closed after pupils and staff complained of nausea, headaches, and throat irritation. Paint emissions and chlorine leaks at nearby industrial plants were cited by the District's environmental health and safety branch as the likely culprits (Louie 1990). Because no new facility was yet available, the District responded by erecting an interim makeshift school, a collection of bungalows in a nearby city park, with plans to build a replacement when funding became available. More than a decade later, the makeshift campus remained, and parents and other community members were growing impatient, if not outraged, with the District's inaction.

Ultimately, a new site and the money to construct the long awaited new facility for Tweedy arose out of collaboration between the community group that had organized around the cause and the new Community Outreach Department that invited their participation. As anyone asked about Tweedy will attest, the new school would not have been built without parent action – both in the form of pressure on the District to spend bond money where it was most needed, and pressure on local residents to relinquish their properties for the greater good. In fact, the school has become somewhat of a symbol of the power and possibility of community action in Southeast L.A.

The community-based organization (CBO) that was instrumental in the fight for a new Tweedy Elementary School, and that is ever-present in any discussion of local community groups that have been involved in the fight for new schools in the Southeast Cities, is Padres Unidos Para Nuestras Escuelas (Parents United for New Schools/Padres Unidos). This group emerged in the wake of Tweedy, as parents and other community stakeholders began to organize around the need for new schools in the City of South Gate. In the siting of Tweedy, Padres Unidos were, as both members of the District's Community Outreach team and of the group itself tell it, instrumental both in keeping the momentum going, and in urging some neighborhood holdouts to give up their properties for the new school. As Estrella recalled,

> *There was so much resistance, but it got done. Padres Unidos really worked with those neighbors. They started inviting them to the meetings. Something happened where one of the key opponents started to see what Padres Unidos was trying to do, and he became a member. He was the most vocal person opposing the site…(Estrella, LAUSD organizer)*

As Estrella attested, Padres Unidos really coalesced and became an influential community force around the Tweedy controversy. Members had been fighting separately for years over similar causes, but really came together at a time when numerous issues related to facilities overcrowding and safety began to converge around the promise of new schools in the Southeast. The group began meeting after one of the first huge protests that occurred with the passage in 1997 of Proposition BB, the first in a line of local bond measures, which allocated $2.4 billion for renovations and new classroom space. This particular meeting was focused on a District plan to reorganize schools in order to accommodate more students, a plan that would ultimately serve to fuel the fire of parents and other community activists, fed up with LAUSD's lack of accountability.

Describing the build-up of tensions, from Tweedy forward, between the District and local community stakeholders, Cristina, a founding member of Padres Unidos recalled,

When parents heard kids were not having a new school and started to understand how long it would take to get a new school, they started to fight the District…Schools in South Gate were overcrowded and year round…4,500 students at one middle school that was meant to be for 1,500. One high school with 3,500 year round also had about 800 kids being bussed out. It was outrageous what was going on, and nobody was accountable back then. (Cristina, member of Padres Unidos)

Motivated by their outrage and their desire to provide the best for their children, members of Padres Unidos and other local CBOs have remained a force in the District's planning process, as both collaborators and opponents of LAUSD's plans. Below, I describe the ways in which community input from members of well-known groups like Padres Unidos, as well as from the public at large, impacted the siting and design of new schools.

Community Contributions to Siting and Design

In addition to building public consensus (or at least community buy-in), participatory planning also is meant to gather public input through deliberative process as a means of tapping into community expertise. Remarking on how crucial community buy-in and expertise in the school planning process is, Estrella explained,

The objective was always to move forward with community support and participation...I really saw the community as not just an added benefit, but as true experts in what their needs were…(Estrella, LAUSD organizer)

As explained above, such "expertise" was sought throughout the development of each new school project. At various points during this process, input from groups like Padres Unidos and other local CBOs, like Padres del Surestes (Southeast Parents), was simply offered, unsolicited by LAUSD. But, whether District or community instigated, dialogue between LAUSD and local stakeholders not only has aided LAUSD in building community trust and support for the construction of new schools in the Southeast, but also has provided the District with local knowledge about community issues and needs.

This notion of capitalizing on community needs, which considers local people as experts and teachers and outsiders as novices, or where possible, as resources, is a hallmark of participatory planning theory. In the literature on participatory, or collaborative planning, the need to "improve decisions by incorporating citizens' local knowledge into the calculus" is among the most important reasons justifying the need for public participation (Innes & Booher 2005, 422). Yet, the question almost always becomes, is community input, once solicited, truly being integrated into planning and design decisions? In the case of LAUSD's new school construction program, the response is a qualified yes. In some cases community stakeholders were integral in selecting sites and influencing design. As Estrella explained,

Parents don't know how much power they really have in the decision making about schools.

Yet, in others cases, input was perceived as less vital:

> *I don't know that parents were really involved when the school was built. There was one thing, the busy street, that resulted in construction of a bridge. But, there were other issues that didn't get addressed.*

> (*The school*) *was mostly the architect's vision. The community was just happy to get a brand new school. (Selena, principal at a local elementary school)*

Where local stakeholders did provide integral input to Community Outreach staff, it generally came in the form of specific proposals about where new schools should be located within their communities, and how new facilities should be configured and designed. As Luis reflected,

> *The community will find a means to get the District to accommodate their needs. They will make their needs known. They will make their own creative suggestions as to how to make a school fit into a community.*

> *Regardless of where the school would be sited, when we got to the design portion of it, the community wanted to see the design be reflective of community…(Luis, LAUSD organizer)*

Whether integrated by the District into the siting and design of new schools or not, the perspective of community contributors is clear: they are concerned that new schools should not only benefit their children's education, but also that new facilities should be situated and designed to become community assets. Residents perceived early on, for instance, that the construction of new schools could provide an opportunity to rid their communities of undesirable uses, such as blighted structures or businesses attracting drug traffic and prostitution. Anna, a former LAUSD School Board staff member described how community stakeholders found ways to offer their suggestions,

> *…there was a lot of sites during Phase I that the community wanted us to redevelop. So, they would call the Board member's office, or they would lobby Community Outreach, and they would say, there's this cluster of apartments that are just blighted, and there's a lot of criminal activity there – can you consider that as a potential site?...and there were a lot of sites that we had to move away from because the community was so vocal about it. (Anna, former School Board employee)*

Anna's description corroborates the notion that "good" planning should tap into local knowledge. In this case, that knowledge, or expertise, speaks also to an important goal of organizing for school reform: that school and community improvement should occur in concert. Hence, both to inform District process and to advocate for community redevelopment, activist community members in the Southeast had a vested interest in doing the work of siting schools.

Ramona, a founding member of Southeast Parents, described the way in which her CBO facilitated parent involvement in improving not only their children's educational opportunities, but their communities as well. In addition to emphasizing the community's desire to displace undesirable uses (e.g., drug sales), this particular parent also acknowledged the difficulty of minimizing the number of residences that were displaced.

> *We gave parents in different area assignments to help locate potential sites in their neighborhoods. We worked with everyone's ideas to choose the best sites. We wanted to prioritize saving homes and businesses…(Ramona, Southeast Parents)*

To aid in the process of school siting, parents not only attended District meetings, but also literally presented LAUSD staff with neighborhood maps outlining preferred school locations. This assertiveness among community members showed both a concerted effort to have their recommendations heard by the District, and a willingness to work with LAUSD to find opportunities where mutual benefits could be realized. As Clara described,

> *A lot of times they (community members) have presented to the District site configurations on parcel maps, and they are what the District used to present to the community. Sometimes they come and say, we've talked to everyone, and these people are willing to sell their homes. We've worked with them. (Clara, LAUSD organizer)*

From the perspective of one active member of the Southeast Parents, the type of community-District collaboration Clara described did at times occur; but, it was hard fought. Community Outreach, she explained, ultimately gave Southeast Parents a lot of support – giving tours of the local district, answering questions. However, she said, it was not easy.

> *It was not easy, because we fought. We told the District they need to first listen to the community. We don't care about your board members or whoever. You need to respect and listen to the people, because we pay and we are the boss. (Sylvia, Padres Unidos member)*

Sylvia's comment reflects a classic tension both in planning and in education reform between community and institutional interests, stemming from who has the power and knowledge to make the best decisions for the community at large. In the case of LAUSD, while the rhetoric, at least within Community Outreach, was generally about seeking the *community's* expertise, District staff on balance have tended to presume that their own institutional knowledge trumped community desires – regardless of who was serving whom.

In some cases, District knowledge *was* in fact more informed by data and by the realities of the physical and economic constraints posed by developing new school facilities in built-out communities. And, once residents understood such constraints, they sometimes advocated within their communities for the District's, not the community's, preferred plan. For instance, in the course of making affirmative recommendations for new school locations, many residents came out against the taking of residential properties, for fear of losing their own homes and/or out of a general concern that housing stocks would be depleted. Yet, over time, most residents saw the

new schools as a needed public good, and either willingly forfeited their own homes or apartments (in the case of renters, being bought out often resulted in an opportunity to put a District payout toward a down payment on a home), or worked together to convince project opponents to take compensation for their homes.

This particular tension, between the need to site new schools and the desire to minimize the taking of homes, also was reflected in stakeholder comments at District sponsored community meetings, where community members were insistent that their interest in protecting their homes and their neighborhoods did not preclude them from valuing education. For example:

> *We're not against school construction; we're for our homes. There are sites you can use to save our houses. I found this place on Atlantic between Cecilia. It used to be a construction tools place…this place is close to the site you have.*

> *I just want to let you know about the propaganda going around the city of South Gate is not against education – we're about family and good neighborhoods and all the things that make a strong community.*

These types of comments, affirming the support for schools, while expressing concern for property retention and value, were pervasive at District meetings held in the Southeast. Such comments again reflect a tension in any kind of civic participation - between personal and public good. Of course, some perceived the proposed new schools neither as a net benefit to the communities of the Southeast, nor to themselves or their children. Especially as state budget cuts began to threaten teacher jobs and limit funding for programs and supplies, some local residents questioned the value, despite persistent overcrowding in Southeast schools, of spending money on new schools, as enrollment seemed to be dropping.

Despite such tensions, the level of community buy-in for new school construction has been impressive overall, especially given the sheer number of projects the District has undertaken in recent years. As Estrella recalled,

> *One lady sent a threatening letter to real estate, saying she was going to kill someone. In the end, we had to bring the sheriff to her house to get her out of her home. But, of all the schools we've built, obviously that stands out, because that only happened that one time. It stands out because we haven't encountered that, and we've relocated 3,000 families.*
> (Estrella, LAUSD organizer)

As is evidenced by Estrella's description, the process of siting and building new schools, as expected, was not without conflict. Yet, once resolved, whether by force, or through District-community negotiation, the opportunity literally materialized for new schools sites to emerge as community assets.

Arguably, the process for soliciting community input has been far from perfect. It could have been more inclusive, or more democratic. And, some would argue, to be truly community oriented, it should have begun earlier, with a true community planning process. In an ideal world, this would include multiple opportunities for community visioning and brainstorming around where and what schools should be. Yet, given that school planning rarely occurs at such a level, and despite some of the shortcomings in design discussed below, most of the new schools in the Southeast have tended to measure up both as actual resources for the community and as indicators of neighborhood change, and this has occurred in part due to the community's contribution.

From a participatory planning perspective, conclusions reached through some sort of formalized collaborative process are, by definition, simply better decisions. Thus, in the case of new school development, public school facilities are more likely to become neighborhood assets if the perspective of local stakeholders is sought. Planning decisions that have incorporated some form of public deliberation also are considered to be more legitimate because they are more democratic. In other words, as Innes and Booher point out, "If a planner can say 'We held a dozen public hearings and reviewed hundreds of comments and everyone who wanted to had a chance to say his piece', then whatever is decided is, at least in theory, democratic and legitimate"(Innes & Booher 2005, 423).

In reality, however, public process that is democratic only on its face can be problematic. Those who attend public meetings, for instance, generally are either strong proponents or adamant opponents of a project. Hence, the minimal time allotted for debate is rarely focused on building consensus around alternate plans. Furthermore, simply holding numerous meetings to which a broad array of stakeholders are invited does not guarantee that all interested parties are able to attend and be heard. Thus, the simple fact that LAUSD held numerous meetings, providing stakeholders an outlet for concern and input, does not ensure an inclusive, democratic process make.

Again, however, despite its imperfections, the Community Outreach process has contributed to the development of new schools that have emerged as neighborhood assets, both as physical features that can be utilized by neighborhood residents, and as symbols of new hope both for educational opportunity and neighborhood renewal. Some new schools, for instance, offer services and amenities to surrounding neighborhood communities. Schools have increased recreational space in Southeast neighborhoods, with the addition of sports fields and swimming pools. New sports fields that can be used by the public after school and on weekends are a particularly welcome addition in neighborhoods where green space is lacking. With the construction of new multi-purpose rooms and auditoriums, new schools have also provided places for the neighborhood community to hold meetings and events.

While no study has been done, to my knowledge, linking the construction of new schools to drops in neighborhood violence, several residents also named new schools as positive influences on both school and neighborhood culture. One local city council member and more than one student identified the reduction in overcrowding at schools as having a positive effect on fighting and on "criminal issues", both in- and outside of new schools in the Southeast. Further, at many new schools, Safety Collaboratives have been developed, where principals, teachers, parents, local police and city officials meet on a regular basis to voice and address safety issues affecting both school and neighborhood environments.

In many cases, safety and related neighborhood quality concerns have been addressed at the urging of local residents. For instance, as one community stakeholder reflected at one of LAUSD's community meetings,

> *I am in agreement to tear down all the apartments because it's true that they sell drugs and there are lots of gang members.*

Beneficial reuse of industrial properties also has occurred with the construction of new schools. For instance, Southeast High School was built along with other new school facilities on a 57-acre lot that formerly housed a General Motors (GM) Plant, and now is collectively known as the South Gate Education Gateway. The high school was built to alleviate the crowding at other schools in and around South Gate, including South Gate High School, Bell High School, and Huntington Park High School, and was the first public high school built in the South Gate area in 73 years.

Local job creation also has been a benefit of the new schools, creating employment both during and after construction. Many argue that the schools have been a detriment to the small cities of the Southeast in this regard, since properties large enough for commercial development are hard to come by, and many available parcels of adequate size have been seized by LAUSD for the purpose of constructing schools. By the time the District is done constructing planned projects in South Gate, for instance, it will have increased the number of schools in South Gate from 12 to 21, totaling about 175 acres, or nearly 5 percent of the city's total acreage. And, while many see this as a boon for job creation and for neighborhood educational development, some city officials in South Gate, in particular, see the new schools as robbing the City of potential and much needed revenue. In most of the small cities of the Southeast, however, local officials and business owners see the need for a balance between improving educational opportunities and the need for economic development.

An additional benefit of the new school construction program has been the importance of having schools within close proximity of the homes of the students who attend them. This benefits students in several ways: they do not have to spend hours of their day travelling to and from school; they can more readily participate in after school activities; and especially for younger students, there is a certain comfort for parents in having their children attending schools nearby. The increased potential for parental involvement that new neighborhood schools have provided is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

New schools also have provided gathering space for community members to meet and to interact, to provide what some would characterize as a school as center of community. As one principal at a new elementary school described,

> *You don't need a newsletter in this community. Word gets out. People like to bring food and sit and talk at the school. This connects the school to larger issues, like right now they are talking about global warming in the context of saving energy at the school site…We hosted a movie night one night, and the movie wasn't even good, but nobody left because they only have crowded apartments to go home to. (Principal, local elementary school)*

This same principal acknowledged that while she is keenly aware of her school's place as a "beacon of community" and a potentially transformative force within the neighborhood, she is

keenly award that a "shiny new building" does not a great school make. Yet, while the principal is correct that new school buildings cannot instantly improve student prospects, it is significant that LAUSD's new facilities have benefitted some of the grittier neighborhoods in Southeast L.A. As one community stakeholder described of some of the older, industrial areas of South Gate and Cudahy,

> *From Otis to Atlantic, there is a lot of property by the (railroad) tracks. The companies are **old** and they are an **embarrassment** to the city.*

The implication here being that perhaps the location of new, beneficial uses, like new schools, could, as neighborhood stakeholders have advocated, be used to displace some of these older, less desirable uses. And, while not everyone is hopeful about the prospect of new schools as neighborhood assets, community activists indicated that new facilities provide an aesthetic benefit to neighborhoods, that by some accounts has translated into potential gains in neighborhood character and property values. As one parent commented,

> *Yeah, it looks better. And, I believe in the future we have to change the businesses to look better to blend with the school. (Vanessa, South Gate parent)*

Echoing Vanessa's sentiments, Clara commented,

> *You drive around the neighborhoods and unfortunately, in a lot of these neighborhoods, they are in dire need of painting, cleaning, removing graffiti, and then you see this little oasis of a school that provides a sense of hope for the community. (Clara, LAUSD organizer)*

Students at Maywood Academy High School, which has won awards for its green design, were especially proud to relay their knowledge about the design of their school and its value as an example of environmental stewardship and as a neighborhood asset. They shared the fact that the school is the "greenest" in LAUSD, and that the interest surrounding it had spread beyond the District. The students also shared some specifics about the building: that the paint is non-toxic, that recycled materials were used throughout; that it has double-paned windows for energy conservation; and that the classrooms have skylights and light sensors, so that the lights automatically dim when more natural light is available. These are just a few of the facts the students were eager to convey. Referring to the same campus, one educator at the school commented,

> *The community is glad to have the school. It has displaced apartment buildings and improved property values. (Administrator, Maywood Academy High School)*

As mentioned above, the new schools in the Southeast also have provided something of a moral boost, a chance for educators and students to start fresh in some new digs. Again, while residents and educators alike recognize that a new school does not necessarily translate into a "good"

school, the symbolic importance of new schools going up in poorer neighborhoods cannot be understated. As Soledad, a parent of a Southeast High School student described,

> *It's the best place. It's a nice school. We have nice administrators. People live in apartments. They don't get much. But coming to this school, I believe the self- esteem is better. Because, they are, the school is representing something wonderful for them. (Soledad, Southeast High School parent)*

A similar comment came from a teacher at one of the feeder schools to Maywood,

> *...The students, they feel like it was a once in a lifetime thing for them being at a brand new school, and they kind of feel like it's their school, so they take better care of it...They feel like they own it. (Anita, Teacher, Maywood Elementary School)*

Echoing these sentiments, Estrella recalled,

> *We heard from students, 'We feel like people care about us, like you are investing in us. We feel like we are important. We are no longer all in a crowded classroom like sardines. Coming to a new school has made me feel really excited'. And, parents who come out on the first day, they feel like they get to be a part of something great that has been given to their children. (Estrella, LAUSD organizer)*

The significance of such statements (and the many others like them) relating to the morale boost that new schools have provided to students and teachers alike should not be undervalued. Studies have shown that more often than not, the reason teachers leave under-resourced schools is not because of the students they work with, but due to the quality of the facilities they work within (Buckley et al 2004). Further, for students who have been cramped into overcrowded, decrepit, and sometimes unhealthy facilities, to have a sense of starting anew is noteworthy indeed. When it comes to community outreach, however, it is these student and educator stakeholders who feel as if their opinions have not been sufficiently solicited.

Who Was Left Out: Educator and Student Reactions to Siting and Design

A consideration of participatory planning practices could not be complete without accounting for the range of stakeholders engaged by the project proponent - in this case LAUSD - in the planning process. LAUSD's structure for gathering public input, while not necessarily conformant with a Habermasian framework for consensus-based participation, does confirm a popular conception of modern participatory planning: that planning projects are more likely to be suitable for their end users when a broad range of stakeholders are engaged. In the case of schools, the broader the range of local expertise, the more optimal the facility location and community connection is likely to be.

Ultimately, the point is that stakeholders, or participants, bring unique perspectives that contribute to deliberation about what sort of project should be built. Participants, as Baum

articulates, "bring not only interests, but also information and perspectives. When they encounter one another in efforts to address problems, they may test assumptions, discover new ways of understanding conditions, and agree to collaborate" (Baum, 1999, 1).

Hence, as is the case with many planning projects, end products will always be wanting when the input of certain key stakeholders is limited. It then follows that when asked about the quality of the new facilities they inhabit, both teachers and students voiced concerns and delivered opinions prefaced with, "If they had asked us…" In all fairness to LAUSD, it is not that educators were not at all consulted; the Existing Facilities Division of the District does employ educators to contribute their expertise to the design process. However, the District stopped short of holding interviews and conducting surveys of current teachers and administrators likely to represent the end users at proposed new schools.

Therefore, along with many positive reflections on changes in their new work environments, concerns were raised by teachers at new schools about elements of design that not only detracted from their work environment, but also had the potential, in their view, to negatively impact the effectiveness of teaching and learning. Concerns from educators about the design of school campuses related primarily to the functionality of the space for teaching, the learning environment for students, and the safety of the facilities for both teachers and students. Notably, both teachers and principals felt that some of the problems associated with the school designs could have been eliminated if input had been sought from educators during the design process.

Some teachers spoke to their inability to control their work environment. Staff at a few schools, for instance, mentioned their inability to control the temperature in their classrooms. Others felt that classroom elements were poorly placed and further hindered by their inflexibility (the teacher's desk is, for example, bolted down). Other comments were in reaction to what educators perceived to be poor design decisions. For example, teachers mentioned not having enough staff bathrooms, insufficient lighting in classrooms, poorly located storage, and a staff lounge that can only be accessed by walking through the multi-purpose room, causing class disruptions.

Grievances about the outside space included a lack of trees and shady spaces in the yard, and a lack of water fountains and bathrooms in the yard outside. Other teachers mentioned student eating areas being situated directly next to a busy road, which caused the tables (and presumably, the students) to get covered with dust from the smog. And at two schools, uncovered walkways and waiting areas were identified as problematic during rainy days.

Safety issues also arose when discussing design shortcomings. Examples of safety concerns included: one school which has only two stairways serving 700 students; another where a major exit leads directly outside such that staff have a hard time monitoring people exiting and entering; and, numerous examples of exits and entrances that are "strangely" located and could create challenges in emergency situations. One teacher pointed to a stairway at her school that is enclosed, leaving staff wondering what might be going on behind it. Again, these were called out as examples of the types of problems that many teachers felt could have been avoided if teachers had been consulted during the design process.

As Amelia, a teacher at Maywood Elementary School explained when asked whether teachers and/or students had had any input in the design process,

See that's the list that I made, if anybody had asked a teacher. First of all there aren't enough light fixtures, outlets in the rooms- I have like two or three and they're on the

wrong walls. I mean, really obvious. The TV's, and they bolted everything down so the rug is over here, then it's my desk, and in there is the TV- it's really in a horrible place, but nobody asked. Also, the furniture, the tables are really hard to clean, but again they gave the administrators the power to decide- nobody asked us, and they're very difficult to clean, because they're not smooth, they're rough. (Amelia, teacher, Maywood Elementary School)

Even though most principals and teachers had no hand in the location of the school or its design, there were a few exceptions. At one school, the principal did have decision-making authority over some cosmetic choices, such as the color of the walls. Teachers also had some influence over the rooms they would occupy. One teacher was able to look at the facility plans before the internal classroom construction happened, for instance, and noted that the white and bulletin board placement was poorly chosen – behind the computer station. The placement of the boards was changed at that school due to the teacher's suggestion.

Students at two of the new Southeast high schools also weighed in about how their new school has affected their learning environment and the surrounding neighborhood. Students were asked to identify some of the shortcomings of their new school facilities that they felt could have been addressed up front if student input had been sought during the planning and design process. In responding to the question of what advice they would give to school architects and builders, students named a number of weaknesses in school design:

- Buildings are unconnected

- More space for movement in the halls and outside; too little spaces breeds violence

- No marquee

- No/not enough bike racks

- Lunch lines are too long, and there is not space to accommodate them

- Need to consider distance between classrooms: time vs. crowding

- Everything looks the same

- More open/green space needed

- Brighter colors

- More student parking

- Trees in the middle of the field

While it is true that many of these flaws may have been difficult to avoid, given space, time, or financial constraints, student responses do beg the question of why representatives of those who would be the primary inhabitants of the new school facilities were not consulted during project design. As one student articulated when the group was asked whether student input in school design is important to consider,

Yes, because we are the people that are going to attend the school. We go to school like 8 hours a day, so we have to feel comfortable. (Fernando, Maywood Academy High School student)

It is important, as Fernando stated, to consult end users like students simply and logically because they are the people who will be spend the most time occupying a new facility. But, it is also important to include students in the process of school development, because it can provide a valuable lesson in public process. When students observe a process that is truly inclusive of all stakeholders, it presents a vital example of democracy in action.

Conclusion

Another important purpose of participatory planning, especially as it relates to public projects undertaken within underserved communities like those of Southeast L.A., is to promote equity and fairness. With such a boon in public funding for new schools, it is this author's view that LAUSD should be considering its planning process as an opportunity to re-engage underserved communities in visioning what schools can do, both for their children and for their neighborhoods. Planning practice, in theory, is more legitimate, and ultimately more productive for the communities it involves, if poor, low-income, or other marginalized communities have had the opportunity to influence the policies and projects it effects. Of course, a counter-veiling truth is that "participation itself does not ensure that decisions will benefit the most disadvantaged", in part because those who are most organized and vocal may not be the ones who most need assistance (Abers 1998, 53). In the case of school planning this makes promoting authentic and inclusive participation especially critical. For, the stakeholder base that is amassed during the planning phase may well contribute to the future productivity of a new school by helping to form its support base. Further, it is impossible to see how a school can be what it needs to be for the community it is meant to serve, if local knowledge is not solicited. Even acknowledging that neighborhoods change and that communities are always in flux, there remains the need to gather as much intelligence as possible from those we know in the present time to be the population that will use and benefit from a new school facility.

Taken a step further, equity in planning requires that participatory planning be elevated beyond what Arnstein identified as "consultation toward delegated power" and toward citizen control (Arnstein 1969)). This perspective echoes Davidoff's much cited 1965 article, which articulates a role for advocacy planning to promote a plural, as opposed to unitary, public interest and evoking the language of community organizing, to empower traditionally disenfranchised citizens (Davidoff 1965). This perspective also mingles readily with elements of Freirean philosophy that have been highly influential in academic debates over 'participatory development' and development more generally. Freire's emphasis on emancipation through interactive participation, for instance, has been used as a rationale for the participatory focus of development (especially in international context). This Freirean rationale holds that 'participation' in any form leads to development that is based on the true needs of the population it is meant to serve, and to the empowerment of poor or marginalized groups.

As is evidenced by the data presented and summarized above, there is no doubt that the District's Community Outreach process has served to inform, in many cases consult, and occasionally even to collaborate with community stakeholders. Yet, as much as some of LAUSD's organizers might strive for it to be so, the form of participatory planning that LAUSD has undertaken does not appear to rise to the level of community empowerment and control. Rather, it has done what participatory planning process typically does: it has invited community

input within a controversial development process, and ultimately has sparked community activism parallel to, but separate from, the outreach process. The following chapter provides a discussion of who "the community" that has responded to LAUSD's call for public participation is, and how the community's own limitations, as well as those stemming from inter-district and district community dynamics, have served to truncate the potential for truly collaborative, community-based school planning.

Chapter Four
The Politics of School Development:
Problematizing the Participatory Process

If we are going to do community schools, if we are going to bring together all of the community players and make the school a community asset, we have to start a year and a half before CEQA. (Steven, Architect)

In California, the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requires that every public agency provide opportunities for public participation to ensure that the public has a chance to make an "independent, reasoned judgment" about a proposed project, and so a public agency can receive and evaluate public reaction as to the potential consequences of its proposed action. The idea is that in various forms, and throughout the phases of a project, a public voice is inserted into the planning process. But, for many planners and public advocates, public participation in the context of CEQA falls far short of the type of collaborative, community planning that Steven refers to above.

This chapter grapples with the depth of LAUSD's participatory practice and the ability of local communities and their advocates to push the boundaries of the prescribed planning process. It does so by problematizing the participatory process through a deeper exploration of who "the community" is, what the nature of its response to LAUSD has been, and how the agenda of advancing participatory power among community stakeholders has been constrained by a host of political factors including a relative lack of civic capacity, differences in District versus local government agendas, and the conflicting purposes and power differentials that exist, both between LAUSD staff and higher-ups, and between the community and District as a whole. Given the uneven power relations and divergent priorities that define the field, this chapter argues that the ability of Community Outreach to engage community in a way that "establishes the foundation for ongoing community participation, beyond the completion of new schools" (LAUSD, 9/07 Presentation), and that concomitantly lays the groundwork for community-based school improvement, is inherently constrained by limited institutional and civic capacities and by divergent District and community goals.

To advance this argument, I begin by providing a description of community activism in the Southeast in general, and then of the activism that has taken place around new school construction more specifically. I then rely on this context to show how community capacity in the Southeast is at once well developed and limited. Next I turn to the District and demonstrate the ways in which inter-district politics have constrained both the ability of Community Outreach staff to do the capacity building work they wish to do, and the likelihood that community demands can be met. The context and subsequent discussion provided below are intended to advance my overall argument by describing the limiting factors that have been brought to bear on the Outreach process, and that can keep communities from being empowered and the District from maximizing its collaborative capacity. For ultimately, the extent to which these limitations figure into the participatory process affects whether and how the District and the community can work toward sustained and productive parent and community engagement in schools.

The "Community" in Community Outreach

The community that generally has responded and reacted to District calls for community participation has included a broad range of stakeholders, from neighborhood residents directly affected by a proposed schools project, to activists and government representatives attuned to regional educational issues and inequities. This is important to note, because who defines the community, and how, can have a profound effect on who is on hand to plan and shape new schools. Following is a description by one member of LAUSD's Community Outreach of whom she considers to be "the community" that the District has attempted to reach.

> *When I talk about community, I mean it in the broadest sense of the word. Where we view every stakeholder, whether you are a business owner, a neighborhood activist, if you belong to a neighborhood watch group, the neighborhood councils. If you are just an interested individual, maybe you haven't been active in schools, but maybe you are active, in I don't know, social programs. We set out to identify all of these different community members within each of the communities we work in. (Estrella, LAUSD CO Organizer)*

With meetings and mailers targeted at various constituents of the proposed new school neighborhoods, LAUSD has done its due diligence in reaching out to "the community", as defined. But, who truly represents the parties not only most interested in the process of building new schools in Southeast L.A., but most moved to involve themselves in that process?

A review of transcripts from District-sponsored community meetings as well as interviews with numerous LAUSD staff and community representatives revealed that a wide array of local residents have responded to the District's call. Many have been parents fighting for better schools for their kids, some home or business owners concerned about the loss of their properties, and still others elected officials and other community members concerned about improving the educational landscape in Southeast L.A. And, beyond just responding LAUSD's call for public involvement, many local stakeholders have gotten involved in organizing around new school construction, spurred both by vocal community activists and by elected officials. As described in the previous chapter, community organizing around the push for new schools in the Southeast began well before the first phase of the school construction program, led by the newly formed Facilities Division, began. Thus, such activism has influenced, and will continue to shape the possibilities for community connections to schools beyond the construction phase.

Activism in Southeast Los Angeles

Growing up in Huntington Park in the 1970s, Selena recalled a long history of educational activism in Southeast L.A. As part of what would become a vast demographic shift, her family members were among the first Mexicans to move into the area. As early as 1976, Selena remembered her mother organizing against Concept 6, a temporary District scheme at that time that her mother knew would likely become permanent, and would not bode well for local schools. Being bilingual, her mother became the community translator. As Selena described,

She would translate, and she was organizing, saying this is not going to be good. We need to have some strategies to protect our quality of life. But, in retrospect, she also didn't understand how to work the system and how to really push them into not doing it. The decision had already been made by bureaucrats. (Selena, Southeast Community Organizer)

The time Selena recounted represents a profound demographic, social and economic shift not only in her home city of Huntington Park, but also within similar, adjacent Southeast cities. In South Gate, for instance, the Latino population jumped from 4 percent of the total in 1960, to 46 percent in 1980, and 83.1 percent in 1990 (Nicholaides 2002). Today, the Latino portion of South Gate's population is approximately 92 percent. Similar turnover occurred in Maywood, Huntington Park, Bell, Cudahy, and Maywood, which are each now between 90 and 96 percent Latino.

Parallel economic erosion in the area resulted as deindustrialization Los Angeles, driven by the same forces of industrial expansion and capital mobility that had made the region's southern industrial suburbs flourish. Filling the employment vacuum in the Southeast was a new "sweatshop economy", which established minimum wage jobs and antiquated working conditions (Nicholaides 2002). With this economic restructuring came a dramatic deterioration in local services, including schools, and a lack of community capacity to pick up the slack where government institutions had failed to provide. In other, wealthier and more politically organized areas of the region, for instance, local residents were able to raise funds through private donations and grant-making institutions. Whereas, the newer, poorer immigrant populations of the Southeast had neither the social nor economic capital to keep up with their growing need for schools and related social services.

Fast-forward about 30 years and the transformation of Southeast L.A. continues to evolve. In those cities where so much demographic change occurred in the latter part of the 20th century, the children of first generation immigrants are coming of age, and many are staying in the area. And, in the next several years, these young people will be the ones to come into leadership positions in local government.

Several of the Southeast cities, in fact, are young cities run by relatively young city council members who have come up out of their communities. The path to higher office outside of some of these small cities is unlikely, however. And, as one activist described, despite their organic community origins, some local politicians don't have an interest in building momentum for educational reform.

Just because they are racially and ethnically aligned doesn't mean they have the community's best interests at heart. These are people who are self-interested. And, they will use these positions as climbing posts rather than to make change. (Selena)

Contrary to what Selena describes, many in local government have, in fact, earnestly represented their constituents around matters related to public schools. In particular, when it comes to supporting activism around neighborhood schools, some have even urged activism among community stakeholders. The following section describes how community activism in the Southeast area has emerged out of this historic context in response to current planning for new schools and in concert with Community Outreach.

As described in the previous chapter, many residents of the Southeast rallied in response to LAUSD's abandonment of yet another potential school site - the infamous 40-acre site; and, as recounted above, some of those who had already been involved at their local schools were fighting for new and better facilities. But, it was during Phase I of LAUSD's construction program that the mobilization of parents really began. Various community groups, some existing, some fledgling, emerged in response to a lot of the construction that was taking place, and then out of desire to guide where that construction would take place.

<div align="center">Padres Unidos</div>

The site that spawned arguably the most influential CBO in the Southeast was Tweedy Elementary. The group, as mentioned previously, was (and still is) Padres Unidos. With regard to the group's influence on the school construction process, Anna, an ex-School Board employee recalled,

> *So Padres Unidos, because I think, they've been around the longest – since like 2000 – they've learned how to sort of infiltrate the district, to get a lot of what they want. So, they exert pressure, but also they are willing to meet with insiders, they are willing to conduct these very organized meetings; they have pre-meetings, they have an agenda, they are very organized. They try not to be reactionary. They have learned how to sort of co-opt a lot of the practices of what is acceptable to the District. And they try to model that and they use it for their advantage. (Anna, former School Board employee)*

As Anna suggested, much of Padres Unidos' success in exerting influence over District decisions can be attributed to the willingness and ability of its members to learn to play the game. During the course of its existence, this has included not only learning what to do and say at public meetings, but also to understanding the importance of building social capital. Additionally, the approach of the group over time has been tailored toward a less reactionary, and arguably more politically savvy approach toward appealing to District officials. This evolution exemplifies how "project" critics can most effectively convey their ideas, and exhibits a channeling of activism into a pursuit of more traditional political power.

Planned on a parallel track with Tweedy, Southeast High School also served as somewhat of an incubator for the Community Outreach process at the inception of the new school construction program. Padres Unidos was very involved in this project, as they were generally in educational matters throughout the City of South Gate. As one District staff member described, members of this group really bonded over their activism around schools, and now in addition to remaining active on the issue of new schools, have a representative at each school in South Gate – "to hold the principals and District accountable".

Speaking specifically to the contribution Padres Unidos made to the completion of Southeast High School, Soledad, a parent volunteer noted,

> *That's why they got together, so they could ask for new schools….It's very important. To me, Padres Unidos is very important because it's one of the reasons we have this school and some other school. Like Tweedy elementary, it was in the park. It was bungalows, and it was a big issue for our city. Now that the school is already built, and my*

grandchild is going there, I am happy. I respect that group, Padres Unidos. Yes, because they did a great job.

Evoking Padres Unidos in the context of Tweedy, Soledad again emphasized the perceived significance of this group of Southeast community stakeholders as a force in compelling LAUSD to provide not just this one elementary school, but to build many other new schools in an area experiencing such dire need. The success of Padres Unidos on behalf of the community of South Gate also is invoked in Sam Quinones' book about Mexican migration to the U.S. The author talks about Padres Unidos in his chapter on South Gate, and more specifically in his discussion of school overcrowding in Southeast L.A. As quoted by Quinones, Hector De La Torres, the former State Assemblyman who helped form Padres Unidos, portrayed the group in this way,

The success of dealing with L.A. Unified School District emboldened them to think, 'We can do this. We can take anybody on'.

De la Torres was among a number of elected officials who helped Padres Unidos to form and gain momentum, and who were early and continuing members of the group. Providing valuable social capital to local residents in their fight for new schools, officials like Congresswoman Roybal-Allard would regularly attend Padres Unidos meetings to make sure the group stayed on track. Catalina, a founding member of the group recounted,

Congresswoman Roybal-Allard would come to PU meetings to make sure that the things we were asking for were very specific. They had their plan, but we also brought a plan of what we needed. We got more than what they asked for in terms of the six schools that were built in South Gate. We succeeded because we were organized and respectful. (Catalina, Padres Unidos member)

Another member, Sylvia, went on to highlight the support the group has received over time from LAUSD officials, including former Superintendent Rome and local Superintendent Galindo.

The local Superintendents have been very supportive…They know that we don't just ask for things; we offer services. (Sylvia, Padres Unidos member)

In emphasizing the degree to which Padres has worked with LAUSD through Community Outreach, Theresa, a founding member, placed more emphasis on what the District has done for Padres Unidos, rather than what the group has done for the District.

Community Outreach has been very effective…they are like members too. We make sure that they are doing what they are supposed to be doing, that they are giving the correct information. They make sure that we know what they are doing. (Theresa, Padres Unidos member)

The office (of Community Outreach), echoed another member, "was created to help Padres Unidos".

Some in the greater Southeast community see the "respectful" approach touted by Padres members as somewhat of a handicap – ultimately tying their agenda too closely with the District's. Further, inasmuch as Padres Unidos has worked tirelessly for the interests of their kids and their neighborhoods, they have not been immune to exclusionary politics. As Diego, a long-time LAUSD organizer with experience working in the Southeast recounted,

One of the things I didn't like about politics in South Gate was this attitude of, well, those kids from across Alameda, we don't want them here in our school. So, there was politics everywhere, up and down. It was really kind of sad sometimes. You got to see a lot of different sides of people. (Diego, Community Outreach organizer)

Diego went on to clarify that Alameda represents somewhat of a Mason-Dixon line in this area of L.A., dividing the very different racial and cultural landscapes of the Southeast and Watts. Once you cross Alameda, you are in the City of L.A., and more specifically in Watts, a predominantly African American community. Thus, while Padres Unidos members ultimately see themselves as working for "everybody's kids in the community", their capacity for inclusiveness and collaborative reform ends up being somewhat limited by a narrow definition of the community.

Anna, the former School Board employee quoted above also referred to the long-standing tension between South and Southeast L.A. Her perspective goes beyond identifying a prejudice to explaining the underlying tensions that presented a complex and difficult dynamic for the District.

In South L.A., you have a very interesting dynamic. You have historically African American communities that are becoming brown. One of the struggles that Community Outreach had there is that you have the older African American homeowners who are now against the school district, because they feel that the district is trying to displace them to accommodate these "brown babies", as Maxine Waters said. (Anna, former LAUSD School Board employee)

Ironically, throughout the course of the multi-year school construction process, conflicts have occurred not only between the communities of South and Southeast L.A., but also among the communities of the Southeast. Members of Padres Unidos, which primarily represents South Gate, began later in the development process to fight to keep schools out of their communities, instead pushing for schools to be sited in smaller, adjacent cities. The attitude, as some described, became one of classic NIMBYism: more schools may be needed, but we now have enough in our city. Clearly such tensions have implications both for participatory process and for community organizing. The evolution of Padres Unidos, as an example, appears to have veered more strongly in the direction of mainstream participation than as organizing to promote a unique agenda. Similarly, as activism around schools has spread to other Southeast cities, other groups have found their push from outside the District evolving into more of a collaboration from within. One such group is Padres del Surestes.

Padres Del Surestes

Already a tight community, South Gate really took to heart the potential effect (both positive and negative) that schools could have on their community. But, this activist sprit was not

limited to the City of South Gate. It also infiltrated other nearby communities, which followed the lead of Padres Unidos by forming another parent-based organization: Padres Del Surestes (Southeast Parents). Members of the Southeast Parents have been particularly active around the siting of new schools in Bell, where they started, and have subsequently have expanded to other small cities in the area.

Prior to the new school construction program, the Southeast Parents were pushing for parent centers in schools and providing education for parents. Many parents, one member explained, had experienced open hostility by the schools their children attended. Others just didn't feel encouraged to participate, or didn't know how. Feeling unwelcome at school, they would get involved only when they were having trouble with their kids. Some didn't know the names of their children's teachers, their room numbers, or even the grade their child was in. Many never attended meetings at the school, which, she explained was part of the problem.

To get these parents involved, the Southeast Parents set out to provide parents with what they needed. This meant helping to provide college classes, as well as basic English and GED classes, for parents at the local community center. The group also lobbied educators to start using parents who came as immigrants from countries where they had been professionals for tasks beyond cutting paper for lessons. This fight for schools to see parents as resources, rather than as a threat or an inconvenience, has translated effortlessly into the group's fight for more and better schools in the Southeast, and for sustained parent involvement, through parent centers and other means, to be a hallmark of each new school. Explained Ramona, a founding member of the organization,

> *You need to start with the parents if you want to improve the community. (Ramona, Southeast Parents)*

In describing her experience advocating for new schools, Ramona explained that one of Southeast Parents' main goals has been to provide a unified front in dealing with the LAUSD. She went on to describe the evolution of the group's activism, from the inception of the District's new school construction program.

> *Eight years ago, the District made a decision to build new schools, but only for L.A. – nothing in the Southeast area. We have old schools. Buildings are very old – built 30 to 40 years ago. As a community, we said, we need schools right here…we need to work to bring more schools to the community. Many students have to travel long distances to go to school. (Ramona, Southeast Parents)*

Similar to the approach of Padres Unidos, the Southeast Parents have tended to advocate for proposals that would improve neighborhood communities, while, to the extent feasible, avoiding the displacement of homes. Recounting their involvement with a proposed project in Cudahy, Ramona explained,

> *We thought there was a better plan for the City that involved displacing undesirable uses rather than older people who had just paid off their homes. (Ramona, Southeast Parents)*

Also similar to the approach of Padres Unidos was the Southeast Parents' early alliance with local politicians. In fact, Ramona, who lives in the City of Bell, was personally encouraged

to get involved in the fight for new schools by a former mayor of the city. This former city official knew early on that getting the community on board would be crucial in demanding that LAUSD deliver schools to the Southeast. So, he and other local officials approached some key community activists and provided the support they needed to mobilize other parents and community members. Such local organizing converged with the beginnings of LAUSD's formal participatory process to create the current opening for change within the educational landscape of Southeast L.A.

<p style="text-align:center"><u>Parent U-Turn</u></p>

Another CBO that existed prior to the new school construction program, but that fought for new schools as an extension of their work in the Southeast organizing against Concept 6, is Parent U-Turn. This parent collaborative was formed by South and Southeast L.A. residents who had participated in UCLA's Parent Curriculum Project, an initiative intended to inform low-income parents about school reform and encourage them to become school and community leaders and advocates. (Oakes et al 2006). When it came to the fight for new schools in Southeast L.A., parent involvement in this initiative turned out to be the ideal bridge between community concern and activism beyond District process.

The project introduced would-be parent leaders to the official "elite" knowledge held by educators, and gave them the opportunity to work with the purveyors of that knowledge, university professors, whom they could then call upon as resources as they sought solutions to a host of problems they would go on to try and tackle. In other words, the participants gained both cultural and social capital that they would apply as they went forward in their own efforts to empower parents in educational decision-making. From the perspective of Betty, one of the organization's founders,

> *Our goal was to empower parents with basic tools: to teach them how to communicate, how to recognize good teaching, and to learn how to navigate the system…(Betty, Parent U-Turn)*

Betty, whose work began in the South L.A.'s City of Lynwood, and then spread to include the Southeast cities, also noted that many of the groups who had started around the same time (i.e., Padres Unidos and Padres del Surestes) did not experience the growth that Parent U-Turn did. She attributes this to a number of factors; but, primarily, she credits the fact that the group coalesced as a mix of skilled parents, who benefitted from and capitalized on the training they received. In her words,

> *The training gave parents the ability to speak like educators, in the same terms and words…the training gave parent the ability to speak like researchers. We didn't feel like we have to change. We could just take what we wanted from UCLA researchers. Both groups benefitted. (Betty, Parent U-Turn)*

Betty's orientation emphasizes reform from an organizing approach – wherein activists simultaneously push the system and learn how to operate within it. In this spirit, Parent U-Turn's involvement in collective action in Southeast L.A. has included a sustained campaign to relieve overcrowding in South Gate schools. Schools where their presence has been strongest, and those that were among the largest and most densely populated in the nation, include Stanford

Elementary, South Gate Middle School, and South Gate High School. Parent U-Turn also has played a major role in Local District 6, because of parent motivation to turn their schools from Concept-6 to traditional 180-day calendars.

Telling the story of the fight for a traditional school calendar in the Southeast, Betty described how the District wanted to put a 4th track at Stanford Middle School. While LAUSD perceived this as a neutral reform, teachers and community members saw it both as a logistical nightmare and as a potential delay in long awaited return to a traditional school calendar. Parent activists and others in the community also were fed up with having their voices excluded from debate on these meaningful issues, and were beginning to view this latest decision as another in a long line of discrimination and neglect (Oakes et al 2006).

Since the change was to be made in June, parent activists met with UCLA researchers in April to seek advice on what their options were for stopping the plan. The parent activists emerged from the meeting armed with data, and commenced with a plan to boycott the schools.

> *We put signs all over South Gate. We talked to Jose Huizar (LAUSD School Board member, beginning in 2001). We called the strike, and 85% of the students stayed home…Our connection with UCLA helped us get media coverage. (Betty, Parent U-Turn)*

Within days of a District Board Meeting, to which Parent U-Turn brought 400 parents, and the successful boycott at Stanford elementary, the Board withdrew from the 4-track plan, and agreed to keep the schools on Concept 6 until more schools were built.

Community Capacity

While not always representative of every facet of the larger community affected by a given school project, the groups profiled above have provided an important voice for Southeast neighborhood residents who, for various reasons, have been unable or unwilling to push back against the District. As Estrella, an LAUSD organizer described,

> *Many of these students and communities are relatively low income. Parents don't have time to come to meetings because they are working. Also, a lot of parents don't recognize their own power. They don't take advantage of their freedom of speech. (Estrella, LAUSD organizer)*

This same staff member cited a language barrier as another reason why some community members don't participate, despite the fact that translation is always provided and in the past, some meetings had been hosted in Spanish. Recently, she said, LAUSD has stopped holding Spanish-only meetings, because of the controversy surrounding them. This, despite the fact that 95 to 99 percent of students in many most Southeast schools are Latino. Both the language barrier, and the cultural proclivity by some to avoid questioning authority have been helped, Estrella recounted, by the most vocal community activists, who have jumped in at meetings and make sure everyone is heard and understood.

Despite such barriers, LAUSD organizers portrayed the Southeast as relatively well organized, to the extent that District staff couldn't simply hold a meeting without first notifying members of the prominent community organizations. Estrella recounted,

> *The Southeast is well organized, so you have to make sure that prior to a meeting, you conduct your mini-briefing before the meeting. It's a very tightly knit community, regardless of whether it's Huntington Park, Southgate, etc. (Estrella, LAUSD organizer)*

On the other hand, a number of people portrayed the Southeast as having relatively limited civic capacity. In other words, what Estrella perceived as orchestrated activism, others saw as a relatively unorganized reaction to District policies and decisions. One District official, for instance, portrayed the communities of the Southeast as having a limited depth of political capital. Concurring with the official, Selena, a community activist who grew up in Southeast L.A. and has continued to be active in the area, characterized capacity in the Southeast Communities as "very limited". Assessing the capacity of the CBOs that have ramped up in recent years around new school construction in the Southeast to affect long-term change in the educational landscape, Selena went on to say,

> *I think that organizations like that (need to) evolve. And, they have to evolve into being either about social advocacy, school advocacy, or membership organizations that are welcoming and create a better power base. Or, they end up being the same people, the same group, always advocating for the same thing, but not really developing. (Selena, Southeast Schools Activist)*

Going on to describe her experience with Padres Unidos more specifically Selena stated,

> *My experience has been that if you are not part of the club, you are not welcome at the table, and your ideas don't matter. And that is a real indication of lack of forward thinking and insight. It's just not OK. And it's a lack of capacity to understand that there's a bigger picture, and if we're really about building momentum, that group that I think is now maybe 30 people, should be 300, it should be 3000. Especially because they've done this for such a long time. (Selena, Southeast Community Activist)*

What Selena referred to is similar to the "narrow sectarianism" that Dennis Shirley identifies as a limiting factor in many school reform efforts. Holding up the Alliance Schools, created by the Texas Education Agency, as an example, Shirley emphasizes the power of relationship building between school and community in transforming schools into centers of community. In this model, the school is positioned as "a vital geographic nexus in which friends and neighbors convene to identify, debate, and correct the exasperating proliferation of social problems" which accompany the type of economic and social dislocations that have occurred in Southeast Los Angeles (Shirley 1997, 27). In essence, Selena's interpretation suggests that these local CBOs have failed to fully cultivate the "generalized reciprocity and social trust" needed to engender broad reaching collaboration around school reform (Shirley 1997, 27).

Selena did clarify that despite her critique, she respects the work these groups have done, and the fact that they'd advocated for some really important cases. As Shirley notes about the Alliance Schools, each had to go through its own developmental process in order to "evolve from a site of bureaucratic control to a center of civic activism" (Shirley 1997, 284). In this vein, perhaps Selena might also concede that local activism in the Southeast simply has not yet completed its evolution. Perhaps. But, frustration precluded the possibility of such an analysis, as she again emphasized the shortcomings of the CBOs that have developed largely around the

fight for new school facilities,

> *Facilities are just not enough. They haven't gotten beyond that, and quite frankly, they
> don't want to get beyond that. When I talked to them about, you know, let's talk about
> college prep for all, they weren't having it. And, I was like, 'What do you mean??' It was
> just so appalling, quite frankly. (Selena, Southeast Community Activist)*

Similarly critical of Padres Unidos, Betty, the parent U-Turn activist quoted above, also
characterized the group as somewhat exclusive, and intimated that it was acting as a puppet to
the District.

> *They don't like to work hard. They were against the strike. We tried to get into that
> group, and we were excluded. If you are not in their clique, they don't want you on their
> campuses. School involvement shouldn't be about what group you are in, or who you
> know. They were formed by politicians. I'm not a puppet for nobody, and nobody's going
> to tell me what is good for my kids. U-Turn are not afraid to go against the
> establishment. (Betty, Parent U-Turn)*

Betty also noted that, unlike members of the other groups, she had deliberately chosen not to
become a consultant to LAUSD, despite her years of trying to work with the District on school
improvement issues.

> *We (Parent U-Turn) believe that you cannot work for your oppressor, because sooner or
> later you start to look the other way. I don't believe that researchers or the
> superintendent who don't live in our community are the experts in how to find the
> answers. It's us who live there everyday who, with their assistance, need to find the
> answers. (Betty, Parent U-Turn)*

Real or perceived, the potential for community activists to be co-opted by the District goes
to a larger issue of the need to distinguish between the forms of empowerment that can result
from civic activism. While the goal of contemporary planners in general and Community
Outreach staff in particular may be to build capacity among community stakeholders, such
capacity can be limited by the activist's affiliation with "the oppressor". Thus, the distinction
between "redistributive" and transformative" empowerment is helpful to understanding the ways
in which community capacity in the Southeast may in fact remain limited at this juncture. As
articulated by Kennedy and Tilly, redistributive empowerment implies a more temporary,
context-based solution, wherein the faction of activists working within the institution (i.e.,
District) run the risk of being co-opted. Transformative empowerment allows for a more
"countercultural collectivism", which may be limited in terms of short-term gains, but holds
greater potential for permanently altering the school-community agenda (Kennedy and Tilly
1990).

Questioning the potential for such transformative empowerment to emerge from the efforts
of Padres Unidos, Betty expressed skepticism not only about the group's autonomy, but also its
commitment to improving instructional quality,

> *Padres Unidos are not worried about what goes on in the classroom. They don't know*

what instructional quality is. I know kids are 40 or 45 to one with teachers in the classroom. If you ask them, they, they don't know. They don't know the data. (Betty, Parent U-Turn)

Turning the critique toward Parent U-Turn, Anna, a former School Board employee, offered a perspective on the approach of Parent U-Turn versus that of Padres Unidos that illuminated why the latter group's approach may have engendered greater initial success in making demands of the District. While acknowledging a great deal of respect for the work of Parent U-Turn, Anna noted that in some settings, "aggressive" strategies are not particularly effective. Her take on which groups have been most successful in making demands on LAUSD is quite telling with regard to the District's overall motivation for engaging community.

...Sometimes you have to escalate strategies, but I think that has to do with being so new to mobilizing. And they use strategies that really just make the school district very uncomfortable...and, again, it's that edge that they have which could be good in some situations, but with the district, they're not open to mobilizing. They're not really open to activism; and, then you bring in an edgy strategy. That is going to turn them off. So, in many meetings, where we were going to have controversial projects, we would personally call Padres Unidos and let them know, this is what's coming down the pipeline, and this is why, and this is how you could influence this. We were less inclined to call other groups because of some of the strategies that they have used to publicly shame the District. (Anna, former LAUSD School Board Staff)

This perspective provides some insight into how LAUSD orders the participation of local community stakeholders, particularly those who are just learning how to insert themselves into public process. Notably, no matter how enthusiastic or how much of a force certain individuals and groups in the Southeast have been, activism in this area still is not at the same level as it is in more affluent areas, where parents and other community members are more versed in how to play the game. No question, this is changing. But, it is as yet unclear whether the social capital, primarily in the form of District alliances, that community activists have built have helped them to engender relational power – or, whether community representatives that are willing to cooperate are simply being co-opted. Describing her experience at one community meeting, Selena, commented,

So, what happens in these systems, and I've seen this happen over and over again, the people who are most vocal and most challenge the system are the ones who get co-opted by it. They are the ones who first get hired to basically control them. And I had parents in the Valley, parents in South L.A., parents in East L.A., because of our organizing efforts...basically you need to know that I can't say these things, because I work for them now. So, my perception of who gets hired into these community outreach positions is very much in line with that. It's very much people who are connected politically or have the potential to be connected politically, get brought into the fold, are hired to control the masses. (Selena, Southeast Community Activist)

Selena subsequently conceded that despite an overall lack of political development or savvy among the communities of the Southeast, there has been some valuable political capital

gained by community groups who have learned to work with elected officials and with LAUSD during the process of new school planning and development. Groups like Padres Unidos and the Southeast Parents were, after all, formed in conjunction with members of local government and of Congress. However, like others in Southeast L.A. who are long-time educational professionals and advocates for local schools, Selena wants to see more. It's great, she explained, to be able to get a meeting with the Superintendent, but a few significant political levers does not a movement make. Elaborating, she explained,

> *I think the lack of political consciousness, and political development, and actual political savvy, has really hurt the community. Because, they kind of get blinded by the minutia, and they don't see the bigger picture. And so, I think that their work has been incredibly important to actually get the Southeast on the radar for the District…Why can't we really look at 2012 for the Williams settlement for Concept 6 to be eliminated for sure? And, why don't we push for small schools within the schools and not be placated by the small learning communities bullshit? (Selena, Southeast Community Activist)*

On an even more fundamental level than savvy or experience, capacity can be limited by practical constraints, like work schedules and family concerns. As Luis, who has been an organizer in the SE for several years, clarified,

> *Even though meetings sometimes start at 6pm, you are sometimes dealing with families that have multiple jobs to make ends meet, so it's still tough for them to make the meetings. You are competing with people trying to adapt to their economic conditions. (Luis, LAUSD organizer)*

(Re)Building Capacity

Whether the stakeholders that have surfaced around facilities planning in the Southeast have the capacity to parlay their activism into a movement further remains to be seen. Quite possibly, an accurate characterization of civic capacity in the Southeast combines some of the social infrastructure that Estrella, the District employee quoted above, portrayed, and some of the lack of forward momentum illustrated by Selena, the local activist who remains skeptical. What the current situation most likely reflects is the slow rebuilding of the loss of social infrastructure that occurred with the deindustrialization of the South and Southeast areas of L.A. The softening of the economic backbone of the area led to a loss of about 350,000 industrial jobs within a five-year period in the late 1970s. And, most of that job loss and concomitant loss of social infrastructure happened in the Southeast.

Prior to this time, there were social institutions within the communities of Southeast L.A. that provided an organized voice for change. But, during the transitional period of the late 1970s and early 1980s, when the population of Southeast L.A. went from being only about 70 percent Anglo to being, on average, 90 percent Latino, the civic capacity to advocate for education just wasn't there. As Doug, the former mayor of a small Southeast city recounted,

> *There were no community-based organizations there to support the huge change that was taking place. So, in terms of new schools being built, you didn't hear much about it.*

Now, decades later, while the capacity for change, and specifically for school change, may not be where it needs to be for a wholesale change in the educational landscape to occur, it does appear to be building. As one parent organizer explained,

> *The Southeast is a much newer immigrant community (than other areas of L.A.), and activism is really just getting rooted in this area.*

In recent years, local capacity has been activated not just in pushing for new and better schools, but also in hitting the streets to raise money for their construction. A great deal of political organizing was entailed with the passing of each recent local bond, for instance. And, while LAUSD has played a central role in lobbying key constituencies, the support of local voters has been indispensable in selling the idea that new schools are needed and that money is required to pay for them.

For example, a local circle of activists have been involved with developing and pitching local LAUSD bonds. And, education reform groups have been at the table, placing demands on those who craft and push bonds: charter advocates, preschool proponents, anti-poverty groups combating overcrowding and pushing for a longer instructional year (anti-Concept 6), joint-use and community development advocates with education interests. Among groups and individuals specifically pushing bond measure passage, as well as those organizing locally around new schools, a set of common causes has emerged: an eagerness to improve the quality of L.A. schools; a view that decrepit schools signal that L.A. doesn't really care about the working-class and poor kids; a perspective on school construction as an equity issue; and the waging of a wider war between urban and suburban areas of the state.

District Politics

Despite tireless activism on the part of community stakeholders, a relative lack of civic capacity in the Southeast has limited both the scope of demands made by local CBOs, and how the District has felt obliged to respond. Yet, of equal importance in this regard is that LAUSD's ability to lay the foundation for sustained school-community connections has been constrained by its own internal struggles over the extent to which community engagement should take place, and what form it should take. In general, District politics have dictated that despite good faith efforts to solicit input and approval from communities, there remain overarching disagreements over importance of the Community Outreach process.

To understand the difficulties that Community Outreach has faced in attempting to fulfill its mission of engaging community stakeholders in a way that not only informs them, but that considers them to be the true experts on their own needs and desires, one must understand the relationship between Community Outreach and the balance of the New Construction Branch within the Facilities Division. Among the distinguishing factors between the two is that Outreach staff tend to come from organizing or community service backgrounds, whereas others in New Construction tend to be builders or construction management professionals. Further, Community Outreach is one of the few places in the District where there is Latino representation in leadership. Whether or not this latter difference has affected collaboration between Outreach staff and others in the division, however, is the subject for another study.

Though collaboration has improved over time, the consensus among Community Outreach staff and others familiar with the workings of LAUSD, is that Outreach and the balance of New Construction, and of Facilities as a whole, are somewhat at cross purposes. Although each belongs to the same branch of the District, and each ultimately is propelled by the same overarching goal - to eliminate school overcrowding and return students to schools in their neighborhoods - the way each sees fit to go about it diverges. In sum, Facilities Division leadership has tended to see the school development process as an exercise in efficient project management, and Outreach as an opportunity for community collaboration and capacity building. Anna, the former Board employee quoted above put it simply,

> *They (Community Outreach) wanted to mobilize the community, they wanted to engage the community and sort of organize the community. And, although that's sort of inherent in their role, it's not what the District wanted to see.*

Anna elaborated, explaining that what LAUSD's upper management really wanted was an arm that would go out and disseminate information, so that the District could check public engagement off its "to do" list. In the beginning, when the Facilities Division was headed by Jim McConnel, Outreach was afforded little power to do what it really wanted to do. This former chief executive came to his position adamant about operating as an autonomous body within the larger District. And, a big part of his philosophy was that the traditional way LAUSD had operated, which in his mind involved far too much stakeholder participation, had to be abandoned. Anna described the former chief's modus operandi as follows,

> *He just really felt like, if we want to be effective, and if we want to deliver, then it has to be in a very tight timeline, and it has to be done differently than what the District does. He felt that if Facilities took on the form and shape of the District, then nothing would get done, and the schools would not be completed. (Anna, former LAUSD School Board employee)*

Under this leadership, the initial group of Facilities planners became quite effective at delivering schools, and once the ball got rolling, delivering them quickly. Consequently, despite some evolution over time in attitudes toward community involvement, this initial ethos had a lingering effect on how the Division as a whole came to value Community Outreach. The mission began, and has remained over time, to get the schools built with as little disruption from community stakeholders as possible. Anyone in a leadership position who wished to alter the agenda to prioritize community involvement was controversial and short-lived. Doug, a former local mayor, put it this way,

> *Community Outreach is a great group of folks. It's the real estate side that doesn't get it. They don't believe in community outreach. (Doug, former Southeast mayor)*

Luis, a District organizer concurred, and explained that while the majority of Facilities staff may see a project meeting as just another meeting, for community members looking to relieve their children of the burden of overcrowded schools and long commutes, project updates are a "light at the end of a tunnel". Families in the Southeast have been highly anxious, if not

desperate, Luis explained, for their kids to attend school on a regular schedule. Tying in the obligation that he and other District organizers feel to these communities he explained,

> *They come to these meetings like, OK, we're one step closer. Share with us what's the latest and greatest, and how close are we to our goal. It's a responsibility we take very seriously when it comes to public engagement. (Luis, LAUSD organizer)*

In the beginning, the divergent outlooks of Community Outreach versus Facilities leadership featured prominently within inter-district politics. Outreach staff felt that most Facilities staff embodied the perspective of many in the development industry that there is no reason to engage community. They (the community) are not going to understand, it's too complex, was their thinking. And, other Facilities staff often saw Outreach as being too closely aligned with the community, and as undermining to the process. Explained by Estrella, a founding member of the Community Outreach staff,

> *There have been instances where directors within the division have felt that Community Outreach was not, was being counterproductive to the overall goal. Or, Community Outreach is not with us, they are against us. And, I would have to say, no I'm with you in spite of you. (Estrella, LAUSD organizer)*

Addressing such doubts in the dedication of Outreach staff to the end goal of building schools, Clara, another LAUSD organizer explained,

> *It's not about jeopardizing a school, because at the end of the day, we have the same goal. We want to get these schools built, because we understand that with new schools comes new beginnings in communities. We may just disagree at times as to how we reach the same goal. (Clara, LAUSD organizer)*

Having to answer to many bosses, including Facilities Division leadership and School Board members who don't necessarily practice or value community consultation, Outreach staff often have found it challenging to do what they see is their job, while respecting the real constraints of the development process. Outreach organizers understand that the department was, after all, set up to balance out the construction minded attitude of those at the District who would prefer to bulldoze anything that gets in the way of schedule and budget. As Clara acknowledged,

> *The balance between getting a project done and getting enough community participation is difficult. Timeline drives the process forward. When community issues come up, it slows the timeline. And, that's when issues come up. (Clara, LAUSD organizer)*

Painting a somewhat more graphic picture of the place of Outreach in the larger development scheme, Diego, another LAUSD organizer recalled,

> *In retrospect, I feel like our department was set up to help balance that. They just put us right in the middle of the bulldozer, and the homes and the community, the parks, and whatever else we were going up against. That's where we were. It's just been a tough struggle. It still is. (Diego, LAUSD organizer)*

Diego also reflected on his own role in the process, after nearly 8 years at LAUSD. He characterized himself as having been somewhat of a renegade when it came to balancing objectives, and as someone who, as a result, probably played right into the perspective held by some in the Facilities Division: that Outreach were not on their side.

> *My role is to kind of fight for the other side, if you will…I guess they just feel like I'm not a team player. It's kinda like, I do my own thing. If I want, I get people involved, even if the project team doesn't want to. But, it's been a little bit of what I see as my success. I can sleep at night knowing that I did the right thing. You know, and I kept the project moving forward. Because it's in spite of themselves, the developers, that the projects keep moving forward. (Diego, LAUSD organizer)*

This theme of Outreach helping other Facilities staff, in spite of themselves, to overcome community challenges and move projects forward, was quite prevalent in the reflections of Outreach organizers. Diego explained, for instance, how he saw his team as also helping to navigate disagreements with Board members and elected officials. There was a project, he explained, where Board members were surprised that the District was not going to keep teachers involved; so, despite what the project team wanted, he decided to have another meeting specifically targeted at teachers. He caught "a lot of flack" for meeting with the teachers; and, ultimately, related complaints made their way to the deputy chief, his boss. Defending his decision, Diego explained,

> *If we hadn't held the meeting, the Board members probably would've called us and demanded they accommodate the group. They (the Board) probably would've said they wouldn't make decision and would hold up the process. (The) short-sidedness of developers gets them in trouble. (Diego, LAUSD organizer)*

While aligning the objectives of these divergent District factions has been challenging, with some effort, other New Construction departments, along with Facilities as a whole, have come around to understand the importance of Outreach, and to better appreciate the constraints faced by Facilities. However, Luis pointed out, the Outreach department has had to change the minds of the larger Division at every stage of the process.

> *Real Estate has gained an appreciation over time for the input we've solicited. They have come to appreciate that people aren't just warming up a seat in an auditorium…Given that these fixtures are going to change the way that education takes place in these communities, their (the community's) input is invaluable. (Luis, LAUSD organizer)*

Despite the gains that Luis pointed out, critics claimed that nearly 10 years into the process, and despite the staff's laudable goals and strides, Community Outreach remains guided by the limiting ideology that organizers have fought from the beginning. More specifically, to some the process remains not so much a good faith effort to incorporate community knowledge and concerns, but rather a box to be checked off in the school development process. Explained Linda, a member of the New Construction team,

Organizers don't have that much power. They basically just set up community meetings and hold ribbon-cutting ceremonies. (Linda, Project Manager, New Construction)

Taking a step further this notion that the LAUSD's approach is limiting in its nature, Steven, a school architect and community activist, surmised,

The District frustrates the process of participatory planning from the outset. By the time LAUSD gets to the point that they are ready to talk to the community, they are talking in either or terms about the site…the public is therefore not truly engaged in the shaping of its schools or its communities. A lot of options are already taken off the table. That's not a good guy bad guy scenario. That's partly the scale of LAUSD, that limits their ability to sit down and talk to players without going to the public. (Steven, school architect and community activist)

From Steven's perspective, the ability of Community Outreach to sway the process has been limited not only by the way in which the District's approach to public engagement is implemented, but also by what is decidedly *not* part of it's approach. Namely, true community planning, wherein community stakeholders are involved from a project's inception, represents an approach that LAUSD is either unwilling or unable (or both) to undertake. And, as some Outreach organizers will admit, the Department has garnered little power over the process, beyond their ability to sometimes sway board members into leaning on higher ups to delay decisions on projects generating sustained public controversy. Regarding the efficacy of Community Outreach, one School Board member commented,

They are good people, but we (LAUSD) don't really know authentic engagement. We don't take seriously, or treat as important, community perspective as compared to official data compiled by the District.

Elaborating further on this point, the Board member explained that the balance that LAUSD has managed to reach is the ability to be respectful and authentic, while drawing the line when what the community wants is not a good thing for the kids. In other words, the District has to be able to put its foot down when it does, in fact, know better than the community, especially where matters of safety are concerned. But, as a whole, LAUSD also needs to be more sensitive to community needs and interests. Simply put, the District is not in the mode of community input, and if the type of systemic change that many parent and community activists seek is ever to come to fruition, that needs to change.

This is not to say that efforts to inform and consult the community have been without merit. To the contrary, and as described in Chapter 3, the Community Outreach program implemented by LAUSD has both shepherded LAUSD's school construction program to a measurable degree of success, and made the District a more open and trusted public institution. And, among community stakeholders outside of the District, internal politics and intentions have remained somewhat irrelevant; as despite limitations, LAUSD organizers have been able to do the work of building trust and fostering communication between the District and local community stakeholders.

Yet, despite strides in legitimating their process and gaining community trust, Outreach continues to be thwarted by the bottom line attitude within the District that too much openness

will build obstacles, not schools. Further, whereas the original team of District organizers dispatched to Southeast communities came from the areas in which they were working, hiring has since become more centralized, such that it makes it difficult for the department to bring in the type of people the Department originally attracted. More specifically, those brought in initially to interface with communities had existing relationships to build on; they had the ability to get community stakeholders to sit down with the District. As Estrella explained,

> *If we had to start in 2001 with the hiring restrictions we have now, it wouldn't have worked. We needed people in the beginning with an extremely high level of commitment to the job. (Estrella, LAUSD organizer)*

Diego, another LAUSD organizer, also acknowledged the difficulty of finding good organizers who really care about the community.

> *You can't really teach that to somebody. It's hard to find people that want to spend the time and energy doing this work. (Diego, LAUSD organizer)*

Both Estrella's and Diego's comments highlight the importance of building capacity from within these communities so that stakeholders can be their own advocates in continuing this work of demanding from LAUSD quality facilities that are set up to foster school and neighborhood improvement.

The fact that up to this point, LAUSD has relied heavily on the community connections many of the organizers bring, while often failing to give them credit for their contributions to the process, also shines a light on the balance of power between Outreach and the Facilities Division as a whole, and between the District and the community. For despite having elevated Community Outreach to the same level as other departments within the Facilities Division, staff have been left with a relative lack of power to make decisions. They are meant to inform the community, and in some sense "organize" them, but not really in the way they would like to. As Selena, a community organizer, pointed out,

> *Part of what institutions do to maintain their power is to hire people that are fighting for their power to placate them…So, I don't think it's a coincidence that the whole division is black and brown. I think it's totally intentional. (Selena, Southeast Community Organizer)*

Selena expanded her characterization of Outreach staff, relative to the remainder of Facilities, to further illuminate how, in her perspective, Outreach themselves are a party to their own powerlessness.

> *I also see that folks within that Division have allowed themselves to be put in those positions. They have allowed themselves to not demand to be part of the planning process. From the senior management position in that department down. They don't have a seat at the table in terms of planning. It's more like, here, get the word out, and that'll be your job. You're like our PR hand, but you're not part of our strategy team. And, that's really not OK. (Selena Southeast Community Organizer)*

In the same way Outreach was brought in, but given relatively little power, community stakeholders have been asked to participate, but provided little sway when it comes to the core planning that occurs within the District prior to project implementation. On the District side, this power imbalance is largely a reflection of value judgments regarding the importance of different roles within the context of the school construction program. And, on the community end, it stems from a power imbalance between the District as a whole and the small cities of the Southeast, as a result of their size and "outsider" status within LAUSD, and because they are predominantly immigrant communities.

Some would argue that even if LAUSD as a whole bought in ideologically to the notion that community input should be elevated in status within the planning process, the District is bound by a number of barriers, including the fundamental structure of the institution and the legacy of its own bad faith. The decision to separate within LAUSD's structure instruction from facilities planning was arguably the best way to go for the sake of expediency. The communities of the Southeast, in particular, had been waiting a long time for new schools; and, for them, as well as for the reputation of the District, there was a lot weighing on LAUSD's ability to deliver the needed seats quickly. Yet, this approach not only reinforced the disconnect between facilities and academics, but also set the New Construction team including Community Outreach, to do triage rather than to implement systemic reform.

As Steven, an architect who at one point did a great deal of work with the District summarized,

> *If you could convince them…that you could change the trajectory of a child's life if you could connect that child to adults, community resources, etc., that it's even more powerful than the particular course of a school. And, if you could make that intervention and really draw that community together…they'd say no. My job is to build more seats. I'm a facilities person. It has nothing to do with me. (Steven, Architect/Former LASUD consultant)*

Steven went on the emphasize just how much the possibilities for process outcomes are determined by how the problem is defined, pointing out that if the problem is just getting schools built, then all you really need is community buy-in. But, if a problem is defined more holistically, as not only an overcrowding issue, but also a fundamental disconnect between schools and communities, a true community planning process is a logical approach. Peripherally, and probably whole-heartedly, LAUSD has said that it wants to improve the connectedness of schools and communities, in part by building a foundation for sustained community engagement in schools. But, as Steven pointed out,

> *There is no place in the process for the school as community model. There's no champion for it. The task is defined as seats. The need for seats…We are going to come back to this process in 10 years time and say, we just spent $20 billion in the neediest urban and inner-suburban neighborhoods in our community and we got nothing out of it. We still have gang problems. We still don't have access to childcare, heath care, community facilities. We still have a lack of parent/community engagement in schools…But, we did build the seats. (Steven, Architect/Former LAUSD consultant)*

To be fair, the bind that LAUSD is in is not unique to one school district. School districts across California face numerous external requirements that limit their ability to incorporate stakeholder input. Rigid timelines related to funding opportunities often prevent them from engaging community players early on, and then from allowing community debate to run its course. And, many districts, including LAUSD, find themselves so strapped financially that staff can barely do the job they've been assigned, let alone expand their role to include expanded community engagement. So, if districts, including LAUSD, are ill-equipped to do true community planning, what sort of political will and collaboration would be needed for them to expand the scope of community involvement? And, what other barriers, aside from the institutional structure of the District, would need to be overcome?

City/School Dynamics

The political will to build stronger school/community connections, and to begin to do so through inclusive school planning does exist to an extent in many of the small cities of the Southeast. This is evidenced by the hands-on attempt by many local officials to not only engage local stakeholders in the process of new school development, but also to collaborate with LAUSD on behalf of their jurisdictions. These efforts often have been in vein, however, in part because of what drives LAUSD as an institution, and in part because of the status of the Southeast cities relative to other areas of the District that have more political and economic capital to bring to the table. Furthermore, as largely poor, immigrant communities that are not part of the City of L.A., these communities have often been either overlooked or marginalized by LAUSD. As Isabel, a long-time community activist, characterized it,

> *The Southeast Cities have always been a stepchild of L.A., even when (local bond measure) BB was passed, a lot of funding went to other parts of the District first, for renovation. (Isabel, Southeast Community Activist)*

Over the years, cities in the Southeast have undertaken a number of efforts to overcome the disadvantage to which Isabel referred. Some have involved collaborating with LAUSD around school planning, and others sharing recreational facilities. A few of these projects have succeeded; but, in large part, LAUSD's lackluster response to joint planning initiatives has earned the District a reputation as being somewhat intractable.

In addition to perceiving LAUSD as "difficult", if not impossible to work with, City representatives also tend to view the LAUSD as insensitive to local needs. For instance, throughout the new school construction process there have been numerous disputes over the placement of schools within communities. As Isabel explained,

> *The District didn't see the significance of the loss of businesses in some areas. Something as small as a commercial strip is a big deal for small cities like Cudahy. (Isabel, Southeast Community Activist)*

What Isabel describes is a fundamental disconnect that is unsurprising between the interests of a massive, multijurisdictional institution like LAUSD and the leadership of a tiny city like Cudahy. And, despite some of the recent successes Community Outreach have enjoyed, LAUSD often has done little to gather local intelligence toward understanding the needs of such

jurisdictions. George, a former mayor of one of the Southeast cities, recounted a specific story where he felt LAUSD had failed to do its due diligence with the community. As part of a new elementary school project, the District had proposed to take two larger trailer parks. What Doug described was par for the course in how cities viewed LAUSD's capacity for collaboration.

> *First of all, they (LAUSD) didn't believe in communicating with us. So, here we have a room full of people at a council meeting one night. It's all old people, seniors, who live in these trailer parks. They'd all gotten letters from the school district saying, we're going to take your place to build a school. That's the first they'd heard about it. That's like a theme that has happened throughout the years. It wasn't the first time, and it certainly wasn't the last. (Doug, former mayor, Southeast city)*

For their part, local communities also have fallen short in their attempts at collaboration. One problem has been a lack of clarity about local needs and desires with respect to schools and school planning. Local elected officials can say one thing in public about their city's need and desire for schools, and another in private negotiations with LAUSD. Speaking about a local city council member, Diego recounted one example of the ambivalence displaced by local officials.

> *...(She) is a contradiction in herself. (In one context) she supports schools, but when she meets with the District, she's like, we have enough schools. She is a politician. (Diego, LAUSD organizer)*

Despite some cases of ambivalence, most local politicians are aware of the importance of getting and keeping the support of the community groups that drive the election process in these small cities. As one Outreach staff member acknowledged, "folks would know" when a councilmember wasn't supporting a project.

City leadership also has stifled collaboration by either a lack of follow-through or a perceived disregard for the costs and liability the District can incur when it opens up its campuses to neighborhood use outside of school hours. Further, cities have found themselves at odds with the District over losses of housing, which often mean the permanent displacement of residents. As mentioned above, the loss of revenue and employment generating businesses also is of great concern, especially for small cities. For some cities, the ability or desire to be proactive in their attempts to engage in joint school-community planning is also an issue. In short, while a city's interest in having new schools in the area may align with the District's, their perspectives and needs are different.

Evident on both sides is also a lack of capacity for learning from either past mistakes or successes. Further, those collaborative planning successes that have occurred have been hard fought. As Isabel illustrated, despite LAUSD's commitment to developing joint-use elements as part of new campuses, and the desire of local jurisdictions to partner with the District, school planning has remained relatively disjointed from neighborhood planning, and for that matter from school improvement.

> *Schools are their own thing, and get plopped in the middle of the neighborhood, with lots of green space that is captive inside a fence. How do you change some of the arrogance that comes down from the district? It's not just LAUSD, but school districts*

in general, who have the attitude of this is ours, and kind of hold it like that. (*Isabel, Southeast community activist*)

This disjointedness between schools and communities is in part due to the institutional structure of the District; but, it is also a reflection of the nature of the school planning process within many school districts. First, there are constraints as to when a district can legally engage the public. For instance, because it is involved in taking properties, LAUSD cannot map a potential site until it can indicate that that is the best alternative within a neighborhood. So, often, by the time LAUSD gets to the point of talking to the community about a given school site, the options available for public comment are limited. As Phillip, a former District consultant, pointed out,

> *They're talking in either or terms at this point. The public is therefore not truly engaged in the shaping of its schools or its communities. A lot of options are already taken off the table. That's not a good guy, bad guy scenario. That's partly the scale of LAUSD that limits their ability to sit down and talk to players without going public. (Phillip, Architect/former LAUSD consultant)*

In many cases "the public" that Phillip referred to also includes the cities in which new schools are slated for construction. And, LAUSD's attitude has largely been to push forward until local jurisdictions push back. Again, Phillip aptly summarized the plight of local communities.

> *There's not a structure for including other community constituencies in the process. Cities just try and get what they can out of the process, but see it as too costly and time consuming to try and engage with the District. (Phillip, Architect/Former LAUSD consultant)*

Conclusion

In the end, while there are viable models for community planning that LAUSD could follow, it is clear that a number of factors would structurally and politically limit any given trajectory. For instance, for school planning that acknowledges both the community building and place-making potential of school development to occur, an inclusive, early visioning process would be required. Yet, as described throughout this chapter, the political and social dynamics of the community, the District, the cities, and their relationships to one another, all weigh in as limiting factors to the implementation of a planning process that prioritizes the types of sustained school-community connections that could be employed to improve both school and communities.

Chapter Five
Sustained Community Engagement:
Building a Foundation for Long-Term Parent
and Community Involvement in Southeast Schools

I think that the New School Construction Program was the gateway for the District to be able to reach out to the many communities that it serves. I think that it was an eye-opener. Keeping that relationship can only happen through communication. Hopefully, it was a pilot program as to what can be gained from a group like ours. (Luis, Community Outreach staff)

More than ten years into implementation of the nation's largest comprehensive new school construction program, most view as evidence of the program's success the shiny, newly erected buildings that have popped up in and beyond the communities of Southeast L.A. Yet, within and beyond the District, there also are those who see the social infrastructure that simultaneously has been built around these new schools as a powerful, positive outcome of the construction program and associated Community Outreach efforts. As Luis revealed and others have realized, while sustained community involvement within these schools and in larger District policy debates remains a vision to be realized, the potential is real and present. This chapter is about what has occurred to create the current opening, whether through deliberate action by the District, pushback from the community, or a combination of both.

As illustrated in the previous chapter, many impediments were placed in the path of Outreach staff as they set out to engage communities in a way that utilized stakeholder expertise and fostered sustained involvement. Community stakeholders too were limited both by their own lack of capacity and by the process and framework for community engagement set forth by LAUSD. In this chapter, I argue that despite these limiting factors, a combination of intended outcomes and unintended consequences have had the collective effect of fostering community mobilization, and hence the potential for longer term engagement, around schooling in Southeast L.A.

Whether this mobilization will be translated into sustained involvement among parents and other community members remains unknown. But, by documenting a range of openings for long-term parental and community engagement in Southeast area schools, this chapter provides direct evidence that community engagement around new school construction has, in fact, established a foundation for sustained parent and community involvement in schools on which future efforts by LAUSD and its school and community stakeholders can build. In support of the overarching argument that public engagement in the process of new school development in Southeast L.A. has both resulted in benefits to school and neighborhood communities and established a foundation for sustained parent and community involvement in schools, this chapter illuminates how outreach has fared with respect to goals that LAUSD staff articulated to measure their own success[4]:

- Educate the community on the complexity of building new schools

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[4] Bullets are taken from the "New Construction All Hands Community Outreach" PowerPoint Presentation, given on October 26, 2005.

- Within an accelerated construction schedule: 1) identify real opportunities for community input, and 2) manage expectations

- Develop a support base for new schools

- Establish the foundation for community participation beyond completion of new schools.

I use these measures as a launching point in addressing the following primary question: To what extent has the District attempted to build sustainable ways of engaging the community, and in what ways has a foundation for sustained engagement been fostered despite limiting factors? More specifically, I am interested in how well the District did in achieving its own goals, where they fell short, and what happened in and for the communities of the Southeast, despite process deficiencies.

Outreach as an Educational Process

Throughout its new school construction program, LAUSD has endeavored to educate the public on the complexity of building new schools, in large part through press releases and public meetings. Parent and neighborhood activists also have increased their knowledge through their own dogged perseverance. In the end, however, it appears that LAUSD's effort to familiarize stakeholders with the school development process was more an effort to manage expectations than to contribute to the community's edification. Simply put,

> *The first challenge was to get the community to believe that it could be done. (Estrella, LAUSD organizer)*

As discussed in previous chapters, prior to the new school construction program, decades had passed since LAUSD had provided much-needed new schools in Southeast L.A. And, when school projects were undertaken, in the Southeast and elsewhere in the District, they were notoriously abandoned or monumentally over budget. So, as Estrella intimated, outreach began by necessity, as somewhat of a public relations campaign. Yet, despite this somewhat cynical beginning, it appears that valuable learning did occur as a result of the Outreach process. For instance, throughout the course of new school planning, community activists gained knowledge as to what to expect and how to most effectively make demands on the District. Some participants grew so knowledgeable that they took it upon themselves to keep the District honest.

> *Now people are used to the process and make demands…What I love the most is when community members recite the process. They know; they are empowered now. It's different day. (Estrella, LAUSD organizer)*

Above, Estrella referred to the education and ultimate empowerment of community stakeholders as a desired and even celebrated result of their participation in the Community Outreach process. However, the need to strike a balance between empowering the community with knowledge and getting a project done has constantly remained at the forefront of concerns for Community Outreach staff. In short, because it was never the goal of the larger District

apparatus for members of Community Outreach to be community organizers in the purest sense, the education provided by the District often was more of a download of information, and a constant negotiation as to what the community wanted and needed to know.

Cognizant of the closed and challenged relationship LAUSD has had with constituent communities in the past, Outreach staff have been consistently clear that one of the keys to their success was be honest with people about the challenges inherent in planning for school development, and thorough in their dissemination of information. Diego, another LAUSD organizer, shared his own perception of the accomplishments of Community Outreach in this regard,

> *We have accomplished a great deal in terms of educating a lot of community members to be more aware of the construction process. Now it's expected of us to update folks, to make the process transparent. (Diego, LAUSD organizer)*

It is clear given Diego's and Estrella's perspectives that building the bridge between informing the public to educating and even empowering them has been the task of Community Outreach. And, as explained in the previous chapter, whatever success Outreach staff have enjoyed in this endeavor has occurred despite the resistance of other staff and leadership within the Facilities Division. As Diego succinctly emphasized, Community Outreach

> *...was (created) in spite of everyone else not wanting to have community involvement.*

Indeed, in spite of everyone and everything working against the implementation of an authentic community involvement process, the education and empowerment of the community clearly went beyond the scope intended by LAUSD leadership. More specifically, while the District's aim was to educate the public about *this* process, the process of building new schools, community stakeholders ultimately became educated in how to participate in *the* process. As stakeholder understanding of the school construction process has evolved over time, in other words, so did the capacity of community stakeholders for applying their expanded cultural and political capital to new and different challenges. Estrella, a long-time District employee explained,

> *Now people are used to the process, and they make demands…People now know that if they don't like something the LAUSD is doing, they can reach out to elected officials. (Estrella, LAUSD organizer)*

As Estrella implied, parent and community activists have both gained a better understanding of the process trajectory and where to insert themselves within it, and become more savvy about the importance of social and political capital. In fact, a number of community activists made it a point to mention their connections with prominent community and District leaders. Members of Padres Unidos talked not only about the importance of their connections with political officials, but also noted that some of those officials had come up out of the community as a result of their activism. Still, as time goes on, the community's continued education, whether enabled in part by the District, or by virtue of their own activism, will be crucial as the fight for better schools is likely continue as a battle waged primarily within the grassroots. As Selena, a community activist summarized regarding politics in the Southeast,

Just because they (politicians) are racially and politically aligned, doesn't mean they have the community's best interests at heart. They are people who are self-interested. And, they will use these positions as climbing posts rather than to make change. (Selena, community activist)

The larger issue to which Selena alluded is the power imbalance that exists both within participatory planning efforts and community organizing campaigns, and that can limit the possibility of fruitful collaboration. In planning, the tension is between the developer and his/her public agency allies against the neighborhood; while, in organizing for school reform, it is the institution (be it a school or a district) against the community. In either case, capacity building among the less empowered faction is crucial to altering power dynamics and achieving shared goals. For her part, and contrary to the positive outlook expressed by many Outreach staff members, Selena remains skeptical of the likelihood that the current activist base in the Southeast is capable of advancing serious school reform initiatives. But, only time will tell what influence the education of community stakeholders around new school construction will have on the overall reform landscape.

Creating a Forum for the Community to be Heard

True to its mission, LAUSD's Community Outreach process has provided opportunities for parents and other community members to express their concerns related to the construction of new schools, even within an accelerated schedule for constructing new schools. Where should schools be sited? What should they look like? What types of facilities should they provide for general community use? As depicted in Chapter 3, these are all matters on which input was sought and received by the District from the community.

Additionally, and perhaps equally important, the process has provided a forum for community stakeholders to express concerns above and beyond those directly related to the topic at hand. More specifically, a review of summaries and transcripts from the dozens of meetings LAUSD held over the course of the last several years reveals that the Community Outreach process has served not only as an opportunity for public comment on proposed school projects, but also as a forum for community members to voice their general concerns about LAUSD and its schools. Acknowledging that the process has filled a void in opportunities for communication between the District and the communities it serves, and in doing so, became a forum for the community to vent about issues related to schools in general, one School Board member revealed,

There is no other forum for people to complain…When you are engaging parents at a school site, no matter what the meeting is about, parents will take the opportunity to speak their minds. (Clara, LAUSD School Board Member)

Anna, a former Board staff member concurred with Clara and expanded on the importance of providing a forum for community stakeholders to air their concerns, the benefits of Community Outreach in this regard, and the connection of mutual awareness to community activism.

...other people are hearing their concerns and they're saying, yeah, that's true. And, maybe that's building an awareness that they already have. But, they're able to air that awareness and make other people aware that, you know, this isn't normal…I don't think we've ever done a good job of going out into the community. So, to have the District leave Beaudry[5] and go out to the community, I think that's one of the benefits. (Anna, Former LAUSD School Board Staff Member)

Regarding the importance of dialogue between LAUSD and community stakeholders, both Anna and Clara embody a perspective similar to that of Community Outreach staff. Namely, that having a forum for folks to express concerns is crucial, not only to the proper dissemination of information regarding District goals and policies, but also to ensure that effective partnerships for school improvement can be formed between District professionals and parents and other community members. Indeed, as evidenced by Mediratta's study, *Organized Communities, Stronger Schools*, District-led reform efforts are likely to be both more politically palatable and ultimately more successful when District leadership priorities and organizing interests can be aligned through communication (Mediratta et al 2008).

The lion's share of concerns expressed at LAUSD Community Outreach meetings were related to relocation – *How much will I get for my home? When will I know if my home will be taken? What relocation benefits will I receive?* But, many comments recorded in community meeting reports related to educational issues beyond the seizure of properties and the aesthetics of the school that would replace them. Instead, parents and other community members brought to the fore concerns about failing schools and diminishing resources:

You want to eliminate the negative effect in the community but every school is failing and has no resources. Crenshaw just got decertified. Their degrees are not worth anything…Throw out the current system.

It's good you're recording and because we want to make sure that its going all the way up but our children need books. We don't have books; we have bad bathrooms. The chairs and desks – what happens with the tests? California is at the bottom – what's happened?

The money has been spent on air conditioning – but we cannot use the money for books or for teacher's salaries…we hope that with the same passion you ask the state to give us the money so that we can have to money for books and teachers salaries.

We need to do something about the congestion; we have kids crossing the railroad tracks. I've made several calls to Huntington Park because we need to police that area. I saw a school police talking with a guard and two girls fighting there. We need to voice this out about the issues.

You have heard everything about how we don't want to lose our home and concerns about how bad our education system is. And how needy and how bad conditions in our schools are, the football team doesn't have showers.

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[5] Beaudry is the street in Downtown Los Angeles where LAUSD's main office is located.

For the most part, the above concerns relate to school resources, including the lack of funds for adequate teacher salaries, for campus police services, and for basic needs like books and school furniture. Yet, in addition to voicing concerns related to the quality of schools LAUSD provides, meeting attendees registered complaints about the institutional culture of the District. Some such complaints related back to the type of generalized, long-standing distrust of LAUSD that was discussed in previous chapters. Still others pinpointed the racial and geographic tensions of the Southeast area that many residents perceive as impacting education. For instance, addressing a District staff member at a community meeting, participants submit the following comments,

> *I find it hard to believe you. You never come to us truthfully. We would like as parents for you to come and tell us the truth. Since we are Hispanics, you think we know nothing.*

> *This is a circus they are organizing. They are using us and lying to us. They are used to Latinos fighting amongst one another. Huntington Park and South Gate say they will not allow the LAUSD to build any school. These people think that they are going to do something with us, but they should have taken us into account earlier.*

At separate public meetings, residents expressed concerns about District practices by emphasizing community insiders and District outsiders. These comments again speak to the power differentials that exist between District decision makers and their constituents. In LAUSD, as in other urban districts, these dynamics have often been exacerbated by racial and ethnic differences such as those highlighted by the above comments, and by tensions between those who hold power and those who do not.

> *You are here to lie to the community…you have only come to stir up trouble in the community. He wants to build a high school in Maywood and he insists on continuing. We need to get him out of our community.*

> *The school district has no historical memory. Maybe you should listen to these people to find out what occurred even before 5 years. You need to have us here. The community needs these schools and resources now and in the future.*

Both of the above commenters emphasized community needs over District intentions. And, while each acknowledged District-community conflict, the second speaker attempted to turn the power differential on its head – valuing historical perspective above the power to make decisions.

Ultimately, despite the intent of Community Outreach, which was to gather input on the discreet topic of new school construction, it made sense that given a new found forum for voicing their concerns, local residents would take full advantage. At long last, Southeast residents had a captive audience in the form of Community Outreach staff, to whom they expressed a broad range of concerns related to LAUSD schools and their governance. When LAUSD set out to interface with the public around the development of new schools in Southeast L.A., one of its primary goals was to identify opportunities for community input and to manage

expectations, each within the context of an accelerated construction schedule. This goal is particularly telling of the challenges that Community Outreach staff faced as attempted to find authentic ways of soliciting stakeholder input, against the backdrop of limitations placed on them by the genuine constraints of the development process (i.e., schedule, budget) and the overarching goals of the Facilities Division, that as explained in Chapter 4, are inextricably tied to such constraints.

In the end, input was offered by the community and received by the District. However, the scope of stakeholders comments and concerns were likely more than Outreach staff had bargained for; and, the extent to which the community was willing to allow its expectations to be managed was less than many in Facilities had hoped. So, despite an effort at outreach that, in the words of the Board member quoted above, "felt more like compliance", the community was able to make itself heard on topics of critical importance that reached above and beyond issues related to new school siting and design.

Developing a Support Base for New Schools

As described in chapter 4, the overarching intent of the school development process and the internal workings of the Facilities Division presented barriers to what Community Outreach staff were able to accomplish through community engagement. Thus, while the vision may have been for the Outreach process to be an instrumental part of developing a support base for new schools in the Southeast and beyond, the actual design and implementation of the process did little to incubate the mobilization that took place into a sustainable foundation of community support. Ultimately, whatever components of a school support base that did emerge with the planning and development of new schools were largely an unintended bi-product of the overall school construction program.

That said, the very fact that after decades of overcrowding and long student commutes, new schools finally were built in the neighborhoods of the Southeast L.A., created new opportunities for community involvement in schools. As described below, such opportunities have emerged in the form of increased opportunities for parent involvement in schools, and city-school connections manifest as city-District partnerships and inter-city alliances around school improvement. Again, while Community Outreach cannot necessarily claim full credit for such outcomes, the emergence of community-District dialogue after so many years did open the door for community-wide consideration of what it will take for these new schools to succeed.

Parent Participation

In many ways, building new schools in areas where neighborhood schools have long been absent has created opportunities for parents to participate in their children's education. Insofar as educators and researchers alike consider parent involvement to be chief among the types of school-community connections that are important for improving overall school quality and individual student achievement, this is a significant development. It should be noted that within the research on parental involvement, there are numerous definitions as to what "involvement" entails. For instance, some researchers emphasize activities that take place at the school in their definition of parent involvement, such as parental attendance at school events and participation in parent-teacher organizations. Others include home-based activities that support student achievement, such as parental homework help and discussions about school issues between

parents and children. Still others refer to involvement more conceptually, and instead of referring to parent practices, focus more on the idea of supporting a child through encouragement and high aspirations (Jordan et al 2001).

In describing the opportunities for parent involvement that have resulted from the construction of new schools within the neighborhoods of Southeast L.A., I refer primarily to opportunities for parents to participate in school-based activities. However, it is my assumption that parents who are physically involved at their child's school are likely to engage in other types of involvement as well, such as helping with homework and demonstrating through encouragement and high expectations an overall value for education. Further, such opportunities and behaviors are particularly critical in communities like Southeast L.A., wherein English and non-English speaking parents have traditionally felt unwelcome in their children's schools. For, despite perceptions that some parents are not highly involved in their children's education because they just don't care, research supports a different conclusion. According to a recent Civic Enterprises study on parent involvement in schools, 1) a significant majority of parents of all racial and income backgrounds share high aspirations for their children, (2) they believe that parental involvement is necessary for their children's success in school, and (3) the majority of parents who are not as involved as they should be generally believe there are things that schools can do to foster greater involvement (Bridgeland et al 2008). In other words, most parents want to be involved; many just need to be presented with opportunities to do so.

One of the primary ways that the construction of new schools in the Southeast has provided opportunities for parent involvement has been simply to build schools. As described previously, schools in the Southeast have been so crowded for so long, that students have been forced to attend schools outside of their neighborhoods, often in far-off parts of the District. One of the effects of this has been that the ability to parents to visit their children's schools, to volunteer their time in classrooms, to participate in campus work sessions, or to attend meetings has been limited. Thus, simply by returning children to their neighborhood schools, opportunities for this type of school-based parent involvement have been increased. Sylvia, a parent activist with Padres Unidos described how new schools not only have encouraged more involvement, but also made the broader connection of the importance of parental involvement in schools for improving student outcomes.

> *Parents are now closer to the schools…we are asking for parent rooms at each new school, working with principals and superintendents to make sure schools offer resources that parents need…The District knows how important parent involvement in schools is for kids' education to grow. (Sylvia, Padres Unidos)*

As another parent activist explained, the ability for parents to become involved in their children's schools (and, by extension, in education in general) has been made easier with the development of new schools in the Southeast, in part because parents now live closer to the schools. This has allowed schools to recruit parents for recreational activities or training opportunities, and made it easier for activists to work with principals and superintendents to make sure schools offer resources that parents need. Importantly, Sylvia, along with other involved parents, give some of the credit for helping parents to help their kids to the District. The District knows, another parent explained, how important parent involvement is for their children's education. And, with the growth of parent (and community) involvement, she sees a continued increase in the number of students from her community that are graduating from high

school and going to college as a logical outcome.

LAUSD has not always demonstrated an awareness of the importance of parent involvement. In fact, just as LAUSD historically has not valued community input and involvement in its schools, it also has maintained a reputation, both at a District and a school level, for putting off parents. Isabel, a local organizer, referred to the prevalence of what she termed an "open hostility" toward parents in LAUSD schools. Ramona, a member of the Southeast Parents expanded on this, explaining that the historically negative relationship between parents and schools historically.

> *When parents go and ask, schools perceive it as a problem. They come to help, but that's not how it's perceived. Some schools don't want parent centers, because they think it's just a lot of trouble. (Ramona, Southeast Parents)*

Ramona went on to provide a personal account of her frustration with her daughter's school in this regard. What she described was a barrier to involvement that emerged both due to proximity (her daughter was bused to a school outside of the neighborhood) *and* school culture. Her request was fairly straightforward: to be invited to parent meetings at her daughter's school, and to have the meetings held at a time that would allow her (and other parents in her situation) to attend. And, in her opinion, the school's reaction was indicative of the lack of value placed on parent participation, both by individual schools and by the District as a whole.

> *They had meetings at 4pm at the school. I called and told them that I wanted to attend the meetings, and was told that they didn't include parents whose kids travel to go to school, and had not for years included those parents. (Ramona, Southeast Parents)*

Hence, in addition to having to endure years of school overcrowding and bussing, students and parents in the Southeast also had to withstand concomitant practices such as excluding certain parents from schools meetings that had been institutionalized over time. Ramona went on to point out that if she, as a parent who works for the District, finds it difficult to deal with the school, she could only imagine how other parents who are not as connected as she is feel.

In the context of this discussion, Isabel explained that while there *has* been a recent acknowledgment by LAUSD that the devaluing of parent participation is a problem District-wide, the problem remains prevalent. For instance, parents who only want to be involved in their children's education have been characterized as troublemakers, and there have been documented cases of hostility toward parents by principals. Some principals, she explained, had on occasion outright banned parents from schools. Because part of this tension may stem from the fact that many parents only get involved when they are having trouble with their kids, finding ways to get parents involved in more proactive and positive ways will likely bring positive results.

Again, as evidenced by the Civic Enterprises study cited above, most parents are interested in being more involved with their children's schools. Yet, beyond the relationship between the proximity of school to home and the likelihood that parents will become involved, there is a clear correlation between the kind of outreach to parents a school performs and the level of involvement and satisfaction of those parents. In other words, a real or perceived lack of effort on the part of schools correlates highly with lower levels of involvement and satisfaction (Bridgeland, et al, 2008).

One concrete, school-centered opportunity for parent involvement has emerged in the

form of parent centers, a feature that parent activists from all of the CBOs involved in the construction process fought to have included at each new school. One parent activist from Padres Unidos described the importance the organization places on parent centers, and how the spaces for parents in the new schools have been improved from older schools, where parents only had "little closet-like rooms".

The use of the spaces provided on school campuses for parent volunteers also has changed over time. Whereas earlier versions were often used more as social gathering spaces, newer parent centers generally are used as spaces for volunteers to work out of, to hold meetings, and to do prep work for projects that teachers then implement in the classroom. As an administrator at Tweedy elementary described of the parent center on her campus,

> *I would say it's being used more as a parent center, with volunteers working out of it; more like parent centers are supposed to be running. Whereas the first year I was here, it felt more like a club…now they have a center where they can get in and they can be useful – and some of them are now volunteers in the classroom…(Lisa, Administrator, Tweedy Elementary)*

As Lisa alluded to, and consistent with the Civic Enterprises findings summarized above, parents increasingly are looking for more meaningful ways to get involved in local schools. Many of the parent-led meetings held in the centers in Southeast schools, for instance, are now geared toward helping parents to become more involved in their children's education, in ways beyond helping teachers by doing their project prep work. For example, some centers will hold a class providing subject matter assistance for parents to support their children on one day, and an opportunity for parents to meet with a school counselor the next.

Many parent centers in the Southeast also hold ESL classes for parents, so they are better able to communicate with school staff and with their predominantly English-speaking children. Yet, while providing opportunities for parents to learn English is meant to encourage them to do so, non-English parents are by no means precluded from involvement. The administration at Maywood Academy High School, for instance, is well aware of the population of parents they are dealing with: the school is 99.9 percent Latino, and according to the principal, "the majority" of parents don't speak English. The school makes an effort to include parents who aren't always well-versed in how to interface with the school, by printing a newsletter in both Spanish and English, and by generally trying to create a culture where parents and other community members feel like schools staff are available to them.

Many parents have become more involved simply by participating in the enrichment opportunities available through parent centers. Yet, others have gone above and beyond, becoming parent volunteers and leaders. Soledad, one such parent, became a volunteer at the new school because as she saw it, having the school in her community was an opportunity presenting itself to her.

> *I knew that because it was a new school…I though that I had something to give, because my daughter was here, and my community. I've lived here for 25 years, so I thought that it'd be good if I do a little bit, if I do something for my community and for my family to be here and help in any way. (Soledad, Parent Volunteer, Southeast High School)*

Soledad also talked about how she became a community representative for the school after

volunteering for a period of time and becoming more and more comfortable being in the school, and described the satisfaction she feels being involved and helping other parents to find ways to participate.

> *...it's very inspiring to have parent that are here to help. And, that makes my day, to help them. And they help the school. To me it's a value filled time that they give for the school and for the community. (Soledad, Parent Volunteer, Southeast High School)*

In addition to school-directed participation, having new neighborhood schools also has provided opportunities for parent-directed activities to occur in schools. Such activities are intended to foster community connections, create ways for schools to use parents as resources, and allow parents to utilize their skills in a way that supports their child's school. As Betty, a Parent U-Turn activist described,

> *Parents are seeking out programs to bring to the school. They play a role in bringing what they think they need at their school, and that affects the community as a whole. (Betty, Parent U-Turn)*

The type of parent participation in both school and community improvement described by Betty holds a great deal of promise for new schools and the Southeast L.A. neighborhoods that surround them. Yet, while the presence of new schools in the Southeast appears to be increasing opportunities for parent involvement, the levels of participation are many schools are still relatively low. Soledad made a point of how challenging it has been to get more parents into the school.

> *...we have 2800 kids right now, and if we have a meeting here, we have 20 or 30 parents, or at most it's 40. To me, it's a struggle to get those parents that don't come to come. It's a struggle, what can I do to bring more parents here? What can the school do to bring more parents to get involved? (Soledad, Parent Volunteer)*

When asked what she sees as the biggest barrier to increasing involvement, Soledad admitted that she really didn't know.

> *I would like to know. I would like to know so I can get them to come…The school wants to get parents involved in trainings that will help their children. Because I believe that if we help one child, my child, the community is going to receive what she is going to give. Most of the parents, for whatever reason, they don't want to be involved with me. So, that is my challenge. (Soledad, Parent Volunteer, Southeast High School)*

The challenge that Soledad and others have articulated, of increasing the physical presence of parents on school campuses, is certainly an important goal. But, as mentioned above, also at issue are the different conceptions among parents themselves as to what constitutes "involvement". For instance, while a parent may maintain consistent contact with a child's teacher through telephone calls and written notes, or provide homework assistance and constant encouragement at home, he or she may not participate actively in volunteer activities at the school campus. Relatedly, researchers are only just beginning to understand the ways in which culturally diverse families are already involved in their children's education and how to engage

them in new ways (Jordan et al 2001). Given the complexity of defining involvement, the National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools makes the important point that because school personnel and parents may conceptualize parent involvement activities and outcomes differently, there is a need to more fully explore teacher and parent perspectives about what constitutes appropriate collaboration and what role each can and should play in a child's education (Izzo et al 1999, as cited in Jordan et al 2001).

Regardless of how it happens, increasing and expanding parent involvement is particularly important in areas like Southeast L.A., given how disconnected many parents have felt from their children's education. Especially for immigrant parents, who may feel unfamiliar with the educational system and often unwelcome in their children's schools, actively encouraging parent participation is one way to broaden the range of community stakeholders contributing to school improvement efforts. When asked whether the District has some responsibility for finding ways to help people to get involved, Soledad, the parent activist at Southeast High School, replied,

> *Yes, it would be good. I come from Mexico and it took me years to get involved in the school. So, it might be true what he said (referencing a remark I shared with her by a local city council member about it taking generations for immigrant parents to get involved). And, if we have more information, more someone to tell them, you know, get involved, just be here and you will see. (Soledad, Southeast High School, parent volunteer)*

City-School Connections

Just as there are numerous incarnations of parent involvement in schools, there also are many ways of defining community-school connections. While some define school-community connections as formals partnership between the school and another local organization, business, or government entity, others highlight learning opportunities that take students out of the classroom and into the community for real-life experiences such as job internships and community research projects (Henderson and Mapp 2002). Still other researchers and practitioners look at the role of the school in the larger community—as a community center or a community institution that provides services and amenities to the community and plays a role in community development efforts (Bingler, Blank, Dryfoos).

This section describes the types of community-school connections that have emerged out of LAUSD's school construction process, as illuminated through interviews conducted and observations made during visits to schools and community events. Such connections, which have the potential to make a significant contribution to the development of a base of support for local schools, generally fall under the categories of school-community partnerships and schools as community institutions. Included within the former category are alliances formed between communities and with the District to work to toward the improvement of local schools. Community-driven school reform efforts also are important examples of community-school connectedness. The emergence of this particular phenomenon in the Southeast is addressed in the following section of this chapter, where the expansion of participation in the school development process to include broader school reform efforts is discussed.

One salient example of Intra-city and city-District collaboration observed in the

Southeast was the activism of the Southeast Cities Schools Coalition (SCSC), a quasi-governmental organization comprised of representatives of the six Southeast "hub" cities, along with LAUSD representatives. The group established itself in large part to ensure that the communities of Southeast L.A. would see their fair share of school construction dollars. However, its goals are very much framed around creating stronger connections between schools and communities, for the sake of LAUSD students, their families, and the communities in which they live.

SCSC was formed initially in 2005, and formalized in July of that year, when Antonio Villaraigosa was elected Mayor of Los Angeles. This timing was no coincidence, as the coalition was created in part out of fear that Villaraigosa's ambition for taking over LAUSD would leave poorer, smaller cities that are outside of the City of Los Angeles even more powerless than they already were when it came to influencing when and where new schools would be located in their communities. In addition to their desire to present a united front against both the City of L.A. and LAUSD, the Southeast cities also were motivated by a desire to vet issues around school construction and to find ways to encourage the planning of schools in concert with other development. In short, these communities wanted new schools, but didn't want them planned by the District without their consultation.

According to locals following the school construction process, as well as District staff and leadership, the alliance of these small cities around the promise of new schools was no small feat. These cities are often very boundary conscious and territorial; thus, as one early member of the coalition put it, it is "a big deal" that these cities were willing to attempt to overcome their disputes in order to advance local interests while attempting to better weave schools into the fabric of their communities. As Anna, a former School Board employee described,

> *When I was there (in the Southeast), there was a lot of division between, there's a hierarchy between those cities. And it wasn't until this role was created that there was a scent of unity among them. So, I think that's very positive. I think they've come a long way…If they continue to look at themselves by their boundaries, then they are not going to succeed. (Anna, former LAUSD School Board employee)*

The "role" that Anna referred to is that of director of SCSC, who is charged with keeping abreast of local school development issues and helping to mediate disputes between LAUSD and its member communities. As Isabel, an early member of the coalition explained, there have been numerous disputes between LAUSD and local communities over the placement of schools. One cause of such disputes has been the perceived insensitivity of LAUSD to local needs and concerns. For instance, the District failed to see the significance, according to local community members, of the loss of a relatively small number of businesses for a small, poor city. Similarly, the loss of homes has been an issue of great concern to leadership and community stakeholders in the Southeast, particularly because these cities are so small and the housing stock is already overcrowded. As explained by Theresa, a member of South Gate's City Council,

> *The City's perspective on siting new schools is that we want to relocate as few residents as possible, but avoid the loss of revenue to the City resulting from lost businesses. (Theresa, South Gate City Council)*

While this perspective - shared not just among others in the City of South Gate, but also

amongst residents in other Southeast cities - may seem reasonable, the desired results have in many cases remained elusive. Sometimes, as many local stakeholders claimed, LAUSD has made matters worse by proceeding with projects, ignorant of local community and economic development interests. Yet, probably more often, the problem has been logistical: either a school facility needs to be constructed, and ample, suitable land in the desired location has been scarce; or, creative solutions have eluded the District, in large part because it has been unwilling to go to the trouble of working with local cities.

As Michael, a former City of Bell official pointed out, there have been past examples of City-District collaboration around schools. One is Theresa Hughes Elementary in Cudahy, a project for which a joint-powers agreement was formed between LAUSD and the City of Bell. The agreement continues to provide for joint use and management of the grass fields situated adjacent to the school site; and, according to Michael, the fields are a huge success. They are packed with kids, especially at night, and their location has allowed the City of Bell to create an aggressive soccer program. Yet, despite this and other successes, such joint planning efforts have never become the norm – in part because the push-back that local cities feel they've gotten from LAUSD has left them with the sense that even if the results could be positive, the effort required is just too much. Michael summarized his own perspective on collaborating with the District - a perception of LASUD that is typical of local leadership in the Southeast cities,

> *They (LAUSD) don't know how to plan. They don't interact with the public very well. They don't listen in that respect. A new school is going to be built in Bell, and it's going to have a wonderful joint-use program. But, it took the City of Bell fighting with them…They talk about joint-use with cities. They brag about it, but they don't collaborate to do it. The District is arrogant…they need to be more cognizant of how they could improve neighborhoods, like removing undesirable uses. The City of Bell is pushing the District to think that way, but (I) can't say it's happening in other cities. (Michael, former City of Bell official)*

Distributing the blame beyond LAUSD to make local cities at least partially culpable, Anna described the lack of understanding among the public about what it takes for cities and school districts to orchestrate joint projects, and highlighted some of the shortcomings that local cities may demonstrate in their attempts to coordinate with the District.

> *I don't think that either the City or the District is really doing their job in building communities, the appropriate way, at least. (Anna, former LAUSD School Board staff member)*

It was out of a sense that local governments had a role to play, and an effort to make school-community collaboration in the Southeast more common and more fruitful that SCSC was created. From Michael's perspective, such collaboration is particularly important around joint-use projects that provide recreational opportunities in the Southeast. While the cities of Huntington Park and South Gate are both lucky enough to have sizeable city parks, he noted, the greater Southeast area generally lacks adequate parks and open space. Thus, as Michael described, the Southeast Cities Schools Coalition also was created to encourage consistency in how the District deals with cities.

So, it wasn't just every city having to fight with the District over every joint use-agreement. (*Michael, former City of Bell official*)

Beyond ensuring the creation of additional recreational and open space amenities in Southeast L.A., the SCSC also is interested in looking at public safety issues in a more regional way by encouraging and participating in collaborations between local police departments, and between police departments and schools. Further, the Coalition seeks to work toward regionalizing programming – for instance, for pre-schools. And, over time, local leadership see the Coalition as an advocacy organization, focused on building networks and social capital among local residents.

City-School Silos

Just as LAUSD cannot be held fully accountable for the lack of city-school collaboration in Southeast L.A., the problem of challenged or absent city-district collaboration is not unique to this particular area within LAUSD, or for that matter, to this district. School and community governance structures often operate as separate silos, even though they are integrally connected in so many ways – spatially, socially, politically, and economically. Isabel framed it well when discussing the problem of the city-school disconnect, and the related governance issues at hand for a quasi-governmental body like the SCSC,

Schools are their own thing, and get plopped in the middle of the neighborhood with lots of green space that is captive inside a fence…It's not just LAUSD, but school districts in general, who have the attitude of, this is ours, and kind of hold it like that. (Isabel, SCSC member)

It is for this reason that one of the primary goals of inter-city collaboration in the Southeast has been to break beyond this convention. But, for certain, it is a tough mold to break. Steven, an educational activist and community schools advocate framed the dilemma in a way similar to Michael's characterization above,

They (the District) see it as their money. Why should we work with a city or park district? It's an attitude reflected in the DNA…they don't see themselves as trustees of the public's money. (Steven, architect, community schools advocate)

While Steven's statement may or may not be true from LAUSD's perspective, it is clear that the District, by virtue of it's own "DNA", traditionally has limited its own charge to building and programming facilities, while divorcing itself from larger issues of the connections between community development and school improvement. The following sentiment crystallizes both the challenge and the importance of the efforts of SCSC to find ways to break down the city-school silos, and to consider school reform to necessarily be a collaborative undertaking,

If you could convince them…that you could change the trajectory of a child's life if you could connect that child to adults, community resources, etc. that it's even more powerful than the particular course of a school, and if you could make this intervention and really draw that community together, and put all of these different services together in walking

distance for families to get to, that you could have educational benefits, they'd say no. My job is to build more seats. I'm a facilities person. It has nothing to do with me. So, if that's the definition of the job, you can't do what we're talking about (build community schools). (Steven, architect, community schools advocate)

It is yet to be determined whether LAUSD has the desire or the will to move beyond the narrow mission that Steven described toward a movement of drawing stakeholders together to build community schools. But, for it's part, the SCSC is working to make current activism count toward the long-term stability and success of new schools in the Southeast. Members are doing so by attempting to answer critical questions about how to build and sustain community capacity. For instance: How do you get critical thought and long-term vision as part of activism, so that you are at the table with the "ask" that's going to push your agenda forward? Isabel, a founding member of the Coalition, framed the group's current push as an effort to refine and channel local community activism.

> *We are trying to get everyone to think long term about what we need, and not to get pissy about the one school project that doesn't go your way…to bring about change by getting a little bit here and a little bit there, working toward long-term systemic change. (Isabel, local activist, founding member Southeast Cities Schools Coalition)*

Establishing the Foundation for Community Participation Beyond the Completion of New Schools

Finally, in response to, and to some extent in spite of, the District's institutional orientation and process, the school construction process and associated community outreach and involvement have spawned an expansion of educational activism in Southeast L.A. They have done so by providing a launching point for some individuals and organizations and a logical arena for the expansion of others. And, ten years and dozens of new schools later, such activism appears to be at the very least laying the groundwork for they sustained community participation in schools that LAUSD claims to be striving for.

CBOs like Parent U-turn, for example, existed prior to the new school construction program, and have expanded their reach to include issues related to school construction. Other organizations, such as Padres Unidos of South Gate, coalesced around the construction program. Southeast Parents (Padres del Surestes), which boasts 500 registered members, formed before the construction program and began by offering classes for parents in the community, but really blossomed with its advocacy for new schools. As one representative explained,

> *We do workshops for parents, in leadership and personal development. We partner with community colleges to give classes in leadership. This was happening before the district process. Now, we can't stop people. (Ramona, Southeast Parents)*

Ramona elaborated on the mission of the group, explaining that she sees her job as improving the schools, getting parents involved, and improving communication with parents.

> *With the campaign to build new schools almost gone, now we are trying to improve education. (Ramona, Southeast Parents)*

Padres Unidos, a group that has been extremely involved in the effort to build new schools in the Southeast, prides itself on its development as an organization and on its direct involvement in schools. The group, which was born out of the Community Outreach process, now holds meetings once a month. In the spirit of collaboration, LAUSD organizers regularly attend these meetings. Padres Unidos also maintains a parent representative in each of the schools in South Gate as a way of holding school principals and the District accountable.

As Estrella, an LAUSD organizer explained, all of the groups (CBOs) have at some point been involved in site selection. Now, they are active around instruction and other issues at the schools.

> *They (community activists) have come into contact with other folks who are in politics, activism, and they have become activists. I don't know if they are focused on policy, as much as current community issues, as well as parent engagement classes...it doesn't seem like they are going to stop meeting because our process is done. Now these groups meet on a weekly or monthly basis. And it seems like they are going to keep meeting. (Estrella, LAUSD organizer)*

Similarly, Clara, another LAUSD Community Outreach staff member who has worked extensively with the community stakeholders of the Southeast, commented,

> *They (community stakeholders) all sound like elected officials running for election...just really focused on improving the lives of their children, and even those in their community -all the children in their community, not necessarily their own kids. (Clara, LAUSD organizer)*

Not surprisingly, this theme of taking care of all of the community's children was ever-present in conversations with local community members. Selena, a local elementary school principal pointed to Padres Unidos, in particular, as a prominent force on the educational scene in the Southeast area, noting the group's desire to improve the educational landscape for all of South Gate's children.

> *They're very active in this area and their focus was just new schools in general for a very long time – Tweedy in particular. I think they're changing their focus from having a nice building to having a quality education. I'm pleased to see that they're really interested in making sure that happens for the children. (Selena, principal, Southeast Elementary School)*

In line with Estrella and Clara's observations, the members of Padres Unidos themselves see their vision and mission very clearly,

> *We know what we want, and we work for that. We feel passion for things we are doing. We work for the community...we use every resource we have available. (Claudia, Padres Unidos founder)*

To ensure the continuance of their work, the group has begun the process of forming a non-profit arm. The goal of the organization, they explained, will be to advocate for parents who need help navigating various school-related issues, including overcrowding, student drop-out, or not feeling welcome at their children's schools. Arguably, the parents' grassroots efforts could prove instrumental in sustaining parent and community mobilization around Southeast schools.

In reflecting on the engagement that has blossomed around school construction, Diego, a long-time organizer with LAUSD, concurred with other organizers in his account of the potential for sustained activism around schools in the Southeast,

> *Groups are working on a bunch of stuff that has nothing to do with school construction; they are always busy. They are always going to be there. We are just one thing on their agenda. (Diego, LAUSD organizer)*

Diego also illuminated what is unique about how community stakeholders in the Southeast have mobilized around new school construction. He noted that in the City of L.A., education is "just one issue on a larger canvas of issues", whereas, in the Southeast, "folks are really focused on education". Asked whether he thought the construction process had spurred sustained involvement of community stakeholders in schools, Diego responded by emphasizing how things had changed at LAUSD with respect to its communication with the public,

> *The District's attitude was a lot different in 1999…there just wasn't that push to build new schools. They didn't really care. They didn't really have that communication with parents. Now, there's a lot of communication, around facilities and construction but also around other issues – academics, the inner workings of a school once it's built. (Diego, LAUSD organizer)*

So, while Diego and the other LAUSD organizers are clear that their role (and consequently the District's) ends when the ribbon is cut at a new school, they also acknowledge that community stakeholders clearly have learned to use the school construction process as an entry point into involvement in the educational system. As Luis, another LAUSD organizer put it,

> *I think that parents are definitely keyed up about the new school construction program. And, that momentum has been sustained and reinvigorated with the opening of each new school. (Luis, LAUSD organizer)*

Echoing the spirit of Luis's remark, a member of LAUSD's School Board characterized grassroots activism around education in Southeast L.A. as an evolution.

> *I have seen this community go from 50 person meetings to being able to take a busload down to the District…There's a growing awareness around the problem, and an evolution of knowing who our leaders are…(LAUSD School Board Member)*

Along with this Board Member, activists and other District staff alike acknowledged a growing awareness of educational issues and an expansion of activism around schools, both of which represent an important step toward meaningful reform. But, how will activism around schools in the Southeast evolve from here? Given that building new schools will not forever be a

means to reinvigorate the momentum of parent and community activists, it remains to be seen whether this level of activism will be sustained once the school construction projects are done. Some fear that much of the current school activism lacks depth on policy issues, and thus may not affect lasting change in the areas that matter most. Others feel that beyond hoping for and relying upon sustained activism, LAUSD has a responsibility to play some sort of role— even once all of the new schools are built—to create and maintain connections between schools and communities. In particular, there are those within LAUSD who see a continued role for Community Outreach, post new construction program, to keep stakeholders engaged and involved in schools. As Estrella explained,

> *I think that New School Construction was the gateway for the district to be able to reach out to the many communities that it serves. I think that it was an eye-opener. Keeping the relationship can only happen through communication. Hopefully, it was a pilot program as to what can be gained from a group like ours. (Estrella, LAUSD organizer)*

So, who will initiate such communication? And, how will it be guided and sustained toward the goal of improving schools in Southeast L.A. and beyond? Only time, and an interpretation of present events as they may pertain to the future, will tell.

Conclusion

To paraphrase a long time organizer within LAUSD, a great deal of good has come out of the new school construction program: from empowering folks to become active around education, and in some cases to run for office, to addressing blight issues in local communities, and allowing some families who had been renting homes to take their pay-out from the District and become first-time home owners. It appears, however, that all of this, including the opening of doors for an expansion of activism around schools in the Southeast, cannot be wholly (or even primarily) attributed to District-led outreach efforts. As described in Chapter 3, such efforts have done much to build public trust and ultimately to cultivate the kind of community buy-in necessary to overcome various obstacles to getting new schools built. Yet, despite a strong desire among Community Outreach staff to foster the type of capacity building that would ultimately bolster sustained community action for school and community improvement, sustained engagement in schools and educational issues appears to have occurred not so much in spite of the District's outreach efforts, but independent of them. When asked whether she thought that LAUSD's community outreach efforts had likely fostered sustained participation beyond new school construction, one former Board employee summed it up well,

> *To answer your question, no, I do not think that the Community Outreach program has actually had an impact at the school site level, because their focus was around a project, and once that project was either eliminated or completed, then they moved on to other projects. And there was no one really at the school site helping to incubate that mobilization that took place. (Anna, former School Board employee)*

Importantly, Anna's comment acknowledges that mobilization did in fact take place at and around new schools. Yet, the question remains as to whether it is the District's job to

incubate community activism into full-fledge participation in school improvement, and if not, whether its job description should be expanded. Further, even if LAUSD or other urban districts actively prioritize parent and community involvement in schools, what is it that really makes it happen?

When asked whether there was anything about how LAUSD did outreach that made people *want* to stay involved Soledad, a parent volunteer, implied that the District's primary role was to provide information and opportunities for involvement to community stakeholders, but that a desire to stay engaged had to come from the heart,

> *Yes, because if I want to do something, it has to come from my heart. And, if they have more information, I believe some other people who think maybe a little bit like me, and they say I want to do something from my heart, I want to spend time or energy on that project. (Soledad, Southeast High School, parent volunteer)*

In other words, while individual motivation must be present for parents and other community members to become and stay involved in local schools, more information about what is going on and how to get involved *can* have the effect of spurring participation. Yet, wherever parent and community involvement and community connections are initiated, there is a clear sense, both among Outreach staff and Board leadership, that there is much to be learned from this process and that LAUSD could do more both to build community support for schools and to authentically engage parents and other community members in school reform. As Estrella, an early member of the Community Outreach staff commented,

> *There's a need for continued participation, continued dialogue. No one stays after hours to work with parents who do work. It's not easy for parents to participate in the current system. Collectively, as a whole, we need to think about things to do differently. (Estrella, LAUSD organizer)*

Chapter Six
Conclusion:
Sustaining Community Engagement through District-Community Initiatives

The problems we have created as a result of our thinking so far cannot be solved by thinking the way we did when we created them. - Albert Einstein

Over the past decade LAUSD's Facilities Services Division has effectively delivered new school facilities to dozens of communities in need. For their part, Community Outreach staff have done much as representatives of LAUSD to rebuild trust among community stakeholders, both within prospective school neighborhoods, and among the public at large; and, many, in and outside of the District, see a continued role for the type of community relations work they have undertaken. However, recent and forthcoming changes in District policies and governance structures make the future of District sponsored outreach uncertain. And, given the significant lack of community-District affiliation prior to the inception of the new school construction program, the loss of formalized community outreach could have the affect of diluting the current enthusiasm around Southeast schools, discarding the opportunity for collaborative school improvement that this moment of increased parent and community engagement has inspired.

As emphasized throughout this dissertation, a community oriented approach to school reform would require not only heightened institutional capacity on the part of the District, but also a sustained, more fully developed level of civic capacity within the community. There are different ways for such capacity building to occur, either through improved participatory process on the part of the District, or through ground-up efforts on the part of community leaders to build social, political, and human capital among community stakeholders, with the goal of initiating change. And, while each of these approaches holds the potential to encourage more sustained, and potentially transformative parent and community engagement in schools, they are distinct from, rather than integrated with, one another. One comes from the top-down, and the other from the bottom-up. The focus of this final chapter is on how, at a moment of transition within its governance structure, LAUSD could sustain and advance community outreach that enhances its own capacity by engaging community stakeholders not just as sources of input, in the spirit of political necessity, but as empowered collaborators who have a vested interest in improving local schools and an inherent knowledge as to what will best serve their communities.

Facilities in Transition

The future of Community Outreach has been tenuous since the very inception of the new school construction program, given that the New Construction Branch (within the Facilities Division) and the departments within it were established to execute the finite task of building bond-funded new schools. Once the bond monies are spent, the new school construction program will be complete. And, in the minds of many stakeholders within the District's reach, construction should be halted even before the bond monies are spent, given the declining enrollment that many areas are experiencing.

Further threatening the perpetuation of community outreach activities is a recent shift in the District's governance that effectively eliminated the autonomy of New Construction. This shift occurred in September of 2009, when Superintendent Cortines brought the quasi-independent Branch back under the control of the District's central bureaucracy. The

reorganization was set in motion after a 2008 audit revealed that many of the consultants working for the Facilities Division were paid much more than District staff. Further, some of these consultants were found to be under qualified for their jobs, and had allegedly overstepped their authority at times by making decisions about the hiring and pay of District workers. Defenders of the Division argued that its relative autonomy within LAUSD's governance structure probably saved hundreds of millions of dollars and resulted in high quality and reasonably rapid school construction. Said civil rights attorney Connie Rice, a member Bond Oversight Committee[6], "For this kind of construction program, it makes sense to use consultants because the top-level people you need are not going to work for the district" (Blume 2009). Rice and others also defended the higher salaries, saying that not only were they were needed to attract top talent, but that the wages were still less than those for comparable jobs in the private sector.

Despite recommendations that the audit findings not be used to dismantle a system that fundamentally worked, the reorganization spurred a number of changes, including the resignation of Guy Mehula, the division's head. Dismayed with Cortines' decision and signaling concomitant shifts that were likely to occur, Rice commented in a separate editorial,

> *It's not a coincidence that Mehula's division has operated with an unusual amount of independence and freedom from school board politics and central office bureaucracy. Mehula's resignation on Monday, and the loss of a measure of that independence, are discouraging signs not only for the future of school construction but for the district as a whole. (LA Times, L.A. Unified takes hammer to its building unit, Rice Constance, 9/29/10)*

What Rice seems to imply is that there are characteristics of the governance and operation of the Facilities Division that not only facilitated efficiency in new school construction, but that could and should be carried forward to inform District practices overall. As an element of LAUSD's governance structure for the past decade, the Community Outreach Department has opened up a pathway of communication between LAUSD and many of its most underserved communities that had long been missing. Yet, while members of the Outreach Department see a clear need for LAUSD to continue to maintain some type of official District-community interface once the construction program is complete, there are as yet no official plans to do so.

Hence, as LAUSD's governance structures are changing, the future shape of District fostered community connections is at best uncertain. So too is the level and form of continued activism among parents and other community stakeholders around schools in the Southeast. The activism that has either developed or expanded around new school construction appears to have built somewhat of a foundation upon which sustained community involvement in schools could be built. But, only time will tell how sustainable activism around local schools will be once the new schools have been built and the District presence in the Southeast once again fades from view.

The question then becomes whether and how LAUSD will capitalize on this moment of

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[6] The School Construction Bond Citizens' Oversight Committee was established to oversee the expenditure of money for the construction, repair, and modernization of schools by the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). The 15-member Oversight Committee communicates its finding to the Board and the public in order to ensure that school bond funds are invested as the voters intended and that projects are completed wisely and efficiently.

increased community engagement and enhanced District capacity to build a more collaborative relationship with parents and other community stakeholders, with the ultimate goal of not just building new schools, but making those schools the best they can be. The remainder of this concluding chapter presents recommendations for how LAUSD may move forward toward capitalizing on the current moment by encouraging sustained forms of parent and community engagement that align facilities with educational quality, leveraging existing district structures and resources to bolster sustained parent and community involvement in schools, and seeking and incorporating public input in ways that encourage and derive benefit from community activism and empowerment. The following recommendations rest on an assumption informed by the findings of this research that while change within the District is still needed, a foundation for institutional and community change has been built through outreach and activism in the Southeast that can either be built upon or left to languish.

Align Facilities Development with the Improvement of Educational Quality

Chapter 3 found that civic engagement in and around LAUSD's new school construction process did much to affect process outcomes. In addition to demonstrating the ways in which community outreach helped to build trust and buy-in among Southeast stakeholders, it showed also that public input actually did influence the location and configuration of numerous new schools in the area. Further, it offered student and educator perspectives on the ways in which outcomes might have been improved if input from facility end-users had been more heavily weighted in the design process. That community stakeholders, including students and educators, had as much to say as they did about where schools should be located and how they should be designed, goes to the connection between the physical quality of teaching and learning environments and overall school quality. Further, stakeholder comments on the contribution of new school facilities to surrounding neighborhoods evidences some level of community impact as a result of the location of a new school within it.

While this research is not focused on making a causal linkage either between facilities and educational quality, or between new schools and neighborhood quality, it does demonstrate that the way in which schools are designed has a substantial impact on the daily lives of community stakeholders who experience the school from both inside and out – so much so that they are able to articulate with both volume and clarity how and how much new school facilities matter. What this indicates is that from a school planning perspective, it is worth improving outreach processes in such a way that early and authentic input is sought from *all* stakeholders whose experience may inform the location and design of a facility that is simultaneously aligned with district and educator goals for instruction, student needs for learning, and community desires for neighborhood improvement. Such a process would involve a change in the culture of planning within the District from an approach built around the assumption that their plan already represents a basis for consensus to one in which diverse groups and agencies come together to begin at the beginning, by exchanging information, exploring common ground and negotiating in an attempt to achieve, or at least approach, consensus.

Collaborative Planning in Southeast Los Angeles

Given the interconnectedness of school facilities and their surrounding communities, improving educational quality in the Southeast will require that the District find new and

improved ways to effectively engage not only with activist organizations that have mobilized around new school construction, but also with local government leadership. One way that LAUSD has, in certain instances, successfully engaged local government leaders within its client communities has been through collaborative planning efforts in the form of joint-use projects. Such projects are intended to promote shared use of common physical elements, such as recreational facilities or other amenities for which use can be restricted to the school community during the day and then extended to the broader neighborhood community in the evenings and on weekends. As described previously, LAUSD has on various occasions successfully engaged local governments in the Southeast in the process of planning and/or improving schools through joint-use project planning. In fact, the stated mission of the District's Planning and Development divisions is to "promote joint planning with local communities to define and execute projects on District-owned land in order to provide needed resources for students, teachers and the community". By learning from past joint planning successes, and through the development and implementation of innovative joint-use projects, LAUSD could go a long way toward fulfilling this mission.

But, the successful negotiation of agreements between cities and the District for the mutual use of facilities should represent only a starting point for LAUSD in its efforts to promote joint planning with local communities. Beyond breaking down city-district silos in the arena of physical planning, the District must also amplify its efforts at collaborating with local jurisdictions in harnessing resources and ideas to improve the educational opportunities it provides, especially in its highly stressed communities. With the establishment and continuing evolution of the Southeast Cities School Coalition, the opportunity for such action in the Southeast cities is ripe.

As described in the previous chapter, the Coalition was established in 2007 through a joint powers authority between the six Southeast cities of Bell, Cudahy, Huntington Park, Maywood, South Gate, and Vernon, in the midst of battles over when and where schools would be sited within their boundaries. But, beyond having an interest in the physical siting and use of school facilities in the Southeast, Coalition partners created this extra-governmental entity to ensure that students and adults residing within these cities have access to quality education. Such an education, members of the Coalition contend, is not only the right of all Southeast residents, but also represents a vital component of the economic health and development of their communities.

The City Councils of the six member cities formalized the partnership with the belief that educating children is a community-wide responsibility and that elected officials, along with school officials, should be responsible for the creation of safe schools and healthy communities where education and learning can thrive. The vision of this partnership is currently being implemented by a Strategic Plan developed through a participatory process involving Coalition Members, the Superintendent of LAUSD District 6, representatives of state elected officials of the Southeast Area, parents, community residents, school representatives and other local stakeholders. Significantly, while the Coalition's plans are being locally crafted and implemented, the realization of its vision necessitates participation and support from the District; as such, the LAUSD should take its role in this endeavor seriously. But, in addition to supporting specific Southeast-centered initiatives, LAUSD as a whole should heed of the collaborative, community-centered approach to educational improvement that the Coalition is advancing.

Green Dot Public Schools

Beyond Southeast L.A., an organization that has made engaging in collaborative planning and politics its business, and that has vastly affected the educational landscape in Los Angeles, is Green Dot Public Schools. While many charters champion parent and community involvement in their schools, Green Dot in particular prides itself on its integration of parents and other community members early on in the process of school development.

Alicia, a staff member at Green Dot, described the Green Dot school planning process in contrast to LAUSD's process:

> *What they (LAUSD) do is after the product has already been developed, when the ideas have made, or discussed, where the plans have already been made, where basically they already have all of the posterboards, you know, the sketches, right? When they have all of that, they say, OK, we're ready to engage you. But, you're going to plan, and you're going to choose from XY&Z. And, XY&Z have been determined by us. And, that's not community planning. That is basically force-feeding people to these other, ill-informed sometimes, decisions that are not really inclusive, or collective, or community based or community centered. They are decisions made by these consultants, and there's not really options or opportunities to discuss them.* (Alicia, Green Dot staff member)

Alicia elaborated on Green Dot's approach with respect to engaging in the type of community planning that she observed to be absent in LAUSD's process.

> *We don't go just to the letterhead names. We work with churches, we talk to community grassroots leaders, and I'm not talking just about the people who go to meetings every Tuesday or every Wednesday or whatever, but people who are leaders at the schools, and also leaders in their churches, small business owners. You know, we will talk to anybody who will talk to us. And, we also have a team that's out there specifically talking to and targeting parents, an outreach team.*

Whether Green Dot's approach has succeeded where LAUSD has failed is not a question that can be answered here. Importantly, however, this model for community engagement represents for many inside and outside of the District the direction in which LAUSD should be moving. In principle, it is an example of the type of community engagement that has the potential to re-establish connections between communities and schools, creating more effective schools and healthier neighborhoods. This type of "authentic" engagement is best wrought through adherence to a series of basic principals[7]:

- Involve all sectors of the community
- Ask the community to engage on important questions and acknowledge its view and contributions
- Involve the community early in the process
- Offer opportunities for people to gather at convenient and comfortable locations at a variety of convenient times
- Hold more than one meeting and allow time in the process to make informed judgments
- Drive the process by aspirations that communities hold for their future

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[7] Principals are adapted from "10 Principals of Authentic Community Engagement", KnowledgeWorks Foundation, www.kwfdn.org.

- Include a learning component that helps build community awareness and knowledge around the subject at hand
- Allow for sustained involvement by community stakeholders
- Utilize community partnerships and expertise
- Employ clear, open, and consistent communication

Opponents of the encroachment of charter school operators on the governance of public schools might contend that for charter operators to come as outsiders looking to solicit community engagement around the development of a charter school is more akin to a top-down, than a grassroots approach. Further, opponents of charters in general, and of Green Dot in particular, might argue that such an in- from-the-outside approach to building school communities can preclude existing community based organizations from meaningful involvement in improving their neighborhood schools. And, even if charter organizations like Green Dot can proffer well honed approaches to school change that have proven effective for many children, they have no magic bullet to offer. Green Dot's takeover of Locke High School in Los Angeles, for instance, has not been without its challenges. The point, however, is in the spirit of the approach – which aspires to early and sustained parent and community engagement in schools involving multiple sectors of community and local government. And, such an approach has the potential to go a long way toward a collaborative approach to school improvement.

Leverage Existing District Resources to Sustain Encourage and Sustain Parent and Community Involvement

As recounted in Chapter 5, various opportunities arose in the Southeast throughout the course of the school construction program for building upon community capacity: parent involvement opportunities were created, activism around schools blossomed, and at least one quasi-governmental entity stepped in to attempt to do what established institutions seemed unable to accomplish. Chapter 5 also concludes that the Community Outreach Department, while not solely responsible for spurring such opportunities, was certainly a contributing factor. Yet, given that Outreach may or may not survive in some form beyond the cessation of current plans for school construction and renovation, what other existing structures and programs might LAUSD bolster from within to further build and access community capacity to move toward more comprehensive school reform? The answer may lay in any of a number of recent and continuing initiatives that LAUSD supports to foster various types of school-community connections. A few such initiatives include the iDesign Schools program, the Parent Community Services Branch, and the Public School Choice Resolution.

iDesign Schools

In 2007, then LAUSD Superintendent David L. Brewer III unveiled the Innovation Division for Educational Achievement (iDivision/iDesign) structure, which allows teachers, administrators, and parents/guardians to submit collaborative proposals to implement innovative educational programs at their schools, and develop partnerships that support school communities to improve student achievement. The idea behind iDivision was to draw upon the innovation, creativity, and resources of community partners, or "network providers", to improve local

schools, and then to replicate proven models within other LAUSD schools.

According to a 2007 Concept Paper memo outlining the Division's guiding principals, network providers would be partners who could commit to a sustained, engaged role in running and evaluating the schools, and who would be anchored in the community, have the capacity to build and hold the community's trust, and serve as a conduit for the necessary dialogue, facilitation, research and learning processes required for change. They would do so by bringing together parents, students, teachers, local organizations, local elected representatives, and all other interested and invested members of the community in order to create strategic school reform. As former Board President Marlene Canter summarized, "IDEA realizes my vision to give our unique school communities the freedom and support they need to accelerate achievement". For some local schools, the iDivision presented itself as a potential support mechanism for getting out from under what they perceived as a failing district's control.

Yet, for all of its innovative potential, iDivision schools, now called iDesign schools and administered by the iDesign Schools, Innovation and Charter Schools Division, appear to have fallen short. In terms of laying the groundwork for community control and empowerment, the rhetoric was all there. Citing a civic capacity theory of change, the 2007 Concept Paper quotes school reform theorists who espouse a community approach to school improvement:

> *It is essential for all-important actors in an urban community to join together in a shared vision of what is wrong in the schools and how to fix it, and to pursue that vision strongly and systematically over a long time. That can only happen, however, if those same actors develop the ability and willingness to set aside narrow aims and favor of pursuing the collective good.*

Yet, at some iDesign schools, LAUSD has curbed rather than bolstered community empowerment when it comes to running their schools. And, recently, the District announced that in June 2010, it would close its Office of Learning and Leadership, which was created to oversee the Westchester schools that opted last year to join the iDesign Division of LAUSD. In this case, since the schools' network partner, Loyola Marymount University (LMU), has no interest in taking over governance of the schools, parents are struggling to figure out how they will maintain the local control they have worked for.

Such actions by LAUSD understandably are driven largely by current financial considerations. Yet, given the interest among parents and other community members in various parts of the District in working to make their own schools better, rather than waiting for a central authority to do it, it seems an unfortunate moment to thwart an initiative such as iDesign. Particularly in the Southeast, such a vehicle could be a useful approach to creating partnerships between struggling schools and local partners who are able to articulate the goals and needs specific to area schools, and then craft initiatives that are more narrowly targeted. Especially given that the District-wide Latino population is about 70% and in Southeast L.A., it is even greater, LAUSD would do well to keep this initiative afloat as a way to target community partners with insight into the educational needs to Latino youth.

Parent Community Services

LAUSD also supports a Parent Community Services Branch, which provides technical support to LAUSD parents, community and schools. According to the Branch website, its

mission is to "promote increased student academic achievement by building the capacities of local schools and communities to train, educate, and support parents as partners in their children's education". The website also lists a host of services provided to parents and other community members, including, but not limited to, implementation of the LAUSD Strategic Plan for Parent Engagement and Involvement, support of the School Volunteer Program and for the formation and monitoring of all School Site Councils, conducting District parent training conferences and classes and facilitating parent attendance at state, national, and local educational conferences, providing incentives for the implementation of parent centers, and hosting the annual Parent Summit.

In addition to this District-wide Branch, each Local District supports a Parent Involvement Unit. It is unclear, however, whether these and other District programs have the ability or the true desire to move beyond the provision of information toward the work of building parent and community capacity for various forms of involvement and collaboration. Like other school districts, especially in cash-strapped California, LAUSD is at a point where its internal resources must be used wisely. And, at this crucial juncture, that means not just relying on parents and other community members to augment District services, but also actively supporting efforts by community based organizations to improve local schools, such that such efforts can become well-targeted and eventually self-sustaining.

The need to cultivate community support and to develop community partnerships is not lost on current District administration. Responding to concerns about a recent plan on the part of LAUSD to gain state funds by limit inter-district transfers, Superintendent Ramon Cortines acknowledged the legitimate need for some students to attend schools offering programs that LAUSD does not. However, he also raised the question of the role of parental involvement in schools, turning the onus of school improvement at least in part onto local parents. In a related meeting, Cortines bluntly asked parents, "Where were you in fixing your own school so you didn't have to leave and go some place else?" The Superintendent went on to explain that while he understands that all parents want the best for their children, he also believes "that parents have the responsibility, that instead of running to someplace else, to take over their school and make it the very best it can be" (Knotts and Waitje, 2010).

Cortines' plea may be a reasonable one. But, as evidenced in Southeast L.A, not all parents have the tools or resources to simply take over their schools. Thus, especially in communities that lack the capacity for self-driven reform, LAUSD must find ways to better assist parents in effectively working with the District toward realizing the mutual goal of providing quality educational opportunities within LAUSD for all students, regardless of their racial, ethnic, or economic status. Again, this is especially crucial in areas of the District like Southeast L.A., where the interest and imagination currently exists to find innovative and collaborative solutions for school improvement.

Public School Choice Resolution

Another recently created District mechanism for involving community stakeholders in school improvement is the Public School Choice Resolution, which provides opportunities for outside public entities to operate new and failing schools. The main idea behind the Resolution, which was sponsored by Board Member Aguilar-Flores, was to ensure that community based solutions were incorporated as part of the District's overall plan to improve schools. In advocating for passage of the Resolution, the Board Member justified the need for such action,

emphasizing that the solutions that had been proposed of late reflected no sense of urgency or collective outrage. And, that, in her reasoning, is what necessitated a swift and bold response that would allow innovation, choice, and competition to win out over the status quo.

A subject of continuing debate, the Resolution was passed by the LAUSD School Board at a meeting that lasted about 4 hours and drew a crowd of at least 2,000 charter school parents and supporters to the District's headquarters. Its implementation allows outside organizations, including LAUSD educators, charter school operators, partnerships, non-profits, and other independent groups to submit plans to LAUSD to operate public schools. The list of eligible schools includes a total of 250 public schools, most of which are new schools, and some of which are specifically identified as under-performing schools.

Further, as a matter of course, the Resolution stipulates that public-at-large will have several future opportunities to provide feedback on developing a process for evaluating applications to run new and underperforming schools and for final review of those applications. Such opportunities will take place at the local level, such as at school-based meetings to discuss community needs, and in formal bodies, like through community representation on review teams. Significant as these mechanisms are with respect to effectuating the Resolution, even more important in relation to this research is the symbolic value of the School Choice resolution.

The rhetoric around this resolution, both among the Board members who proposed and advocated for it, and among the supporting public, has been about the role of community in improving schools. For instance, both Board member and public comments at the public meeting where the vote took place emphasized that LAUSD needs to do a better job in general at listening to the community, and that parents and other community members should be given a voice in what they want for their local neighborhood schools. Even Superintendent Cortines' opening recommendations emphasized community needs and wants as the primary reason the resolution should be passed. Subsequently, in an open letter to all LAUSD staff, Cortines wrote, "Parents and community members need more information and time to engage in the process of improving our schools. This needs to be an ongoing process" (Cortines 2009).

A number of groups and individuals appeared at the meeting in support of the School Choice Resolution. However, for as many supporters as there are of the Resolution, there are equally as many opponents. Some members of the public wondered aloud at the meeting why if some organizations (i.e., charters) are doing such a great job at running schools, LAUSD can't just adopt their approaches at new and struggling schools. Others commented that allowing additional outside organizations to control LAUSD schools is tantamount to privatization. And, even some of those who were not fully opposed to the resolution objected simply to the expediency and relative secrecy with which it was pushed forward. LAUSD gave the appearance, in other words, that it still had yet to learn how to authentically incorporate community stakeholder involvement in its decision making process.

The Los Angeles teachers union, United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA), has been particularly vociferous in protesting the resolution. "Public schools belong to the community," UTLA President A.J. Duffy said. "Especially at new schools, it is important for parents, teachers and the community to see stability in the form of teachers who they know are committed to their school and community" (EGP News Service 2009). Once the policy was approved, Duffy was quick to channel his opposition toward a more constructive tactic: UTLA would help teachers craft the complicated proposals to operate pilot schools or other possible educational models at the schools that would be up for grabs.

Some of these proposals emerged victorious in February of 2010, when the Board considered upwards of 85 proposals to take over 12 low-performing schools and 24 new campuses. Of the proposals submitted, the majority were from charter schools and other outside operators, followed closely by about three dozen from internal groups of teachers and administrators, and a handful from the Mayor's partnership. Two panels reviewed the proposals, and advisory elections were held for each school, with some 40,000 votes cast. In the end, the elections were heavily influenced by United Teachers Los Angeles, which took out radio ads to oppose the charter operators and whip up support for plans developed by members of their bargaining unit. And, when Cortines came forward with his recommendation, only 7 charter school proposals were chosen, two of which were removed from consideration during the final Board vote.

Some see the Board's decision as an endorsement of the status quo, and a disincentive for outside operators to propose innovative strategies for new and struggling schools. As Charles Kerchner, a professor of Education at the Claremont Graduate School put it, "Each of the board amendments was reasoned, but the net effect was to eliminate the strongest charter school operators: those who had the resources and organizational strength to operate a new building and potentially to take over a failing school". (Kerchner 2010) Still others view it as an opportunity for teachers and parents with intimate knowledge of these school communities to implement long considered ideas for innovation. Only time will tell what the result of this and subsequent rounds of school governance changes will bring. The hope is that the latter is true, and that as community capacity is bolstered in ways that allow innovation to emerge from the ground up, the District will have no choice but to endorse reform proposals that truly are community based. But, for this to occur, parent and community capacity must not only be build upon, but built up, by the District.

Empower Communities to Become Effective District Partners

Despite the impressive rhetoric set forth around LAUSD's program initiatives, current and proposed methods for encouraging stakeholder input and collaboration may not yet constitute sufficient work on the part of the District to create real opportunities for community involvement in shaping and improving public schools. As Murphy contends in his account of recent shifts in educational governance, "Critics aver that at the same time we are discovering that traditional attacks on our problems not only fail to attack the roots of the nation's educational problems but may be actually crippling public education, we are witnessing a fundamental disconnect between the public and the public schools" (Murphy 2000, 64).

Education, in other words, has come to represent yet another realm in which citizens are increasingly alienated from systems of institutional governance. Since this lack of public confidence is occurring in the midst of institutional awareness that not only public input, but also collaboration, will be needed to "fix" public schools, it seems logical that school district governance should evolve to encourage participation. Thus, at this juncture in particular, "the question for the state is whom it shall empower to decide what is best" (Coons & Sugarman, 1978, quoted in Murphy 2001, 69).

After decades of fallout from the bureaucratization of education, we stand at a moment when community stakeholders, in L.A. and elsewhere, appear interested in returning to a more democratic system, wherein their own empowerment is somehow part of school district process. This is evidenced locally by the escalation in activism around schools in Southeast L.A.

described in Chapter 5, and nationally, by the rise in community organizing for education discussed in Chapter 2. Given local stakeholder interest in both self-empowerment and schools improvement, LAUSD would do well to move toward a more democratized model for school governance that emphasizes localism and lay control, and that is designed to enable parents to become more effectively involved in the way schools are run, thus forcing schools to "'attend to student needs and parent preferences rather than to the requirements of a centralized bureaucracy'" (Hill 1994, quoted in Murphy 2001, 76).

Again, such democratic governance becomes most effective when *both* institutional *and* community capacity are present. As Briggs points out in *Democracy as Problem-solving: Civic Capacity in Communities Across the Globe*, solutions to the wide array of urgent public problems that currently plague our society will require "broad-based community action *with and beyond government*" (Briggs 2008). Yet, while Briggs' account focuses primarily on the value of civic capacity in solving local problems, I argue that institutions like school districts must concede that because neither civic capacity nor government alone can solve such urgent public problems as the need to improve urban schools, part of a district's job must include evolving its governance strategies to empower communities for collaborative action.

Innes and Booher offer a way of defining capacity, which is useful in considering how a school district can maximize both its own ability to serve its clients, and its clients' ability to be served. Their definition draws on Chaskin's definition of community capacity as "the interaction of human capital, organizational resources, and social capital existing within a given community that can be leveraged to solve collective problems and improve or maintain the well being of a given community" (Innes & Booher 2003, 8). For Chaskin and Innes alike, capacity can operate through or be initiated by informal processes, by organized, institutionally driven efforts, or some combination of the two. What is most important is that capacity emerges out of collaborative planning and action that merges the efforts and interests of different realms of society, and that is inherently adaptive, inclusive, and non-hierarchical.

Thus, collaborative planning relies not only on enlightened institutions, but also on the presence within communities of fundamental elements of human, cultural, and social capital such as personal communication skills, respect, practical knowledge about how to design and evaluate programs and build coalitions, and an understanding of collaborative process. A society with capacity, Innes and Booher argue, is "self-organizing and works in real time through networked, shared, and distributed intelligence", and "governance in such a society is part and parcel of this self-organizing activity"(Innes and Booher 2003, 7). In essence, they claim that solving complex policy problems requires building both community and institutional capacity; and, that the way to build these capacities, and the learning processes that are essential to them, is through collaborative planning and action.

In arguing for a collaborative planning approach that does not just respond to, but works to build civil society, Innes and Booher provide numerous examples of institutional incapacities that have resulted in a failure of well-established institutions, including federal, state and local government, as well as private corporate institutions, to tackle the problems they are charged with addressing. I would add to their list urban school districts, which, despite isolated successes, have for the most part failed to provide an adequate education to their hardest to serve students. This failure includes an incapacity to find ways to involve parents, particularly those who have traditionally felt unwelcome on their children's schools, as well as other community members in working to achieve greater student success.

One way to encourage this type of collaborative practice is to approach the school

planning process as an exercise in building and building upon existing capacity. Such a process would encourage participatory school planning to fulfill what Innes points to as the sixth and seventh purposes of participation: to build a civil society and to create an adaptive, self-organizing polity capable of addressing "wicked problems" in an informed and effective way (Innes 1996). This is particularly important in the realm of education, both because participation by parents and community has been identified as being key to student success, and because as government is able to do less, for better or worse, community must do more.

The approach of Community Outreach, at least in concept, has helped nudge LAUSD in the direction of collaborative planning. In Southeast L.A., for instance, communities have benefitted most from new neighborhood schools when they have learned through the process of school development how to realize their needs by effectively making demands on the District – whether by organizing, by participating in a District-initiated Outreach process, or some combination of the two. And, for its part, LAUSD has governed more effectively where it could develop its own internal capacity to authentically gather and incorporate community input into its school planning process. Now, with the work of New Construction largely done, LAUSD will have to find new ways of leveraging community outreach and organizing to build and sustain better schools.

Going Forward

The New York City Department of Education, the largest district in the country, operates a comprehensive parent involvement program that may provide clues to LAUSD about how to proceed. The Department's primary method for connecting with its communities is through the Office for Family Engagement (OFEA), which replaced the Office of Parent and Community Affairs in 2007. Created to expand outreach to families throughout the five boroughs of New York City, the OFEA oversees multiple programs and supports a number of community partnerships, all with the goal of connecting parents to the Department "to achieve sustainable engagement efforts which provide meaningful information and interactions that empower parents in the school community to effectively advocate for children". Included among the additional initiatives planned for the coming year are a citywide parent empowerment forum, and a new website, SchoolSource NYC, which would offer information to families, parent leaders, and communities to help them navigate transitions in children's education (New York City Department of Education 2009).

Many of the elements of OFEA's operating structure are not necessarily distinct from what LAUSD does. There are parent coordinators and Title I committees, for instance, as well as PTAs that provide forums for parents to share input with other parents, participate in school activities, and raise money for schools. What is distinct, however, is the tangible commitment that the NYCDOE has made not only to making sure that all families feel welcome and respected in their children's schools, but also to creating multiple pathways for involvement. In a school district serving 1,100,000 students, the OFEA operates on a yearly budget of $5,426,728: $1,951,409 for parent leadership training and support; $1,748,910 for community outreach; and $1,726,409 for family programs and events (New York City Department of Education 2009).

What complicates matters in L.A. is that LAUSD is not wholly tied to one major municipal jurisdiction the way that NYCDOE is. The NYCDOE has jurisdiction over schools only within New York City, whereas LAUSD encompasses multiple cities within Los Angeles County. This fact makes governance more complicated in multiple ways. Most significantly,

while mayoral takeover of schools in New York has occurred and proven beneficial in many ways, in Los Angeles, L.A. Mayor Villaraigosa's attempt to take control of LAUSD schools was essentially defeated. As explained previously, in addition to general resistance to the *idea* of a mayoral takeover of schools, strong opposition came from small cities that are wholly or partially included within LAUSD's boundaries, but that are not subject to the leadership of the City of L.A. on other matters.

That the New York Department of Education has jurisdiction over all public schools in the City of New York also makes city-district collaboration less complicated. In L.A., efforts have been made over time - most recently in the form of a joint commission between LAUSD and the City of L.A. - to garner the political will to work together to improve the area's schools. But, as Anna, a former school board employee in L.A. described, "it really developed into a political struggle for control of the school district". Anna further explained that while some isolated examples of the Department of City Planning collaborating with LAUSD do exist,

> *...other than that, if you ask the upper echelon of the District and the City, they will say without hesitation that there is no collaboration. And, I think there's still some anger and some resentment for what took place a couple of months ago (referring to the Mayor's attempted takeover). But, no one could really point to anything that they're doing in collaboration. I think it's just part of a larger political campaign, and then the reality hit that this is extremely hard work to turn over a district that is so entrenched in failure and bureaucracy. (Anna, former School Board staff member)*

While it is past time to begin again at newly constructed schools with a process fundamentally guided by community planning principals, the spirit of authentic engagement can be carried forward by LAUSD to promote a more community-centered governance approach. Again, the rhetoric described above around the School Choice Resolution aligns with such an approach; and, the District leadership behind it appears to be convinced that public involvement both in planning and governing schools is essential to student success. And, while it is as yet uncertain what shape future District-community collaboration will take, it appears that community involvement in new school construction has laid the groundwork in more ways than one for movement toward a better LAUSD. In one Board member's words,

> *No doubt about it, their (the community's) participation in 2001 – calling for an end to busing and the Concept 6 Calendar – absolutely translates into improving schools. (LAUSD Board Member)*

Conclusion

This dissertation has attempted to illuminate what this Board Member, along with other LAUSD officials, staff, and community stakeholders have observed in the process of building new schools: that community involvement in schools matters, and that it matters even before a new school is built. Chapter I began the conversation by setting up my main research question and the context in which I explored it. This initial chapter also explained the connection between community outreach at the school planning level and community centered school reform, as a foundation for the analysis presented in the remainder of the document.

Chapter 2 positioned my work in relation to the literature on participatory planning and community organizing for school reform, each of which relates in a global sense to how people engage themselves in civic life, and more specifically, to how public involvement has unfolded throughout the course of the new school construction process. The framework set forth in Chapter 2 was then used in subsequent chapters, to explore why, how, and to what end participatory school planning has been undertaken for LAUSD's new school projects, how community stakeholders have responded to the District's attempts to solicit their input and buy-in, and what sorts of outcomes have emerged as a result of both top-down and grassroots community engagement. Presenting pertinent background on the development and execution of LAUSD's Community Outreach process, this chapter argued that community involvement in new school planning in the LAUSD has evolved into a complex process whereby the approach to participatory planning executed by Community Outreach has been shaped both by governance structures from above and by community activism from below.

Chapter 3 outlined the ways in which Community Outreach helped to build trust and harness political capital among Southeast stakeholders, with the ultimate result of enabling the District to successfully fulfill its mission to build new schools. This chapter also detailed the specific ways in which the location and configuration of numerous new schools were influenced by public input. And, finally, it offered student and educator perspectives on the ways in which outcomes might have been improved had input from facility end-users been more heavily weighted in the design process.

Chapter 4 explored the ways in which the Community Outreach process was shaped by limited institutional and civic capacities and by divergent District and community goals. More specifically, through an exploration into who "the community" is and what the nature of its response to LAUSD has been, this chapter argued that the agenda of advancing participatory power among community stakeholders was constrained by a host of political factors, such as a lack of civic capacity, differences in District versus local government agendas, and conflicting purposes and power differentials, both between LAUSD staff and higher-ups, and between the community and District as a whole. Chapter 5 then found that despite such constraints, a combination of intended and inadvertent outcomes had the collective effect of fostering community mobilization and the potential for sustained involvement around schooling in Southeast L.A. With respect to District articulated goals for outreach, the specific outcomes described in this chapter included: the community was educated about the process of school development; opportunities were created for communication between LAUSD and the communities it serves around new schools in particular and education in general; a support base for new schools and new opportunities for parent involvement were developed; new opportunities for city-school connections were created; and a foundation for sustained involvement in local schools was constructed.

In conclusion, I suggest that while LAUSD's Community Outreach process has resulted in increased community-District collaboration and built a foundation for sustained community involvement in schools, more must be done to ensure that civic engagement in Southeast L.A. and elsewhere in the District is translated into school and neighborhood improvement. This conclusion, and the research that supports it, builds upon the current literature in both planning and community organizing, which separately address outreach and activism around the planning and programming of urban schools, but together fail to clarify how government and the grassroots can come together to address pressing issues in urban school reform. It does so by employing these distinct frameworks together to understand how outreach and activism around

new schools in Southeast L.A. has and may continue to affect the level of parent and community participation in schools.

        The findings of this research hold important implications for how LAUSD could enhance its collaboration with local stakeholders to improve Southeast schools and neighborhoods. However, before broader conclusions can be made, additional research is needed to identify changes in levels and patterns of community involvement within new Southeast schools over time, and whether such changes do, in fact, lead to sustained community connections. More than likely, sustained participation in schools by parents and other community stakeholders will require a concerted and continuous effort on the part of LAUSD to welcome parent and community involvement, and to create and maintain pathways for it to occur. The potential for improving existing District structures and initiatives such as those described above does hold some promise for the future, as does the possibility of importing conventions from other educational institutions. But, ultimately, for schools throughout the LAUSD to be improved through authentically collaborative, community-centered reform, the District must develop an ethos, and policies and practices to support it, that favors inclusive school governance from conceptual design through high school commencement.

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<center>**Attachment A**
Research Design and Methodology</center>

The research that is the subject of this dissertation employed various qualitative methods for gathering data on the perspectives of stakeholders in the new school construction process. These stakeholders included LAUSD employees and their consultants, School Board members, parents and other community members, educators, representatives of local government, and students. While my primary method of data collection was interviews, I also attended community meetings and visit newly constructed school campuses. My research also involved reviewing district reports, including summaries of District outreach meetings, as well as journalistic and scholarly articles, in order to familiarize myself both with the history of the LAUSD's school construction program and with the controversy surrounding it. In order to understand the context in which LAUSD has undertaken these projects, I also undertook research on the timing and substance of local and state sponsored school bonds that have funded new school construction, including an accounting of new school construction program to date.

Overall, I found these methods useful answering the research questions I sought to answer, because they allowed me to get at how people perceive their own involvement in the Community Outreach process, the types of concerns expressed by stakeholders within different communities, the degree to which these concerns are addressed by the District, and in what ways the school community connections fostered through this process are maintained (or not) once a new school is completed and occupied. Through the interviews in particular, I gained a greater understanding both of who participates in the district led community outreach process and why, and how effective participants perceive the District to be in responding to community specific needs and preferences.

My research efforts have been bolstered by my participation in a larger research project, focusing on school construction in Los Angeles. The project was designed and implemented by UC Berkeley faculty, staff, and students from the Center for Cities and Schools, housed in the Department of City and Regional Planning, and from Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE), a research center in the School of Education. My work is distinct from this larger project, the scope of which does not include an examination of the community outreach process. However, my work has been supported by the broader effort, insofar as it has provided me access to district contacts and assistance with research design.

Case Study: Southeast Los Angeles

When I began the design of my research project, I intended to focus on six case study sites distributed throughout the three regions (Valley, Central, and Southern) of the District, including two sites, one elementary and one high school, from each region. My plan was to look both at the process communities have gone through in order to provide the District with their input, as well as the outcomes of the process, as an intervention in the New School Construction program, for each of the study sites. However, as I began my preliminary investigation into the school construction program in order to narrow and define my research plan, I recognized that given LAUSD's size and governance structure, and the scope of the construction program, it made more sense to focus on one Sub District as a case study of a District-wide process. And, the

Southeast made sense because it encompasses an entire Sub District, Local District 6, wherein many of the early school construction projects were undertaken. Further, as I describe in detail in the body of this dissertation, the Southeast cities represent an area wherein enormous economic and demographic shifts have occurred since the last new schools were built, and where as a result, new and better quality schools were greatly needed.

While LAUSD's new school construction program has included the development of several types of educational facilities, I chose to limit my study to elementary and high schools because these types of K-12 projects represent the largest proportion of all of the new schools developed thus far as part of the construction program. The program has also included renovations and modifications to existing campuses; however, I chose to look only at new school construction projects, because my preliminary research suggested that looking at projects for which site selection processes were undertaken would provide a more complete picture of the Outreach process. Further, it appear that looking at such cases was also likely to yield richer data, given that new construction projects, as opposed to renovations on existing sites, often require the relocation of existing uses (i.e., the exercise of eminent domain) or remediation of vacant, but contaminated properties.

Site Visits
Over the course of approximately one year, I visited several new school sites in Southeast L.A. Most were new school facilities that were constructed and had been operating for one year or more. I also visited a few proposed schools sites, and attended one groundbreaking ceremony, for a planned new elementary school. I toured the new school sites with either the school principal, or with one or more of the teachers. I also had the opportunity to explore the surrounding neighborhoods, to get a feel for the community contexts of the new schools, including the proximity of new schools to one another.

Interviews
I decided to conduct interviews as my primary method of data collection, because I thought it would help me to gain a greater understanding both of who participated in the District led community outreach process and why, and how effective participants perceive the District to be in responding to community specific needs and preferences. I also wanted to know how and among whom grassroots activism around schools in the Southeast area had developed both prior to and during the school construction process. I hoped that interviewing these different types of stakeholders would provide me with a deeper understanding about their motivation and ultimate goals for participation.

I conducted interviews in a variety of settings, including LAUSD offices, school offices and classrooms, community facilities, and restaurants. I also conducted two interviews by phone. Interviews lasted anywhere from 30 minutes to 2 hours; but, most averaged about an hour. Most interviews were audiotaped and then transcribed for the purpose of analysis. I originally set out to interview 30-40 individuals for my research; and ultimately, I found myself generally on target, having interviewed 35 people. This number reflects my desire to gain various perspectives on community involvement in schools, and to get enough variation in perspective within each category of stakeholders. While I met with most interviewees only once, some key informants

were interviewed two or more times. In addition to interviewing individuals and small groups, I facilitated group discussions with students in classroom settings at two Southeast high schools.

Subjects
As mentioned above, I set out to conduct interviews and attend meeting with various community stakeholders to get varying perspectives on LAUSD's community outreach process. Following is a brief characterization of each of the stakeholder categories, and an accounting of the number of each type I was able to interview. It should be noted that these categories are by no means discreet; for instance, some District employees are also residents of Southeast communities, and local community activists are also current or former local government leaders.

LAUSD Facilities Division Staff
I met with 5 members of LAUSD's Community Outreach department, all of whom either now work or have in the past working in the Southeast cities area of the District. In addition, I interviewed one planner within the larger Facilities Services Division, and attended internal Facilities Division meetings on a few a few occasions, in order to get a perspective on how the performance of the Community Outreach department is perceived from others within the Division, who, as I describe in my data analysis, had a reputation for being less concerned with placating the public, and more with building schools in a timely manner, than Outreach staff.

School Board Members
In addition to District staff, I also interviewed two members of the LAUSD School Board, and one former Board staff member.

Community Stakeholders
I conducted interviews with 15 local community members, including parents of students attending new schools in the Southeast area. In particular, these interviews targeted key members of local community-based organization, as a way of tapping into the social and political infrastructure within different communities. In addition to conducting interviews, I attended meetings of community-based organizations with an interest in schools and education in the Southeast area.

Local Government
To better understand the process of site development and community integration, I also interviewed current and former city employees and local government leaders.

Educators
Educator interviews were conducted with teachers and principals at each of four focus sites in the Southeast area. I also had the opportunity to interview two principals at new schools in other areas of the District. Meetings with principals were solo interviews; whereas, conversations with teachers generally were conducted in focus group style settings. In total, I interviewed six principals, and spoke with 20 teachers at new school sites.

Students
I sought permission from both the District and from the principals at two of the new high schools in the Southeast and was able to facilitate discussions in two classes of approximately 25

students each. I collaborated with the teachers of the classes to ground the discussion in the larger issue of civic participation, explaining to the students all of the ways in which the community was engaged in the development of their schools, as well as the dozens of other new schools LAUSD has built and still plans to build as part of the new school construction program. I then used a focus group format to ask students to respond to a series of questions about their perspectives on the connections between their school and the surrounding community, as well as their perspectives on the ways in which the new school they attend would be different if they or their teachers had been engaged in the design process.

Anonymity

No names or other personal information will be used in the analysis and reporting of study findings. All audio recordings and transcripts of those recordings will be saved on my personal computer, to which only I have access. Names will be attached to these files for the purposes of record keeping only; however, as stated above, these files will not be publicly accessible. Handwritten notes from interviews and phone conversations will be filed in a location accessible only to me. Personal contact information, such as phone numbers, emails, and job titles will be recorded for each study subject in an excel spreadsheet, for record keeping and contact purposes only. This information will not appear anyplace in any publicly shared documents or emails.