HOW TO JUMP-START YOUR UNION

LESSONS FROM THE CHICAGO TEACHERS

A LABOR NOTES BOOK

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Lessons from the Chicago Teachers

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First printing: January 2014
Second printing: October 2015

About the Publisher

Labor Notes is a media and organizing project that since 1979 has been the voice of union activists who want to put the movement back in the labor movement. Through its magazine, website, books, schools, and conferences, Labor Notes brings together a network of members and leaders who know the labor movement is worth fighting for. Visit our website at www.labornotes.org.

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Labor Notes
7435 Michigan Ave.
Detroit, MI 48210

Labor Notes
104 Montgomery St.
Brooklyn, NY 11225

Cover design: Stacey Luce
Inside design: Jenny Brown

Cover photo:
Tannen Maury ©2012 European Pressphoto Agency / Alamy

Printed in Canada

ISBN-13: 978-0-914093-01-5

Dedicated to Chicago's students, to the educators who are teaching them a better world is possible, and to the readers who will learn from CTU's example and go out to start their own fires.

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Foreword

Chicago Teachers Show How It's Done

by Jen Johnson

I became an activist when I was teaching history at Lincoln Park High and my principal started firing union delegates.

First, my mentor teacher was let go; then my union mentor, our librarian. I was untenured and scared and just being ushered into union work. After these losses I needed to do more, learn more, and shake off my fears.

Luckily, I joined a small group of idealistic educators—veteran teachers and new unionists—to form CORE, the Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators, in 2008. We set out on a mission to defend public education in Chicago. We built a caucus that would win leadership of the Chicago Teachers Union in 2010 and lead its first strike in 25 years.

How did we get to the point of going out on a nine-day strike? Why are the battle lines drawn so clearly in Chicago when it comes to public schools?

The labor movement has always been "about inspiration and struggle, about ordinary people transforming the world—and themselves in the process," as unionist Joe Burns wrote in his 2011 book *Reviving the Strike*. But our union had fallen into the same trap as most labor organizations in the last few decades: compromise and collaboration with management. Our union had protected basic job security and continued the flow of modest raises—but we hadn't done enough to oppose the destruction of public schools.

Our children's schools were being closed. Our members were losing their jobs. Union-busting had come to dominate the national and local dialogue about education reform, with a single-mind-

ed focus on teacher quality and standardized tests. The voices of experienced educators were being lost.

Though our union leaders did speak against closing schools and replacing them with charters, the full power of the membership was never brought to bear. Instead of talking about what is best for kids, our union to some degree accepted the premise that poor-quality teachers were the main problem.

"We know collaboration works," our former union president said in a 2009 address to the City Club of Chicago—whose members were behind destructive policies like the blitz of school closures. The union agreed to experiments in merit pay.

When CORE took on the job of leading the CTU in 2010, we took on the task of becoming the leading institution of the movement for education justice. The union had to change the public debate, bringing in the voices of its 27,000 members.

Mayor Rahm Emanuel and his corporate friends had created the perfect formula to bring on a teachers' strike—by raking teachers over the coals and driving them out of a profession they loved; by closing schools year after year, replacing them with non-union charters that kicked kids out left and right; by shuffling students around the city in the midst of poverty and violence; by adding days to the school calendar for more standardized testing instead of richer instruction; and finally, by telling teachers they would have to work as many as six more weeks with no more pay.

Jim West, jimwestphoto.com

Jen Johnson

After all that, members were not prepared to just shut up. When we voted to strike, we took back our power as a union. We said we weren't scared any more.

Our allies saw that we weren't just fighting for pay increases. We were determined to change the discussion about public education to focus on our students. At the height of the strike, a poll found that a majority of the city and 66 percent of parents of Chicago Public Schools students supported us over the mayor. The numbers were even higher among blacks and Latinos than among whites.

The strike did not achieve all the educational goals laid out in our manifesto, *The Schools Chicago's Students Deserve*, but it did wake up the city—and the nation—to some of our truths. The dialogue about public education can no longer simply assume that teachers are the problem, that no other issues exist. Parents will not be passive actors when it comes to policies that affect their children. And we showed that teachers unions are not merely protectionist organizations but can be a progressive force for education justice.

A recent Hechinger Education Report says teacher job satisfaction is at a 25-year low. We believe this malaise can be converted into action. After CTU members walked the picket line, we saw a wave of teacher strikes in Illinois. We are witnessing the awakening of teachers unions across the country.

We are still under violent attack in Chicago, with nearly 50 schools closed in 2013. As the closings were announced, thousands of parents, students, teachers, and community members packed hearings to passionately defend their schools. Students are starting their own organizations and taking action.

The strike was not built overnight, and it did not magically build the schools we teachers all want to work in. But it proved that we can fight harder, smarter—and win.

Jen Johnson was a classroom teacher for 10 years. She now works for CTU on teacher evaluation.

1

Why This Book—And How to Use It

The sight of tens of thousands of striking teachers and their allies marching through the streets of Chicago was a much-needed shot in the arm for a sagging labor movement.

For more than a week in September 2012, the Chicago Teachers Union went toe to toe with Mayor Rahm Emanuel and the city's political and financial elites—fighting them to a draw at the bargaining table and besting them handily in the battle for the city's hearts and minds.

It's all too easy to lapse into pessimism about what workers are capable of, whether unions still have power, whether strikes are still viable. But in perhaps the most impressive strike since the UPS walkout in 1997, Chicago's educators demonstrated that the strike is still labor's most powerful weapon.

In the process, CTU upended the conventional wisdom that public employees and taxpayers are inevitably at odds. For both groups, the real enemy is the 1%. The teachers branded Chicago's public schools an example of "educational apartheid" and talked openly about the racial inequalities built into the mayor's plan—proving that unions can tackle thorny social issues head on and still win support from both members and the public.

A Different Kind of Union

Just as important, the CTU experience shows how a run-of-the-mill, bureaucratic union can be transformed with the right combination of rank-and-file organizing, hard work, and trust in democracy.

CTU's leaders took office in 2010, swept into power by an energetic reform movement, the Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators. Reform caucuses, once in office, too often start to look like their predecessors. But CORE had laid a firmer foundation than most.

For years before they were elected, CORE activists had led by example—organizing teachers to fight school closings, pushing back on punitive policies, and working side by side with parents and community organizations.

This book tells how these activists transformed their union from the bottom up, and built to a strike that was about more than bread and butter.

A How-To Handbook

We believe *How to Jump-Start Your Union*'s greatest value is as a handbook. Using the same style that has made our *Troublemaker's Handbooks* a resource for activists, we show "how they did it" so that anyone can figure out "how to do it" in their own union and workplace.

We spell out CTU's organizing model, on tasks ranging from talking to your co-workers to building lasting community alliances to carrying out a strike vote, and much more. Those who want to run a caucus or a contract campaign will find out how here.

Before we dive into the CTU story, in Chapter 2 we set the stage by describing the damage the forces of corporate education reform had done to Chicago's schools. The "how to" chapters begin with 3 and 4, which show how the CORE caucus was forged in battles against school closures, and how it ran for office and won.

Sarah Jane Rhee, loveandstrugglephotos.com

Chapter 5 details the painstaking work of building the union back up at the grassroots, in each school: how the union reorganized itself internally to get more members into action. Chapter 6 describes working with community organizations, and Chapter 7 tells the lessons learned from fighting on many fronts at once in the two years before the strike. In these fights the union turned the attacks on teachers back onto the 1%.

Chapter 8 describes the year-long contract campaign that preceded the strike, including the strike vote and practice strike vote, and Chapter 9 shows the astonishing self-organization that members and parents carried on during the strike itself.

Chapter 10 tells what CTU gained and lost in the contract. Chapter 11 describes how CTU ran with its victory to keep momentum in the year after the strike. Chapter 12 sums up the lessons of the whole experience.

See the Glossary and the Timeline if you see an unfamiliar term or need help on the chronology—CTU really was fighting many battles at the same time. And read the Appendix on the national landscape of "education reform" if you want to understand why billionaires and politicians are so keen to attack educators.

We've also recapped essential lessons at the end of each chapter, so look for highlights there.

2

What They Were Up Against

The Chicago teachers' victorious strike is all the more impressive when measured against the mountain of criticism heaped on unionized public employees in recent years—and the aggressive national effort, funded by billionaires and lauded in the media, to make over the public schools.

From Washington to Hollywood, teachers and their unions have been painted as the primary culprits to blame for the problems in our public schools. Self-styled education "reformers" are pushing privately run charter schools and are determined to undermine teachers unions if they stand in the way.

In the past three years teachers have seen more far-reaching changes to their working conditions and public standing than in the previous three decades. Since 2010, teachers in many states have weathered assaults on the fundamentals of their work. These include eliminating or weakening job security, commonly known as "tenure"; tying teachers' evaluations to student performance on standardized tests; and instituting merit pay, also often linked to student test scores.

Teachers unions have, until recently, responded hesitantly and inconsistently.

It was precisely because CTU tacked in a different direction from most public sector unions and its own national union that Chicago's education workers were better able to defend themselves *and* win public support to their cause.

For a detailed analysis of the national assault on schools and teachers, see the Appendix.

Ground Zero for the Corporate Agenda

The "Chief Executive Officer" of Chicago schools from 2001 to 2009 was Arne Duncan, a former professional basketball player. Early on Duncan had built his credentials as an education reformer in the corporate mold. In 1996 he launched a char-

ter school whose theme was to teach students financial management skills. He enthusiastically embraced the competition among schools enforced by George Bush's No Child Left Behind program, begun in 2001.

Thanks to earlier moves by Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley and the Illinois legislature, when Duncan became schools CEO he had great latitude to implement his agenda.

In 1995 the Illinois legislature had passed a law that singled out Chicago: in school districts serving more than 500,000 residents, the elected school board would be abolished. Instead, the mayor would appoint the board. "So they're bankers, businesspeople…they don't have children in the public schools," CTU President Karen Lewis would explain later.

The law also said the Chicago district was no longer required to bargain with the union over class size, restructuring, or creation of new charters.

For the most part, CTU was caught flat-footed. A reform effort won leadership of the union in 2001 but was able to hang on for only one term. Then, starting in 2004, Daley and Duncan inflicted on Chicago the "Renaissance 2010" plan, a program for scores of school closings and "turnarounds," where a school's whole staff is fired and must reapply for their jobs.

Gary Huck ©2013

Renaissance 2010 shuttered unionized public schools on the grounds that they had failed, and opened non-union charters with public funds. Between 2001 and 2010, 70 Chicago public schools were closed and 6,000 union jobs evaporated.

In 2009 President Barack Obama named Duncan his Secretary of Education. It was a strong signal that showed where the president and the Democratic establishment stood. And two years later, when Obama's chief of staff Rahm Emanuel ran for mayor of Chicago, he brought the same anti-teacher politics back home with him.

During his mayoral campaign, Emanuel toured a Southwest Side charter school with the chain's CEO, Juan Rangel, and declared it an "incredible success" because of its 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. day. To hammer out his education platform, he met with Rangel, Hyatt hotels billionaire Penny Pritzker, and private equity moguls Bruce Rauner and Brian Simmons. Emanuel made a longer school day and school year a centerpiece of his platform—and immediately after winning office in February 2011 he zeroed in on Chicago's schools and CTU.

Educational Apartheid

Many teachers were appalled by the city's enthusiastic push to slash resources and close schools. They knew the charters that replaced closed public schools were kicking out students who had low academic performance, disabilities, or disciplinary records, or whose first language was not English.

And they knew racism fed into the decisions on which schools to close. Those slated for closure and turnaround were nearly all in low-income black and Latino neighborhoods. "Those of us who taught in these low-income African American schools felt like our schools were targeted," said Carol Caref, a math teacher who would later direct CTU's research department. "Our kids had issues they needed help with—and instead of CPS supporting us and doing what was needed for the kids, they undermined us, like cutting back on vocational programs at my school."

Charters and selective-enrollment schools (elite high schools, where students compete for admission) were preserved and promoted. After CORE was elected CTU would publicly denounce the school board's policies as "educational apartheid."

Enrollments were in fact going down in some poor neighbor-

hoods because families were being kicked out of public housing and scattered to other neighborhoods, as real estate developers pushed in. In fact, Renaissance 2010 targeted many of the same areas as the sweeping "Plan for Transformation"—another Mayor Daley scheme that was demolishing public housing to make way for private, "mixed-income" developments, forcing residents to move out in search of landlords who would accept housing vouchers.

As soon as school enrollment dropped, finally allowing for optimal class sizes, CPS would pull teachers out. "We were like, please keep teachers in the building!" said Caref. "We need more adults in the building!"

Duncan's slash-and-burn approach, together with CTU's tepid response, spurred teacher activists to form the Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators and push to take over the union.

By the Numbers

Educators

CTU is the third-largest teachers local in the U.S. Its 27,542 members, as of November 2013, included:

- 5,380 high school teachers
- 13,710 elementary teachers
- 3,066 paraprofessionals (including teacher assistants, school clerks, and many others)
- 162 school nurses
- 267 speech pathologists
- 866 clinicians (such as social workers, occupational therapists, physical therapists, and school psychologists)
- 3,826 retirees.

According to district figures, 25 percent of Chicago teachers were African American, 18 percent were Hispanic, 49 percent were white, and 3 percent were Asian/Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, as of January 2012.

Students

The Chicago Public Schools enrolled 404,151 students as of January 2012. Forty-two percent were African American, 44 percent Latino, 9 percent white, and 3 percent Asian/Pacific Islander.

Eighty-seven percent were from low-income families, and 12 percent had limited English proficiency. ✪

3

Rank and Filers Start Doing the Union's Job

Despite losing nearly 20 percent of the union's members to the Renaissance 2010 scheme, CTU's old guard leaders never had a plan—or the spirit—to fight the closings.

"There were all these attacks on the schools, and the union was basically silent," said math teacher Carol Caref. She joined a union committee on Renaissance 2010, but it didn't go anywhere.

When Englewood High was on the chopping block, history teacher Jackson Potter and other teachers and parents organized to stop the closure. But instead of pitching in, union higher-ups told Potter he should look for another job—and when he and other activists raised their voices in hearings, they were hushed by union officials.

Finding the union unhelpful, activist teachers began looking elsewhere for allies. They found each other—and like-minded community activists—and began to work together. The group that coalesced over a period of several years would become the Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators (CORE).

It wasn't initially about running for union office; it was about saving their schools. But the alliances established in these early fights would support CORE members through their 2010 election, the 2012 strike, and beyond.

The teacher activists and the community activists agreed that racism and gentrification were behind the closings. The teachers "were willing to partner with neighborhood folks because that's who they had the most in common with," said education organizer Jitu Brown of the Kenwood Oakland Community Organization (KOCO), an early ally in these fights.

Saving Bronzeville Schools

It was KOCO activists who led the first major fight against Renaissance 2010—and their success led teachers to seek them

out for advice. The city moved in summer 2004 to implement the program's first phase, the Mid-South Plan, which proposed shutting down 20 out of 22 schools in the historically black Mid-South (Bronzeville) section of the city. (Kenwood and Oakland are neighborhoods in the Bronzeville area.)

KOCO organized a coalition of community members, Local School Councils, and activist teachers. (Local School Councils, or LSCs, existed in each Chicago school, composed of two teacher reps, six parents, two community reps, and the principal, plus a student rep in high schools. The councils have the final say on the school's budget and on hiring of the principal.) Together, this coalition was able to ward off the initial round of closures by packing city meetings, pressuring the district's alderwoman, and marching on the school board president.

But the Bronzeville schools weren't the only ones on the chopping block, and KOCO's organizing know-how was immediately in demand. Brown soon met Jesse Sharkey (who later became CTU's vice president), a history teacher on the North Side fighting the conversion of Senn High School into a military academy. They talked through the organizing strategies KOCO had used to halt the Mid-South Plan.

A Neighborhood Worth Preserving

Bronzeville, on the south shore of Lake Michigan, was once known as "Black Metropolis" and a national hub of African American culture. Sam Cooke, Louis Armstrong, and Muhammad Ali all lived there. But as industry fled Chicago in the 1970s and '80s, the area lost much of its population and plunged into poverty. Now professionals are moving in, and working-class residents are worried about being priced out. University of Illinois at Chicago professor Rico Gutstein called Bronzeville "one of the most gentrified communities in Chicago." (Even the Obama family lives nearby, at the cusp between Kenwood and Hyde Park.)

According to Jitu Brown, the Mid-South Plan was a calculated attempt to destabilize the neighborhood's working class black population and replace local black schools—despite their more than adequate performance—with selective charters that would cater to the young professionals, many also African American, who were moving into the neighborhood. ☼

Brown also began to work with Potter, who later became CTU's staff coordinator, and Michael Brunson, who was then teaching at a school in the country's oldest public housing project, on the South Side, and later became recording secretary.

Potter was a young history teacher and debate team coach in a low-income black neighborhood on the South Side when in 2005 CPS announced plans to phase out Englewood High. He quickly became a leader in the fight to save the school, working closely with Brown and KOCO to organize student walkouts.

Potter also met high school teacher Xian Barrett, and the two began meeting with their students to collaborate. "My students at Julian High School got really into the Englewood fight," Barrett said, "because we could see the writing on the wall that we were the type of school that would be targeted next."

Not all these struggles produced wins as in Bronzeville. Englewood did eventually close, replaced by two new schools, one a charter. The naval academy did take over a wing of Senn High. And 2004-05 was only the first volley in the coming war over mass school closures. But that was all the more reason the growing relationships and organizing skills would be crucial.

Potter also served on the board of the Pilsen Alliance, which had formed in 1998 to defend Pilsen, a working class Mexican-American neighborhood on the Southwest Side, against an onslaught from developers. The city was taking tax dollars that should have gone to schools and funneling them to developers through "tax-increment financing" (TIF).

On paper the subsidies were supposed to promote job-creating industrial development in Pilsen—but there was nothing to stop the money from flowing to new condos and big-box retailers instead. The Pilsen Alliance organized against TIF financing for Target and other big-box stores, bringing Potter into coalitions with community organizations like the Grassroots Collaborative and ACORN.

'Who Wants to Talk?'

Over the next couple of years, as teachers and community activists fought side by side to save schools, the union's leaders continued to be unsupportive. Activists pushed them to create a union committee to counter Renaissance 2010. "We cajoled them

Sarah Jane Rhee, loveandstrugglephotos.com

for a couple months," said Potter, and "they said yes. We got good at putting demands on union leadership together with community groups." But in spring 2007 the union dismantled the committee.

For years the old guard of CTU had given lip service to working on education issues with community groups. But such coalitions often fell flat, largely because of union leaders' halfhearted participation. "In the old days, CTU really had to be brought kicking and screaming," said Rico Gutstein of Teachers for Social Justice, a local activist group with an anti-racist perspective.

"You always hear how labor works with community to get what they want, and then they leave," said Brown. "That coalition began to fall apart because folks didn't feel a commitment from the union to stand with us on the issues that impact our lives."

To make matters worse, CTU leaders were busy fighting each other. Things came to a head in 2008, when the president sought to have the vice president dismissed for financial impropriety, particularly lavish spending on meals and gifts. The vice president accused the president of similar spending. When the previous reformers were voted out in 2004, the union had had a $5 million surplus; now it had to cope with a $2 million deficit. "While teachers suffered from massive job cuts," said Al Ramirez, a teacher at Ruiz Elementary, "their leadership was not asleep at the wheel—they were joyriding."

Kristine Mayle, later elected CTU's financial secretary, was a special education teacher at De La Cruz, a middle school in

Pilsen. When she learned in early 2008 that De La Cruz was slated to close, Mayle worried what would happen to her students, who benefited from the school's award-winning programs for special needs students.

She also worried about her own uncertain future. This was her first job in the district. As a young, untenured teacher, she would be on her own to find a new job if the school got shut down.

She was furious at the lackluster response of CTU's old guard leadership. It was hard to get them to send a representative out to the school to calm nervous teachers, she said, let alone oppose the closing. "We called the union and they basically just told us to get our resumes together," she said.

But someone else did show up at De La Cruz to talk about fighting back. "They dropped some flyers in our mailboxes and said they wanted to have a meeting," Mayle recalled, "then showed up after school one day and said, 'Who wants to talk to us?'"

It was Norine Gutekanst, a third-grade bilingual teacher at a nearby school, and a couple of members of the Pilsen Alliance. "When we saw that De La Cruz was on the list, it was just natural, since it was our community, that we went over to see how we could organize the community to try to stop it," Gutekanst said.

"It was the beginnings of CORE," said Mayle.

Organization started to gel when Potter and Ramirez pulled together a meeting of about 20 people, borrowing the United Electrical Workers hall. Ramirez, a longtime union delegate (steward), had worked with Potter to make a documentary about the school closing fights. In the process, "we started running into other people who were ready for something, ready to fight back," said Ramirez, who would become CORE's co-chair.

Jen Johnson, a young history teacher and delegate, remembers, "It wasn't laid out what was going to come from that meeting. They figured this was the next step, to get more people involved in a new way."

The group decided to keep meeting and before long had adopted a name. "We weren't talking about running for office at that point," Johnson said. "We were thinking maybe we can get more people involved, we can help file grievances, involve community partners, show a different way to fight school closings and draw on the knowledge of community people.

"My personal sense was that there were some really experienced leaders in the room. They were doing things people in my building weren't talking about."

Study Hall

You might expect no less from teachers: one of their early activities was to form a study group, with the goal of understanding the issues and the players, in order to fight more successfully.

"I went to a study group to figure out what was going on in school closings in Chicago," said CTU's future president Karen Lewis, then a chemistry teacher. "I can't tell you how many times I've heard the 'there's nothing we can do' mantra. These teachers were talking about actually forming resistance."

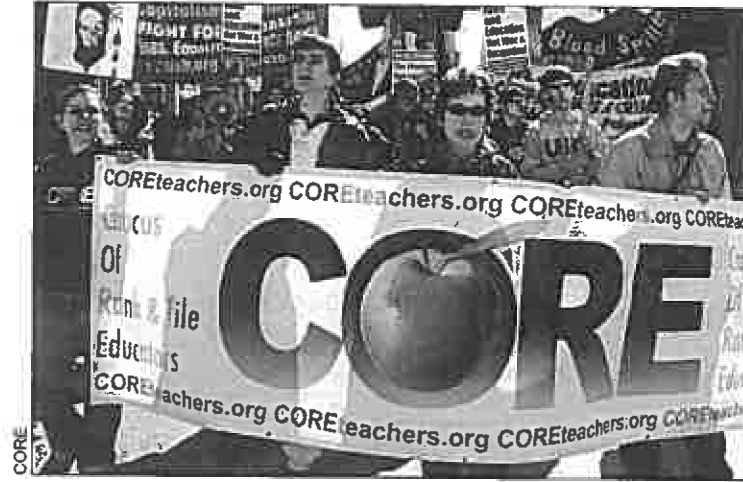
One of the group's first and most influential readings was Naomi Klein's 2007 book *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, which describes how the New Orleans elite seized upon the opportunity of Hurricane Katrina to fire all 7,500 of the city's teachers and hand over the majority of its schools to private charter operators. "I think the best thing that happened to the education system in New Orleans was Hurricane Katrina," Secretary of Education Arne Duncan would later confide.

Klein argued that the rich and powerful use crises—whether real or mostly hype—to frog-march the public towards goals they would otherwise never agree to. The connections weren't hard to see, as waves of "crisis budgeting" were used to push charterization in Chicago.

The teachers also studied their union contract and the Renaissance 2010 plan. They read a Ph.D. thesis on the history of CTU. They read a piece called "Rethinking Unions," from the activist magazine *Rethinking Schools*, which argued for teacher unions to go beyond self-interest and embrace social justice unionism. And they read the newly published pamphlet *Hell on Wheels: The Success & Failure of Reform in Transport Workers Local 100*, about a rank-and-file caucus that won leadership of New York City's bus and subway union.

School of Hard Knocks

Although some of the teacher activists had worked together for years, the group was "very open and welcomed new people,"



CORE

recalled Bill Lamme, a social studies teacher who came to early meetings. He saw himself as a peripheral member at first, focusing his political energies on social justice activism with his students rather than the union. But he was impressed to find such smart, experienced people interested in getting something done together, not self-promotion.

The teachers "developed a collective body of knowledge," Lamme said. "They developed a group with a focused and common view of what had happened. They built themselves; they didn't just bring together disparate individuals."

It wasn't all readings. Among them, teachers in the group had years of knowledge and experience, which they systematically shared. Many were union delegates, veterans of fights within the union and with management, who had developed organizing skills and a solid understanding of what they were up against.

Some had been involved in PACT, a reform caucus that had held the CTU top officers' jobs from 2001 to 2004. So the group studied that experience and asked leaders from PACT to speak at a meeting. One of the key lessons: sentiment against the incumbents might be enough to sweep you into office, but it was not enough to transform the union once you got in. Veterans of that fight were wary of rushing into another electoral campaign. Instead, they stressed the importance of building a strong and

independent caucus with active members in as many schools as possible.

Some in the study group were long-time socialists who knew the history of rank-and-file movements in other unions. And Potter's stepfather, Pete Camarata, was a founder of Teamsters for a Democratic Union. Members of the study group talked with local TDU activists and met with teachers union reformers, too—the Progressive Educators for Action Caucus, part of a coalition that

Starting from Scratch

Jim Cavallero had been a delegate for four or five years—a pretty disappointing experience.

"I was going to House of Delegates meetings and trying to bring information back to people, but there wasn't much to bring back, to be honest," he said. (The House of Delegates is the monthly meeting of representatives from each school.) "People in my school were starting to see the union as a waste."

And action? Forget about it. "I'd never been to a CTU rally," Cavallero said. "I'd never even heard of a CTU rally."

But he wasn't willing to give up. When he saw an article about a new caucus forming in the union, he recognized the author: Jesse Sharkey, someone he knew from the House of Delegates. "I tended to agree with the things he said," Cavallero said—so he went to the first meeting, liked what he heard, and got involved in CORE.

On the day-to-day level at his school, what did that mean? "Instead of me coming to people saying, 'This is what the union can and can't do for you,' I started saying it more as, 'What can we do? What can you do to be more involved—can you do this, can you attend this?'" Cavallero recalled. "Not just looking at the union as Merchandise Mart [the downtown commercial complex where the union had its headquarters], but asking what we as union members could do ourselves.

"And people did buy into it. It was a slow process, but they did. I had a lot of one-on-one conversations, and a lot of small group conversations with two to three people, trying to get them to come to a CORE event, or something one of our allies was throwing.

"When I started to see a change is when CORE ran for union leadership, and people started hearing the things Karen and Jesse were saying. They realized that was the kind of union they wanted: one where membership was involved. Not just trying to fight for a salary. Trying to fight for public education; trying to defend teaching as a profession." ☼

took leadership of the Los Angeles teachers local in 2005, and the Federación de Maestros de Puerto Rico. The Puerto Rican reformers had won leadership of their union, broken from the American Federation of Teachers in opposition to concessions, and in 2008 led a militant strike in defiance of a ban on public sector strikes.

CORE Goes Public

The teachers started spreading the word about CORE online with a June 2008 announcement. "CORE is a group of dedicated teachers, paraprofessionals and other champions of public education. We hope to transform our Union into an organization that actually fights for its members," they declared. "All of our jobs are on the chopping block with 400 teachers fired this year alone... What is our union leadership doing? CORE is fighting to stop these attacks on teachers."

The announcement laid out "a proposal for change that we hope you will help us develop and fine-tune," listing a four-point agenda: wages, improved benefits, better working conditions, and job security. Those sound like traditional bread-and-butter union issues—but under "working conditions" the new caucus included class size, high-stakes testing, an elected school board, and working with parents and students. Under "job security," ending school closings topped the list, and CORE proposed taking job actions and building a strike fund to stop the spread of charter schools.

The group planned a "Fight for Public Education" public event with Jinny Sims, past president of the British Columbia Teachers' Federation. B.C. teachers had struck illegally for two weeks in 2005, attracting the kind of community support CORE saw as vital—and winning smaller class sizes as well as a raise.

Gutekanst was impressed with the listening tours BCTF had sponsored to hear from parents and community members. The union "really connected with what were people's concerns, and what were their desires and hopes for education in the province," she said. About 25 people came out for a daytime meeting, and 75 in the evening. "We weren't talking about striking so much," Caref said, but about how Sims's group had "influenced the union to move in a more fighting, social justice direction."

CORE wasn't running for office yet, but it wasn't shy about

criticizing the incumbent administration. The caucus helped organize a protest at CTU headquarters, demanding the union "stop the crooks and open the books," and calling for greater transparency and accountability to members.

Going to Every Meeting

The fledgling caucus decided to focus on fighting school closings. Although CORE was small and made up of volunteers with full-time jobs, the group committed to attend all school board meetings and closure hearings to speak out.

"Once we started going to board meetings, it totally changed the character of who came out," said Caref. "We went to every school closing hearing, every charter school opening, every board meeting, and we said 'No. Stop now,'" said Lewis. Each time they announced themselves as CORE, more members joined, especially from schools under attack.

Mayle and others had fought the closure of De La Cruz in 2008—they had students write letters to the board of education about what the school meant to them and present them at the school's closing hearing. Ultimately they lost, but they did win an extra year of phase-out, so students could finish middle school there in 2009 instead of having to transfer.

So Mayle's role at the hearings she attended was to prep everyone else—parents, students, and school staff—to "give them a sense of what was going to go down, what talking points worked with the board." Even when this didn't produce new CORE recruits, Mayle said, "we were the force showing that there were still people willing to fight."

Special education teacher Margo Murray first got involved with CORE this way. She was fighting for the therapeutic day school where she worked. "This was a school serving black troubled youth, children with severe behavior problems, who needed therapy," she explained. "The CORE people were there, and I was like, 'Wow, I don't have to do this by myself.'" Teachers and parents were able to stop the school from closing that year.

'These People Are Solid'

The individual relationships many of the teachers had formed through their activism allowed organizational relationships with

community groups to develop organically.

"Initially people may have been a little hesitant to work with CORE due to the perception that they were young and inexperienced, but the fact is they were serious. They made up for their lack of experience with a fervor that was youth," said KOCO's Brown. People in the community organizing world would call him up, asking whether they should go to CORE meetings. "I'd say, 'Yes, these people are solid.'"

"The old CTU leadership never thought about the parents, ever. It was just bread and butter, take care of the members," Mayle said. "We realized our natural allies were the parents. It's super obvious. I don't know why anyone else didn't realize it."

A new coalition, the Grassroots Education Movement (GEM), began to come together. In addition to CORE it consisted of KOCO; Teachers for Social Justice; the Pilsen Alliance; Blocks Together, a community organization based in the Latino neighborhood of West Humbolt Park; Parents United for Responsible Education (PURE), a city-wide parent group; Designs for Change; and others. The coalition also included "a hodgepodge of occasional Local School Council presidents and members, depending on fights that were going on," said Potter.

"I remember a very long retreat trying to work out a mission statement for GEM that took all day," said Mayle. "The whole thing worked on consensus, true consensus." The group committed to democratic principles in education, the rights of every child, and the idea that schooling should "prepare students to deeply understand the roots of inequality and be prepared to act to change the world."

GEM became an important vehicle for mobilizing against the cuts and closures, organizing large protests that brought thousands to the streets in opposition to the school board's plans. Later the groups in GEM became the nucleus for CTU's Community Board (see Chapter 6).

Summit in a Blizzard

In January 2009, just months after the caucus formed, CORE sponsored a citywide "Education Summit" with the help of the groups in GEM. The summit served as a kick-off event for two months of intense organizing against impending closures.

Despite a driving snowstorm, more than 500 people showed up, representing 81 schools—far more than the 100-200 people organizers had anticipated. The crowd talked about closings, firings of veteran teachers, special education, student discipline, and how teachers and community members should work together.

The city had announced plans to close 22 schools in the next year but not said which ones. Right before the summit, the coalition's tireless meeting-going paid off. At one of the meetings, a parent organizer from Parents United for Responsible Education got hold of the closure list—"so we were able to announce the schools closing at this meeting," Mayle said. "We were the source of information for everybody."

Organizers had tried to ensure that each panel included a student, parent, or community member—not just teachers. Former charter school teachers and students exposed the myths about what was happening in charters. The momentum was so great that even CTU's administration felt compelled to participate, so CORE gave President Marilyn Stewart a speaking slot on one of the panels.

That forum was the moment the CORE activists realized their power, according to Johnson. "If 500 people can show up in the middle of a blizzard, then I think we are tapping into something that is real," she said.

Sarah Jane Rhee, loveandstrugglephotos.com

Riding the momentum of the forum, GEM crystallized, and with its partners in CORE "began to mount some pretty intense fights against school closures" in early 2009, Brown recalled. The pressure was making the union's top brass pay more attention to the closures. "We invited the CTU leadership to join GEM," Lewis said, "and they came to a few meetings to learn how to organize."

In between citywide events, CORE activists were making connections with teachers, students, and parents school by school, helping them get organized to fight locally. "They brought their experience of how you do a campaign," Lamme said. "How to organize a demonstration, write a press release, confront the board at a board meeting—strategies for building your movement within a school." CORE didn't just build up a few charismatic individuals; instead, the caucus grew by helping more people develop leadership and organizing skills. "They stood behind people, not in front of them," Lamme said.

In late January, hundreds marched on a board of education meeting—opposing the 22 closures and demanding a moratorium on all closings and "turnarounds" (where the entire staff of a school is fired). The following month, CORE and community groups camped outside the district's downtown offices, keeping vigil in tents through the freezing February night. And the next day, hundreds packed a board of education meeting while hundreds more rallied outside. The coalition won a major victory, forcing the board to keep six of the 22 schools open.

But after the six schools were saved, the union leadership stopped working with GEM. "After the photo-ops ended, so did the union's active participation," reported Kenzo Shibata, an English teacher who later took charge of new media for CTU.

At CORE's convention in April, members held workshops and agreed on the group's principles. The caucus members chose five: a member-driven union, transparency and accountability, education for all, defense of publicly funded education, and a strong contract.

Discrimination Complaint

CORE continued to study the role of race in Chicago schools. As Caref remembers it, during a conversation about how the closures overwhelmingly hit African American students in high-pov-

erty areas, someone pointed out that the district might also be targeting those schools to get rid of black teachers. "I said, 'Let me look that up, because I'm a research person,'" Caref said. She checked out the state statistics and sure enough: "When you compared the number of African American teachers at turnaround schools, before and after turnaround, there was a huge drop."

So in June 2009 CORE filed an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission complaint, on the grounds that turnarounds had a disproportionate impact on black teachers. Since 2002, the percentage of African American teachers in CPS had dropped from 39.4 to 31.6—a loss of 2,000 black teachers. "Essentially, a 'turnaround' constitutes a layoff policy that almost exclusively impacts African American teachers," CORE charged.

Wanda Evans, who taught at Orr High School for 11 years and had been nominated for teaching awards before it was turned around, said she felt "swept right out of the door." She suggested the turnaround plan was designed to save money by replacing senior teachers with lower-salaried new ones. "I'm completely offended by the way veteran teachers have been treated," Evans said. "It's like a fast food special: let's get a 2 for 1."

Socialize to Organize

"I went to my first CORE meeting before I ever went to a union meeting," high school teacher Adam Heenan said. He was invited by Xian Barrett, whom he met at a service-learning program in summer 2009—wearing a CORE T-shirt.

CORE held its meetings at Manny's Deli in those days. "We ordered food and talked about issues," Heenan said. "I was surprised by the way everyone let each other talk and gave their opinions. I hadn't really seen this before." Though busily organizing, the caucus was also still doing movie screenings and reading circles.

"I was impressed," Heenan said. "I said, 'I want to do this. I want to be a part of this. I want to get good at this.'" He took the lessons back to his school building, where he became an associate delegate and later head delegate.

Key to the delegate's job, in his view, is getting members involved in solving problems at their worksite—and getting them to socialize with each other, too. "My thing has always been 'socialize to organize to mobilize,'" Heenan said. "You can't expect people to march in the streets together if they don't even know each other's names." ☼

CORE didn't end up winning the complaint, but the action was a foot in the door to start talking about the connection between school closings and racism—and to get veteran black teachers involved in the caucus. Under its old leaders, CTU had developed "a bad name in some of the black communities," Gutstein said. "What CORE has done is to concretely take up the struggle of the black community in particular."

When Arne Duncan came to speak in Chicago that month, CORE held a protest. "We had the statistics about the number of black teachers losing their jobs due to school closings," remembered Johnson. "We carried signs that were black outlines, the head and shoulders in black, to represent them."

After CORE activists reported via Twitter that they had been threatened with arrest for trying to enter, a flood of teachers responded with solidarity messages, offers to send bail money—and requests for directions to the picket line.

Issue by Issue

The caucus took up fights on other issues in the schools, too, such as the "20-day rule" that allowed schools to open or close positions 20 days into the school year. This was a way for the district to save money by adjusting to actual enrollment levels. But the savings came at the expense of a rocky start to the school year for students who would endure weeks of substitutes or overcrowded classes, or cope with program changes when their teacher was laid off.

"Does it really save money," Caref asked the board of education, "or does it just shift expenses to summer school or after-school programs which might not have been necessary if the school [year] had gotten off to a good start?"

CORE launched a campaign in the House of Delegates, successfully petitioning the union to hold a special meeting to debate the 20-day rule. The ruling caucus managed to block a vote, but CORE intensified its own public campaign on the issue.

The caucus also came to the aid of staff battling a bully principal. Prescott Elementary Principal Erin Roche was handing out record numbers of disciplines and terminations for weird reasons, in an effort to get rid of veteran teachers. One teacher was told

she was fired for closing the blinds, among other "instructional weaknesses," *Substance News* reported; Roche was apparently convinced that "'research shows' children learn better in the sun." Teachers said Roche wanted to start charging tuition for Prescott's free pre-school program, to drive out the low-income Latino students; the neighborhood was in the midst of gentrification.

CTU members at Prescott reported that their union reps weren't helping them fight the harassment, instead advising that they find another job. So CORE and another opposition caucus teamed up to organize an afternoon picket, drawing 50 teachers, parents, and students, on the day of a Local School Council meeting in June. Days after the picket, district officials finally held a meeting to hear from teachers at Prescott and two other schools with problem principals.

CORE also began reaching out to reformers elsewhere, establishing the beginnings of a network. In summer 2009, a delegation traveled to Los Angeles to meet with reformers from L.A., New York, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C. (For more on the network that would grow from these beginnings, see Chapter 11.)

Time to Run

By the time the 2009-2010 school year rolled around, the writing was on the wall. With little more than a year under its belt, the caucus was already doing much of the work union leaders should be doing—but without its resources. "CORE decided if we were going to make a real change, we needed to take back control of the union," said high school teacher Adam Heenan.

Originally, "we just wanted to change the way things were done," Lewis said. "We thought we were making some progress because the president of the union came to some forums we held. We thought, 'Oh, this is great, we're going to see some fundamental change.'

"When that didn't happen, we decided we should run."

Lessons

- ⇨ CORE began doing the work of the union long before being elected.
- ⇨ Like-minded teacher activists found each other through action—fighting school closures—not just at union meetings. CORE sent an activist to every single school closure hearing.
- ⇨ The caucus developed alliances by working together with community groups as equals, not just asking for assistance with its own predetermined goals.
- ⇨ CORE activists were united by more than just their opposition to the incumbents. Through reading, conversations, and actions they developed a shared point of view.
- ⇨ CORE attracted new recruits by tackling issues teachers cared about. Filing a discrimination complaint, for instance, helped the caucus reach out to African American teachers who'd had reason to mistrust the union in the past.
- ⇨ CORE made activism enjoyable and welcoming to new recruits by making social events part of what members did.
- ⇨ Teachers with no prior experience learned how to organize by joining CORE's discussions and actions. As they shared their skills with other new recruits, CORE grew and could take on even more activities.

4

The Caucus Runs for Office

The United Progressive Caucus (UPC) had led CTU for 37 of the 40 previous years—at times even militantly, but those days were long past. Leaders seemed to have accepted that the tide of privatization was unstoppable and the best the union could do was manage its members' layoffs. They had made peace, of a sort, with the notion that management would get its way.

What's more, they saw the union's role simply as defending members on bread-and-butter issues—not as fighting for a brighter vision of public schools. When they couldn't do the former, they sat on their hands. "You would never hear from the union," said elementary teacher Nate Rasmussen.

CORE's win in the third-largest teacher union in the country happened very quickly, just two years after the caucus was founded.

Their victory was one-third inspiring vision—which is what drew Rasmussen to the fledgling caucus that was making a stand against privatization and over-testing. "CORE could verbalize that it was part of a different movement, and not just about our contract and whether we got a 4 percent raise," he said. "It was about quality teaching conditions in our schools."

The victory was one-third activist pluck, the willingness to jump into the trenches and start struggling on the issues. CORE activists didn't take a break from fighting school closures while they ran for office—in fact, they stepped up the fight.

And it was one-third good old-fashioned organizing know-how—the persistent list-making, numbers tracking, one-on-one conversations, and shoe leather, for which there is no substitute. "The genius of CORE, more than anything else, is that the people are organizers and they do it well. They think of details," said high school teacher Bill Lamme. "That's why even being such a new group, we were able to win the election."

Starting with Delegates

The caucus first started winning elections at the lowest rung: delegate. CTU's governing body is the House of Delegates, with about 800 elected members—one from each school and more from large schools. The House meets monthly, but its meetings had devolved to doing a whole lot of nothing.

Some CORE members had already been delegates for years; others ran and won. But once CORE had enough seats (around 20) to propose actions from the floor, union leaders responded by blocking new business from delegates. At times, the president would speak for as long as 40 minutes—counting on enough delegates to leave so there would be no quorum.

The next electoral step was a campaign for two vacant seats on the pension fund board of trustees. Every teacher seat on the board was held by a member of UPC, the incumbent caucus. CORE announced its candidates in July 2009, for an October election.

Jay Rehak and Lois Ashford were both veteran teachers, one white, the other black. Rehak had worked for the union during the PACT reform caucus's term in office. More recently he'd been watchdogging the district's fiscal choices, speaking critically in hearings about its sketchy investments in derivatives.

Ashford had taught for 16 years at Copernicus Elementary and joined CORE after she and the school's entire staff were laid off in a "turnaround" and forced to reapply for their jobs. She'd begun researching the pension board's actions at that point, realizing that the "pension was the only thing they could not take away." Now at another school, she was a member of CORE's steering committee.

Running for Pension Trustees

The CORE candidates went from school to school campaigning, bringing leaflets with pension information and talking to union members about what was at stake. "It was more of an educational campaign than a political one," observed CORE communications secretary Kenzo Shibata (later CTU's new media coordinator).

There was plenty to talk about. District CEO Ron Huberman was trying to bust teachers' pension down to a defined-contribution 401(k)-type plan—just as he'd done to Chicago transit workers in a previous job. Rehak and Ashford promised a more aggressive defense than that of the incumbent trustees, who were caving to both district and legislative attacks on teachers' pensions, they said.

But Ashford and Rehak weren't campaigning alone—the whole caucus got involved. David Hernandez, for example, was one of 10 from Social Justice High who stepped up to leaflet around the city. CORE made a spreadsheet of all the schools and broke out assignments by region.

At the October House of Delegates meeting, UPC moved to endorse the incumbent candidates for the pension board. This mattered because a union-funded mailer would go out with all the endorsed candidates' names on it. In the past these endorsements had been rubber-stamped. But CORE had a plan, an amendment to endorse all six candidates. All the opposition caucuses united behind it, and in a close vote, the motion passed: a good sign.

A Springboard

A week before the election, on a professional development day (when teachers are at school but students are not), CORE members canvassed hundreds of schools one more time. Two days before the election, the CORE candidates spoke once more at a board of education hearing, charging that CPS was trying to short the pension fund $100 million in a "last-minute, back-door" deal in the legislature.

It all paid off. In the October 30 election Ashford and Rehak were, narrowly, the top two vote-getters.

The pension campaign was important not only for its own sake—to salvage members' retirement—but also as a test of the caucus's reach and appeal. As the first union-wide election the caucus had contested, "it was a temperature check of how CORE was organizing," Hernandez said. It was also a springboard, building momentum for the higher-stakes campaign that would follow a few months later.

Of course, it was a signal to the incumbents, too. After the pension board upset, UPC collaborated with Huberman to publish new rules intended to curtail opposition candidates' ability to distribute literature or hold meetings at schools. The administra-

tion also challenged the eligibility of one of CORE's likely nominees for top office.

Forming the Slate

In a January 2010 meeting, 100 CORE members voted among five possible combinations and chose their slate of candidates for the union's top offices: Karen Lewis for president, Jackson Potter for vice president, Michael Brunson for recording secretary, and Kristine Mayle for financial secretary. The election would be held in May.

"First of all we wanted to have folks who were seen as really fighters," elementary teacher Norine Gutekanst said, "and we wanted to be representative of the different demographics in the union." The slate should also represent elementary as well as high schools and both veteran teachers and younger ones. It was a plus that Mayle had a background in special education, and that the four lived in different areas of the city.

The caucus also ran candidates for the rest of the executive board (dozens of seats) and for state and national union convention delegates. The next step would be a February-March push for 1,400 petition signatures to make the nominations official.

Potter, who was in a legal battle over his eligibility, withdrew from the ticket at the end of January, before the petition period was to open. He had taken a study leave three years before, and though he had kept paying dues the whole time, the incumbents now claimed he had not maintained the required three years' continuous membership. CORE activists believed he was in the right, but it would have been too risky to wait for the outcome of the court battle. Senn High School social studies teacher Jesse Sharkey stepped up to run for vice president.

Jen Johnson

CORE ran a slate of top officers in 2010: Jesse Sharkey, Michael Brunson, Karen Lewis, and Kristine Mayle, along with dozens for executive board.

Math teacher Carol Caref was in charge of the petition effort. "It wasn't hard to get signatures," she said, "but you actually have to go out and do it."

(The next time CORE ran, in 2013, the caucus tracked who signed the petition and used it as a recruiting tool. "If in some schools everybody signed it," said elementary teacher Sarah Chambers, "that's a good sign. If half signed it, that's a bad sign, and we would try to have a speaker go there.")

Making the List

It's one of the universals of organizing—the first thing you do is make a list. Alix Gonzalez Guevara, a teacher at Telpochcalli School, remembers staying up late transferring data about each school from a district-published book into an Excel spreadsheet: region, address, how many teachers, how many students. This became a Google document, an online spreadsheet available to everyone working on the campaign—all shared the same login information. "I would highly recommend the Google doc," Chambers said.

The schools were grouped by regions. Within each region, a couple of lead activists stepped up—people who lived or taught in the area—and took responsibility to find people to do outreach at each school. Then, whenever someone went out to leaflet or hold a meeting at a school, they'd document it in the central spreadsheet, so it was easy to track which schools had been visited a lot already and which needed more attention.

After each visit, activists also documented their current estimate of how support was running at the school. CORE didn't try to track where 27,000 CTU members stood individually; tracking was by school, an educated guess at the school's percentage of support based on conversations with members there, what the delegate said (and whether she was supportive), and how many had signed the petition to get CORE's candidates on the ballot. Relationships with delegates were a high priority. "We really tried to recruit the delegates," Chambers said.

On a typical visit, the CORE activist might spend a half-hour in the parking lot, talking with teachers about the issues. Then she would go inside, chat with the clerk if he wasn't too busy, stuff all the mailboxes with the latest CORE flyer, and leave a personal letter for the delegate, with a phone number to contact CORE if he wanted to set up a meeting. Where possible, she would try to arrange a group meeting so the officer candidates could meet teachers and answer questions.

"We had a group of 20 people who were available to go debate with the other caucus candidates at the schools," said Potter. "The decentralized approach allowed us to run circles around the opposition, who only deployed the four officers."

"We had an operation," Gutekanst recalled. "We really tried to blanket the city. We had a little mini-army of people who were willing to do that. And we were well-organized geographically around the city."

'A Mini-Army'

Chambers estimated 80 to 100 CORE members did these kinds of flyering visits, mostly in the morning or afternoon, before or after school. About 20 took some "personal business" days off to campaign. A few were out practically every morning or afternoon. The most work, of course, was done by the dozens of people on the slate, and the top officer candidates most of all.

CTU

CORE leafletted at Puerto Rican Day Parade.

Special education teacher Margo Murray, who made many such visits, reported it was the personal contact that won people over to CORE. "You have to spend that time talking," she said. "Reading it, sometimes they don't get it, but somebody they like or respect their opinion, making that personal contact—if they respect you, they're going to take a second look."

Over the course of the campaign, the caucus hit every school—most schools three times and some five times. The tracking made it easier to prioritize larger schools, ones that hadn't been visited much, those where CORE's forces were weaker, or, in some cases, schools where the caucus wanted to build up a base of potential activists. Lower priority was given to very small schools or to schools that were totally dominated by strong delegates from other caucuses.

At Caref's high school, the 10 CORE people met and split up the list of CTU members, with each person having 10 people to talk to. "People get interested in an election," Caref said. "There were people who hadn't previously been involved in CORE who took CORE lit to other schools and called their friends and were really campaigning for us. And that happened across the city."

"You always have to be putting it out there: 'these are the different ways you can participate,'" Gonzalez Guevara said. Someone might not be willing to hand out flyers, but "they would make some phone calls or host a fundraiser. You have to see what people are interested to contribute."

At CORE's general meetings—which grew more frequent, from monthly to every two weeks to once a week by the end of the

24-Hour Bins

One simple tool CORE came up with was the 24-hour bin. A member would volunteer to host a plastic bin outside their house in a place where people could get to it at all hours—on the front porch, for instance, or under the stairs. The bin would be stocked with the latest flyers, posters, or whatever literature CORE was distributing.

During the 2010 campaign there were five of these bins scattered around the city, making it easy for any volunteer to pick up the latest literature at any time. The system proved so handy that CORE kept using it for caucus flyers after the campaign was over. ✪

campaign—activists would report on the schools they had visited and pick up five or more new ones. Sometimes in these meetings they would role-play what to say when flyering—reporting what new questions they were hearing and brainstorming how to respond. (By the 2013 campaign, "we role-played in almost every meeting," Chambers said. These would be big meetings of 80 to 100 people, and the role-playing made them all "very, very knowledgeable about what was going on.")

CORE also held a half-dozen phonebanks, mostly targeting delegates the activists hadn't met yet. These cold calls proved helpful, Mayle said: "For those that weren't overly political, it helped get CORE's name out there." She and other callers got hold of delegates this way who hadn't even heard of the caucus yet—and by the time the election rolled around, some of these schools would end up voting CORE's way.

(The next time around in 2013, getting CORE's name out there was a non-issue, so the caucus didn't do many calls of this type; instead, mini-phonebanks targeted CORE's own members to make sure they came out to meetings. The ideal model was that used by Sue Garza, who by then led the Far South Side—one of the strongest regions. Each teacher took responsibility for five schools for the whole duration of the campaign. The teacher would stay in constant contact with the delegates those few months, and always know how each school was doing. Chambers

CORE Issues

www.COREteachers.org

Guggenheim Elementary

CORE Events Coming Soon

Meet CORE's 2010 Candidate

Financial Secretary

Kristine Mayle

Hundreds Gather at January 9 CORE/GEM Education Summit

also recruited retirees: "They can go all day flyering. Or even family members! My dad flyered. Whoever you can get.")

Campaign Communications

Any time CORE activists visited schools or held campaign events, they gathered contact information: emails and phone numbers. Shibata contributed the email list he had built from his education policy blog, *thechalkboard.org*; others added members they knew would be interested.

Shibata estimates that at the height of the campaign the email list reached 5,000 and was one of the main ways CORE got its message out—letting members know every time the group organized a forum or rally. The caucus also had a busy blog displaying its many activities—in stark contrast to the union's official website, which didn't look like it had much going on. At the peak of the campaign the CORE site got 1,000-1,200 hits a day.

CORE also began publishing a newsletter not long after the caucus formed, printing each new issue in time to distribute at the monthly delegates meeting. At first the print run was small, but as the caucus grew more visible, starting to successfully move things in the House of Delegates and organize more of its own events, "people were actually asking for them," Shibata said.

So CORE started printing more copies and handing out whole bundles, giving people enough to distribute to each CTU

Fighting School Closings

New Board Prez: "Give Her a Chance?"

member in their building. "At that time the union newsletter was big and glossy, with lots of pictures of the officers," Shibata said. "It worked like campaign lit essentially, and was a bit of a joke with the rank and file. We just did a four-pager, with information on what was going on in the schools—and more people were reading our newsletter than were reading the official magazine."

During the same period, Shibata started using Twitter to report, in real time, what was being said in board of education meetings. Since the meetings took place on weekday mornings when teachers couldn't go, "when I'd tweet them all that info, they could watch it in real time." (Or catch up on their next break.) CORE also started live-tweeting House of Delegates meetings. Oddly enough, Shibata said, the use of Twitter and other new media helped get CORE some press attention. "You can't get mainstream news coverage as a caucus within a union," he said. "But the fact that we were using these technologies often became a story, and got our name out."

As the election neared, CORE bought targeted online ads to make sure the caucus's logo and the election date popped up constantly onscreen for anyone who listed CPS as their employer on Facebook or was searching for anything CPS-related. This was not only a helpful reminder for supporters and fence-sitters—it was also a fun way to psych out the incumbents, making CORE seem ubiquitous. And when CORE's name was mentioned in a *Chicago Tribune* story about its EEOC complaint just before the election, the algorithm caused its banner ad to appear right beside the online story. "We had a huge spike in our page views," Shibata said.

Social and Fundraising Events

CORE's meetings grew steadily bigger, and sometimes split into regional meetings (North, South, and Southwest) "so the meetings could be a little more intimate," as Caref put it.

The caucus also sponsored plenty of fundraising events throughout the year. Among the most memorable were a night at a comedy club and one at a blues club, but others were as simple as a night out at a local bar with a door charge and raffle. These events did double duty—not only raising funds, but also serving as social opportunities to strengthen ties among the activists and welcome new folks in.

Official CORE members paid dues: $35 a year for teachers, $20 for paraprofessionals, retirees, and supporters. But that would have been nowhere near enough to pay for the campaign. Slate members were expected to chip in some of their own money, and the fundraisers held at least monthly were crucial. The campaign cost perhaps $30,000, spent mostly on printing and mailing flyers.

The caucus also continued to organize educational events. In the fall, together with Labor Notes and two AFSCME locals, CORE sponsored a day-long teach-in and strategy session called "Public Sector Workers Unite: Facing the Budget Crisis." And as the campaign heated up, realizing they still had gaps in their organizing know-how, the teachers went to school. The University of Illinois Labor Education Program set up five three-and-a-half hour classes for CTU activists in February, March, and April, focusing on union leadership, and a couple of dozen CORE members attended.

Round Two against Closings

Meanwhile, knowing that another round of school closings was coming, CORE had taken the offensive, starting off the 2009-10 school year with a bang. In an October press conference at City Hall the caucus unveiled a survey on the impacts of the 20-day rule and highlighted the alarming rise in student violence. CORE argued that CPS's policies—the rule and the school closures—were intensifying violence by destabilizing students' lives and communities, and by displacing the veteran teachers (overwhelmingly black) who knew the neighborhoods and students well.

The GEM coalition—CORE and community groups—called for an end to the Renaissance 2010 school closures onslaught in another press conference a few weeks later at a board of education meeting. Speakers included a displaced teacher, several former students, a minister who was on a local school council, a juvenile justice center worker, and the former vice principal of a military school who'd been forced out for resisting the district's push to make it selective-enrollment (students would have to compete for admission).

CORE held a summit at Malcolm X College in January 2010 to organize against the next round of closings—and to announce its slate for the election. The forum was scheduled for the day after CPS was supposed to announce the 2010 hit list of schools. CPS delayed the announcement, but 400 people came out anyway. The list was published a couple of weeks later: 14 schools targeted for closure, turnaround, consolidation, or phase-out.

Busy, Busy, Busy

It was a busy time. CORE activists continued their push to attend every school board meeting and closure hearing. After they persuaded a couple of aldermen to propose a moratorium on school closures, they had city council meetings to attend, too. They picketed the mayor. They held strategy meetings with GEM and caucus meetings of their own, and organized marches and candlelight vigils against the school closures. They showed up to support actions led by allies, such as parent group PURE's outreach at a district "New Schools" expo to showcase charter schools, and a march in defense of the public sector with bus drivers, AFSCME, and Service Employees (SEIU). They participated in the "No Games" rallies against bringing the Olympics to Chicago. All this was on top of the nuts and bolts of campaigning for union office.

But after all, CORE's activist identity *was* its campaign platform. All the meetings and actions gave the candidates plenty of

Sarah Jane Rhee, loveandstrugglephotos.com

opportunities to make their case publicly, tell their personal stories, and prove that their words were backed up by action. The CORE blog was packed with the latest videos and written testimonies from board of education meetings, school closure hearings, and other events. "We always made sure we wore a CORE button, a CORE shirt," Chambers said. People would "look around when a school's closing, and they wouldn't see any UPC."

The school closure fights were the reason Caref was able to get so many of the teachers at her school to join CORE, attend its events, and eventually vote for the slate. "We were always afraid we'd be next on the list," she said. (Sure enough, a couple years later, they were.)

"CORE was camping out all night in front of schools threatened to be closed, joining parents and kids," said Lamme, "while the union was sitting on its hands and being a little too generous in their compensation packages for themselves."

The board of education voted unanimously February 24 to close eight schools—but spared the other six that had been announced, including Guggenheim and Prescott Elementaries, which had mounted the most vigorous opposition. Unlike in the previous year, three aldermen had showed up to testify against the closings alongside CORE activists, and even the incumbent CTU leaders held a small picket and press conference outside.

'Name the Names, Huberman!'

The next day, CPS CEO Huberman announced a $900 million projected deficit and called on the union to re-open the contract—citing teachers' pensions, raises, and class sizes as targets.

CORE activists didn't miss a beat, announcing that they didn't trust the district's accounting. In a well-researched paper released a week later, the caucus pointed out that CPS had claimed a deficit each January or February for the past eight years—yet somehow the district always showed a surplus in its August audited budget. (CORE's early study group had learned about this kind of "crisis budgeting" routine when members read *The Shock Doctrine.*) Meanwhile, tax-increment financing (TIFs) diverted $250 million a year from Chicago's schools to subsidies for corporations.

And couldn't the savings be found in other ways, CORE argued, such as by scaling back executive salaries and cutting con-

troversial bureaucracies like the Office of School Turnaround? CORE called on the district to open its books, and filed Freedom of Information Act requests with the state (and later a lawsuit against the district) for information on TIF money and line-item details on CPS's budget.

"Exactly why should we believe CPS's deficit numbers?" Lewis asked, pointing out that Huberman's harsh cuts would mean balancing the budget on the backs of students and educators. "Thirty-five students in a classroom is inhumane and it nearly guarantees school and student failure."

CORE and GEM organized a series of protests demanding that the district "name the names" of its outside contractors and reveal the cost of standardized tests and how much Huberman was getting paid. They pressed Illinois's attorney general to fast-track the information request. Students held a 13-school, 900-student walkout April 8; a few weeks later, student leaders returned to district headquarters again to call on CPS officials to rescind the awful budget. Senior Javier Lara Mendez said students wanted an "equitable, transparent budget with no cuts to students or teachers."

Solving Problems, School by School

CORE activists knew that in many schools, CTU had little presence. The Professional Problems Committees (PPCs) that were supposed to deal with school-level issues had fallen into disuse in many schools, and many delegate slots were empty. CORE members spent time going to these underrepresented schools to meet people. They worked to identify local fights to organize and involve them—such as schools where administrators were aggressively going after teachers.

"In our buildings we all tried to make an effort to get people to solve problems in the place they worked," said Adam Heenan, who joined CORE in the summer of 2009 and later became his school's head delegate. "If you can't solve the problem that's right in front of people's faces, you don't have their trust and you can't have the opportunity to solve bigger problems. But if you can do that, you've gained an ally and are more able to educate them on broader issues that may or may not have to do with the issue that's right in their face."

Lamme had already built that kind of trust over time. His school, Kelly High, did have a well-run PPC—he ran it. When he and the other teachers on the committee would receive complaints or suggestions, "we'd investigate, talk to the people involved," he said. Often "we got issues resolved before going to the principal."

And even though it was a big school, with more than 200 staff, "I got to know everybody," Lamme said—a personal strength. So when the election came around, it made sense that people came to him to ask, "Mr. Lamme, who do I vote for?"

"We didn't limit our issues to school closings, though that was our main campaign," Caref said. "We got people in buildings to join CORE; we got CORE people to take on campaigns in their school."

Many classrooms were short on textbooks, for instance. So after Potter found out about a state program to help teachers find unused textbooks in storage at other schools, CORE spread the word, providing instructions and a spreadsheet on its website to help teachers track down the books they needed. "CORE is teachers advocating for students," enthused caucus member Joyce Sia, "from fixing the CTU right down to hooking up schools with free textbooks!"

CORE was already "doing what the union should have been doing," said Lamme. "So when the election came, they didn't say 'Elect me and I'll do this.' They said, 'This is what we've been doing and we'll keep doing it.'"

Team of Rivals

Three other slates were also challenging the incumbent United Progressive Caucus in the election. UPC, primarily composed of older teachers and paraprofessionals, many of whom were retired or near retirement, was weakened by a dispute within its ranks, and had taken the union from a big initial surplus to a mounting debt.

The strongest of the other challenger groups was PACT, the ProActive Chicago Teachers led by Deborah Lynch, who had won the presidency in 2001. However, Lynch negotiated a concessionary contract in 2003, and members voted it down. A second, slightly better agreement was ratified, but the concessions were hard to swallow. PACT lost narrowly to UPC in 2004.

CORE tried to ally with PACT early on, but it didn't work out. "We had some common ground," Caref recalled, "but Debbie [Lynch] didn't take us seriously." And although some of CORE's key members had been part of PACT before, the two caucuses had different orientations. CORE was more political (more conscious of race, for instance), more activist, and more focused on organizing—identifying natural leaders and bringing them in. PACT was outspoken in its criticism of UPC, but not big on action.

Residual anger about Lynch's 2003 contract would hurt PACT's chances this time around. Still, PACT sounded a second voice of reform alongside CORE's.

UPC fought dirty, trying to shut down opposition caucuses from campaigning. "Leadership put out stumbling blocks, including telling bosses not to let CORE come to buildings," Lewis remembered. UPC put out flyers saying, "Stop Mob Action, Stop Radical CORE!" and even accused CORE of running for office just to give union money to community groups.

After UPC and the district tried to disallow union campaigning in the schools, PACT filed a free-speech lawsuit, winning a temporary restraining order in March. CORE activists started carrying copies of the order with them when they went to visit schools, prepared to stand their ground if anyone challenged their right to be there.

'Play It Safe,' Incumbents Say

UPC's presidential candidate, incumbent Marilyn Stewart, ducked a public debate with Lewis and made her case online, decrying the reformers' promises she called "pie in the sky." (The five presidential candidates debated in front of the House of Delegates, but the incumbents forbade recording, so few members heard it.) A moratorium on school closings? Hiring more counselors while Huberman threatened layoffs? Reducing class size? Winning a new benefit, paid and pensionable family leave? Halting the privatization of schools? Not a platform to save public education, the incumbents argued, but a series of "unrealistic pledges" made by naïve competitors.

Stewart campaigned on her experience, claiming that Huberman was "rooting for the rookies" over her team. She argued she could best protect the union's five-year contract—then in year three—which had achieved raises and slowed rising health care premiums.

The week of the election, UPC filed a lawsuit that grabbed front-page headlines, arguing that CPS's proposed class-size increases would violate fire codes. But it was too little, too late: UPC had come to be associated with charter school expansion and a decade that saw 6,000 members pushed out.

Right to the end, Stewart's caucus put forward a "play it safe" message. "You don't make radical changes in times of trouble," she told the press.

First Vote

As the May 21 election neared, CORE and its community allies in GEM were simultaneously building towards a big "Save Our Schools" rally downtown, May 25, against Huberman's budget cuts.

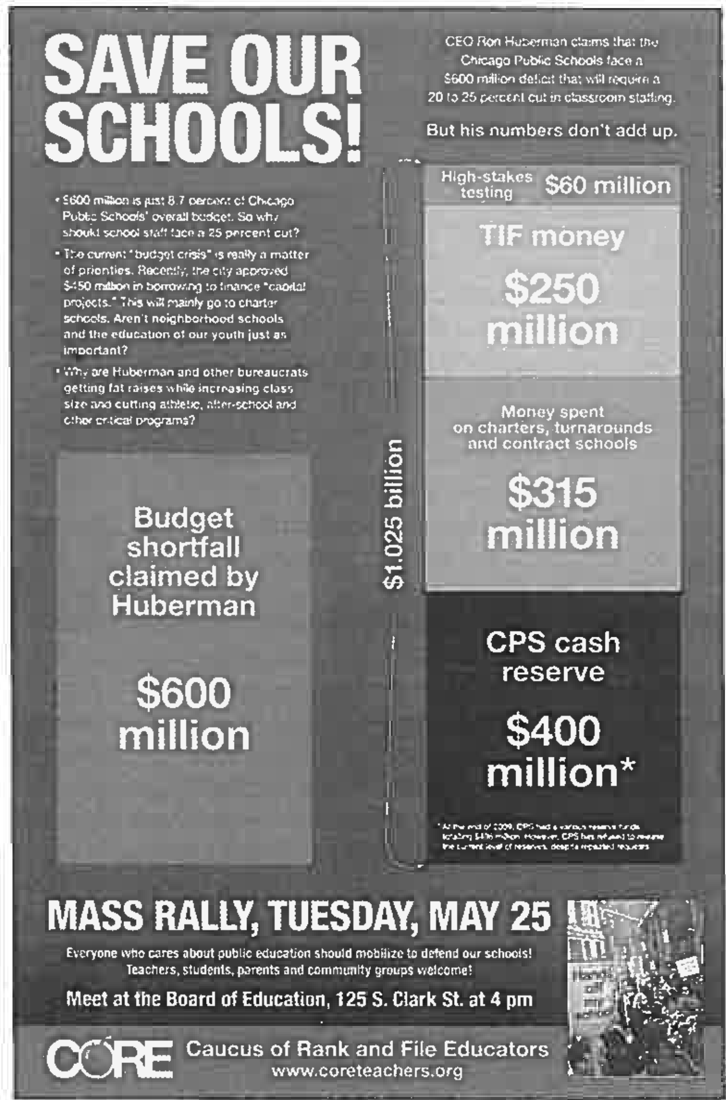
They created enough momentum to box UPC into a corner—the event was going to be too big to ignore. So CORE was able to move a resolution through the House of Delegates to support it. The rally got the union's endorsement "because they knew they couldn't stop it at that point," Mayle said.

CORE went all out on publicity, printing up 30,000 copies of a full-color poster featuring a beautiful, simple infographic—a bar chart comparing Huberman's claimed shortfall (then $600 million) with the $1.025 billion CORE calculated could be saved by cutting high-stakes testing, charters, contract schools, turnarounds, and TIFs, and drawing on CPS's reserves. The poster also included the rally info and CORE's name.

"We did a total blitz, made sure every school had these stuffed in mailboxes," Shibata remembered. Activists were going before school and after school and taking days off to deliver them. The posters were a big hit: easy on the eyes, featuring real information, and with a message of solidarity. Teachers were hanging them up in their classrooms. UPC got mad and called off a joint press conference with CORE. All good signs.

The day of the election, CORE activists and volunteers stood outside the doors at schools, handing out postcards reminding people to vote.

When the votes were counted, UPC got 36 percent and CORE got 33, with the other three slates splitting the other 31 percent. About 71 percent of eligible members voted, a few points higher than turnout in the 2007 and 2004 elections.



CORE

'Save Our Schools' Rally

Close on the heels of the election came the hotly anticipated rally. "It was the first time the membership really showed up," not just a handful of activists but a large-scale turnout, Mayle said. "Everybody knew this was *the thing*."

Five thousand marched downtown, shutting down a main thoroughfare and getting Richard M. Daley's attention when the mayor's limousine got caught in the crowd. Bus drivers joined the march with signs saying "Huberman: Classrooms Are Not Buses"—a reference to the fact that they had endured cuts and layoffs when Huberman was the head of Chicago transit.

"We should have done this every year for the past six years," said Lewis.

"It was quite important, that rally, in helping us land in office," Gutekanst said later. "We were projecting an image of, 'This is what a fighting union leadership should do. We know how to fight and lead.'"

CTU

Run-off

Crucially, all the caucuses opposing UPC had agreed that if there was a run-off, all would throw their support to the non-UPC candidates. CORE had maintained respectful relationships with the other caucuses and did no public mudslinging against them. Some PACT leaders were thus quite helpful in the June 11 run-off.

But the insurgents couldn't assume it was in the bag. CORE activists repeated the outreach they'd done in the months before, visiting schools again to distribute literature and talk to people. This time they had new data to hone their targeting more precisely: the results from the first vote, showing turnout and the breakout of votes by caucus at each school. Gonzalez Guevara said she appreciated making the repeat visits—a chance to talk to more people and keep building the communication networks the caucus would need for its ongoing organizing after winning office.

CORE had started two years before with around 22 dues-paying members. By the time of the election, the group was around 400—still a modest organization among 27,000 teachers and paraprofessionals. But in the runoff, with 76 percent turnout, Lewis and the three other top officer candidates each won a decisive 59 percent, more than 12,000 votes.

"CORE has been doing the work of the leadership already," said Lewis before the win. "So we felt they might as well elect us."

The slate swept the other nine citywide offices and all the vice presidencies for high schools (six) and elementary schools (17). UPC retained a few paraprofessional slots on the executive board. CORE had well and truly won control of the union.

Caref, one of the newly elected area vice presidents, remembered, "And then we were all like, 'uh oh, now what do we do?'"

Lessons

- ⇨ CORE got practice and built momentum by running for lower level offices first.
- ⇨ Teachers were inspired to join CORE because of the group's bigger vision—not just bread-and-butter union issues but battling against racism and to improve education for all students.

- ⇨ CORE activists won fellow members' support by jumping into the trenches and doing the work of the union—even calling a big rally—not just talking about what leaders should do.
- ⇨ But winning office also required practical, old-fashioned organizing: making good lists, recruiting volunteers, going out to every school, holding thousands of one-on-one conversations, and carefully tracking support.
- ⇨ CORE held regional meetings after school, pizza/beer get-togethers, and social events as well as its union/political actions.
- ⇨ CORE set up a fundraising apparatus, selling tickets for events, T-shirts, and more. Many supporters dug deep into their pockets.
- ⇨ CORE made it possible to be involved on many different levels, from bringing a few co-workers to an event, to visiting another school with flyers, to running for office. A CTU member didn't have to choose the course of all-out activism that CORE leaders were exemplifying in order to contribute to the effort.
- ⇨ CORE made good use of Twitter and Facebook, but prioritized face-to-face connections at the schools.
- ⇨ CORE used an online spreadsheet (a Google document) available to all, so that information was not trapped in one person's head or on their computer.
- ⇨ CORE used role-playing to train members to respond to tough questions.

5

Getting Organized in Every Workplace

It was clear from the day CORE took the helm July 1, 2010 that to defend the students and the members—in fact, to save public education in Chicago—the union would need to be prepared to strike when its contract expired in 2012. The aggressiveness of the school board and the corporate education reformers pushed the union in that direction.

Leaders knew they would have to get parents, students, and community organizations on board to oppose the district's destructive strategy. They would also have to activate members for a contract fight like they hadn't seen in years.

But with the local's last strike more than two decades back, in 1987, most CTU members had never even participated in a vigorous contract campaign. No more than one in five had been around for the last strike.

So the new leaders had to transform their union culture: they had to inspire and train teachers in every school to step up. And they had two years to do it.

Organizing at the Building Level

A first step was to rebuild the union as a force within the schools, with delegates (the elected reps in each school) and rank and filers taking responsibility for enforcing the contract. This went hand in hand with educating all members about the huge threats facing the union and the students—but with the message that winning was possible if large numbers were in motion.

The new leaders realized that lack of confidence was their biggest barrier to organizing. Members knew that the sky was falling in on public education; they were not so convinced they could do anything about it. Many members believed that parents blamed them for bad schools.

So many, many union meetings at the schools were spent

trying to convince members that parents could and would support them. To build confidence and expand members' view of what was possible, they also needed *experiences* that proved parents would work alongside them and that victories were possible; Chapters 6 and 7 are about those fights. This chapter explains the internal organizing that was happening at the same time.

History teacher Jackson Potter, who became the CTU staff coordinator, sketched out their goal: "We'd like to see members taking on their principals and organizing with parents and the community before they so much as pick up the phone to call the union office."

One key decision was to start an Organizing Department, which had not existed before (as well as a Research Department). Elementary teacher Norine Gutekanst was tapped to head it. She hired four organizers from the ranks of teachers and paraprofessionals (one of them from the UPC caucus), who were able to go on loan from their jobs in the district. One experienced organizer from another union was also hired, Matthew Luskin from the Service Employees (SEIU) health care local in Chicago. Luskin, a former organizing director, was a strategist who had led large campaigns and managed teams of organizers.

Most of the new staff organizers had not received any formal training. Some went to their national union, the AFT, for basic organizing and communication skills. And after Luskin was hired, he gave classes.

"We trained ourselves," Gutekanst said, "how to move beyond just being an activist to actually convincing other people that through acting together we could accomplish something.

"We learned a very specific rap, a series of steps to go through in every organizing conversation, and tried to stick to it. It involves looking for issues that the member cares about and relating those to the situation the union is in.

"Then who is it who has the power that we need to take back? And how are we going to do that? By working together through our power in numbers."

Revitalizing Old Structures

Using their new Organizing Department, CTU leaders set out to breathe life into their old, existing structures and redefine

An Organizing Conversation

The *issues* part of the conversation means asking questions—and really listening to the answers—to learn what the member cares about, before asking her to take an action like coming to a meeting or signing a petition.

The fact that other members are fired up about, say, a threat to their pensions doesn't mean that's what motivates this person. Maybe she is most concerned about keeping music in the schools, or staffing for special education. Asking her to get involved will be more successful once the conversation is grounded in the issue she cares about most.

Agitation is where the member acknowledges that the problem she's just mentioned isn't okay with her, and isn't going to go away on its own. Telling her this is not nearly as useful as asking her the right question that gets her to say it herself; most of us generally remember what we said, not what the other person said.

Often a good strategy is to ask questions based on what the person has told you: "How long has that been going on? Is that okay with you? Do you see any way that's going to change if we don't take action?" Anyone who works a job knows the answers to these questions, but when we aren't organizing we often avoid facing them, just to get through the day. By reacting, the organizer can help the other person feel "permission" to be angry.

Someone's to Blame

Polarization is about pointing out that someone (an abusive principal, the board of education, billionaire "reformers") is responsible for creating these problems. Asking "Why do you think we're having this problem?" often gets to who is to blame. Often we feel our problems are just "the way things are." Realizing that bad conditions for workers didn't just fall from the sky can be very empowering: if someone made the decisions that made things this way, that also means they could *un*make those decisions.

Once the member is angry, the organizer had better be ready to offer some hope. The *vision of change* means talking about power in numbers and the union's plan to win, making the connection between the member's own issue and the action at hand.

It's important here to emphasize the idea of having a voice. People are motivated by many different concerns, but generally what unites them all is that the people making the decisions aren't the ones most affected by them. For workers, power in numbers is our only way to get a say.

The *commitment* part of a good organizing conversation is asking the member to decide to do something about it. Once she agrees with the vision of change and sees it as a way to win on the issues she's concerned about, asking her to take action is easy. She already believes that taking action with her co-workers is the only way to win; signing the petition, coming to the meeting, or voting yes to strike is the next step in that fight.

If someone is fearful or reluctant to act, it's a lot easier to help her through it when you're challenging her to act on what she believes—rather than being pushy about an action you are trying to "sell." Most people's reservations about taking action have real reasons behind them. Her fears aren't crazy, but still, things won't get better unless she gets involved. The organizer's job isn't to convince her that she's wrong about her fears, but that she needs to act despite her reservations. In other words, the organizer is helping her think like an organizer.

Of course, following this outline doesn't mean following a script mechanically—organizers still talk to people like human beings. But using the organizing "rap" as a guide ensures that the conversation actually moves the organizing forward, and the member isn't left feeling like her time's been wasted with a spiel or a gripe session.

A successful organizing conversation strengthens both the member and the union, and leads to action. ✪

the union's traditional roles. Those included the school-site representatives (delegates) and the monthly House of Delegates meetings, the Professional Problems Committees in each school, and a union position with the unfortunate title "district supervisor." Each layer had its problems.

At first, each organizer was responsible for 150 schools, grouped by region. (Later, when more organizers were hired, that number was cut to 100.) With about 250 delegate slots empty, out of 800, the organizers' first priority was to make sure that every school had a delegate. (Larger schools were supposed to have more than one.) Many schools had no delegate, or they were not doing the job, though the role of a delegate was minimal: to attend the monthly House of Delegates meetings and report back to fellow teachers.

The union had no accountability system to make sure that communication was happening—and boring House of Delegates meetings often produced little to report. Meetings were averaging only 400 delegates. (At the height of the strike, in contrast, 750 came, and the following year typically saw 650-700.)

Delegates had never been expected to write grievances. If a member needed one, the delegate would call a field rep from the Grievance Department. "People who took pride in themselves as good unionists and went to delegate meetings were fairly good at ensuring the basic bureaucratic functions of their role," said Potter. "Maybe 25 percent were doing it.

"But it goes back to the question around the role of delegates. Expectations were so low. Very few actually had the skills and wherewithal to organize their buildings to combat any sort of tyrannical decision-making by the administration, or deal with contract violations.

"What we wanted was a web of people to facilitate everybody being involved at the school level."

So once the CORE slate took office, the duties of a delegate changed. "It was organizing," said Financial Secretary Kristine Mayle. "And educating. We started education at meetings that was more substantive. We started talking school funding and the power structure in Chicago and charters and big picture reform stuff. That's what started the delegates being more active."

To recruit new delegates, organizers went to schools to talk to members in the parking lots or as they were signing out. They called after-school meetings to explain how leaders saw what the members were up against, and they cajoled people to take on the job. If more than one person stepped up in a school, an election was held.

At the same time, the Professional Problems Committees needed to be rebuilt; they had fallen into disrepair in three-quarters of the schools. These are school-based committees of three to five, mandated by the contract and led by the delegate, that are supposed to meet monthly with the principal to resolve issues before they become grievances. They are elected annually, with members serving as the eyes and ears of the delegate around the building.

"We talked to people very directly about what we saw as the changing role of delegates," Luskin said. "Delegates would have to be leaders in their building and organizers of their staff, parents, and school community."

Training about what it meant to be an organizer was specific.

A Turnaround of Teacher Opinion

In a school turnaround, everyone is fired and has to reapply for their jobs. This happened at Curtis Elementary, where Andrea Parker teaches. A private company called AUSL took over managing the school—and from now on, the principal said, everyone had to work until 3 p.m. instead of 2:45.

The school had no delegate, but union headquarters got word and sent someone out to hold an election. "The principal wanted to pick someone she liked to be delegate, but she was absent that day," Parker said. "I raised my hand because I had tenure. They elected me."

Just like that, Parker started going to delegate meetings. "Wow, I felt so empowered," she said. "I got so much knowledge about things I wasn't aware of." For instance, it turned out "we were not supposed to be working till 3 unless we had a meeting with staff and we voted on it. She did it illegally."

Of course, violations of law don't fix themselves—it would take action, by the members, or at least the delegate. "The majority of the teachers were new and said, 'I don't care,'" Parker remembered. Some even got upset, accusing her of being mean to the principal.

Still, knowing that "when you waive one part of the contract, you waive it all," she braved the conflict and filed a grievance anyway. "I said, 'We have to show our union means something.'" It worked. "We got $2,000 back per teacher, on average—including those who were mad at me," Parker said. "Everybody took the check."

There was a big divide between teachers who had worked at the school before and those who were new since AUSL took over. One teacher was sure she could never be fired. Parker challenged her to come to just one union meeting. She did—and was impressed.

"That's why I had 80 percent of my staff come to that march downtown" in May 2012, Parker said. "They realized, 'I'm being propagandized against.'

"That first year we were a turnaround school, 10 teachers were fired for being 'not compatible with the AUSL way.' When people saw that—students' scores not getting raised, people getting fired—they realized Ms. Parker is not the bad guy after all." ○

On a practical level, the union put all the files a delegate would need on a USB flash drive: the contract, the constitution, roles of delegates. More important was the organizing attitude.

"Many delegates would complain about members who

wouldn't attend union meetings in the school," Luskin said. "We encouraged people to think about *why* people weren't coming to meetings. Was it the schedule, for instance?

"Many delegates were mad that people weren't coming to 'get important information.' But 'getting information' can make for a pretty dull meeting. And how important is it really for me to be there, if it's just for you to pour info at me? We pushed people to instead make meetings into a place where issues were raised and plans were made."

The organizers came to know all their delegates: who had a lousy principal, who rarely ran union meetings, who had their building solid. Organizers attended school meetings to listen to members and get them to take action, not to "serve" them. The organizers were a resource for those who wanted to fight but needed support and training. The goal was to have a school meeting once a month before or after school, to discuss both building-level issues and larger ones.

"We decided there are other things you can do besides file a grievance," President Karen Lewis said. "We started talking to people about what you could do. We started doing very simple things—let's wear red on Friday to show our solidarity, to show we support one another. Even people you don't get along with, start talking to them. If you start communicating with one another, you build strength within your building."

"We spent a lot of time talking with people about the 'whys' of these activities," said Luskin. "We tried to avoid just shallow mobilizing—if we were asking delegates to do something we tried to communicate the thinking behind it. For example, we wear red shirts to show the people who are scared in your school how much support they would have, and to make sure the principals are talking about how widespread it is."

In other words, the union wanted to make the new strategy very visible. The idea was to win members over to the strategy, not just turn them out to a string of events.

"That big picture discussion of what we are up against and what it would take to win was a key part of school visits," Luskin said. "This was not the style of organizing where you start with the lowest-common-denominator issue and fight for that, hoping people will get bolder later.

"We said that *your* jerk of a principal was linked to the increased number of bad ratings teachers were getting systemwide, which then was linked to the overall corporate vision of education reform. We said yes, we need to organize to fight on whatever the issue is at your school, but there is no winning on your issue if that doesn't feed into a citywide fight to change the whole environment we are in."

To prod into action members unaccustomed to an active union, organizers would come to the schools with long lists of asks—sometimes too many, said Debby Pope, a retired history and ESL teacher who came to work in the local's Grievance Department. "Can you organize a busload of teachers and parents to the next demo, can you wear red on Fridays, can you get the PPC together and meet monthly with the principal, can you include the paraprofessionals in your meetings, can you talk to the parents at report card meetings?"

Giving members lots of options created many ways for people to get involved in the union—"to broaden people's sense of what counts as 'union issues' and what tactics were fair game," Luskin said. "We gave priority to activities that had members mobilizing their co-workers or doing direct outreach to parents. We thought good experiences at those would build people's confidence and skills, which would be key later."

Training the Delegates

Training of delegates was amped up and now happens every fall and spring. The first delegate training, in late fall 2010, drew 300 and introduced the notions of member-to-member communication and expanding the number of people who identify with the union and can help mobilize. It was a significant shift from delegate training that had primarily covered "know your rights" topics like contract training or board of education processes. Now the training was on how to organize others to enforce and expand those rights.

Labor educator Steven Ashby suggested that the union make a video to talk about CTU's history, introduce the new leaders, and connect the history to today's attacks. The Labor Education Program at the University of Illinois worked with the union to make the 11-minute video, which included photos of CTU mem-

Ronnie Reese, CTU

CTU trains old and new delegates.

bers marching against banks in the 1930s. "It harked back to a militant past that our membership was not aware of, and it pointed to future fights and what it was going to take," said Gutekanst. The video was shown at trainings, distributed to every delegate, and shown in school meetings.

Delegates at the first training also watched a video made by the Teamsters when reformer Ron Carey was president in the 1990s, about how to do member-to-member outreach.

"We were not particularly successful in getting that point across at the first training," Potter remembered. "It was too abstract. But the idea stuck with us, and we were able to figure out the best combination of practical steps. We gave delegates rosters of members in their buildings. We taught them how to figure out who has relationships with particular departments, who should talk to the parents, how to develop the phone tree."

At one point the trainings were expanded beyond delegates—everyone from the Local School Councils was invited, and later, members of the Contract Action Committees (see Chapter 8). Since the strike, all PPC members have been invited, too. The idea is to build teams in each school, rather than depending on individual delegates. In 2013 some high school students were invited to the spring training.

The Saturday sessions had plenary panels of speakers from inside and outside the union, such as community partners, but the heart of the matter was the workshops. Some were on shop floor

skills: how to file a grievance, how to have an organizing conversation, how to build a strong PPC, contract enforcement. Others trained members in the skills they would need to take on the anti-teacher agenda in the outside world, including coalition-building; fighting back against school closings; fighting charter proliferation; ways to win full funding of schools; getting engaged in city council and state legislative fights; engaging parents to save our schools; and research: learning and using it.

Sometimes workshops were set up geographically, with teachers from the same CPS "network" talking with their district supervisors about common issues such as closings or overcrowding. Members of community organizations like the Kenwood Oakland Community Organization (KOCO) and Blocks Together co-led some workshops.

Over time, the workshops were synchronized with the stages of CTU's various campaigns: "How to Move Co-Workers and Assess Strength' in My School" (in the lead-up to the strike vote); "Campaign Planning and Messaging" (as the school closing fight heated up); "Organizing with Our Allies." Each workshop sent delegates home with planning materials, to help them think through ways to put the organizing strategies to work in their buildings.

In March 2011, leaders of UNITE HERE, the Service Employees, and the Operating Engineers, who also represented

New Delegates Step Up

English teacher Jerry Skinner became the head delegate at Kelvyn Park High School in late January 2010, just five months before CORE was elected. A new principal had just bullied the previous delegate out of office, and a CORE member at the school, Liz Brown, encouraged him and fellow teacher Eric Wagner to step up. Brown had already introduced Skinner to Jackson Potter and John Kugler, whom Skinner describes as a "roving all-city field rep and pit bull," and Skinner attended CORE's big January 2010 Education Summit.

"It was designed to educate people like me," Skinner said. "We heard from people already active in other schools. I went to the workshop on bully principals and taking back our schools."

Skinner and Wagner started calling frequent union meetings after school, both on and off campus, which grew from 10 out of 90-some teachers to 30 or 40. Up to 30 teachers at a time have come to Local School Council (LSC) meetings to confront the principal over such practices as rearranging teachers' schedules midway through the semester, cutting extracurricular programs, and terminating staff.

At one point, in April 2010, the two delegates had managed to wangle a meeting with a top CPS official for their "network" (CPS's former term for a geographical division of the city). They wanted him to hear firsthand from teachers about the problems at Kelvyn Park. The night before the meeting the official insisted on having the principal present. Wagner told him flatly no, knowing the purpose was intimidation.

Ninety percent of the tenured teachers turned out the next day to give the official an earful. "Eric and I couldn't have done it by ourselves," Skinner said. "We couldn't have countered his arguments. We needed the special education teachers there. We needed science teachers there. All the teachers would give their precise individual expertise. When the CPS official tried to argue that the school was adequately funded in one area of instruction, a literacy teacher would say, 'No, that's a different budget.' The expertise is in the whole union.

"It was a watershed moment early on."

Skinner says he believes new principals always try to run a school on a tight budget to impress their superiors. He discovered that the principal had returned $300,000 earmarked for Kelvyn Park to CPS.

To get the money back, he and Wagner decided to go over the principal's head to her bosses. Skinner went to an October 2010 board of education meeting with the parent president of the LSC, two girls' volleyball players, and two parents. After the girls testified about their season being canceled by the principal, Schools CEO Ron Huberman set up a meeting with the head of CPS Sports, and this led to a meeting between Wagner and the principal's immediate supervisor. "All of a sudden we had $300,000," Skinner said.

Turning around Transformation

In 2011 Kelvyn Park became a "transformation school," which means it gets extra money from the state. When the designation was announced, Skinner was skeptical. He called a union meeting and Kugler made sure five members from two "turnaround" schools—where the whole staff is fired and must reapply—were there.

It turned out that the same CPS department in charge of turnarounds (the Office of School Improvement) was also in charge of transformations. The visiting teachers told of the ugly experience of turnarounds: teachers not rehired were often blacklisted and did not get rehired at other CPS schools.

"This is just one instance of the culture of sharing information

and looking out for each other that CORE has promoted among the membership," Skinner said. "In this case it helped us insist on more resources in the classroom—rather than more resources for administrators—and better safeguards for members' jobs when we became a transformation school."

He adds, "You have to have someone on your side in every possible forum—the Local School Council, the PPC, the Professional Personnel Leadership Committee (PPLC)—so that there's no pathway through which a principal can push a hostile agenda without meeting resistance.

"The LSC, PPLC, and PPC all have members elected by staff and a contractual-legal foundation, so the principal is obligated to meet with us as equals, where we have the power of investigation and can ask the tough questions." ☼

workers in the schools, were brought to speak at the delegates training, along with the executive director of KOCO. (Custodians, janitors, security officers, lunchroom workers, special education classroom assistants, and engineers are among the CPS workers represented by other unions.)

"We put our labor allies on the same plane as our community allies," Potter said. "We did that on purpose to show our members that we had allies in our buildings and that we had to think about how to include them in our tactics."

The next year, community allies led CTU workshops for teacher representatives on the Local School Councils. (Read more about LSCs in Chapter 6.) Student, religious, and community leaders addressed the full sessions. "We were intentional about using every opportunity to make sure those folks were included," Potter said.

A New Job for District Supervisors

To help activate the 800 delegates and the PPCs, the union decided to revive and transform the long-existing district supervisor system. The DS was an appointed position with minimal duties and a stipend of $100 a month. Members of this "sleepy patronage army," as one member called the DS structure, were briefed after executive board meetings and were supposed to remind delegates in their areas to attend the House of Delegates. Debby Pope, a delegate for nearly 15 years, said, "I got exactly one phone call in that whole time."

The new leaders dismissed the less-engaged DSs and increased the total number to 37 (later 49). Each was responsible for nine to 23 schools, or for delegates from a citywide job category such as clerks or teacher assistants.

The new DSs were tasked with contacting delegates monthly, listening to the issues from their buildings, responding with assistance as needed, and engaging delegates in the union-wide actions going on that month. The DSs checked in with delegates about turnout from their buildings for events and other organizing asks, and they sent reports to the Organizing Department, with each DS reporting to a top officer or staffer.

In the past, the DSs' assignments had not necessarily been geographically logical. The new leaders took CPS's map, where schools were divided into areas or "networks," and split most networks into two parts. The two DSs for each network could work together and cover for each other.

Paraprofessional DS Charlotte Sanders says that after she confers with delegates and talks with members at school meetings, she passes information back to union staffers who can help tackle the problems. Depending on the issue, that might mean staffers from the Grievance Department, the Organizing Department, or both. "Say at a large high school, teachers are not getting their prep period," Sanders said. "You might need someone from the Grievance Department to go out, and someone from Organizing

Ronnie Reese, CTU

A CTU delegate training.

to say 'You don't have to take this.' It's a team effort to cover all the bases."

DSs were trained in how to have an organizing conversation. They began to meet monthly, a week before House meetings, with the financial secretary and Organizing Department leaders.

A typical agenda includes an overview of what is happening in the district, followed by a training or an activity to get them thinking and working like organizers. They might be asked, "Based on your conversations with your delegates, how likely do you think it is they will do x, y, or z? What tells you that?"

Then, in a Q and A session, DSs can tell leaders what they're hearing in the schools, report back on successes and challenges, and ask questions about bargaining or contract violations.

Strategy is a big part of the meetings. "We are transparent in our thinking about how to build and how to move people," Mayle said. If leaders were contemplating civil disobedience, for example, "we'd bounce these types of things around with the DSs to get buy-in, make adjustments to see what would work in the schools, and make sure that the DSs had a deep understanding about *why* we were using the tactics we were and what we were hoping to get from them."

When it came time to build for the strike, leaders started very early with the DSs, laying out their estimates on what it would take, and their goals. "Even when leadership was still being cautious about using the 'S' word," said Mayle, "the DSs read between the lines and knew we were building to a strike before we were able to say anything publicly."

The DSs became a crucial level of organization and an essential communication system. As contract expiration neared, they were to report up the chain how well the Contract Action Committees were doing (see Chapter 8), and how many members were wearing red on Fridays. During the strike they would act as coordinators, overseeing eight to 12 schools apiece, visiting each picket line daily, and then meeting as a body each day of the strike.

Summer Interns Learn to Be Leaders

For six weeks in 2011, the union hired seven members at $450 a week as summer interns, with the goal of training more leaders/organizers. In 2012, to increase the proportion of people of color in leadership positions, of the 25 interns hired, 23 were black or Latino. Special attention was paid to recruiting paraprofessionals, since members in these jobs were often underrepresented. The group included both veteran activists and young members just beginning to think about the union.

Leaders knew they needed to recruit applicants via appeals to the general membership rather than just among activists they already knew. "It helped bring in people who were just becoming union activists, and people with a base where we were weak," Luskin said. "Lots of applications came in from people we never would have met otherwise—many of them very strong."

Using discussions and role plays, Luskin trained interns in the basics of organizing and power dynamics in the workplace, and they learned about school financing and the national anti-teacher agenda. They studied Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" and Cesar Chavez's "A Union in the Community." They learned how to have a doorstep conversation and how to get invited into a member's home. They learned how to listen to fears and reservations, and how to address those concerns and move people past them. They knocked on members' doors at home, looking for those who would be willing to organize a house meeting or work on a community forum, in their own neighborhood, on the union's vision of improving education.

Interns were teachers, paraprofessionals, and clinicians. In 2013 the program would be expanded to include high school students, community activists, and a charter school teacher whose school had recently unionized with CTU support. Organizers were on the lookout for those who had shown their chops as leaders during the strike. All members were invited to apply and some were specifically asked to.

Many of the earlier interns were hired as organizers or later became strike coordinators or DSs; some DSs became executive board candidates in 2013. "It's like a pipeline, a new layer of leadership," Mayle said.

It's worth contrasting the goals of the intern training to the way most unions hire members for temporary organizing roles. Usually such hiring is done when a campaign needs more door-knockers. Leadership development, if any, is a byproduct. CTU's program, in contrast, was primarily about developing new leaders.

Social studies teacher Tim Meegan, an intern in summer 2013, said he'd learned how to encourage people who agree with the union's goals but are reluctant to take action. Knocking on doors, he registered voters, identified community leaders such as block-club presidents, and promoted community meetings to make an action plan on school closings and budget cuts.

"The union is not saying 'here's what we're going to do,'" he explained. "We're calling a meeting to say 'what can we do about it?' The union can't fight this stuff by itself."

Interns gathered petition signatures in 2013 for a graduated income tax in Illinois (one of only a handful of states with a flat tax). CTU is part of a statewide coalition to change the constitution to allow this tax. "We know at the end of the day you can't fight austerity without changing the distribution of wealth," Potter said. "It's a practical campaign that allows you to talk about the root cause of the problems we're having."

Grievance Department

CTU grievances were traditionally handled by full-time staff in the Grievance Department, and still are, but delegates have been trained and encouraged to write grievances rather than always calling a field rep. The separation between organizing and contract enforcement still exists, though, and the union is "grappling with how to make it more seamless," in Potter's words.

He believes it was right to start by forming an Organizing Department and put the emphasis there. "Field staff had become very traditionally oriented," he said, "talking almost entirely about ways you can protect yourself from child abuse allegations or file grievances if you're retaliated against. But most members didn't face that. It was important for us to disrupt that and to send people out who could engage more broadly and figure out what was making people tick—and how to deal with *those* issues."

Of course, the issues at the top of members' minds weren't necessarily contract violations. They were everything from bullying principals to charter school expansion to the loss of black teachers to wanting more special education services. Members wanted things they didn't know they could look to the union for. Part of organizers' job was to change the perception of "union issues."

CORE Sticks Around

After the CORE slate was elected, a majority of its leaders were involved in running the local, as executive board members, staffers, DSs, or chairs of union committees. But there was never any doubt that CORE should remain an active caucus.

Before the reformers knew they would win, they had discussed how important it would be to keep CORE going. Those who'd been involved in the earlier PACT caucus (see Chapter 3) knew that leaders needed a mechanism for keeping in touch with rank-and-file sentiment. They were well aware of the inevitable conservatizing effect of holding office, with a big institution to run and with leaders no longer experiencing the day-to-day problems of classroom teachers.

"Even though the officers don't want to become disconnected, their reality is different from the reality of a teacher slogging it out on the ground," Pope said. "If you can always go to the bathroom when you want...

"It's also very good to have non-officers out there to be eyes and ears in the schools, what's playing well and what's not. And you need to have people who will be critical."

"CORE can raise red flags and alarms, have the pulse of the members," Potter added, "be a critical conscience to raise concerns when the union is making bad choices."

So the caucus, including the new top officers, continued to meet. In the early months meetings were less frequent and not so well attended. Missteps in dealing with the legislature in spring 2011 (see Chapter 7) were a wake-up call that convinced everyone CORE needed care and attention.

"There was a period in the first year when those of us on the CORE steering committee were now working at the union," Potter remembered. "The number of challenges and crises was overwhelming. Our ability to manage both organizations simultaneously was limited at best. There were missed opportunities.

"But we still maintained a regular set of meetings and basic communication; we had internal discussions around issues. Those things did not vanish; they were in place. That allowed our next layer of activists to step up into the vacuum and say, 'Hey, this isn't working as well as it needs to.' We came to the conclusion we needed to diversify the steering committee with more rank and file

and less staffers, so work would get done and people would have more leadership opportunities."

The caucus continues to meet once a month, or twice a month when the situation demands, with an annual convention in the fall. Several hundred members pay dues (still $35 a year for teachers, $20 for paraprofessionals), with 30 to 40, and up to 75, attending a typical meeting. Any CTU member, active or retired, may join—and spikes in activity lead to more members wanting to get involved.

"Folks in CORE tend to be more political," said Gutekanst. "Some have been around a while. We see this is a long-term project. CORE has the possibility of providing more institutional memory, and somewhat of a check and balance on leadership." At the same time, CORE includes many of the youngest activists in the union—the mix of generations is one of its defining characteristics.

The continuing existence of CORE shows members that what changed at CTU wasn't just the feistiness of the leaders at the top. New activists can see the role of rank-and-file leaders in determining the union's direction. It's clear that the leaders at the top came out of a much bigger group, and in CORE, new activists meet peers who feel ownership of having moved the union onto its current course

So CORE continues to function as a recruitment and training ground for new activists, and, of course, as an election vehicle (elections to the pension board, as described in Chapter 3, are held every year).

CORE can also take actions that are more appropriate for a caucus than for the union. In the summer of 2011 CORE sponsored a national get-together for teachers who wanted to fight the corporate "education reform" agenda, inviting both local officers and members of opposition caucuses. In summer 2013 a larger conference was held (see Chapter 11).

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The delegate trainings, the summer intern program, and the building meetings described here were key to spreading skills and the organizing mindset among a larger subset of the members.

Members could choose from a wide array of ways to be involved.

"Before, people got the newspaper or the information the union sent in the mail, and they would read it and throw it to the side," Sanders said. "Now they are more vocal. It's not like, 'I just pay my dues.' It's more of an inclusion."

But the internal organizing was only a part of how CTU got members to step up. The union simultaneously had to strengthen its relationships with parents (Chapter 6) and carry out a daunting number of campaigns, often simultaneous, against attacks from the legislature, the mayor, and the school board (Chapter 7).

More than anything, it was these experiences—speaking to parents about the board's attacks; the rallies where teachers and parents were arrested together protesting against bankers; seeing a principal back off due to a petition or action at a staff meeting—that built the confidence that allowed members to see organizing as the way to go and a strike as a viable strategy.

Lessons

- ⇨ CTU's new leaders saw their first priority as developing rank-and-file leaders who could get their co-workers involved at the school level, so they created a new structure, the Organizing Department, and hired and trained a crew of organizers with that specific task. These they drew primarily from CTU's own ranks but supplemented with experienced organizers from elsewhere.
- ⇨ CTU was frank about the change in course, recruiting delegates to a new conception of their role rather than the old, minimal one. Not just the tasks but also the thinking behind each task were laid out clearly for all to see.
- ⇨ CTU trained a thick layer of new leaders to think like organizers. Trainings were expanded to bring in the largest number of potential leaders, in order to build teams in each school.
- ⇨ While many citywide campaigns were launched, local initiatives led by members in their schools were encouraged, supported, and highlighted to others.

- ➪ CTU made use of its existing structures—ones members were familiar with—even though these had been dysfunctional in the immediate past: the monthly House of Delegates meetings, the district supervisors, the Professional Problems Committees. At the same time, leaders didn't try to fix everything at once; they left the Grievance Department to tackle later.
- ➪ CTU developed an intermediate layer of leaders, the district supervisors, who played an essential support and communication role between officers/staff and delegates in the buildings.
- ➪ CTU consciously trained a new layer of leaders through the summer intern program, and recruited members of under-represented groups to fill those slots.
- ➪ Recognizing the inevitable pressures on officers, CORE members continued to function as a caucus that could help correct course when necessary—and provide a training ground for still more leaders.

6

Community Partners

One of the most remarkable things about CTU's 2012 strike is that these educators won community support in a national political climate that was not simply anti-union but anti-teacher. A poll conducted by We Ask America in the strike's final days found that a majority of Chicagoans—including 63 percent of African Americans, 65 percent of Latinos, and 66 percent of parents of school-age children—were supporting it.

Community support, however, went far beyond mere favorable opinions. Neighborhood organizations throughout the city played a critical role in both drumming up support for the strike and coordinating on-the-ground support. Action Now, the Kenwood Oakland Community Organization (KOCO), the Albany Park Neighborhood Council, and the Logan Square Neighborhood Association pulled members together to canvass their neighbors in the lead-up to the strike. They held town-hall forums, organized day camps for out-of-school children, turned out members en masse to downtown rallies, and organized pro-CTU press

CTU

Different Types of Alliances

(Excerpted from CTU training materials)

Weakest—"Please come support us!" Some people will come help, because they like us or because it is "the right thing to do."

Medium—"You help us on *this* and we'll help you on *that*!" Scratch each other's backs: It does help for your ally to know that you will return the favor. It's stronger than a one-way relationship, but people will only go so far just to help you with your issues.

Strongest—"We're in it together!" Solidarity: We are both being harmed. Working together and supporting each other is the only way to fix it. "Supporting you helps me win, too." ✪

conferences and rallies of their own (see details in Chapter 9).

Why did community groups feel so compelled to support the strike? It was simple, said Jitu Brown, a KOCO organizer: "Parents knew their schools were being sabotaged, and they knew that teachers were standing up against that, so they stood with them."

In addition, said Raul Botello of the Albany Park Neighborhood Council, which functions on the Northwest Side, it was important that CTU was willing to call out the school board's racism. "They were talking and speaking the language of parents and youth," he said. "The people felt their fight."

Parents didn't just see the strike as a way to support their children's teachers. They were fighting side by side on issues both groups were passionate about: smaller classes, more resources for schools, over-testing, and racial equity.

The relationships started long before teachers walked out—even long before CORE members were elected. Chapter 3 told how CORE members worked alongside community groups like KOCO as far back as 2004, long before they had institutional power. "Working with the community was natural to us because we had already been working with the community," said Michael Brunson, now CTU's recording secretary.

More than just shoulder-to-shoulder activism, the union's ability to build enduring relationships came from its willingness to tackle the tough issues of race and class discrimination head-on

and to listen to community members, not just work to get them on the union's message.

Katelyn Johnson, director of Action Now, a community organization active on the South and West Sides of the city, said her group had tried to work with the old CTU leadership "and found they weren't interested. If there was something they needed they would reach out, but after that you didn't hear from them." Botello said when the CORE members were elected, "it was like talking to organizers. The previous administration, they were politicians."

CTU Staff Coordinator Jackson Potter says the goal now is "a real relationship," one in which both union and community allies can "make mistakes and take risks to see where we can go and how far we can take it."

Community Board

Once in office, leaders wanted to formalize their relationships with community groups. They wanted to make sure there was always a channel for community and parent voices to be heard in the union.

So CTU established a new Community Board. At its nucleus were the organizations in the Grassroots Education Movement (GEM), which was born in 2008 to fight school closings (see Chapter 3). The groups were invited to a big rally against layoffs

Christa Lohman

and school closings, held in the Hyde Park/Kenwood area on the South Side in July 2010—the new leaders' first reach-out to the community.

Board members also came from the Grassroots Collaborative, a coalition formed by Service Employees (SEIU) locals and community organizations to campaign for a living wage ordinance for big-box stores (eventually vetoed by the mayor).

Mostly the groups on the Community Board had real membership roots in their neighborhoods, although a few were more of the think-tank variety. As in most large cities, plenty of nonprofit and neighborhood organizations existed that were content to attempt influence through back channels to politicians; these were not invited. CTU chose groups with organizing traditions and with attitudes toward the power brokers that matched CTU's new orientation.

"We gave more weight to groups that were more rooted in the community, rather than citywide organizations," said Organizing Director Norine Gutekanst, who worked closely with the Board. "We wanted people who really wanted to push on the school board, who identified their policies as racist. We chose organizations that believed that, rather than those who thought they could work with the school board."

According to Gutekanst, September and October 2010 were a "visioning period" for the Community Board, where the organizations discussed their top priorities in education, such as "social and emotional supports for children in the schools" (social workers and counselors), recruiting quality teachers from their own communities, and stopping the closings. "The visioning was a good way to all get on the same page," she said, "and for us to understand how the partner groups identified the problems with our schools."

The Board initially consisted of representatives from around 15 groups. (In 2012 it decided to re-adopt the name GEM. Today it includes 30 organizations and meets at least once a month.)

History teacher Jen Johnson pointed out that the Community Board rested on the years of work done by CORE before the slate was elected. "For CORE it was foundational to work with community groups to build a movement," she said. "We didn't want to just create a caucus. We wanted to create a movement, and we wanted people to buy in and to know we would not sell out if we were elected.

"CTU has tried to carry out the same vision. Having those community partners will help hold us accountable to that vision. They can help keep us on track."

Two Campaigns

After CPS CEO Ron Huberman stepped down in the fall of 2010, the union suggested a campaign for a say in choosing his replacement. Union and Community Board leaders chose a blue-ribbon panel of citizens to identify a schools chief with an education background—unlike Huberman and the two CEOs before him, whose backgrounds were in business.

And in 2012 groups on the Board launched a campaign for an elected, representative school board with seven of 13 spots reserved for parents. Since 1995 the mayor had controlled Chicago's schools through an appointed CEO and seven-member unelected board. These appointees tended to be wealthy businesspeople, not educators or working class parents. The lineup included Hyatt hotel heiress Penny Pritzker and banking executive David Vitale, ex-CEO of the Chicago Board of Trade. CTU developed a research paper on the value of elected boards.

A group called Communities Organized for Democracy in Education (CODE) was formed. Its tactic was to run nonbinding referendums in 327 precincts on the South and West Sides, to ask the state legislature to change the law that gave Chicago an appointed board. (Each precinct contains a couple thousand residents; there are 2,069 precincts altogether.) "They targeted wards and precincts that had been struck by a history of school closings and destabilization," Johnson explained.

Organizers presented 10,000 voter signatures in August to get the measure on the 2012 ballot in targeted precincts, and in November, a resounding 87 percent of those voting said yes. The victory was symbolic—actually switching to an elected board would require the state legislature to act—but the show of public support was a milestone.

Not surprisingly, neither of those campaigns directly moved Chicago's powers-that-be. Looking back, Potter had second thoughts about the union's push to engage the community in

choosing the next CEO. It was "a good talking point, but that didn't translate into a campaign that had any chance of winning," he said. "It was too wonkish of an issue to get broad participation from the public. In hindsight it was a poor use of our time and energy."

The campaign for an elected board, on the other hand, worked out better—and this one had not been the CTU's idea, but came at the insistence of KOCO. "We were not sold on this being a good use of union resources, initially," Potter recalled, "because we were in the middle of a contract campaign." But KOCO correctly predicted how popular the idea would be, and pointed out that having no control over school governance made everything CTU did an uphill battle. Chicagoans could see that racism and class bias were the reasons city authorities had, as Potter put it, "a free pass to ignore the desires of their constituents."

The idea of an elected board was, and continues to be, "very easily supported everywhere we go," Gutekanst said. "It's a no-brainer: why would you have billionaires sitting on your school board? They don't have kids in our schools." Union leaders saw the elected board as a longer-term fight, something they knew they wouldn't win that year but could support with their contract campaign.

As it turned out, not many CTU members worked on the elected school board campaign personally, because they were

CTU

thoroughly involved in that contract campaign. But the two campaigns were complementary. "It helped to set the stage," said Gutekanst. "We could say, 'We're trying to get a better school day, but the school board is an obstacle.'" (See Chapter 7 on the "better school day" campaign.)

Gutekanst believes it's important that the Community Board "isn't a vehicle for CTU, it's a collaboration. Some things we agreed on that were joint campaigns, some not." Botello said, "We have some really honest and hard conversations. The union might say 'we can't weigh in as heavy as you-all.'" Johnson of Action Now says it's important to CTU's credibility with community groups that the union is also invested in issues that aren't directly tied to education, such as getting an ordinance requiring that vacant properties within a certain radius of schools must be boarded up and secured.

In addition to the Community Board, aided by the fact that one of CTU's in-house organizers is a minister, the union reached out to faith communities in the summer of 2011 to form Parents, Educators And Clergy for Education—PEACE. "Mayor Daley had certain ministers in his corner," Brunson explained. "Rahm Emanuel the same thing. We had a breakfast and a certain group came just to get information and report back to someone. So we drew back and formed a committee of clergy that we knew were aligned with our vision."

Local School Councils

Chicago schools differ from those in many other cities in that a voice for parents, community members, and teachers is built into school governance through the elected Local School Councils, which approve school budgets and hire the principal. In practice, the councils vary widely in their effectiveness. Some are rubber-stamps for the principal, some have low participation, and in the many schools on probation because of low test scores, their role is advisory only.

When CTU held its delegate training in March 2011, the invitation list was broadened to include the teacher reps on the LSCs. The union also obtained a citywide list of parent reps and sent them regular emails to keep them abreast of what was happening in the district and invite them to events.

In the strike, the LSCs didn't play a big role. It's easy to see their potential, though, if they were organized and strong. Fast-forward to summer 2013, when Rahm Emanuel announced drastic budget cuts, up to 25 percent for some schools. On the mostly middle-class North Side, some LSCs dared to defy the principal by voting down their diminished budgets. And as spring 2014 LSC elections neared, CTU planned a new emphasis that would encourage teachers to run, give training to those reps, and get active parents to run as well.

"We are really thinking through how we can get our members to deepen those relationships with parents," Gutekanst said.

From the beginning, the community partners shared the ideals that were animating CTU. "I remember an early meeting where they said, 'What is it that CTU is trying to do?'" says Gutekanst. "And I said, 'We're trying to build a movement in Chicago so that people in communities have some say-so in how the schools are run.'

"Heads nod, and they said, 'Let's build a movement.'"

Read much more about CORE's and CTU's community alliances in Chapters 3, 7, 8, and 9.

Lessons

- CTU saw alliances as year-round, not rustled up in an emergency.
- CTU was upfront about its view that treatment of Chicago students amounted to institutional racism.
- CTU was willing to take leadership from other groups, even if the union's own priorities were distinct.
- CTU saw alliances as coalitions of equals that would learn from each other and sometimes agree to disagree or work separately.

- CTU chose its allies carefully, declining to waste time on groups that were on a different page in their analysis of Chicago power politics.
- CTU plans to use the Local School Councils, existing structures which have ranged from strong to moribund, and breathe new life into them through recruitment and training.