

Case Study: The "Schools Everyone Deserves" Campaign

I. From Crisis to Coalition: A Story of Power and Purpose

In early spring, the Harmony Public School Board dropped a bombshell: a sweeping austerity plan that would **eliminate 15 social worker positions, increase class sizes, and freeze salaries** for all educators. For many, this felt like the final blow in a district already stretched thin. Teachers whispered in hallways, parents vented on social media, and students worried about losing trusted counselors. The mood was grim.

But inside a modest union office, a new leadership team of **10 determined educators** gathered around a scratched wooden table. They were the newly elected leaders of the **Harmony Public School Educator Union (HPSEU)**, and they knew one thing: **traditional lobbying would fail**. The Board had already made up its mind. If they wanted to win, they needed a new playbook.

A Bold Pivot: From Service to Organizing

The Core Team made a radical decision: **pivot from a “service union” model to an Organizing Model rooted in Bargaining for the Common Good (BCG)**. Instead of framing the fight as a narrow labor dispute, they would **recast it as a moral struggle for “the schools everyone deserves.”**

This shift changed everything. It wasn’t just about paychecks anymore—it was about **students’ futures, community well-being, and educational justice**. The message resonated. Parents, students, and community allies began to see themselves in the fight.

Building the Common Good Coalition

The union launched a **Common Good Coalition**, bringing together:

- **Teachers** who feared losing vital classroom support
- **Parents** worried about overcrowded classrooms
- **Students** who refused to accept cuts to mental health services
- **Community allies** who understood that strong schools mean strong neighborhoods

The coalition didn’t just meet—they organized. They held **listening sessions in church**

basements, town halls in school gyms, and strategy calls late into the night. Each conversation built trust and expanded the circle of commitment.

Escalating Actions: From Conversations to Confrontation

The campaign unfolded like a carefully choreographed dance:

1. **Petition Drives** – Thousands signed on to demand “Schools Everyone Deserves.”
2. **Visibility Actions** – Rallies outside school board meetings, educators in matching shirts, parents holding signs that read “*Cuts Hurt Kids.*”
3. **Community Forums** – Stories of impact shared publicly, shifting the narrative from numbers to human lives.
4. **Mass Mobilization** – A march that drew **over 5,000 people**, a show of force that stripped the Board of its political cover.

Each step tested the union’s capacity and **grew its power exponentially**. The 10-member leadership team mobilized a community **504 times its size**—a feat that stunned even seasoned organizers.

The Turning Point

When the coalition delivered **5,000 signed commitments** to the Board, the message was clear: **reverse the cuts or face a political reckoning**. The Board caved. Social workers stayed. Class sizes held steady. The salary freeze was lifted.

But the victory was bigger than the budget. The campaign **reshaped the power dynamics** in Harmony Public Schools. The union was no longer a service provider—it was a **movement leader**.

Key Outcomes

- **15 social worker positions saved**
 - **Class size increases stopped**
 - **Salary freeze reversed**
 - **5,000+ community members mobilized**
 - **Union transformed into a community power hub**
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II. Organizing Framework and Context

The HPSEU campaign was structured using the core components of the community organizing framework:

Element	Description	Rationale for People Power
Core Mobilization Structure	The Interdependent Leadership Structure : A decentralized, tiered network where the 10-member Core Team recruited and coached key leaders, who then recruited their own teams, enabling exponential growth.	Power is distributed and accountability is personalized, ensuring rapid, deep mobilization across all school sites and the community.
Broad Campaign Goals	Moving beyond the salary freeze (a "bread -and- butter" issue) to demand the restoration of 15 Social Workers and caps on class size (a "common good" issue).	Draws in a wider base of support (parents, students, clergy), exponentially expanding the coalition and the moral weight of the demands.
Theory of Change	The Board only responds to overwhelming public pressure. By demonstrating massive, unified people power , the HPSEU could remove the Board's political support and force concessions.	Focuses all efforts on a measurable target: the number of people willing to take action.

III. Phased Mobilization & Metrics

The campaign's success is defined by the number of people mobilized at each escalating phase, with the core target being **5,000 signed "Pledges to Defend Student Services."**

Phase 1: Internal Commitment (The Spark)

Goal/Milestone	Number of People Mobilized	Power Mechanism	People Power Result
Leadership Team & Building Representative Structure	10 (<i>Leadership Team members</i>) trained to coach and steer the campaign. 150 (<i>Building Representatives, or 10% of the union</i>) recruited as the first tier of organizers.	Established the direct, rapid communication network to the entire union membership.	Mobilization Ratio=10:150
Peak 1: Internal Test	1,380 (<i>92% of union members</i>) participated in "Green for Harmony Day" by signing the initial pledge.	First Victory: Secured a supermajority commitment , validating the internal structure before engaging the public.	Internal Unity=92%

Phase 2: External Coalition (The Multiplier)

Goal/Milestone	Number of People Mobilized	Power Mechanism	People Power Result
Coalition Recruitment	50 (<i>New external organizers</i>) recruited from parent groups, student leagues, and faith - based organizations.	Exponentially expanded the HPSEU's reach into non-union households and political constituencies.	Organizer Base=150 internal+50 external=200
Peak 2: Mass Rally	1,250 (<i>Total attendees, with over 60% being non-union community members</i>) mobilized for the public rally.	Demonstrated the power of the unified Common Good Coalition , showing the Board the community was actively involved.	External Mobilization=750+ community members

Final Phase: The Confrontation (Victory)

Goal/Milestone	Number of People Mobilized	Power Mechanism	People Power Result
Final Commitment	5,042 (<i>Total signed public pledges</i>) collected by the coalition.	Maximum Mandate: Created undeniable, data - backed political	Political Force=5,042 committed stakeholders

		pressure, proving the wide-scale opposition to the cuts.	
Peak 3: Ultimate Leverage	1,410 (<i>94% of members</i>) voted to authorize a strike, backed by the 5,042 community pledges.	Final Victory: The combination of near-unanimous internal unity and overwhelming public commitment removed the Board's political will to sustain the fight, forcing them to capitulate.	The 10-member Core Team successfully leveraged a force 504 times its size to win.

Organizing for Power: The "Schools Everyone Deserves" Campaign

Our core lesson: **Power is not what you have, but what you can mobilize.** The campaign won by strategically increasing the number of people committed to **action** at each stage.

1. The Core Principle:

The Schools Everyone Deserves campaign succeeded because it treated people mobilization as a measurable output, achieving its goal by leveraging a force **504 times the size** of its initial core team.

Success Metric	Result in Campaign	Key Lesson
Mobilization Ratio	10 Core Leaders organized 150 first-tier leaders.	You must invest deeply in training a small percentage of your base

		(10%) to be organizers, not just members.
Internal Unity	Achieved a 92% commitment (1,380 members) on the first test.	High-stakes campaigns require supermajority commitment . Test your internal structure early with low-risk actions (structure tests).
External Multiplier	Over 60% of the mass rally attendees were non-union community members.	Shift the narrative to "Common Good" issues (like social workers) to exponentially expand your base by recruiting <i>their</i> networks (parents, students).
Ultimate Leverage	Used 5,042 public pledges combined with a 94% strike vote .	Power is measurable commitment. The sheer number of committed people removed the opposition's political ability to govern.

2. Phase-by-Phase People Power Results

Exponential power is built in tiers . Never skip a step, as each phase is essential for building capacity for the next.

Phase 1: Internal Commitment (The Spark)

The goal is to move your members from passive recipients of information to active organizers. This requires **one-on-one organizing conversations** led by your core leaders.

Stage	Mobilized Numbers	Action/Outcome	Training Focus
Building Structure	150 Organizers Recruited	Established the Snowflake Structure (direct lines of communication and accountability).	The Ask: Train organizers to ask peers for specific, measurable commitments in a one-on-one conversation.
Internal Test	1,380 Members Committed	Secured a 92% commitment to the first low - risk action ("Green for Harmony Day").	Accountability: Train organizers to map their peers (Yes, No, Maybe) and follow up to move "Maybe" to "Yes."

Phase 2: External Coalition (The Multiplier)

The goal is to expand your organizing base by recruiting constituencies that care about your "Common Good" demands.

Stage	Mobilized Numbers	Action/Outcome	Training Focus
Recruiting Allies	50 New External	Exponential	The Narrative:

	Organizers	Growth: Recruited high-leverage parent, student, and faith leaders.	Train leaders to tell a compelling Story of Us that fuses the union's struggle with the community's needs.
Mass Rally	1,250 People Mobilized	Demonstrated capacity to mobilize the public on a weeknight, putting pressure on the Board.	Logistics: Train teams in specific mobilization roles (phone banking, childcare, transportation) to ensure the 1,250 people actually show up.

Final Phase: The Confrontation

The goal is to translate your mobilized numbers into a political concession.

Stage	Mobilized Numbers	Action/Outcome	Training Focus
Final Commitment	5,042 Pledges Secured	Achieved a final political mandate (pledge count) that the opposition could not dismiss.	The Pledge: Train organizers that the number of signed pledges is the true measure of power , not rally attendance.
Ultimate Leverage	94% Strike	The high vote,	Discipline: Train

	Authorization Vote	combined with the 5,042 pledges, forced the Board to concede, securing the campaign's core goal.	for unwavering unity and discipline in the face of threats, ensuring the commitment (pledge) holds firm during the final negotiation.
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3. Case Study Debrief Questions

Understanding Core Concepts

What does the phrase “Power is not what you have, but what you can mobilize” mean in the context of union organizing?

How did framing demands as Common Good issues change the campaign’s reach and impact?

Analyzing the Case Study

What were the key turning points in the Schools Everyone Deserves campaign that shifted power toward the union?

Why was achieving 92% internal unity before going public critical for success?

How did the coalition with parents, students, and community groups amplify the union’s leverage?

Applying Lessons to Your Context

What steps from the Action Checklist can you implement immediately in your own organizing work?

How can you identify and train 10% of your base as organizers in your district?

What measurable power metric (similar to the 5,000 pledges) could work for your next campaign?

Reflection on Strategy

Which phase—Internal Unity, External Coalition, or Final Confrontation—do you think is most challenging for your local union? Why?

How can you ensure your organizing structure remains strong and accountable during escalation?

4. Team Planning Checklist: Building Your Own People Power

Use these questions to assess your campaign's organizational strength:

1. **Leadership Team:** Do we have a diverse, action-oriented Leadership Team of **5-10 dedicated leaders** ?
2. **Structure Test:** Have we identified and trained **10%** of our base to be organizers?
3. **Measurable Ask:** Does our action (e.g., a petition, a button -wearing day) have a clear goal (e.g., 90% participation) that tests commitment?
4. **Narrative:** Is our primary demand framed as a **Common Good** issue to bring in external partners?
5. **Coalition:** Have we identified and secured the commitment of **50 external leaders** (parents, students, clergy) to mobilize *their* networks?
6. **Power Metric:** What is our final, public measure of commitment (e.g., **5,000 Pledges**)? Do our actions steadily build toward that number?