



**Valley Interfaith and School Reform: Organizing  
for Power in South Texas (Joe R. and Teresa  
Lozana Long Series in Latin American and Latino  
Art and Culture (Paperback))**

*Dennis Shirley*

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Can public schools still educate America's children, particularly in poor and working class communities? Many advocates of school reform have called for dismantling public education in favor of market-based models of reform such as privatization and vouchers. By contrast, this pathfinding book explores how community organizing and activism in support of public schools in one of America's most economically disadvantaged regions, the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas, has engendered impressive academic results.

Dennis Shirley focuses the book around case studies of three schools that have benefited from the reform efforts of a community group called Valley Interfaith, which works to develop community leadership and boost academic achievement. He follows the remarkable efforts of teachers, parents, school administrators, clergy, and community activists to take charge of their schools and their communities and describes the effects of these efforts on students' school performance and testing results.

Uniting gritty realism based on extensive field observations with inspiring vignettes of educators and parents creating genuine improvement in their schools and communities, this book demonstrates that public schools can be vital "laboratories of democracy," in which students and their parents learn the arts of civic engagement and the skills necessary for participating in our rapidly changing world. It persuasively argues that the American tradition of neighborhood schools can still serve as a bedrock of community engagement and academic achievement.

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