



**TSDC**

Transforming School Discipline Collaborative

# Strategies for Parent Engagement

A component of the TSDC Toolkit for School Transformation

Created by: Communities Organizing and Family Issues (COFI)  
2016

## I. INTRODUCTION

Parent engagement is critical to student achievement and school effectiveness. Schools in which parent engagement is encouraged are schools in which students learn, behave, thrive, and achieve. Schools in which parent engagement is suppressed, neglected, or overlooked are schools in which students struggle. These conclusions are well-supported by a great and growing body of rigorous research on school effectiveness<sup>1</sup>. This Guide explicitly addresses the importance of parent engagement in improving school discipline and student behavior -- a focus that similarly is strongly supported by research<sup>2</sup> -- identifying specific strategies and practices school administrators can undertake to make parents effective partners in implementing restorative justice in their schools.

### **A note about the authorship of this guide.**

This guide was created by an Illinois nonprofit, Community Organizing and Family Issues (COFI) that has developed a unique process for parent leadership and engagement that has brought, over the past 20 years, over 3,400 low and moderate income parents into leadership and engagement in dozens of schools and communities in Chicago and across the state. Parent leaders, in Chicago, created a citywide, cross-community group called POWER-PAC that has won over 100 community schools and the reinstatement of recess in Chicago; the group has also championed a set of practices to increase the participation of at-risk children in quality preschool programs and successfully fought for and won the replacement of zero tolerance with restorative justice in Chicago and now statewide. This Guide thus is grounded in 20 years of experience in building effective partnerships among schools, parents, and policymakers.

## II. FOUNDATIONAL FRAMEWORK

### **What does parent engagement in schools' mean?**

'Parent engagement' has multiple definitions, from attending general meetings, participating in teacher-parent conferences, ensuring reading and homework time at home, volunteering in classrooms, attending school events, or serving on school committees. For this Guide, however, **'parent engagement' means involving parents as full partners with school administrators, faculty, and staff in supporting student achievement and success.**

## **What are core practices in schools to strengthen parent engagement?**

Schools that effectively engage parents as full partners:

- Create a welcoming climate for parents, encouraging them to visit classrooms, confer with teachers, meet with other parents, learn how to better support their children's school achievement, and participate in activities.
- Involve parents as leaders in school decision-making.
- Communicate with parents frequently and in their first language – and specifically offer translation at all meetings in communities, where appropriate.
- Listen to parents – their perspectives on what is happening in their homes, neighborhoods, and communities provide helpful context.
- Create useful volunteer (and paid) roles for parents in supporting student learning, behavior, family learning, and extracurricular achievement.
- Create spaces for parents to meet and learn in the school.

A wide range of structures can strengthen parent engagement and parent leadership. Many school districts and individual schools utilize structures such as a Local School Councils, Parent Advisory Councils, Parent Action Teams, PTA's and PTO's.

## **III. STRATEGIES FOR PRACTICE**

### **PARTNERING WITH PARENTS TO IMPLEMENT RESTORATIVE JUSTICE**

#### **Why are parents critical partners to schools in implementing restorative justice?**

In Illinois, parents have been among core leaders in the movement to replace zero tolerance with restorative justice – *they* were among the first school stakeholders to recognize that zero tolerance was counterproductive in improving student behavior and encouraging student success. Many of those parent leaders have become informed in the effective implementation of restorative justice practices in schools and have the capacity to teach other parents about the policy (now encoded in Illinois law) and engage them in making this new policy work for principals, teachers, students, and families. Please see [http://www.cofionline.org/COFI/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/COFI\\_ParentGuide.pdf](http://www.cofionline.org/COFI/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/COFI_ParentGuide.pdf) for background on this work.

#### **How can schools engage parents at the local school level in implementing restorative justice?**

- First and foremost, implement the core practices of parent engagement as described above – welcome them, listen to them, communicate with them, create opportunities for their leadership and volunteerism, respect them as true partners in school success.

- Communicate with parents about what restorative justice is, what it means for their children, how it will be implemented in your school, and how parents can reinforce restorative justice principles at home. One resource: COFI-POWER-PAC's parent-to-parent training in restorative justice.
- Create a school-based team to implement restorative justice and involve parents as partners in the local school team, which could also include security staff, bus personnel, faculty, office staff and student leaders. This team would continuously review restorative justice practices and their effectiveness, identify promising program and practice models, analyze suspension and other school disciplinary data, and assure continuing and deep parent engagement.
- Consider the creation of Parent Peace Centers, a model COFI has developed in Chicago that trains and employs parents in restorative justice and peace circle-keeping and provides intensive tutoring and mentoring to students exhibiting disruptive behavior as an alternative to suspension. Peace Centers, in combination with other school culture changing efforts like those above, are showing significant results in improving student behavior and achievement and in decreasing suspension rates.  
<http://www.cofionline.org/victories/peace-centers-in-six-more-chicago-schools/>

### **How can school districts engage parents in implementing restorative justice?**

The new state law mandates the creation of parent-teacher advisory committees within school boards or governing bodies of charter schools. School districts are thus mandated to engage parents in restorative justice policy development, implementation, and monitoring. Among the provisions for parent engagement within this mandate<sup>3</sup>:

- School authorities are required to provide a copy of its school discipline policy to the parent or guardian of each student within 15 days of starting classes.
- The parent-teacher advisory committee will participate with the school governing board in an annual review of school discipline policy and its implementation.
- The parent-teacher advisory committee will also participate with law enforcement and school bus personnel in developing and monitoring security and safety policies.
- Lastly, the parent-teacher advisory committee will inform policy and practice with respect to managing/correcting the behavior of aggressive students, including bullying behavior.

## PARENT ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES

### Parent Engagement Practice: Parent Leadership Development Program

**What it is.** A leadership training program that helps parents see themselves as leaders and become proactively involved in improving their families, schools, and communities. One example is COFI's parent leadership program that often begins by partnering with local schools to encourage parents to participate and then COFI provides up to three years of on-site training on-site and support for the parents. In COFI's model of leadership development, within 7 weeks, parents form action teams that begin to work with schools on projects they believe will improve children's school experiences.

**Where to see parent leadership teams in action.** COFI-trained school based parent leadership teams are in action in dozens of schools, predominantly in Chicago but also in Aurora, East St. Louis, Elgin, Evanston, and Skokie.

**What they cost.** COFI's cost of supporting a groups of parents at one school participating in the leadership program and meeting as a parent action team on a weekly or biweekly basis can range from \$15,000 to \$25,000 per year – depending, in part, on the level of other supports available to the parents at that school. School staff and school partners can also be trained in COFI's parent leadership development model.

**Results.** School based parent action teams have won facilities improvements, playlots, and after school programs, successfully championing these issues with school boards. They have partnered with school security personnel and law enforcement in creating safety patrols and safe passage routes. They have run for and won numerous Local School Council and PTA seats. They have hosted Family Nights and Health Fairs. They have advised school officials on how to communicate better with parents. And they have volunteered in classrooms, after school centers, safety patrols, and Peace Centers.

### Parent Engagement Practice: Parent Peace Centers

**What it is.** Parent Peace Centers engage high-risk students in intensive (at least weekly) one-on-one and small group work with community resident parent leaders called Peacekeepers trained as peace circle keepers and in leadership and conflict resolution skills. Students learn to resolve conflicts non-violently. Peacekeepers are also called in by schools to mediate conflicts as they arise.

<http://www.cofionline.org/victories/peace-centers-in-six-more-chicago-schools/>

**Where to see them.** In Chicago, Parent Peace Centers are currently operating on the westside at Melody (West Garfield Park), on the northwest side at Nixon (Hermosa) and on the southside at Reavis (Kenwood) elementary schools.

**What they cost.** Minimally, a school-based Parent Peace Center costs \$20,000 - \$35,000 per year to operate, for the cost of training, employing and managing parent leaders as Peacekeepers, supporting their ongoing professional development for the Peacekeepers, data collection, and supplies for the Centers.

**Results.** 79% of survey respondents, including school administrators and teachers, agreed that the school culture was positively impacted. The same percentage agreed that the work of the Peacekeepers had a positive impact on the attitude of the student.

### **Parent Engagement Practice: Parent Training on Restorative Justice**

**What it is.** COFI/POWER-PAC parents have created a two-fold training package – a print parent guide in both English and Spanish and a face-to-face training led by parent leaders expert in restorative justice – to engage parents as partners in implementing restorative justice and improving student conduct. The trainings focus on parents’ roles and responsibilities in helping schools implement restorative justice and also reinforce how parents can support positive behavior of their children and in teach them how to revolve conflicts without violence – at home as well as in school and neighborhood.

**Where to see it.** For the Parent-to-Parent guides:  
[http://www.cofionline.org/COFI/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/COFI\\_ParentGuide.pdf](http://www.cofionline.org/COFI/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/COFI_ParentGuide.pdf). For the parent-to-parent trainings, please contact COFI to schedule a session.

**What it costs.** Parents in Chicago have developed a 2-hour bilingual Peer-to-Peer Restorative Justice 101 training for parents in Chicago Public Schools. The session costs \$500 per session and can be adapted for other communities; the Parent-to-Parent Guide is free.

**Results.** Parents who have participated in the training report significant increases in knowledge of how they can get involved in implementing restorative justice in their children’s schools, from monitoring disciplinary practices and speaking out when ‘zero tolerance’ slips back in to assuring that their child practices restorative justice in school. Parents also report improvements in their own disciplinary practices, reinforcing restorative justice at home.

## **Parent Engagement Practice: Parents as Partners on School Climate and Discipline**

**What it is.** Beyond training parents in restorative justice and working with them to create Parent Peace Centers, local schools can bring together parents and teachers and other school staff to create a school-based advisory committee to examine issues of school culture, informing practice and policies that intend to create a caring, healthy, restorative school climate that promotes peace, non-violence and conflict resolution. This committee also can also monitor disciplinary incidents and help assess practices and policies that may or may not be contributing to a healthy, restorative school climate.

**What it costs.** Costs are minimal and could include staff costs for teachers and school employees participating in the committee and stipends or reimbursements for parents participating to cover childcare or transportation, refreshments for meetings, translation for meetings, or the cost of the school directly providing childcare for the parents' children during meetings.

**Results.** Parents have a unique perspective on issues of school culture and are valuable partners in assessing and shifting school culture. They monitor school discipline practices and help identify practices and policies which can move the schools toward a more restorative culture.

## IV. REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> See for example 'Parental involvement is key to student success' at <http://www.publicschoolreview.com/blog/parental-involvement-is-key-to-student-success>; Parental involvement in schools at <http://www.childtrends.org/?indicators=parental-involvement-in-schools>.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.csos.jhu.edu/P2000/ppp/Samplers/2012-Behavior-Sampler.pdf>; Parental involvement in schools and the role of school security measures, <http://eus.sagepub.com/content/47/7/830.abstract>.

<sup>3</sup> Among the provisions of the law:

**To establish and maintain a parent-teacher advisory committee to develop with the school board or governing body of a charter school policy guidelines on pupil discipline, including school searches and bullying prevention as set forth in Section 27-23.7 of this Code.** School authorities shall , to furnish a copy of the policy to the parents or guardian of each pupil within 15 days after the beginning of the school year, or within 15 days after starting classes for a pupil who transfers into the district during the school year, and the school board or governing body of a charter school shall to require that a each school inform informs its pupils of the contents of the its policy. School boards and the governing bodies of charter schools, along with the parent-teacher advisory committee, must are encouraged to annually review their pupil discipline policies, the implementation of those policies, and any other

**The parent-teacher advisory committee in cooperation with local law enforcement agencies shall develop, with the school board, policy guideline procedures to establish and maintain a reciprocal reporting system between the school district and local law enforcement agencies regarding criminal offenses committed by students.** School districts are encouraged to create memoranda of understanding with local law enforcement agencies that clearly define law enforcement's role in schools, in accordance with Section 10-22.6 of this Code.

The parent-teacher advisory committee, in cooperation with school bus personnel, shall develop, with the school board, policy guideline procedures to establish and maintain school bus safety procedures. These procedures shall be incorporated into the district's pupil discipline policy. (d) The school board, in consultation with the parent-teacher advisory committee and other community-based organizations, must include provisions in the student discipline policy to address students who have demonstrated behaviors that put them at risk for aggressive behavior, including without limitation bullying, as defined in the policy. These provisions must include procedures for notifying parents or legal guardians and early intervention procedures based upon available community-based and district resources.



## TABLE OF RESOURCES

<b>Name of the Document/ Resource</b>	<b>Author/ Associated Organization</b>	<b>This document is helpful for....</b>	<b>Citation and Links to Access</b>
COFI website	COFI	General public	<a href="http://www.cofionline.org">www.cofionline.org</a>
Meet COFI parents:	COFI	Hearing stories of real parent leaders	<a href="http://www.cofionline.org/parent-campaigns/meet-the-parents/">http://www.cofionline.org/parent-campaigns/meet-the-parents/</a>
COFI training model:	COFI	Those working to engage parents and build their leadership	<a href="http://www.cofionline.org/the-cofi-way/introduction/">http://www.cofionline.org/the-cofi-way/introduction/</a>
<i>Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family/School Partnership</i>	Harvard Graduate School of Education	Schools and families building family/school partnership	Anne T. Henderson, Karen L. Mapp, Vivian R. Johnson, and Don Davies (2007).
Harvard Family Research Project:	Harvard Graduate School of Education	Academic research on family involvement	<a href="http://www.hfrp.org/family-involvement">http://www.hfrp.org/family-involvement</a>
U.S. Department of Education: Family and Community Engagement:	U.S. Department of Education	New guidelines from the federal government	<a href="http://www.ed.gov/family-and-community-engagement">http://www.ed.gov/family-and-community-engagement</a>
<i>Parent to Parent Guide: Restorative Justice in the Chicago Public Schools:</i>	COFI	A Parent-friendly document about restorative justice and how parent leadership impacts change (Chicago example)	<a href="http://www.cofionline.org/cofi-reports/parent-to-parent-guide-restorative-justice/">http://www.cofionline.org/cofi-reports/parent-to-parent-guide-restorative-justice/</a>
<i>The COFI Way: Policy &amp; Systems Change:</i>	COFI	How parent leaders approach policy and systems change and succeed	<a href="http://www.cofionline.org/cofi-reports/the-cofi-way-policy-systems-change/">http://www.cofionline.org/cofi-reports/the-cofi-way-policy-systems-change/</a>
<i>Parent Engagement that Builds Leadership and Power in Early Learning:</i>	COFI	How parent leaders have taken on change in early learning systems with a focus on overcoming access barriers	<a href="http://www.cofionline.org/COFI/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/ParentEngagement_brief-web.pdf">http://www.cofionline.org/COFI/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/ParentEngagement_brief-web.pdf</a>
<i>Parent Peace Centers in Chicago Video:</i>	City of Chicago	Short video on the school-based Parent Peace Center work	<a href="http://www.cofionline.org/victories/peace-centers-in-six-more-chicago-schools/">http://www.cofionline.org/victories/peace-centers-in-six-more-chicago-schools/</a>