

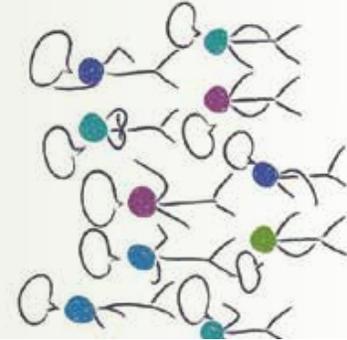
The COFI way to policy and systems change, step by step

1

Build relationships of trust among parents across communities

COFI trains and organizes parents in many settings and many neighborhoods. Then, we bring together graduates of COFI's two-year intensive program. These parents are leaders. They have learned to set and achieve goals for themselves and their families. They have worked in teams with other parents and community members. And they have made things happen in local schools and communities.

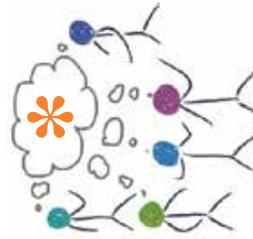
The first step towards policy and system change is building deep and trusting relationships among truly diverse parents. We face the reality that, for many, life experiences have made it risky to step outside their trusted circles. We use the astonishing power of sharing personal and family stories, getting to know each other parent-to-parent, and sharing hopes and dreams to sow the seeds for common ground across neighborhood, racial and ethnic, and language and cultural divides. COFI creates a safe space and a positive process where trust and community can grow.



2

Parents create a shared vision and focus on positive change

Out of their shared stories and leadership experience, parents identify common struggles and challenges. They talk through what they believe needs to change to make a difference in their lives, families, and communities. The issues they take on resonate in their own lives and experiences. To date, parents' campaigns include access to early learning, refashioning neighborhood schools into community centers, eliminating punitive discipline that pushes kids out of school, and fighting for the basic right to recess for all children. Through dialogue and deliberation around a table of trust, parent leaders build a shared vision for positive change.

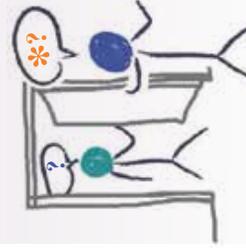


3

Parents do their own research to inform recommendations for policy and systems change

The problems are big and the solutions are complex, but COFI's central premise is that *parents themselves know best what will really work*. Our successes rely on the fact that parents themselves often have the most creative and down-to-earth ways of solving complicated issues. We invest in parents taking the lead in research, and they dig deep to understand and define tough problems. Eventually, parents articulate what needs to change in bigger systems and public policies to really have an impact on their children and communities.

Research and recommendations develop through parent-to-parent and door-to-door conversations to collect data and deeply understand the problems. Parents build relationships with professional advocates and experts working on the issues to gather a range of perspectives. They use COFI's unique "Web of Support" exercise to do strategic planning and power analysis. As a result, parents identify recommendations for "what needs to change."

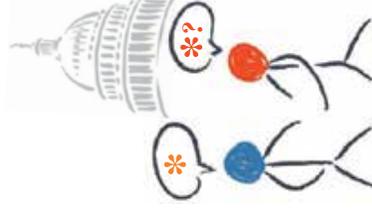


4

Parents build relationships with policymakers who can influence decisions

Parents, following their own instincts, have intentionally built relationships with "insiders," many of whom become allies and even champions. Parents win this kind of support through organizing meetings that begin with sharing their personal stories related to the issue at hand. Then, they present their research and recommendations for policy changes that are fresh, innovative, and deeply informed by real people. Rather than coming in confrontationally with a set of demands, parents believe that decision makers need to listen and hear them out. Deep connections are made. Sometimes people in power have personal experiences not so different from the parents, perhaps growing up in the same communities, or raising their own children in challenging circumstances.

Working hand-in-hand with insider champions—while still keeping outside pressure on them whenever needed—parents negotiate innovative solutions and ultimately help implement them. *These insider relationships have proven to be key to the success of the parent-led policy change.*



5

Parents win, implement innovative and successful solutions... and the circle of policy change continues

Winning on an issue is really another beginning in the policy change process. For parents, implementation matters and often their innovative solutions depend upon parents working on the execution of new programs. Thus there is an even deeper engagement of parents in the system; they become the on-the-ground, go-to experts on the issues that matter to families.

The circle of policy change continues. Parents go back to their system insider allies and bring new insights, pushing the work further along. Parents take on more and more campaigns as they win and move on to something new, while continuing the intentional work of bringing more and more parents into the the COFI leadership development process.

