

Parent Policy Associates Program Materials

Program Summary and Evaluation

COFI piloted the Parent Policy Associates (PPA) program during the initial Community Schools Campaign to support the growth and development of emerging parent policy leaders. It is not a requirement of accomplishing the five-step campaign, but by intensifying the time commitment and expectations for the citywide leadership team, the program was able to speed up the process by which leaders learned the skills of policy leadership and led the first campaign. Sample application, fact sheet, contract and report forms are on the following pages. Here is a summary of components and accomplishments of the program.

Goals of the program:

- Create a core of parent leaders: develop skills, confidence, knowledge
- Build relationships with policy makers and advocates, and form alliances
- Lead a successful citywide, statewide, or regional campaign

Program components:

- Stipends: Participants are provided with a salary and an expense stipend to lessen the financial burden of participation and strengthen their participation in the program.
- Expectations: A written contract is signed by participants outlining their commitments and the expectations. Regular reports and reflections (oral or written) are required.
- Training: Organizing staff provide a series of core trainings as well as trainings in the context of the planning and implementation of the campaign.

The Parent Policy Associates were all experienced leaders from COFI-trained teams who committed to advancing their skills, experience, and roles as citywide parent leaders by working on policy issues that affect families. COFI provided the Associates with stipends, advanced training, and support, while working with them to build a strong parent voice in the policy arena. The program ran for one year.

What was accomplished?

Policy-level change:

- The PPAs forged relationships with policymakers at both the local and state levels: “We were able to get more respect from public officials this year because we had more parents involved; we had better communication; we had more diversity; we had good issues, and understood them better; we had more confidence; and we talked to more parents.”
- The PPAs also expanded the role of parents in the formal policy-making process. One Associate was appointed to the Illinois After School Task Force.
- As a result, public officials and policymakers responded and were more receptive to the needs of parents and their goals: through the work of the PPAs, parent engagement was made a priority in a new Chicago Public Schools RFP and a top Illinois human service official publicly promised to make it a higher priority in the State’s “prevention” programs.

Institutional change:

- Schools: The PPA program fostered increased cooperation with principals and staff within specific schools. School personnel have become more responsive to the needs of parents.
- Advocacy organizations: The PPAs expanded the voice of parents within several advocacy organizations at the city and state levels. In particular, they worked with other local organizations to create a new citywide and a new statewide coalition on the issues that they were working on.

Through these relationships, they helped to make these advocacy groups more responsive to parents' issues and needs: "It made a difference for us to be present at the various advocacy group meetings. When these organizations see parents at their meetings, they get a better understanding of what families are up against, what is working at the local community level – specifically we were able to share more information about what the school-based community centers are doing. We believe this led to these groups making different and better decisions."

Building a citywide parent policy organization:

- Brought together a diverse group of people to fight for a common cause
- Recruited 15-20 new parent leaders to join the Citywide Parent Policy Committee
- PPAs gained recognition and respect in the eyes of other parents and stakeholders
- Worked well together as a team