



# Making Change

Lessons from the Families  
Improving Education Initiative

Final Evaluation Report  
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the **James Irvine** foundation

**harder+company**  
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**Photo Credits:** All of the photos included in this report were taken by Families In Schools at various FIE events throughout the state. The cover photo was taken in Sacramento on Advocacy Day and features representatives from various FIE grantees.



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# Table of Contents

<b>Executive Summary .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>4</b>
About the Families Improving Education Initiative .....	5
About the Evaluation .....	6
How to Read this Report .....	8
<b>2. Strengthening Civic Engagement &amp; Support .....</b>	<b>9</b>
Overview and Background.....	9
Promising Strategies and Success Factors .....	10
Results and Key Findings .....	12
Looking Ahead: Opportunities and Considerations for Future Work .....	15
<b>3. Improving Policies &amp; Practices .....</b>	<b>16</b>
Overview and Background.....	16
Promising Strategies and Success Factors .....	17
Results and Key Findings .....	19
Looking Ahead: Opportunities and Considerations for Future Work .....	22
<b>4. Strengthening Organizational Capacity .....</b>	<b>23</b>
Overview and Background.....	23
Promising Strategies and Success Factors .....	24
Results and Key Findings .....	28
Looking Ahead: Opportunities and Considerations for Future Work .....	29
<b>5. Concluding Remarks.....</b>	<b>31</b>
Recommendations and Considerations for Future Work.....	32
<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>33</b>
Appendix A: Additional Information on the Evaluation .....	33
Appendix B: Major Advocacy Milestones & Achievements, by Region and Grantee .....	35

# Executive Summary

## What are the key findings of the Families Improving Education Initiative?

*Through the Families Improving Education (FIE) initiative, community-based organizations have strengthened their capacity to engage families and build collaborative relationships with school boards and educational leaders. These efforts are fostering more inclusive decision-making, improving school practices and policies, and building a multi-stakeholder movement to close the achievement gap.*

The James Irvine Foundation launched the *Families Improving Education (FIE)* initiative in 2008 by funding eleven community-based organizations in California's Central Valley and Inland Empire to support parent involvement in K-12 educational policymaking. Families In Schools, a Los Angeles-based advocacy organization was selected to serve as a technical assistance provider and grant-making intermediary. The FIE initiative is based on the premise that *parent-engagement efforts can foster more responsive and appropriate school policies that enhance student success.* This report highlights the insights and promising strategies of the FIE initiative, looking closely at three core components: increasing the involvement of parents in K-12 decision-making; influencing educational decisions, policies, and practices that lead to improved academic outcomes; and strengthening the capacity of community-based organizations to engage in educational advocacy. Key findings are below.



*FIE grantees in Sacramento during Advocacy Day 2012*

- **Harnessing the Power of Parent-led Advocacy.** FIE grantee organizations played a crucial role in engaging underrepresented communities in educational advocacy. Grantees were challenged to engage parents who had little or no previous civic engagement experience. This evaluation revealed that, despite a multitude of barriers, grantee organizations made significant strides engaging, training, and building the confidence of parents as partners and educational advocates. Most parents had no previous involvement in educational advocacy and often lacked the confidence to speak with classroom teachers, let alone decision makers. With a keen understanding of their local communities and a variety of

engagement strategies, FIE grantees helped equip parents with the tools, knowledge and confidence to advocate and participate in decision-making. Furthermore, interviews with school board members revealed that parent-led advocacy was more likely to gain their attention and lead to change than advocacy efforts driven entirely by community-based organizations.

- **Cultivating Internal Champions.** In 2011, grantees invited school board members and educational leaders to participate in the FIE quarterly learning institutes, resulting in some of the initiatives most ardent champions. Board members valued the opportunity to connect with their peers in other regions and discuss common challenges and best practices. They also benefitted from the training and capacity building activities, enhancing their ability to access the information, tools, and allies needed to advocate successfully for changes at the local level. As a result, FIE grantees and parents were able to gain increased access to local decision-makers, foster more inclusive decision-making practices, and promote improved policies at the local level.
- **Using Data to Strengthen Advocacy Efforts.** Learning to interpret and use data proved to be a powerful way to build credibility, focus advocacy efforts, and inform decision-making at the school and district levels. Not only did grantees increase their ability to use data, they shared that knowledge with parents, community leaders, and internal champions. Armed with data and information about models and best practices, parents and grantee organizations gained respect among educational decision-makers as “informed and credible partners.”
- **Creating a Culture of Inquiry and Collaboration.** FIE stakeholders overwhelmingly indicated that Families In Schools helped to facilitate and promote a culture of inquiry, continuous reflection, and collaboration within regions and across the initiative. *Quarterly learning institutes* became a critical venue to build skills and share best practices. Initially designed as a peer learning community for grantees, the institutes evolved to include local educational decision-makers and parent leaders, allowing for a more collaborative approach to permeate all levels of the FIE initiative. The institutes became a safe place for difficult conversations about inequities and to reflect on lessons learned. This is contributing to a shared understanding of the issues as well as greater credibility, transparency, and collaboration among parents, school board members, and district leaders.
- **Building Regional Networks.** Building on the strength and momentum of its multicultural and multi-stakeholder approach, the FIE initiative has been cultivating regional collaboration to better focus and coordinate the advocacy efforts of multiple grantees in the same district. While grantees acknowledged the challenges of reconciling different approaches, styles, and agendas, the benefits of a regional approach are starting to bear fruit. In addition, events like Advocacy Day, which brought parents and organizations to speak with policymakers in Sacramento, have proved to be powerful opportunities to apply advocacy training and leadership skills. This coordinated and collaborative approach is gaining attention and contributing to more inclusive decision-making at both the regional and state level.

## Building on What Works: Considerations for the Future

- **Engage high-level educational decision-makers:** FIE grantees made notable progress engaging school board members and administrators, but more work is needed to gain support from district Superintendents. FIE stakeholders recognize that without support from educational decision-makers, reforming the education system will be an uphill battle.
- **Expand and deepen parent engagement efforts:** While grantees made notable strides engaging “hard to reach” parents, they recognize the need to expand and deepen engagement strategies by thinking “outside the box” and trying new and innovative strategies to engage parents. In a recent learning institute, FIE stakeholder reflected on how to reach the other 90% of parents who remain disengaged and uninvolved in the educational system.
- **Continue to strengthen strategic capacity:** FIE stakeholders identified a number of capacity areas to strengthen as they move into the next phase of the initiative, including policy analysis, media advocacy, and strategies to ensure accountability and monitor policy implementation.
- **Leverage regional and state networks:** While the regional collaboratives are at various stages of development, stakeholders are building a solid foundation for a more coordinated approach at the district level. They are also looking for opportunities to leverage a growing state-level presence and link FIE advocacy efforts to other educational practices and initiatives, such as Linked Learning.
- **Continue to assess progress and promote continuous learning:** FIE stakeholders value opportunities to reflect on lessons and achievements, thus enhancing their capacity to respond to emerging opportunities and adapt their strategies. As the initiative matures, it should explore ways to systematically assess and discuss the initiative’s progress and use those findings to inform future strategy development and share lessons with the field.



# 1. Introduction

What is the Families Improving Education Initiative all about?

*"... California's public schools are not providing a quality education to all children. While multiple approaches are necessary to improve student outcomes, parent-engagement efforts can foster more responsive and appropriate school policies that enhance student success. Yet many parents do not know the best ways to engage with school officials to express their concerns and experiences."<sup>1</sup>*

Public education reform is one of the most pressing policy issues facing California today. The state's public schools are struggling to address growing numbers of English Language Learners (ELL), disproportionately high drop-out rates among minorities and low-income students, and major income disparities within and across communities. While no single solution exists to these and other challenges, reform advocates are promoting new approaches that encourage greater transparency and engagement of local stakeholders. Parent engagement is an especially essential component of education reform, particularly in low-income, minority, and immigrant communities where parents are traditionally excluded from the decision-making process. According to the James Irvine Foundation, "While multiple approaches are necessary to improve student outcomes, parent-engagement efforts can foster more responsive and appropriate school policies that enhance student success."<sup>2</sup>



*Community meeting with FIE grantee, parents and residents.*

But families often need help in understanding how to navigate the complexities of public school systems. The Irvine Foundation notes, "[M]any parents do not know the best ways to engage with school officials to express their concerns and experiences."<sup>3</sup> With that in mind, the Foundation has supported efforts to promote parent involvement in local education decision making. Through the *California Democracy* program, it funds organizations that create opportunities for traditionally underrepresented communities to participate in public decisions and shape policies that affect their lives. One of the program's most ambitious efforts is the Families Improving Education Initiative, which is the subject of this report.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.irvine.org/grantmaking/our\\_programs/californiademocracy/civicengagement/familiesimprovingeducationinitiative](http://www.irvine.org/grantmaking/our_programs/californiademocracy/civicengagement/familiesimprovingeducationinitiative)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

## About the Families Improving Education Initiative

The James Irvine Foundation launched the *Families Improving Education (FIE)* initiative in June 2008 by funding eleven community-based organizations in California's Central Valley and Inland Empire regions to support parent involvement in K-12 educational policymaking. Using an intermediary model, the Foundation selected Families In Schools, a Los Angeles-based advocacy organization, to serve as a technical assistance provider and grant-making conduit. The FIE initiative seeks to:

- Strengthen the capacity of organizations in the Central Valley and Inland Empire to implement education advocacy initiatives;
- Engage and prepare parents to become involved in K-12 education decision-making; and
- Influence educational decisions, policies, and practices that ultimately translate into improved academic outcomes.

The FIE initiative targeted community-based organizations in some of the most under-resourced regions of California. Some grantees were service providers with no advocacy experience, while others had a well-developed organizing model and base of support. Nearly all the grantees were new to educational advocacy and parent engagement in educational decision-making. While they all employed some common approaches, each one needed to refine and adapt their strategies in response to new challenges and emerging opportunities. Families in Schools played an important role in supporting grantees with the development and implementation of their education advocacy plan and helping develop their capacity to better engage families in advocacy. In addition to ongoing coaching and technical support, they convened grantees on a quarterly basis, provided research and resources to build upon their existing knowledge of educational systems and policies, and oversaw grantee progress toward the grant-funded outcomes. The table below provides a summary of grantee organizations by region, organization type and policies they targeted as part of the FIE initiative. A map of the grantees can be found in Appendix A.

FIE Grantee Organizations				
Region	Grantee	Organization	Target Policies	School District
Stockton/ Lodi	Lao Family Community of Stockton	Service Provider	Increase Parent Engagement	Stockton Unified School District & Lodi Unified School District
	PACT	Organizing Agency	High School Drop Out	
Fresno	Reading and Beyond	Service Provider	English Learners Academic Achievement	Fresno Unified School District
	Californians for Justice (CFJ)	Organizing Agency	High School Drop Out	
	Fresno Center for New Americans (FCNA)	Service Provider	Increase Parent Engagement	
Bakersfield	Dolores Huerta Foundation	Organizing Agency	English Learners Academic Achievement	Bakersfield City Unified School District
	Faith in Action	Organizing Agency	High School Drop Out	
San Bernardino	Congregations Organized for Prophetic	Organizing Agency	High School Drop Out	San Bernardino City Unified School



FIE Grantee Organizations				
Region	Grantee	Organization	Target Policies	School District
	Engagement (COPE)			District
	Inland Congregations United for Change (ICUC)	Organizing Agency	High School Drop Out	
Earlimart/Visalia	Community Services Employment Training (CSET)	Service Provider	English Learners Academic Achievement	Earlimart Unified School District
Coachella	Consejo de Federaciones Mexicanas en Norteamerica (COFEM)	Service Provider	Increase Parent Engagement	Coachella Unified School District

## About the Evaluation

In 2011, the Irvine Foundation contracted with Harder+Company Community Research to conduct a **formative evaluation of the FIE initiative that documents structures, practices, early outcomes and lessons learned**. To fully understand the context of this evaluation, it's important to consider the long-term nature and unique challenges of measuring the "success" of civic engagement and advocacy efforts. Advocacy efforts such as FIE evolve over time and are far more sensitive than direct service programs to shifting external influences.<sup>4</sup> Another important and relevant distinction is that most advocacy organizations are relatively small and often have limited organizational capacity. Some evaluation experts have argued that "successful advocacy efforts are characterized not by their ability to proceed along a pre-defined track, but their capacity to adapt to changing circumstances. [...] The real object of initial evaluation should not be an organization's strategy, but its strategic capacity."<sup>5</sup>

In light of this, the FIE evaluation emphasized the ability to adapt as a key measure of success. Specifically, we documented how Families In Schools and participating grantees responded to challenges and opportunities by adjusting their strategies for FIE's three broad goal areas: (1) strengthening civic engagement among parents, (2) influencing educational decision-making, and (3) strengthening organizational capacity. Because of the long-term nature of civic engagement efforts, the evaluation focused on early and interim outcomes using a predominately qualitative lens to understand the milestones and changes experienced by grantees, parents, and educational decision-makers. Key evaluation questions focused on grantee capacity, parent engagement, and systems-level measures outlined below:

### *Organizational capacity and funding*

- + Have organizations increased their ability to train and support parent advocates?
- + Have grantee organization built new relationships with community members, congregations or other organizations?
- + Has their understanding of parent engagement, civic participation and strategies for changing local schools changed as a result of FIE?

<sup>4</sup> Coffman, J. "What's different about Evaluating Advocacy and Policy Change?" The Evaluation Exchange. Harvard Family Research Project. Vol. XIII No. 1 (Spring 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Teles, S and Schmitt, M. "The Elusive Craft of Evaluating Advocacy," Stanford Social Innovation Review (May 2011). [www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/the\\_elusive\\_craft\\_of\\_evaluating\\_advocacy](http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/the_elusive_craft_of_evaluating_advocacy)

- + Have grantees secured new funding related to it's FIE work?
- + Have organizations developed or strengthened advocacy, organizing or communications abilities?
- + Have grantees increased visibility among local leaders?

#### ***Individual parent capacity and activities***

- + Have parents strengthened their confidence and ability to advocate?
- + What ways have they participated in advocacy activities (i.e. public meetings, hearings, forums, one-on-one meetings with educational decision-makers)?
- + How have parents engaged others in advocates develop their skills?
- + Have FIE-trained parent advocates been involved in local school-related elections?

#### ***Local education system***

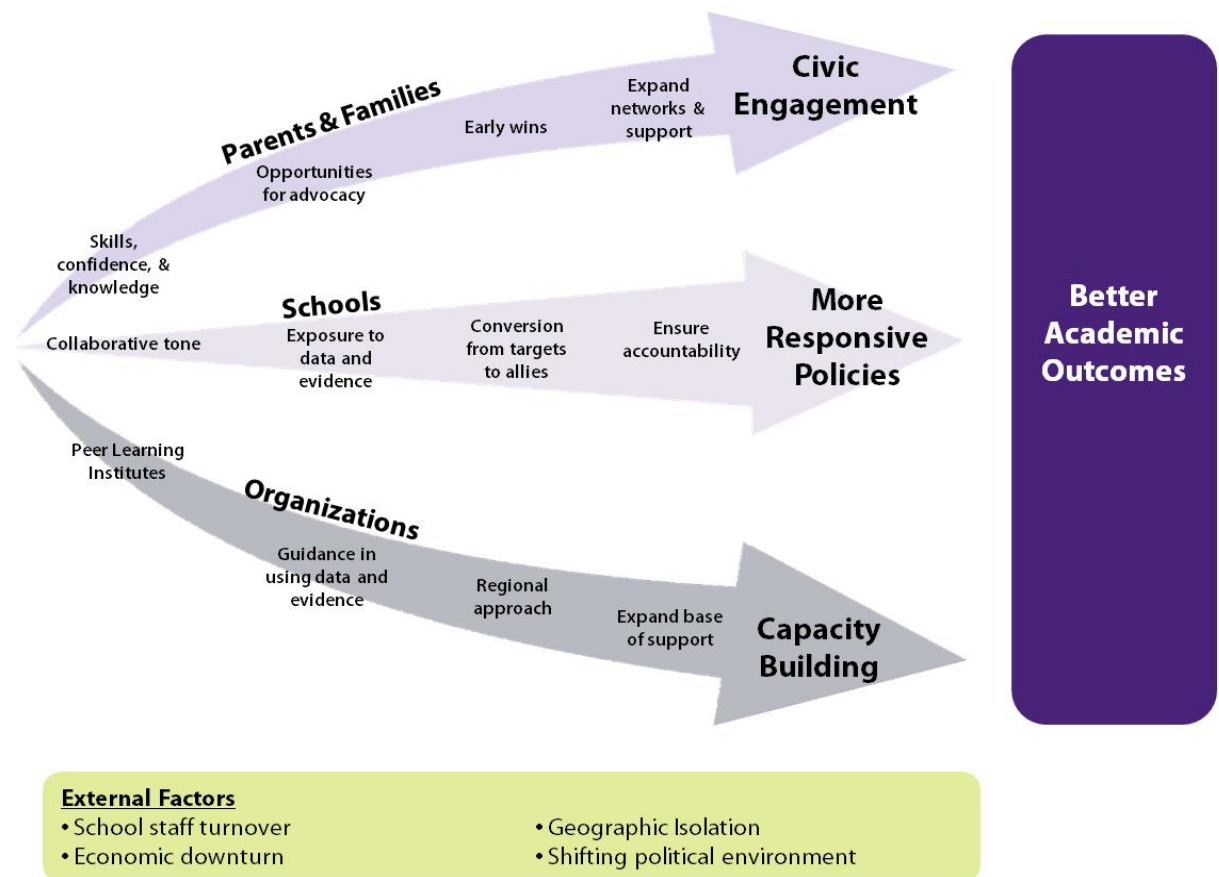
- + Have there been changes in policies, procedures or programs associated with FIE activities?
- + Are local educational decision-makers more aware of FIE and its local activities?
- + Do parent advocates participate in standing or ad hoc decision groups?
- + Are parent engagement processes more inclusive as a result of FIE activities?
- + Are there other indicators of change associated with FIE activities?

Existing documents and grantee reports provided valuable information to the evaluation team about grantee activities, challenges, and milestones at various stages of the initiative. In an effort to build on that information, the evaluation team focused data collection efforts on capturing the perspectives of parents, educational decision-makers, and other key stakeholders to document how the initiative impacted their participation in educational decision-making. We also interviewed staff from grantee organizations and Families In Schools, conducted site visits, observed parent advocacy engagements, and attended learning institutes. A description of data collection sources is presented in the table below.

<b>Evaluation Methods &amp; Sources</b>	<b>Total #</b>
<b>Site Visits/Observations:</b> Site visits included staff interviews and observation of parent events.	21 site visits
<b>Focus Groups:</b> Focus groups were conducted in multiple languages with parents, caregivers, and residents.	21 focus groups
<b>Grantee Interviews:</b> Staff was asked to share challenges, strategies, and changes due to FIE.	23 interviews
<b>School Board and Administration Interviews:</b> Interviews were conducted with local school board members and administrators.	56 interviews
<b>State-Level Stakeholder Interviews:</b> This round of interviews included state-wide leaders and partners that participated in FIE trainings or provided technical assistance, as well as staff from Families In Schools.	12 interviews
<b>Secondary Data Analysis:</b> Review of background information, grantee reports, and evaluation data provided by Families In Schools.	N/A
<b>Survey:</b> Parents and community members who participated in focus groups were asked to complete a brief survey to gather more quantifiable data about their experience and involvement with the FIE initiative.	73 participants

## How to Read this Report

The graphic below illustrates some of the most commonly mentioned milestones that have led to increased civic engagement, more responsive policies, and strengthened organizational capacity. In Chapter 2, we highlight the challenges, strategies and success factors for parent engagement. Chapter 3 describes how parents and community organizations engaged educational decision-makers as well as initial progress in reforming policies and practices. Chapter 4 describes the strategies and impacts of FIE efforts to strengthen the capacity of community-based organizations. Collectively, these efforts have contributed to increased knowledge, skills, and confidence among parents, more collaborative relationships with school board members, and more effective advocacy organizations. Equally instructive is the story of how Families In Schools and grantees adapted their thinking, took strategic risks, tackled challenges, and responded to emerging opportunities.



## 2. Strengthening Civic Engagement & Support

### Strategies for Engaging and Sustaining Parent Involvement

*"My opinion is no longer what I use to make my decisions. Now I have access to data to make decisions. It's longer-lasting, it's not about my emotions. When the emotions wear off, I still have the facts. This is very specific to education. You need to base it on facts." - FIE parent*

#### Overview and Background

Families In Schools and the FIE grantee organizations have played an important role in building parents' capacity and confidence to advocate for their children, as well as become partners in improving local educational policies that benefit all students. According to FIE stakeholders, trust and relationship building are fundamental pre-conditions to community engagement and critical ingredients for successful advocacy work.<sup>6</sup> As one grantee stated, "If they [parents] don't trust you, then it doesn't matter what you do, they are not going to participate."

While this is clearly a continuous and ongoing task, substantial progress was made as grantees and parents established trust and credibility with each other and with educational decision-makers. The evaluation findings show that **the ability of parents to participate more confidently in discussions with school administrators, and to better articulate both issues and solutions, is contributing to more collaborative decision-making at local schools and school districts.** But creating and sustaining engagement, particularly among isolated and frequently disenfranchised groups, is a complex process. This section highlights some of the strategies, milestones, and challenges related to engaging parents and building their capacity to become active partners in educational decision-making.



This word cloud is based on parent responses to the question, "What was the most important thing you learned or gained through your participation in this initiative?"

<sup>6</sup> Throughout this report, references to "stakeholders" includes individuals who have been involved in the FIE initiative such as parents, grantee staff, Families In Schools, school board members and administrators.

## Promising Strategies and Success Factors

Given the diversity of issues and stakeholders involved in the FIE initiative, the ability to remain flexible and adapt engagement strategies was crucial to most grantees' success. While many of the grantee organizations had some experience engaging community members, they demonstrated varying degrees of experience and readiness to organize parents and other stakeholders on education issues. **Most grantees agreed that a “one size fits all” was not a viable approach and they needed to adapt their engagement strategies to reflect the socio-political dynamics and cultural context of their local community.**



*Parents signing in for a parent summit*

The FIE initiative created an opportunity for different types of organizations to learn from each other and adapt their approaches as the initiative evolved. Regardless of the model or strategy, engaging parents and sustaining their involvement required persistence and cultural sensitivity. According to one grantee, “Base-building was the biggest lesson learned. It was difficult to build our base and keep them consistently engaged. We had to learn to be flexible in scheduling meetings to ensure attendance.” With a keen understanding of their communities, grantees used the following strategies to engage parents, address barriers, and build parents capacity and confidence to participate in advocacy activities.

- **Adapting organizing strategies to meet the needs of diverse communities:** Grantees used various organizing models, with some reaching out to parents through religious congregations and others through community-based organizations. While almost all grantees used some form of peer-to-peer outreach, they emphasized the importance of cultural adaptation. A few stakeholders expressed that confrontational approaches were not an effective way to engage immigrant communities or educational decision-makers. For many immigrant parents, questioning institutional authorities and trained “experts” is not the norm and parents are discouraged from participating in their child’s education. They often arrive in the United States with different expectations and assumptions as well as the inability to communicate in English. Some grantees expressed the need to be more inclusive of different populations and religious groups. One grantee commented, “Our community has so many different religions. [...] So it’s very hard to use one particular model and say this is going to work. So we just pick and pull whatever works.” Most organizations leveraged parent leaders to engage other parents in the community. According to a local stakeholder, “Parent-to-parent organizations are highly effective. Some [people] might not trust me as an administrator but would trust another parent.” Another stakeholder commented, “One of the ways parents are most helpful to each other is that they talk to each other, they are pillars in the community. [...] That’s their asset: They have a relationship with each other. We don’t need to manufacture that.” While one grantee regularly conducted a “parent café” to provide opportunities for discussion, several others

“Parents have the tools they need to be an active part of this process, and we’ve seen an increase in parent participation at meetings. They are feeling more comfortable with us.”

- FIE Grantee



adapted a house meeting model (including one grantee that based its approach on the model developed by Dolores Huerta and Cesar Chavez to organize migrant workers in the 1960s).

- **Engaging the media:** While most grantees struggled to engage the media, it was an important strategy for some grantees. One grantee adapted models and best practices from Southeast Asia to better reflect the ethnic populations it served. The use of ethnic media (radio, TV, and talk shows) was a very important part of this organization's organizing approach and helped to promote issues, gain credibility, and generate community interest. A school board member in the Central Valley expressed the critical importance of the media: "Anytime we have an action meeting, there's always media. Media is a strong partner...Wherever we are, we call [...] newspaper and TV."
- **Connecting educational issues to broader community concerns:** Many of the grantees were taking on educational advocacy for the first time and were much more accustomed to working with parents on other community issues, such as safety. They recognized that safety and education are intrinsically linked, and that an opportunity existed to connect those issues to build a broader base of parent support for school improvement. A parent commented, "This [grantee] organization has opened our minds[...] and they have brought important people to us who come and listen to our concerns. Before we didn't have meetings with the police or the superintendent, and now they come and listen to us. The organization has helped us to understand what is going on in the schools and what is going on in the community."
- **Facilitating opportunities to engage in action:** Grantees facilitated a variety of opportunities for parents to engage in advocacy activities ranging from local school board meetings to a statewide Advocacy Day in Sacramento. These proved to be powerful events for parents to apply their training while still building confidence and leadership skills. By far, the most frequently mentioned action involved taking parents to speak with policymakers in Sacramento for Advocacy Day in the spring of 2012. A key informant stated that "parents realized they have power [and] can be in control of their children's needs." A grantee stated, "At first, parents came with much trepidation and feared they weren't capable or knowledgeable [enough] to effect change. But I've seen parents grow and gain self-esteem. This growth is an accomplishment."

"Ninety-five percent of our parents are farm workers, and we realize they are working from 5am to 4pm, they are tired, and it's an extra effort to get them to us." - FIE Grantee

## Results and Key Findings

Evaluation findings clearly indicate that grantees made considerable progress engaging parents who are traditionally left out of educational decision-making. Many parents began with no civic engagement experience and gradually became involved in community activities, a process that one grantee referred to as "baby steps." A survey of 72 FIE parents revealed that nearly 98% had become involved in educational advocacy as a result of the initiative, with approximately 31% becoming involved in the past year. A local stakeholder noted, "I've been really impressed by the number of parents who had never been involved in anything but started coming to events that they [grantee and Families In Schools] were doing. That's been great, just to see regular people,

because a lot of times people want to help their kids but they don't have a lot of confidence.. [... The grantee] organizations are good at reaching out to those types of people.”

Several grantees saw the continued involvement of parents as an important measure of success. Both parents and grantees stressed how important it was to be persistent and were energized by positive results. For many, early success was about being heard and feeling welcomed by school administrators and decision-makers. One parent observed, “[In] the beginning, the school board and the superintendent didn’t recognize that there was a need. Today, they do! They see us as partners. We have overcome the perception that a problem doesn’t exist.” In a survey of 72 parents, 96 percent agreed or strongly agreed that the initiative was creating change in their community. Other key outcomes of parent engagement include:

- **Increased parent knowledge, skills, and confidence:** All FIE stakeholder groups agreed that parents increased their knowledge and capacity to participate in educational decision-making as a result of the initiative. In a survey of 72 parents across FIE sites, 82% strongly agreed that their involvement in the initiative had increased their ability to address educational issues and 78% strongly agreed that it had increased their confidence to advocate. As one stakeholder noted, “... this has been a learning process for parents... building capacity of people you want advocating is important, so they feel they know what they’re talking about...” According to a parent, “I know I can teach my community how to be a better advocate for their children. To me, it has helped me advocate for my children and for other people’s children.”

- **Increased understanding of the school system and parent rights:** Parents -particularly new immigrants- frequently said that their knowledge of the school system was limited prior to their involvement in the initiative.

Through trainings and engagement activities, parents

learned how to navigate and interact effectively with teachers, school administrators, and school board members. Many parents gained an understanding of the process of standardized testing, the re-classification process for English Language Learners (ELL), and tracking systems that allow parents to follow their children’s academic progress online. All stakeholders reported an overall increase in understanding parents’ rights and responsibilities. A school board member observed that parents learned “they have every right to question teachers. Parents have a right to question. There’s a culture of not asking teachers. Latinos assume teachers know everything and we tell parents they have a right to go to schools and they are welcome.” Meanwhile, a parent commented, “I’ve learned how to talk to the teachers and administrators. Now I feel comfortable in the schools and with the teachers. I used to be very shy, and when I came to this program, they told me that I had that right to go to the school and sit in the class.

“[Parents’] eyes are opening and their confidence is building ... They can no longer be intimidated by the ‘suit.’ They can make a change. Their voice can be heard. I see that confidence in some of the parents. It’s amazing to see the change.”

- FIE Stakeholder

- **Higher expectations for academic achievement:** To address the achievement gap, parents and grantees talked about the importance of setting higher expectations for kids. Numerous parents described how they used their knowledge and confidence to insist that failure is not an option. In addition to trying to raise expectations at school, parents have also improved the lines of

communication with their own children. Some grantee organizations provided communication trainings to help parents improve their interactions with their children and learn more about how they are doing in school.

- **Increased credibility:** Through workshops, trainings, and educational summits, grantees worked to give parents the tools, information, and confidence to ask questions and share their concerns. For many parents this was a first. Through events like Advocacy Day (further described below), parents learned how to use data and prepare talking points for meetings with legislators. Training and preparation helped parents get beyond the fear and intimidation of speaking to decision-makers or leading group meetings. A stakeholder observed that training “validates [parents’] belief in their own leadership. It makes them stronger advocates and they believe they can continue to be successful.” As a result of parents’ increased involvement, school boards are beginning to view parents and community partners in a new light, regarding them as “sophisticated” and “well-informed” partners. A school board member noted, “They have come to school sites to find out what is going on. Parents know their principals and are finding out what is affecting their child. Now they come to the board and demand things. We are now able to communicate with parents a little better.”
- “Going to Sacramento gives me energy to continue forward. You realize that we are not the only one with...problems.” - Parent
- **Cultivation of new parent leaders:** New parent leaders emerged through the engagement and training process, and many—perhaps unexpectedly—began to initiate meetings and engage other parents. As one grantee summarized, “Parents are taking the initiative now. For example, one parent took the initiative to start setting up meetings with the school district administrators around the issue of police officers on campus.” Another parent described how she applied her newfound confidence and leadership skills: “My time [with the grantee organization] has given me confidence...I have changed a lot. For example, I went to a steering committee meeting. I directed the meeting with 200 people. It was my first time that I could lead such a big event...I feel empowered. Before, I wouldn’t even feel ready to talk at church.”
  - **Increased engagement on other community issues:** More than half (66%) of the parents in our survey said they were applying their advocacy skills to address other community issues. Specific issue areas included healthcare reform, immigration, safety and violence, low income housing, mental health, and other social justice issues. Many parents joined health fairs, community council meetings, and public utility district meetings. Grantees and community leaders also observed increased participation. A key informant stated, “Most parents belong to a church or some civic organization or a community-based organization, and their sphere of influence expands beyond the school. When they feel empowered, parents can be more responsive to support their education process and work.” One parent illustrated this comment: “I have the tools to chat not only with people from the school but also with other people. I always want to help the community. It doesn’t have to be education. I can advocate for all.”

- **Increased sense of community and support:** Through participation in the FIE initiative, parents were able to expand their community-wide support networks. One parent summarized a commonly stated sentiment, “It’s comforting to know that I’m part of a group and it’s more effective to collectively advocate instead of advocating on our own... We work better together!” Local stakeholders also recognized the importance of parents’ sense of community: “Coming together as a group creates a stronger approach to resolve some issues. [...] To look for a solution together is much better than parents in isolation working on their own.” Meanwhile, another parent stated, “Parents now come up to us to ask for help.... Sometimes we don’t know the answer but we know where to send parents to get them help. We can channel them in the right direction.”

## Looking Ahead: Opportunities and Considerations for Future Work

The successful engagement of parents over a relatively short period of time is one of the most significant accomplishments of the FIE initiative, but there are still many more parents

on the sidelines and critical educational issues to address. Opportunities and considerations for future work include:

- **Expand and deepen parent engagement efforts:** While grantees made notable strides engaging “hard to reach” parents, they recognize the need to go beyond the “nature leaders” by deepening and expanding engagement strategies. In a recent FIE learning institute, stakeholders reflected on how to engage the “other 90%” of parents who remain uninvolved. As one stakeholder noted, “we need to go beyond the traditional vehicles and venues for parent engagement.” One emerging strategy is to explore ways to involve teachers on parent engagement efforts. Stakeholders should continue to explore and implement other innovative strategies to expand their reach and engage new parents in educational decision-making.

## Educating & Energizing through Advocacy Day 2012

In March 2012, nearly 120 parents, community leaders, FIE agency staff and school board members traveled to Sacramento for Advocacy Day. The purpose of the event was to raise awareness among state-level decision makers about the local advocacy efforts of FIE grantees. Organized by Families In Schools, each grantee was able to take up to 12 participants to advocate on behalf of their local efforts. It was described by all participants as a highly successful and energizing advocacy event.

One parent commented on what parents hoped to accomplish on Advocacy Day: “Our goal was to inform legislators about our necessities and what is happening in the school system. We wanted to let them know our problems, our worries, and our daily reality. We wanted them to know firsthand the necessities we have as parents...that there are a lot of parents that are involved and want to participate despite the lack of information from the schools...we wanted the legislators to hear us and have them pay attention to us...and take action.”

Grantee organizations worked closely with parents to prepare them with the information and tools for success. One parent described “We prepared ourselves by coming up with questions. We made petitions, how you develop them and how to prepare for a meeting with a legislator. We met three times before Advocacy Day. On the day of the event, we met again and broke into groups and practiced for the meeting with legislators. We developed our focus: how to advocate for our children, how to address the necessities we saw in the schools, and how the legislators would be able to take action and help not just the school but the parents and the community.”

- **Explore creative strategies to maintain engagement:** The ability to adapt to changes and maintain momentum will undoubtedly continue to test the resolve of FIE stakeholders. Grantees and stakeholders spoke of the need to find creative and “out of the box” strategies to maintain momentum and identify constructive opportunities for parents in advocating, decision-making and ensuring accountability. “We can’t get different results from doing the same thing over and over,” reflected one grantee, “how do we build on what we’ve done so far? What can we do better?” Stakeholders should continue to explore ways to re-frame parent engagement and seek opportunities for meaningful participation.
- **Continue to assess progress and share what works:** The FIE initiative has provided a valuable platform for learning, adapting, and sharing what works. Stakeholders should continue to gather and share information across the initiative and with the broad civic engagement field. Ongoing evaluation and reflection will help strengthen the capacity of FIE stakeholders to adapt to change and refine their strategies.



*FIE grantees at a Learning Institute*



# 3. Improving Policies & Practices

## Strategies for Influencing Decision-makers and Reforming Systems

*"They [FIE grantees] all communicate with the administrators. From my perspective these organizations are not only working on the outside, but the inside as well. They are viable agencies within the community." - School Board Member*

### Overview and Background

Large-scale community engagement and advocacy efforts can take years to truly influence the policies and cultures of the bureaucratic institutions they seek to change. With support from Families In Schools, FIE grantees and supporters targeted several key policy objectives in their respective communities including decreasing high school drop out rates, improving academic achievement for English language learners, and increasing parent engagement (see textbox to the right). While all of these are hefty long-term outcomes, the FIE initiative has produced clear indications of progress and is building a strong foundation for change. **In many districts, school decision-makers have begun to view parents as credible partners, and school board members have strengthened their own capacity to work collaboratively and advocate for change.** While some changes have been more subtle and locally-oriented, others have contributed to important legislative changes at the state level.

In addition, many stakeholders expressed that **the "icing on the cake" has been the impact of FIE efforts on the awareness and capacity of school board members.** To many FIE grantees, engaging board members as advocacy partners was more of a happy accident than an intentional strategy, but their participation in the learning institutes proved to be a highly effective way to build capacity and cultivate internal allies. This has improved the working relationships among grantees, parents,

### Targeted Policy Issues

- **High School Dropout Rates:** Policy recommendations included standardizing disciplinary policies that lead to high suspensions and expulsion rates for students of color, ensuring early interventions for students with low academic performance, adopting dropout prevention plans and restoring parent/teacher conferences on a district wide basis.
- **English Learners Academic Achievement:** Policies focused on providing adequate support services for EL students and their parents, the implementation of a parent friendly tracking systems to ensure timely reclassification as English proficient and strengthening the district/parent relationship to better inform parents of their children's reclassification status.
- **Increase Parent Engagement:** Efforts to improve policies related to the district's parent communication practices including accessibility to translators, providing cultural sensitivity training to school staff, strengthening parent advisory committees and increasing the district's attention to parent involvement.

and school board members, and has played an important role in influencing priorities and decisions at local schools. One school board member noted that having an increased “awareness of what [FIE does] at a higher level [and] put[ting] some pressure onto our staff about certain issues...makes for more informed decisions. You really get the full picture.” This section further highlights some of the small and big effects that FIE efforts had on institutional policies and practices.

## Promising Strategies and Success Factors

Grantees and parents described varying levels of “push back” from the schools, school board members, and district staff throughout the initiative. At first organizations not only experienced challenges in contacting district members, but felt they were not taken seriously. Although some FIE grantees shared that they were still experiencing institutional resistance to their efforts, many others felt that they had overcome such challenges.

As with all advocacy efforts establishing trust and creating a collaborative non-threatening dynamic were described as fundamental to change. Some of the steps that grantees took to achieve those conditions are highlighted below:

- **Setting a collaborative tone:** Some grantees made an explicit policy of treating district leaders as partners. For instance, Lao Family, in Stockton, worked to build relationships with district administrators and the school board by sharing information about their community work. The grantee wanted to “let them know we are not here to bully them, but here to support the school district and bring parents to support the work they are doing in the district.” Faith in Action also relied on relationship building to accomplish policy goals. A representative of the organization stated, “We have a working relationship with school board members, which gives us leverage in the school district.”
- **Using data and evidence to create awareness:** Many grantees made headway in advancing their policy goals by using data to educate key decision makers. For several grantees, this educational component began with school board members then trickled down to district administrators. A grantee noted, “One challenge in the beginning was with the school board president. [...] He felt that our school district is doing an excellent job, no need for change, and no need for help. And when we showed them the numbers and the reclassification issue, they were humbled and they were willing to take the information we had.” Many grantees found that it was hard for school officials to argue with the numbers on graduation, drop outs, ELL reclassification rates, and other key indicators of school success. In addition, grantees said their exposure to research on these topics allowed them to have more meaningful conversations with decision makers.
- **Identifying internal allies:** Grantees actively sought champions within the school district, since the support of school board members and administrators was seen as an essential element of achieving

“That was one of our strategies—having the administrators hear that the board members support us. We didn’t see any response from the district until they heard that we were planning on bringing parents to one of their meetings. Then the superintendent suggested that we just continue our own conversation outside of the board member arena.” - FIE Grantee

policy change. FIE grantees shared that it was not enough to have support from the outside and that change came about when they were able to identify advocates within the system. By gaining the support of key players inside the school district, grantees achieved a greater level of institutional buy-in that increased credibility and laid the groundwork for policy changes to take root over time.

- **Promoting parent-led advocacy:** Participants frequently mentioned that parent-led advocacy work had a greater effect on key decision makers than other approaches. One school board member said, “I think the fact that [FIE grantees] get the right people in the room together is something that you can replicate. I think the whole idea of teaching parents and giving them the tools on how to do things for themselves ... that’s how we can reverse these things. Once that happens you have a stronger community all the way around.” In interviews, key decision makers also frequently identified the importance of parent involvement in advocating for change. In some cases, having agencies advocate for what parents wanted simply did not yield the same impact as having parents advocate for themselves. A school administrator stated, “It’s impacted my work by asking the deeper question, asking if this is what parents really want.” Two school districts have formally passed comprehensive parent engagement action plans that include trainings on how to engage staff in connecting with parents as well as trainings on measuring a variety of school outcomes. In addition, a separate school district has implemented a parent educational component to their online student tracking system in order to engage parents in tracking their child’s academic and disciplinary progress. Lastly, one school district is implementing parent trainings through an FIE grantee to strengthen their district’s parent engagement efforts in their English Learner Advisory Committees (ELAC). As one grantee stated, “[Parents] have gone from communicating in a limited scope to actually sitting in offices and having candid conversations.”



*Parents, grantees, and community members in Sacramento for Advocacy Day 2012*

- **Ensuring accountability:** Both grantees and parents expressed that good working relationships with educational decision-makers made it easier to hold school districts accountable for newly implement policies and practices, as well as student outcomes. Grantees and parents understand that the job is not done once a resolution has passed or a policy has been implemented. Parents have begun to follow up with administrators and board members after discussing policy changes. One parent shared how her group of parents maintained contact with a board member: “We will be doing a follow up at her office, sometime this month we’ll be talking to her about the matters that we discussed at the town hall

[meeting]. We build that ally [relationship] with them so we don't have to go through the maze, we can just go directly to her."

## Results and Key Findings

While each grantee organization and community is at different stages in the policy/advocacy process, they all have made some progress towards inclusive decision-making and policy change in their school districts. In addition, grantees made a significant contribution to two recent California State Senate bills that were signed into law by Governor Jerry Brown. These bills will help improve the English Language Learner reclassification financial supports and process for school districts throughout the state.<sup>7</sup> A graphic timeline highlighting the initiatives key milestones and providing an overall view of the initiative's progress is included on page 21. This timeline captures important flashpoints for FIE grantees as well as local and state policy changes that occurred as a result of the FIE initiative. Some key policy achievements are described below, and a more detailed list can be found in Appendix B.

- **Changing disciplinary procedures:** Parents have met with school board members to advance community appropriate solutions to disciplinary issues within their local schools. Specifically, parents successfully led efforts to change suspension procedures and created linkages between alternative high school and social services. In Fresno Unified School District, for instance, parents and students developed and presented recommendations to revise the decade-old Parent and Student Notifications and Information Handbook. The revisions are the first steps of an ongoing effort to challenge disciplinary practices that disproportionately impact students of color and contribute to drop-out among those students.
- **Creating strategies for increased parent involvement:** As a result of parent efforts, two school districts have passed comprehensive parent engagement action plans. In Coachella Valley Unified School District, parents successfully advocated for the adoption of a parent engagement resolution, which included a component that tracks and evaluates parental engagement throughout the district. Board members in Bakersfield passed a resolution to establish district-wide strategic planning to ensure parent engagement. This required parents to present directly to the school board. In other communities, parents have worked with superintendents to change district level staffing in order to increase the number of hours a staff member is dedicated to addressing English Language Learner (ELL) issues.

"One of the successes [of FIE] is changing the culture . . . . [Before,] it was a toxic environment where people felt marginalized. Now they know it's more positive, collaborative, and people feel their voice will be heard and their opinions will be sought."

- School Administrator

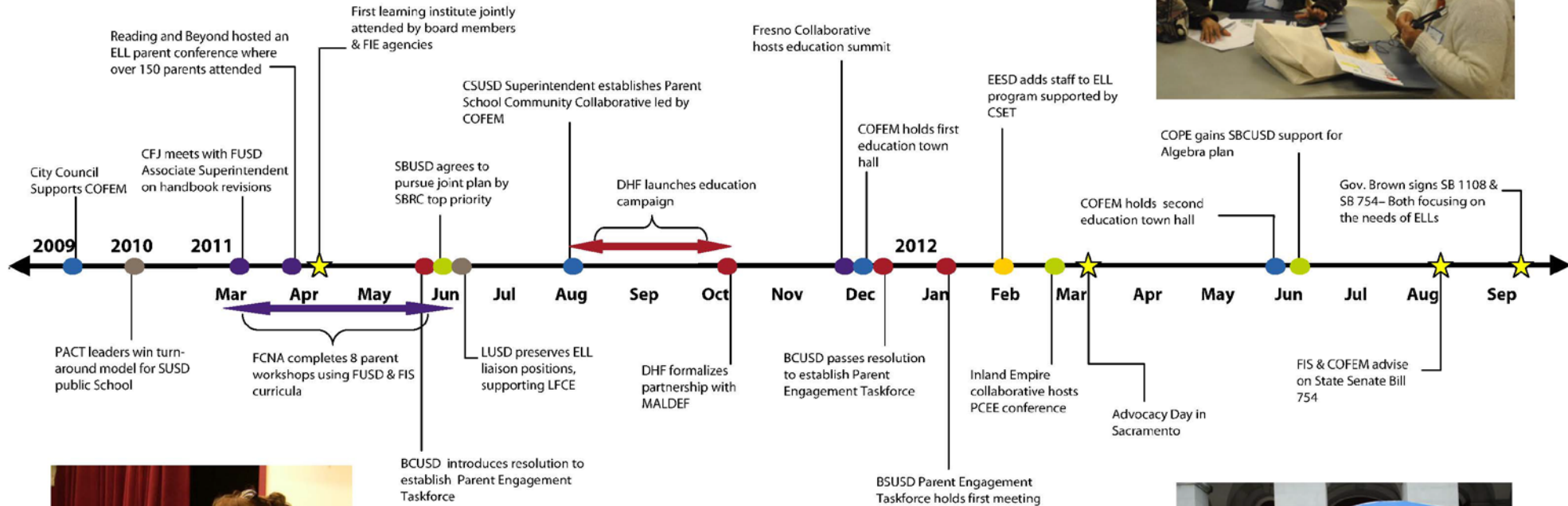
<sup>7</sup> In October 2012, Governor Brown signed into law SB 1108 on Reclassification for English Learners and SB 754 on reporting economic impact aid for English Learners. Both bills were sponsored by Senator Alex Padilla with support from Families In Schools and several FIE grantees (Fresno Center for New Americans, Community Services Employment Training, and Consejo de Federaciones Mexicanas en Norteamérica). The grantees also helped mobilize parents to present at public hearings.

- **Promoting quality improvements:** In San Bernardino City Unified School District (SBCUSD), parents gained board support for a district-wide effort to improve Algebra I success for all students. This resulted in the SBCUSD Board of Education allocating professional development funds to support coaching and collaboration for middle and high school math instructors to facilitate better articulation of instructional practices across grade levels.
- **Improving support for ELL families:** In Earlimart, board engagement led by the FIE grantee agency and parents resulted in the hiring of two dedicated English Language Learner staff members specifically charged with looking at reclassification practices within the district. In Fresno and Coachella Valley, parents are making progress towards improving how school districts track and notify parents about students' reclassification status by improving English Language Learner (ELL) systems. Their efforts have resulted in district sponsored workshops and trainings on ELL reclassification processes.
- **Improving parent access to information:** Parents advocated for the implementation of online monitoring systems, such as the Aeries Parent Portal in San Bernardino City Unified School District and the Atlas Parent Portal in Fresno Unified School District. Parents in these regions continue to advocate for broader use of the systems to help them monitor and access student information such as grades, assignments, attendance, behavior, and reclassification status.
- **Improving access and inclusion of under-served populations:** Engagement among Lao, Hmong, and other Southeast Asian parents in Lodi and Fresno is helping to increase district responsiveness to these traditionally underserved populations. In Lodi, Lao Families advocated to ensure Lao representation and participation in both District English Language Advisory Committees (DELAC) and school English Language Learner Advisory Committees (ELAC). Parents also successfully advocated retaining bilingual liaison positions at the district-wide and school levels that were in jeopardy of being eliminated due to budget cuts. In Fresno, parents gained support from the superintendent to partner with the district's Parent University to engage Hmong and other Southeast Asian parents in their children's education through workshops at local schools.



# FAMILIES IMPROVING EDUCATION INITIATIVE CREATING CHANGE THROUGHOUT CALIFORNIA

## Major Advocacy Milestones



## Regions

- **Fresno**
- **Bakersfield**
- **San Bernardino**
- **Earlimart/Visalia**
- **Coachella Valley**
- **Lodi/Stockton**

★ **Key Initiative Turning Points**



## Looking Ahead: Opportunities and Considerations for Future Work

While FIE stakeholders have made important strides in shifting attitudes and building relationships with school officials, they continue to encounter numerous institutional barriers – and sometimes outright resistance – to change. Opportunities and considerations for future work include:

- **Gaining support from the top:** One of the most successful attempts to institutionalize parent engagement and implement changes in practice had the full support of the district superintendant. Support and commitment from top leaders at the district-level plays a critical role in shaping the culture and tone for parent engagement and inclusive decision-making. “Principals won’t pay attention unless superintendents do,” noted one educational leader. As the FIE initiative enters its next phase, stakeholders recognize that the next critical hurdle will be increased engagement at the superintendent level.
- **Continue to press schools to have “courageous” conversations about race and equity:** Issues of race and equity are inherently hard but critical conversations to have with school administrators. FIE stakeholders have grappled with how to effectively discuss these issues with decision-makers. As one parent noted, “the race issue needs to be on the discussion table” and FIE stakeholders need to press forward in having these “courageous conversations” in constructive and non-threatening ways.
- **Implement mechanisms for monitoring and accountability:** As FIE stakeholders achieve changes in policy and practice, mechanisms to ensure accountability will require more attention. Stakeholders should be intentional in engaging parents in the implementation and monitoring of changes. This might include mechanisms to systematically track progress and gather stakeholder input on the successes and challenges of implementation.

“School decision-makers need to understand that parent involvement leads to better student outcomes. Parent involvement is not something you can put off until you’ve addressed student outcomes. They go hand in hand.” - FIE Grantee

# 4. Strengthening Organizational Capacity

## Enhancing Organizational Knowledge, Skills, and Strategies

*“Advocates have to be very organized, very confident in understanding the education jargon and the data, very politically savvy, politically correct at times, and able to know about accountability.” - Key stakeholder*

### Overview and Background

In an effort to strengthen the capacity of participating grantees, Families In Schools provided ongoing coaching, training, and technical support throughout the course of the initiative. Starting in 2009, each organization completed an annual capacity assessment that Families In Schools used to identify and prioritize capacity building needs. Given that nearly all the grantees were new to educational advocacy, Families in Schools initially focused on helping grantees build a solid understanding of critical educational issues affecting local communities and school districts. As grantees became more comfortable with educational issues, Families in Schools shifted from basic content knowledge to deeper discussions about using data, framing the issues, and building working relationships and credibility with the targets of their advocacy efforts.

Considering the varying levels of skill, capacity, and “readiness” among the FIE cohort, strengthening their capacity to engage in educational advocacy was not a simple task. Grantee organizations served

“Our capacity was enhanced by the FIE trainings, where we learned how to connect existing data with the work to make parent engagement even more powerful.”

- FIE Grantee

very different populations, including new immigrants from Latin America and Southeast Asia (particularly Hmong), African Americans, Latinos, and migrant families. Some grantees had considerable experience as community organizers and came with a well-established model and base of support. Other grantees were direct service providers that had trusting relationships with clients but limited experience in the field of advocacy.

Despite the varying levels of advocacy experience, most grantees strengthened their capacity but at least three continuously struggled to align their efforts with the FIE framework. Conversations with various stakeholders suggest that **the most successful and high-performing grantees were those with strong and committed leadership as well as the adaptive capacity to align their efforts and respond to emerging opportunities and challenges.** “Some organizations weren’t nimble enough to adapt to the FIE framework,” one stakeholder commented. Others noted that some organizations were more rigid in their approach and not open or “ready” to explore different ways of doing business. The issue

of readiness, leadership and adaptive capacity are important measures of success for FIE and other similar initiatives that are striving to replicate or scale-up this model.

Families In Schools recognized the need to meet grantees “where they were at” and provided highly customized technical assistance and coaching to each grantee organization. In interviews, they expressed the importance of setting realistic expectations based on an initial base-line assessment of each organization’s strengths and weaknesses. **Families In Schools was also able to effectively manage these differences through the use of quarterly learning institutes and regional collaboratives.** The learning institutes not only served as a forum for training, it actively exposed grantees to different approaches and points of view. The regional collaboratives also challenged grantees to reconcile philosophical differences and consider the strengths and benefits of regional advocacy partnerships. Ultimately, community organizing agencies benefitted from the opportunity to learn about less adversarial approaches, while direct service providers learned to view their clients not just as people with needs but as new and emerging leaders.

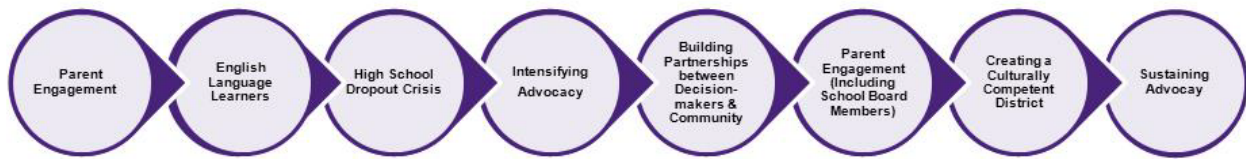
Perhaps the riskiest strategy and most unexpected success was the attempt to convert advocacy “targets” to advocacy “partners.” In 2011, school board members from each district were invited to participate in the FIE learning institutes. Understanding that the inclusion of board members would change the dynamics, the grantees and Families In Schools agreed to test the strategy. **Ultimately, the involvement of school board members has produced some of the initiative’s most dedicated champions.** This section provides additional details about these strategies and other key elements that contributed to strengthening the capacity and effectiveness of FIE grantees.

## Promising Strategies and Success Factors

### Peer Learning Institutes

According to many grantees, one of FIE’s most powerful attributes was the inclusion of structured peer learning institutes that convened grantee organizations on a quarterly basis. The institutes filled a number of important training and capacity building needs, while also helping to establish a culture of collaboration and learning. Families In Schools worked to keep content relevant and meaningful at the learning institutes, initially starting with critical content areas (e.g., dropout rates, English Language Learner issues) and later expanding to discussions on base building, strategy development, and sustaining momentum. (See learning topics in Exhibit 5 below.) Sessions were structured to ensure active participation, hands-on interaction, reflection, and information sharing. As a member of the Families In Schools staff noted, “It’s been an evolution from content to strategy [...] The shaping of the initiative is very entrenched and embedded in our local work as well.” Institute topics ranged from content-specific trainings to techniques and strategies for framing issues and using data.

## Exhibit 5. Families In Schools Learning Institute Titles 2009-2011



Grantee interviews and annual capacity building assessments both clearly demonstrated that grantees increased their knowledge and skills across a variety of domains.<sup>8</sup> In addition to relevant content and skill-building opportunities, there were a number of key factors that contributed to the learning institutes' success and the strengthening of organizational capacity:

- **Promoting a team approach:** Grantee organizations were expected to send a team to each learning institute to help ensure for a deeper level of engagement. The teams were made up of executive level staff as well as program staff and community organizers. This helped to increase the likelihood that new knowledge and skills could be readily applied within the organization. It also allowed staff at various levels to share their perspectives and implement new knowledge, skills, and strategies on the ground. Numerous grantees mentioned that they used what they learned to improve trainings for parents and community members.
- **Facilitating “courageous” conversations:** Grantees appreciated receiving training about cultural competency, educational inequity, institutional racism, and other sensitive topics that challenged them to reflect upon their own assumptions and discuss how to initiate these “courageous” conversations in schools. Several grantees noted that these topics served as a catalyst for deeper discussion and dialogue within their organizations and with district school board members. The learning institute trainings helped grantees frame the issues more effectively and armed them with research to better advocate for equity driven practices in schools and communities.
- **Sharing information and expanding networks:** According to grantees, the institutes not only enhanced their skills and capacity, but also strengthened their connections to other grantees and networks in their region and across the state. In addition to hands-on training, the institutes were designed to be highly interactive and created numerous opportunities for peer learning and sharing. Grantees and participating board members alike said they appreciated the opportunity to learn about the challenges and strategies of their counterparts in other school districts and regions of the state. One grantee noted, “We gained a lot from hearing from everybody as a group, to see what difficulties other groups are having [...] and to see that we’re all in this together.”

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<sup>8</sup> Beginning in 2009, Families In Schools administered annual online advocacy capacity assessment designed by the Alliance for Justice. The results were used to inform trainings and capacity building priorities but also revealed an overall strengthening of advocacy capacity.



- **Using data and evidence to drive advocacy:** Through ongoing technical support and the learning institutes, grantees were also motivated by an improved capacity to access, interpret, and use data to frame their advocacy agenda. Families In Schools leveraged resources and recruited the help of The Education Trust-West to assist FIE grantees in understanding their district data and trends. The Education Trust-West provided expertise in data analysis and tools that could be used by grantees and school board members alike. Grantees were able to disaggregate data to better understand the needs of their district and use that information as a basis for pressing for change and empowering parents. One grantee noted that the continuous discussion and use of data “helped us think about how to focus our work.”

### Cultivating Internal Champions

One of the most transformational milestones of the FIE initiative was the inclusion of school board members in the quarterly learning institutes. While the initial intention of the institutes was to create



*FIE parent speaking at a community meeting*

a “safe place” and learning forum for grantee organizations, Families In Schools and grantees agreed to test the strategy of including their advocacy “targets” as partners and participants in the quarterly meetings. The inclusion of school board members proved to be a highly effective way to deepen relationships with key champions and internal allies. Many organizations reported that, initially, board members viewed their advocacy efforts as a burden to the school district, or even as competition. However, after attending the learning institutes, many board members changed their perception and

were more committed to collaborating. A Families In Schools staff member commented, “There was an assumption that board members knew more, and then we realized that board members needed that education component as well. There was a lot of learning that impacted how we look at other events in the initiative.” One participating school board member expressed appreciation for the learning institute and the opportunity to bring school board members and advocates together: “A lot of times, that kind of communication doesn’t happen, and if it does it’s not very consistent. I see those [learning institutes] as a catalyst for better communication, collaboration, and learning. It’s also helpful to have multiple districts from the state come together and talk about common issues, challenges, and successes.”

The first effective practice is [...] to understand the story that the data tells, because it’s a very compelling story and it can bring allies from the business and educational community. The data don’t lie. You can spin it but it doesn’t lie.”

- FIE Stakeholder

## Pursuing a Regional Approach

Given the geographic isolation, limited resources, and institutional barriers that most FIE grantees face, regional collaboration began to emerge as another key strategy in the second year of the initiative. A Families In Schools staff member reflected that, at some point, “local advocacy reaches a plateau. Decision-makers at the local level have their hands tied by elements of civic structures that go up the chain.” Interviews with stakeholders also indicated a need for coordination and common messaging, particularly in regions where multiple grantees were approaching the same decision-makers. As a result, Families In Schools began exploring more formal collaboration among grantees serving the same region. The goal was to exert coordinated pressure at the regional level and employ a multicultural, multi-community regional approach in areas that are traditionally divided by race, ethnicity, geographic isolation, and/or language barriers. This strategy led to the creation of three regional collaboratives in the second year of the initiative: San Bernardino’s *Parents and Communities Engaged in Education (P-CEE)*, the *Fresno Partnerships for Children and Families*, and the *Stockton for Tomorrow Coalitions*. Families In Schools played a key role as the intermediary providing coaching, technical support, additional funding, and capacity building tools to each collaborative.

It’s important to note that the regional approach is still an “experiment in progress” and despite the potential benefits, grantees experienced challenges. Agreeing to a shared common agenda has not been easy and a few grantees felt the partnerships were funder-imposed rather than organic. Some grantees questioned the level of political will and commitment their partners had to the collaboration. Other organizations butted heads over engagement strategies, particularly when community organizing agencies were partnered with service providers. One grantee noted, “As an organizing agency, we have a different way of doing things than they do, and sometimes our ideas get pushed aside because maybe they are considered a little too direct or it might hinder some of the relationships that those particular organizations might have with certain individuals in the school district.”

### Sharing What Works

Using Data & Best Practices to Inform Strategy

Identifying and learning from best practices has been an important capacity building strategy throughout the initiative. Through the learning institutes and ongoing technical assistance, Families In Schools provided support in using data and best practices to inform local strategies and advocacy efforts. For example, in the summer of 2011 Families In Schools facilitated a delegation from the San Bernardino School District to meet with the neighboring Val Verde School District to learn more about their successful efforts to close the achievement gap for African American and Latino students. Since that was also a central focus of advocacy efforts among San Bernardino County grantees, they invited their local school board champions to participate in the visit and share the experience with the full board. Through their exposure to data and best practices, both grantees and parents are gaining the attention of decision-makers, developing more cooperative relationships, and identifying potential solution to address critical educational issues.

The regional collaboratives are still evolving, but some important lessons have been learned during their early implementation. First and foremost, as with all collaborative advocacy efforts, building trust and relationships takes time and patience. Time is needed to assess how well the regional collaboratives are functioning and how effectively they contribute to educational advocacy and reform efforts. But even outside observers recognize the potential of a regional approach, with one school

board member stating, “If you don’t begin the work, you won’t be able to implement strategies and bring them to scale... with everyone moving forward on the common vision. If you’ve never established the relationships, it’s difficult to establish a common core belief and vision so you’re all marching in the same direction. Relationship building is critical.”

Some regional collaboratives initially had more synergy than others, but all of them needed coaching and time to establish trust and common ground. The San Bernardino regional collaborative had the advantage of a shared policy agenda (improving graduation and college-going rates among students of color), as well as similar faith-based organizing strategies. But they still struggled to bridge cultural differences and establish a functional partnership. Over time, they made important inroads at the regional level by cultivating board champions and successfully advocating for a district resolution to support Algebra readiness and completion. Both San Bernardino grantees also expressed that their ability to bridge racial barriers by getting African Americans and Latinos to work together on a common education issue was an important milestone. A school board member observed that the collaborative has made important strides towards inclusiveness and bridging barriers: “Fortunately we have a community where the teacher’s union, the churches, a lot of organizations, will let the collaborative use their facilities. And they meet all over the town.... and make what they are doing available to all parents, to all ethnicities.”



*Parents summit hosted by FIE grantees*

Other regional collaboratives had additional hurdles to overcome. For example, the Fresno regional collaborative included three grantees with very different constituent groups (Latino, Hmong, and African American communities), different approaches, and three different advocacy issues (parent engagement, support for ELL students, and disciplinary procedures). Learning to work together and focus on a joint advocacy campaign was daunting and time-consuming. But they have also experienced promising signs of progress

and maturity. One grantee noted, “We’ve been able to go to Fresno Unified and present a proposal with the strength and muscle of three organizations, instead of just one. Now it’s not just one little organization with its own agenda, it’s three organizations working for the same objective—to have all students graduate from high school, to go on to higher education, by addressing parent engagement, drop-outs, and ELLs.”

## Results and Key Findings

Participation in the FIE initiative has helped grantees strengthen their capacity to engage “hard to reach” parents and prepare them to participate in educational decision-making. In many ways, grantees were successful in going beyond the usual group of community activists and natural leaders to engage parents that have been traditionally marginalized from civic engagement activities. This was a real shift and learning experience for some grantees that had traditionally relied on a core group of

seasoned resident leaders. However, over time grantees expanded their reach and became to engage parents and build momentum on issues they care about. Key results related to grantee capacity include:

- **Increased engagement of internal champions:** The engagement of school board members and educational leaders in the FIE quarterly learning institutes, was described as “revolutionary” by one stakeholder and was a key flash point for the initiative. By building relationships with internal allies, grantees and parents were able to create a shared understanding of the issues and foster more inclusive decision-making practices at the local level. In one community, this led to a school board resolution to establish district-wide strategic planning process to improve parent engagement as well as a resolution to improve support systems for English Language Learner students. Board members also valued the opportunity to connect with their peers in other regions and discuss common challenges and best practices. In fact, their participation inspired another initiative (the School Boards and Community Engagement Initiative) funded by the Irvine Foundation to strengthen the relationships of board members and community organizations in the school districts targeted by FIE.
- **Increased commitment to reflect, learn, adapt and improve:** As the intermediary and technical assistance provider, Families In Schools played a critical role in providing relevant, respectful, and quality training, coaching, and technical assistance to grantee organizations and stakeholders. The FIE structure and “culture of collaboration” have been key to its success. *Quarterly learning institutes* became a critical venue to build skills and knowledge, share best practices, and refine advocacy agendas. The institutes also challenged grantees and school board members to have “courageous conversations” about difficult issues and to reflect on them in new ways and from different perspectives. Both grantees and stakeholders specifically mentioned the discussion of cultural competence as useful and eye-opening. Another board member commented, “I look at my board differently. I ask, ‘How are parents involved? What are our staff roles?’ I question everything since attending the learning institute.”
- **Increased networking and collaboration across the region:** Building regional collaboratives proved to be challenging but well-worth the effort. One of the regional collaborative was able to move its advocacy efforts through the first two stages of the policy lifecycle (problem definition and agenda setting) and has started the policy adaption stage. By working together and focusing on a joint advocacy agenda, FIE grantees have been able to garner institutional support, promote more inclusive decision-making, and successful advocate for various district-level resolutions. In addition, FIE grantees and parents have contributed to policy-making at the state-level by providing testimony and advocating for improved supports and systems for the reclassification of English Language Learners (ELLs). Families In Schools and several FIE grantees (Fresno Center for New Americans, Community Services Employment Training, and Consejo de Federaciones Mexicanas en Norteamerica) helped to mobilize parents for public hearings that resulted in two senate bills being signed into law by Governor Jerry Brown.

## Looking Ahead: Opportunities and Considerations for Future Work

Reflecting on accomplishments to date, one stakeholder commented “I think we will look back and really marvel at the change in culture and condition that organizations were able to create” during the course of the initiative. At the same time, both grantees and Families In School agree there is more terrain to cover. Both capacity building and advocacy are long-term endeavors and advocacy organizations need to have strong infrastructure and robust capacity to be sustainable and viable well beyond the life of an issue. Opportunities and considerations for future work include:

- **Continue to strengthen strategic capacity:** FIE stakeholders identified a number of capacity areas to strengthen as they move into the next phase of the initiative including policy analysis, media advocacy, and strategies to ensure accountability and monitor policy implementation. They believe opportunities still exist to improve leadership development, media advocacy, and relationships with nontraditional partners. Many of the organizations also need to build greater capacity to engage on the legislative front, including the ability to analyze policies, review bills, and respond to potential policy changes in a timely fashion.
- **Leverage regional networks and growing state-level presence:** While the regional collaboratives are at various stages of development, stakeholders are building a solid foundation for a more orchestrated approach at the district level. Nonetheless the regional approach is still an experiment and it is too early to determine how effective those collaborations will be over time. There are also opportunities to leverage a growing state-level presence and link FIE advocacy efforts to other educational practices and initiatives such as Linked Learning. Given that regional collaboration is a cornerstone of the initiative’s second phase of funding, it would also be instructive to further assess the challenges, benefits, and gains of the regional approach.
- **Continue to assess progress and promote continuous learning:** FIE stakeholders value opportunities to reflect on lessons and achievements, thus enhancing their capacity to respond to emerging opportunities and adapt their strategies. As the FIE initiative matures and enters a new round of funding, it will be beneficial to continuously track the initiative’s progress and use those lessons to help inform future capacity building efforts and ongoing strategy development. In particular, it would be helpful to assess and document the development of the regional collaborative approach as well as how grantees and Families In Schools sustain the momentum and build upon past achievements



## 5. Concluding Remarks

*Through the Families Improving Education (FIE) initiative, community-based organizations have strengthened their capacity to engage families and build collaborative relationships with school boards and educational leaders. These efforts are fostering more inclusive decision-making, improving school practices and policies, and building a multi-stakeholder movement to close the achievement gap.*

The FIE initiative has made significant progress in addressing challenges and creating the conditions to engage community-based organizations, parents, and key decision-makers as partners in educational decision-making. Our assessment of the initiative reveals that grantees have strengthened their capacity to engage parents in educational advocacy and are building a multi-stakeholder movement to close the achievement gap in some of California's most under-resourced regions. Parents have increased their knowledge, skills, and confidence and are increasingly viewed as credible and informed partners in educational decision-making. School board members and administrators have deepened their understanding of key educational issues and are increasingly seeking the input of parents and community organizations to develop and implement solutions. Furthermore, the ability of FIE grantees and stakeholders to continuously assess their environment, reflect on their progress, and adapt their strategies has been an important measure of success. As mentioned in the beginning of this report, resident engagement in policy-making can be highly sensitive to external influences that can facilitate or derail even the most well-planned efforts. Families In Schools and grantees have demonstrated both resilience and adaptability by continuously refining their strategies, taking strategic risks, responding to emerging opportunities, and reflecting on lessons learned. Below we reiterate some key recommendations for stakeholders to consider as the initiative enters its next phase of work.



*Grantees in Sacramento for Advocacy Day 2012*

### Recommendations and Considerations for Future Work

- **Engage high-level educational decision-makers:** FIE grantees made notable progress engaging school board members and administrators, but more work is needed to gain support



from district Superintendents. FIE stakeholders recognize that without support from the top, reforming the educational system will be an uphill battle.

- **Expand and deepen parent engagement efforts:** While grantees made notable strides engaging “hard to reach” parents, they recognize the need to expand and deepen engagement strategies by thinking “outside the box” and trying new and innovative strategies to engage parents. In a recent learning institute, FIE stakeholder reflected on how to reach the other 90% of parents who remain disengaged and uninvolved in the educational system.
- **Continue to strengthen strategic capacity:** FIE stakeholders identified a number of capacity areas to strengthen as they move into the next phase of the initiative, including policy analysis, media advocacy, and strategies to ensure accountability and monitor policy implementation.
- **Leverage regional and state networks:** While the regional collaboratives are at various stages of development, stakeholders are building a solid foundation for a more coordinated approach at the district level. They are also looking for opportunities to leverage a growing state-level presence and link FIE advocacy efforts to other educational practices and initiatives, such as Linked Learning.
- **Continue to assess progress and promote continuous learning:** FIE stakeholders value opportunities to reflect on lessons and achievements, thus enhancing their capacity to respond to emerging opportunities and adapt their strategies. As the initiative matures, it should explore ways to systematically assess and discuss the initiative’s progress and use those findings to refine strategies and share lessons with the field.
- **Engage in Sustainability Planning Discussions:** The FIE initiative has experienced notable success in building regional and local relationships at various levels. As grantees and Families In Schools enter a new phase of the initiative’s life cycle, they are contemplating important questions about how to harness and sustain momentum and how to innovate and think differently about the work ahead. Now that agencies have gained greater visibility they are asking, what’s the next frontier? This is an opportune time to engage in stakeholder discussions about the initiative’s future goals and objectives as well as ways to expand capacity and sustain strategic investments in these under-resourced regions of California.

### Through the Families Improving Education Initiative:

**19,471** participants were reached including parents, students, CBO leaders, political leaders and school staff

**241** activities took place to prepare families for greater involvement in advocacy

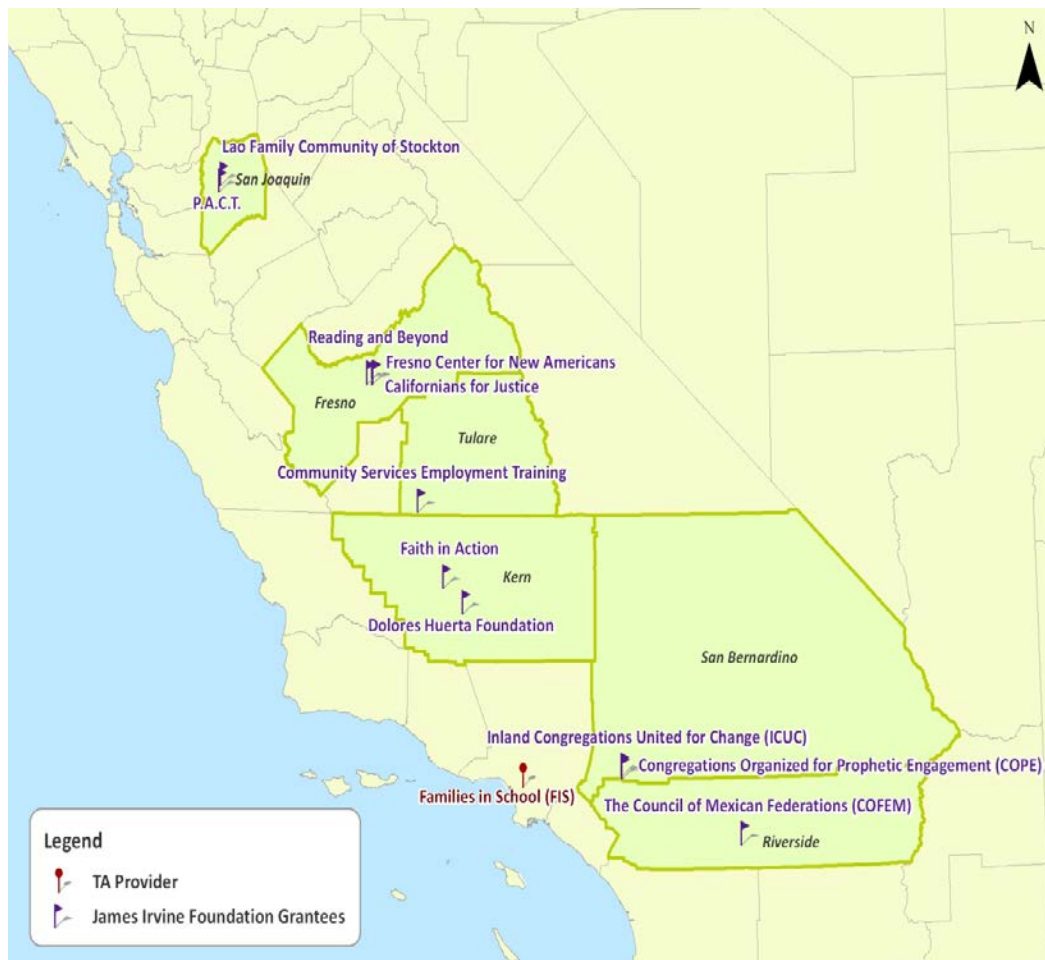
**131** activities for families were implemented to engage in advocacy through school board meetings occurred

**183** activities engaged FIE grantees as advocates

# Appendix A

## Additional Information on the Evaluation

**Exhibit App-1. Map of FIE Grantees**



## Exhibit App-2. Additional Evaluation Questions & Themes

### **Strengthening Civic Engagement & Support:** Strategies for Engaging and Sustaining Parent Involvement

- **Parent Capacity:** Have parents strengthened their knowledge, skills and confidence to advocate? How has this changed their interactions with local schools and educational decision-makers? Have parents helped to broaden that base of support by recruiting others?
- **Organizing Models:** What organizing strategies were used to engage parents and how were they adapted? How did grantees with more established models share strategies with other grantees? What can we learn and replicate from these models and strategies?

### **Improving Policies & Practices:** Strategies for influencing decision-makers and reforming systems

- **Overcoming Institutional Barriers to Change:** What were the main systems barriers and how did grantees address them? How did they engage champions to gain credibility?
- **Strengthening School Board Capacity:** In what ways have board members and administrators expanded their understanding of these keys issues? What impact has it had on them and their schools/school districts? What strategies were used to engage board members? What were the challenges? What worked?
- **Changing Policies and Practices:** What changes in policies, procedures or practices have occurred? Are parent engagement processes more inclusive as a result of FIE activities? Are there other indicators of change associated with FIE activities?

### **Strengthening Organizational Capacity:** Enhancing Organizational Knowledge, Skills, and Strategies

- **Strengthening Organizational Advocacy and Engagement Capacity:** Have grantees increased their ability to train parent advocates and build new relationships with other key stakeholders? Has their understanding of parent engagement, civic participation, and strategies for changing local schools changed as a result of FIE?
- **Strengthening Organizational Alliances and Regional Collaboration:** How did the regional approach evolve and in what ways did grantees collaborate? What were the challenges and lessons learned? What are the benefits? What makes it work?

# Appendix B

## Major Advocacy Milestones & Achievements, by Region and Grantee

### FRESNO

#### Reading and Beyond

- **English Language Learner (ELL) Parent Conference (April 2011):** The conference hosted over 150 parents and featured a variety of workshops addressing topics such as 1) early child care 2) the importance of reclassification presented by Marlene Wilson, a consultant currently working with several other FIE agencies, and 3) on college readiness. In general, the event provided numerous learning and sharing opportunities for parents and community members. During the conference, parents attended three rotating workshops: 1) Before School – The importance of early childhood education, presented by Abriendo Puertas; 2) In School – The importance of reclassification from English Language Learner (ELL) to Fluent English Proficient (FEP), presented by an ELL consultant for FIS; and 3) Beyond School – How to ensure that your child is eligible for a four-year university presented by an Academic Counselor at California State University Fresno.

#### Californians for Justice (CFJ)

- **Reforming Disciplinary Practices (March 2011):** By drawing greater attention to the district's disciplinary practices, CFJ students and families advocated to have FUSD revise its Parent and Student Notifications and Information Handbook. Targeting the Fresno Unified School District's disproportionate suspension and expulsion rates among African American students, CFJ partnered with the ACLU to submit a Public Records Act request letter seeking access to over 1,000 documents containing information on the district's discipline policies, practices, and data. Further analysis of that data led to the development of a specific advocacy agenda centered on standardizing discipline policies and practices, which include clarifying the district's definition of willful defiance, gang-related attire, and other similar suspendable offenses. CFJ staff and several high school student leaders met with FUSD Associate Superintendent of Prevention and Edward Gonzalez to present and discuss CFJ's recommended revisions to the discipline code as part of the student and parent handbook. After ten years with no revisions, FUSD will be revising the student and parent handbook for the 2011-2012 school year and has committed to incorporate recommendation from CFJ.

## The Fresno Center for New Americans (FCNA)

- **Raising Parent Awareness (March-May 2011):** In partnership with FUSD, a series of eight (8) workshops were held at Ann Leavenworth Elementary and McLane High School. Along with the Parent University, FCNA conducted parent orientations for Hmong parents at three local schools. The workshops were a combination of Parent University curriculum and Transition to Middle School curriculum from FIS. A total of 14 sessions were held with parents during this school year period.

## Fresno Regional Collaborative- *Families In Education*

- **Advocacy and Education Summit (December 2011):** The Fresno Collaborative agencies (Reading and Beyond, Californians For Justice, and the Fresno Center for New Americans) held an education summit that hosted over 100 parents, two school board members, and a councilmember. The goal of the summit was to prepare parents for greater advocacy and to provide an opportunity for board members to engage with families outside of the board meeting setting. The agencies used the summit as an opportunity to promote the community's advocacy agenda and publicly engage decisions makers with a focus on their "collective ask." The agencies partnered with Parent University to bring District computers to the event and set up a lab where parents received their log-in and password information to access ATLAS. At the end of the summit, the FUSD Parent University staff reaffirmed their commitment to continue to train parents on how to use ATLAS. Thus far they have trained 500 parents. To date, the collaborative has met with six of the seven school board members and has outlined a plan to include key academic indicators as part of the District's rollout plan of its online parent portal, ATLAS, that contains key student data.

## BAKERSFIELD

### Dolores Huerta Foundation

- **Education Campaigns (August-October 2011):** The Dolores Huerta Foundation launched their Education Campaign in the communities of Arvin, Weedpatch and Lamont. Through the House Meeting Campaign in August through October, organizers successfully met with 122 parents in South Kern.
- **Raising Parent Awareness (October 2011):** The Dolores Huerta Foundation formalized collaboration with MALDEF and was granted use of their Parent School Partnership (PSP) program curriculum. The training schedule includes 10 sessions that will be held every two weeks.

### Bakersfield City Unified School District (BCSD)

- **Parent Engagement Task Force (June 2011- December 2011):** In June 2011, school board member Andrae Gonzalez introduced a resolution to the Bakersfield Unified School District school board to establish a Parent Engagement Taskforce. The board passed and adopted the resolution in December 13, 2011. On January 31, 2012 the new BCSD Parent Engagement

Task Force held its first meeting. As the task force continues to meet and learn together it will be their goal to grow this partnership by strengthening engagement between schools, parents, and students to increase student achievement.

## **SAN BERNARDINO**

### **Congregation Organized for Prophetic Engagement (COPE)/San Bernardino City Unified School District (SBCUSD)**

- **Algebra I Project Roll Out (June 2012):** Parents organized to gain board support for a district-wide coordinated effort to improve Algebra I success for all students. This effort resulted in the SBCUSD Board of Education allocating professional development funds to support coaching and collaboration for middle and high school math instructors to facilitate better articulation of instructional practices across grade levels. Board members further supported: 1) formal collaboration between middle and high school math departments for sharing of best practices and consistency in course rigor; 2) the development of Algebra intervention teams at school sites to improve early monitoring and notification of students in jeopardy of failing; and 3) articulation between SBCUSD and a local community college to expand Algebra courses to support credit recovery efforts.

### **San Bernardino Regional Collaborative- *Parents and Communities Engaged in Education***

- **Increasing Advocacy and Engagement (June 2, 2011):** COPE serves as the fiscal agent for the San Bernardino collaborative. In partnership with ICUC, BLU Education Foundation and P-CEE (Parents and Communities Engaged in Education), the collaborative presented a joint-plan to the San Bernardino Unified School District (SBUSD) board of education in June 2011 outlining recommendations to improve district practices related to Algebra I completion and access to A-G courses for students of color. Parents and students representing the organizations provided testimony and presented data detailing the impact of the district's current practices on graduation rates and college access for students of color. The board agreed to pursue these changes in its practices and to lead a district-wide effort that makes strengthening parent engagement a top priority.
- **Education Summit (March 2012):** The Inland Empire regional collaborative, a partnership between COPE, ICUC and BLU Educational Foundation known as Parents & Communities Engaged in Education (PCEE), hosted an "Education is Prosperity" summit on March 17, 2012. The event hosted 472 participants with representation across the district, including all of its high schools, four middle schools and eight elementary schools. In addition, three board members and three high-level district administration personnel, and the president of Valley College attended throughout the day. Participants attended a range of workshops centered on one four themes: advocacy, college preparation & youth, parents & community, and educators. Participants also gained public commitments from the District's deputy superintendent and chief academic officer to continue partnering with them to improve its Algebra I completion, graduation, and college-going rates for students of color.



## EARLIMART/VISALIA

### Community Services Employment Training (CSET)/Earlimart Elementary School District

- **Additional Staff Allocated to ELL Reclassification (February 2012):** Prior to this initiative, the district had purchased a system to monitor the reclassification process of their ELL students. Through investigation, CSET found that it had not been implemented and had no district staff dedicated to their ELL students monitoring process. When CSET learned that there were no students reclassified in 2008-09, they began asking the district why and offering ELL support. Since then, the school district has employed 2.5 full-time staff dedicated to working with ELL students to reach English language proficiency in order to reclassify and reach the district ELL goals. CSET has informed parents of the Earlimart School District staff who will be responsible in monitoring the ELL status of their children.

## COACHELLA VALLEY

### Consejo de Federaciones Mexicanas en Norteamérica (COFEM)

- **Collaborating with the City Council (September 2009):** COFEM staff presented on its education project before the city council in an effort to secure the City as a partner, and provide a space at City Hall for a local office at a nominal fee. As a result of the fostered relationships and meeting with city officials, the Council voted unanimously in favor of supporting COFEM and its education project. COFEM secured an MOU with the Coachella City Council that formalized a partnership whereby COFEM would occupy an office in City Hall.
- **Parent School Community Resolution (April 2011):** As a result of COFEM's coalition building work and partnership with Coachella Valley Unified School District (CVUSD) Superintendent, on August 18, 2011, Superintendent Dr. Adams presented a resolution that established the Parent School Community Collaborative for Student Success. The taskforce will be led by COFEM and comprised of parents, community partners and district representatives who will provide input and feedback to the district on how to improve its parent engagement efforts.
- **Education Summit (December 2011 and June 2012):** COFEM held two events that combined as their education summit. In December 2011, COFEM held an education town hall for parents and families with the support of the district Superintendent and school board members. Parents provided a presentation on the collaborative work that resulted out of the taskforce established by the Resolution in August 2011. In June 2012, COFEM held a second town hall meeting to provide an update and public accountability on the District's progress on each of the thirteen points. Thirty-five participants attended along with the Coachella Valley Unified School District Superintendent, Dr. Darryl Adams, board member Manual Martinez and district staff Marta Olmedo. Out of these two events, COFEM parent leaders gained the following District commitments: 1) Inclusion of the parental engagement survey created by the Parental Engagement Collaborative in the district's Parent Handbook for the 2012-13

school year; 2) A plan to revise the English Learner Master Plan (ELMP) in 2012-13; 3) Creation of a task force to bring in input from families/community; and 4) Greater supports provided to English Learners through the District's iPad initiative by investing in the Rosetta Stone program

- **Senate Bill 754: Transparent English Learner Budgets (August 2012):** As a result of COFEM's work on English Learners in the Coachella Valley Unified School District (CVUSD) they realized CVUSD had failed to report on every single category during their last compliance monitoring review. Since then, under the leadership of a new Superintendent and in partnership with the Families Improving Education Initiative, the district has been able to work with parents and community to restructure their EL programs; as well as establish the Parent School Community collaborative for Student Success and a Parent Engagement Taskforce. Through these efforts, the district has establish monitoring mechanisms and are supporting improvements to new and existing EL programs for successful reclassification of EL students. SB 754 would require school districts to post online and in an easily accessible location the economic impact aid budget for school district and each school within the school district. In order to highlight the need and importance of transparency on school level funding, Senator Padilla reached out to Families In Schools to provide a parent and community perspective on this bill. FIS selected COFEM's FIE English Learner work as a story to tell for this bill.

## LODI/STOCKTON

### Lao Family Community of Empowerment, Inc.

- **Securing ELL Funding (June 2011):** The Lodi superintendent presented a recommendation to the school board to eliminate district community/bilingual liaisons and school site bilingual liaison positions due to budget cuts. Working with school board member Ken Davis (an SBCEI participant), Lao Family brought parents to the board meeting to oppose the elimination of these services. The school board sided with the parents and voted to preserve these positions that support ELL students.

### People and Congregations Together (PACT)

- **Successful Turnaround Model (Spring 2010):** PACT leaders, including teachers, parents, churches and community residents successfully advocated for a turnaround model on one of Stockton Unified School District's (SUSD) lowest performing schools from a public to a charter school. PACT leaders and advocates gained board commitment to have the community work with the school to develop the charter proposal. The Superintendent agreed to have an Assistant Superintendent help move the charter forward incorporating both the ideas of the PACT team and the principal.





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