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Niraj Salhotra

Introduction

Parent involvement matters for a child's education. While I always knew this and saw its veracity in my own life,¹ the message never truly sank in until I became a teacher. During my first year as a teacher, I taught pre-calculus, which was a graduation requirement for every YES Prep student.² Although seniors were well-aware of this fact, in April it became clear that twenty students were in danger of failing pre-calculus and, therefore, not graduating. These twenty students, all of whom were first-generation and worked for years to be the first in their families to walk across the stage and earn a high school diploma, faced the very real prospect of being consigned to summer school and not graduating with their classmates. After trying countless motivational techniques, I decided that perhaps I should call my students' parents.³

I vividly remember going to school on a Saturday morning and speaking with

the parents of all twenty students. Most of the parents were shocked. Despite our sending report cards every six weeks, they had no idea their children were doing so poorly and were at-risk of not graduating. The parents promised to talk to their children and require them to attend extra tutorials. Those phone calls proved to be transformational. Students who previously would never attend tutorials came each day; students who heretofore never asked questions suddenly became inquisitive, and students who were in danger of failing proudly graduated with their classmates.⁴

This experience, coupled with several others from my two years of teaching, taught me several important lessons. Firstly, every parent I called wanted to be involved in their child's education and was keenly interested in what they could do to support their child. While many Americans assume that low-income parents do not care about their children's education,⁵

my experience suggests otherwise.⁶

Secondly, during my conversations with parents, many lamented the fact that they had no idea how to check their child's grades online, or interpret their child's report card, or calculate the grade their child needed to earn so that she would not fail. These points was particularly disheartening because the school district had invested thousands of dollars in an electronic grading system and implored teachers to record all grades online; however, no one taught the parents how to use the system. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, as these twenty students showed, parent involvement can positively affect student outcomes.⁷

Motivation for this Paper

After teaching for two years, I co-founded Students With Ambition Go (SWAG) To College, a non-profit organization aimed at supporting more low-income students to and through college. SWAG To College provides high school

students with a college mentor to guide them through high school and the college application process. Until recently, our organization had neglected the important lessons I had learned as a teacher. We forgot that engaging parents is essential to the success of our students. Our team's desire to involve parents is the inspiration for this paper.

Overview of the Paper

In this paper, I ask the question: how do successful educational organizations such as schools or non-profit organizations engage parents? This paper is structured as follows. In the first section, I conduct a literature review about the importance of parent engagement in a child's education. In the second section, I develop a framework for distinguishing among parent involvement, parent engagement, and parent organizing. In the third section, I highlight five organizations that are successfully

engaging and organizing parents. Finally, in the fourth section, I identify lessons learned and explain how SWAG To College can apply them as it develops its own parent organizing program.

1. Effects of Parent Involvement

In his first address to a Joint Session of Congress, President Obama said “[t]here is no program or policy that can substitute for a mother or father who will attend those parent-teacher conferences, or help with the homework, or turn off the TV, put away the video games, read to their child.

Responsibility for our children's education must begin at home.”⁸ President Bush and his Secretary of Education Rod Paige also believed that parent involvement were crucial for a child’s educational success.⁹ Similarly, many of the most successful charter schools like Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP), YES Prep,¹⁰ and Achievement First also focus on parent engagement.¹¹ While many institutions and

policymakers claim parent engagement is a positive determinant of student success, it is important to examine whether research supports this belief.

Literature overwhelmingly supports the contention that parent engagement drives academic success. For example, research finds that higher levels of parent involvement improve students’ performance on standardized tests.¹² Moreover, National Research Council staff Susan Burns, Peg Griffin, and Catherine Snow also find “compelling data between parent involvement and successful schooling.”¹³ Additionally, some researchers conclude that “[t]he most accurate predictors of student achievement in school are not family income or social status, but the extent to which the family creates a home environment that encourages learning, communicates high yet reasonable expectations for the child’s achievement, and becomes involved in the child’s

education at school.”¹⁴ Finally, the Harvard Family Research Project completed a meta-analysis of studies about parent involvement’s efficacy. They concluded that “parental involvement is associated with higher student achievement outcomes, and these patterns emerged regardless of whether the outcome measures were grades, standardized test scores, or a variety of other measures, including teacher ratings.”¹⁵ Although some researchers have found weak or statistically insignificant impacts of parent involvement on education,¹⁶ the majority of research is clear—parent involvement positively affects student achievement.¹⁷

A. Parental Involvement along Class

Lines

While parent involvement seems to positively affect student achievement, an important question remains: are all parents equally involved in their children’s education? That is, are there differences in

parent involvement along racial or socioeconomic lines? This question is crucial because if low-income parents are less involved than are high-income parents, for example, then parent involvement may actually exacerbate the achievement gap. Alternatively, if low-income parents are more involved than high income parents, then parent involvement could actually help narrow the achievement gap.

Unfortunately, as with several other determinants of student success, parent involvement seems to be correlated with income—wealthy parents are more involved than are low-income parents. For example, Professor Maria Eulina P. de Carvalho found that “rates of parental involvement are significantly higher among middle and upper class parents than in low-income families.”¹⁸ Moreover, sociologist Annette Lareau finds that higher-income parents spend more time involved in their children’s education than do low-income parents.¹⁹

Finally, Laura S. Abrams and Jewelle Taylor Gibbs interviewed low-income mothers and found that despite their interest in their children's education, they were less involved than their higher-income counterparts.²⁰

B. Drivers of Low-Income Parents

Lack of Involvement

Before concluding this section, it is crucial to ask why this disparity persists, that is, why are low-income parents less involved in their children's educations than are higher-income parents? Although several reasons are posited, I will focus my conversation on two: 1) personal reasons (low-income families just do not care about their children's education) and 2) structural reasons (there are systemic barriers preventing low-income families from being involved in their children's schools).

This question resonates with me because of my own experience as a teacher. When I told my friends and family that I

would be teaching at a school where most families received free or reduced lunch, nearly everyone said something to the effect of "[g]ood luck; you know those parents don't care about education." As my introductory story indicates, my experience suggests this belief is unequivocally incorrect. My students' parents, just like my own parents and just like all parents, hoped that their children would succeed and were willing to do whatever they could to help their children. Research confirms that low-income and high-income parents are equally concerned about their children's educations.²¹

Instead, structural reasons prevent low-income families from being as engaged as high-income families in their children's education. Firstly, some low-income parents work multiple jobs, and thus, cannot take time off to visit their child's school or attend parent-teacher conferences.²² Secondly, some low-income parents do not speak

English, which restricts their involvement in their child's education.²³ Thirdly, some low-income parents did not complete high school or college themselves and thus may be unsure of how to help their children.²⁴ Fourthly, while high-income parents often have social networks that provide resources for their children, low-income parents may not have access to such networks.²⁵ Fifthly, underfunded schools themselves may not have programs designed to engage parents.²⁶ Without an official mechanism for parents to be involved, low-income families are systemically excluded from involvement in their children's education.

C. Summary of Section 1

Section 1 reviews the literature regarding parent involvement, and we can draw three conclusions. (1) Parent involvement is crucial to a child's educational success. (2) High-income parents seem to be more involved than are low-income parents. (3) Low-income

parents are not less involved because they do not prioritize education; instead, systemic factors prevent them from becoming deeply involved in their child's education. Combining these lessons, it seems imperative to design programs that break down the barriers that prevent low-income parents from engaging in their children's schools. To address this issue, first, we must define "parent involvement."

2. Framework for Parental Involvement

Parent involvement is a nebulous term that has different meanings to different people. For example, "parent involvement," as used in the No Child Left Behind Act, seems to connote a combination of informing parents about the education system, particularly their child's school, and then hoping they will lobby school officials for change.²⁷ Alternatively, some define "parent involvement" as attending parent-teacher conferences and volunteering at the school.²⁸

For this paper, I will use the terms parent involvement, parent engagement, and parent organizing distinctly. Building on the framework of the *Making a Link* Foundation, I consider these three terms as lying along a continuum.²⁹ Parent involvement lies at one extreme, and we can define “parent involvement” as occurring at only one school and encompassing passive activities such as receiving either their child’s report card or information about their child’s school.³⁰ Most organizations and schools are stuck at this level, however, some have progressed to parent engagement.

Parent engagement lies in the middle of the continuum, and we can define it as occurring at a group of schools and involving more active participation such as parents having an official role on a committee with some decision-making authority.³¹

Parent organizing, in sharp contrast, represents the most advanced level of parent

and school interaction. We can define parent organizing as occurring at a system level and including active, collective advocacy, with parents as equal partners with schools and community organizations. Parents are actively shaping agendas and dismantling the structural barriers to educational equity by “bring[ing] about institutional change in education.”³²

Currently, many low-income parents are not even involved, let alone engaged or organized. We know even basic parent involvement will improve student outcomes and therefore schools and parent organizations should work to increase involvement. However, as the framework suggests, we should not be content with parent involvement; instead, we should push for parent engagement, and ultimately parent organizing, so that parents can change the educational reality for all low-income, underserved students.³³ Our vision should be to empower parents to become leaders in

their communities and powerful advocates for change.

A. Summary of Section 2

Section 2 provides a framework to conceptualize “parent involvement,” “parent engagement,” and “parent organizing.” These three terms lie along a continuum with parent involvement being the least active and parent organizing being the most active. While any parent participation in her child’s education is beneficial, parent organizing is the most effective as it empowers parents to make systemic changes in the lives of their children.

3: Successful Parent Organizing

Endeavors

Although low-income parents are often not involved, let alone engaged or organized, in their children’s educations, some organizations are successfully organizing parents. In this part, I profile five such organizations: People Acting in Community Together, Parent Ambassadors,

KIPP Bay Area, Parent U-Turn, and La Familia Initiative.

A. People Acting in Community

Together (PACT)

PACT works in San Jose, California and was founded in 1985 as a “multi-faith, grassroots organization that provides leadership training and experience to community members of many different ethnic, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds . . . [and] works to solve the most pervasive social problems of our day.”³⁴ The narrative that follows comes from my conversation with Frank Ponciano, a PACT organizer.³⁵

Although PACT does not solely engage parents, much of their organizing does focus on educational issues.³⁶ PACT is part of the PICO National Network and therefore follows three-step organizing cycle shown in the figure below.³⁷



The first step is “1-1’s” wherein organizers hold 1:1 meetings with parents to determine important issues. The second step is “Research” wherein parents meet with stakeholders at both the district and school level to understand more about both the issue and the opinions of various stakeholders. Finally, the third step is “Action” wherein parents hold an event to demonstrate power, and force elected officials to make a public commitment toward supporting a policy change. The parents then hold those politicians accountable by their votes in the subsequent election.

PACT has undertaken several successful organizing campaigns; however, I will focus on one recent one in order to illustrate their model. In early January 2017, PACT began holding 1:1 meetings with parents in a small California school district. As PACT organizer Frank Ponciano noted, “I had no idea what issues parents felt were important. As such I went into every meeting with an open mind.” During this listening phase, Frank met with between 20-30 parent leaders whose names he received from teachers at the local school.³⁸ At each meeting, Frank would ask parents to identify other parents who might also be interested in organizing. After two weeks of meetings, Frank and the local parents decided on an issue: inadequate enrichment programs for students.³⁹

At this point, parents began the Research phase and set up meetings with important stakeholders. Throughout this phase, Frank and PACT focused on

developing parent leaders. For example, some parents had never sent an email to schedule a meeting, so Frank taught parents how to craft an email. Importantly, however, the parents themselves always sent the email and requested the meeting. Frank noted that, “many of our parents were stunned when the superintendent agreed to have a meeting with them. They didn’t believe they had any power.”⁴⁰ Moreover, because nearly every parent was unaware of the power structure within the school district, PACT held trainings to inform parents of the district leadership.⁴¹

The parents met with multiple school board members, the district superintendent, and the district’s chief financial officer. Some parents were unaware of meeting logistics such as what questions to ask and how to share their concerns effectively. Frank and PACT staff held trainings so parents so could prepare for their meetings.⁴² At the meetings, parents led the

conversations while Frank and PACT staff sat in the back and took notes. Frank emphasized this point: “it is crucial the parents lead the meetings; they have to take ownership of this and develop their own leadership.”⁴³ During these meetings, parents asked district officials about barriers to developing more enrichment programs, how money was spent, and what discretion each school had in making decisions. Armed with this information, the parents brainstormed solutions. While there were several options, they decided to propose the following policy: the school district shall not make decisions on enrichment spending without first publishing the proposal with adequate time for community input.⁴⁴

The parents then moved to the “Action” phase and planned a demonstration. While they could have protested outside the school district building or they could have had more individual meetings with School Board members, the

parents decided to hold a town hall meeting and invited multiple School Board members to attend.

At the town hall meeting, over 300 parents showed up to hear the discussion with the two School Board members. With over 300 parents attending, the parent leaders showed the School Board members they were powerful and needed to be taken seriously. At the town hall, the parent leaders proposed their idea and asked the individual School Board members if they would commit to supporting this initiative.⁴⁵ The School Board members publically stated their support for this initiative and promised to introduce this policy at the next School Board meeting. This moment was especially powerful; Frank mentioned: “some of the parent leaders began crying as they realized they actually had power; they could impact the policies affecting their children.”⁴⁶ The School Board has since introduced and passed this policy, which

will expand parent involvement in enrichment program decisions.

B. Parent Ambassadors

Parent Ambassadors is based in Washington State and organizes parents to advocate for Head Start⁴⁷ and the Early Childhood Assistance Program.⁴⁸ In sharp contrast to the PACT model, Parent Ambassadors has already identified the issues for which they were advocating. As such, they do not hold house meetings or 1-1 conversations; instead, Parent Ambassadors focuses on training parent leaders who can then advocate for these programs at the state legislature and inspire other parents in their local community to become engaged.⁴⁹ Parent Ambassadors has succeeded in defeating proposals to cut child care assistance and passing proposals to expand funding for pre-kindergarten. The narrative that follows comes from my conversation with Katy Warren, Deputy Director of Parent Ambassadors.⁵⁰

Every summer, Parent Ambassadors distributes an application to all the parents whose children are currently in pre-k in Washington State. It then selects a cohort of 25 parents from across the state. Each parent commits to remaining in the program for the entire school year and organizing and training other parents at their child's pre-k. Parent Ambassadors has three Parent Coordinators who individually meet with each parent twice a month. The Coordinators help train parents in how to tell their story, how to offer testimony at the state legislature, and how to set SMART goals. Each of these trainings is designed by experts in the area and is standardized across the program to ensure that parents receive high-quality guidance. Twice a month, the cohort of 25 parents meets as a group for a Google Hangout video call. On these video calls, parents share their experiences and brainstorm how to address challenges a parent faces in her/his community. Finally,

once every three months, the entire cohort meets to both write testimony and practice delivering it at a legislative hearing.

Once the 25 parents complete their training, they are ready to testify at the State Legislature. Nearly every session, there is a bill (if not multiple bills) related to Early Childhood Education. Additionally, once the parents "graduate" from the program, they become lifelong members of Parent Ambassadors. In fact, the parents have created an alumni association to remain connected to each other. These alums then help recruit the future cohorts and also serve as mentors to the next cohorts.⁵¹

C. KIPP Bay Area

Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) is a nation-wide charter school network that has 209 schools and serves 87,000 students.⁵² KIPP is a high-performing charter school. Its students graduate high school and college at a significantly higher rate than do public

school students from the same background.⁵³ While KIPP has many strategies for success, one crucial one is parent engagement.⁵⁴ Because KIPP provides each region significant autonomy, each region has its own parent engagement strategy. While some regions focus solely on parent involvement (sending home report cards, asking that parents sign them, calling parents when a child does not complete her homework, or asking parents to volunteer at the schools), other regions (such as KIPP Bay Area) focus on parent engagement and even parent organizing. The description that follows stems from two interviews—one with Anthony Wilson, who manages the parent initiatives for KIPP Bay Area, and the other with Mike Espinoza, who is a community organizer that consults and advises KIPP Bay Area on its parent organizing work.⁵⁵

KIPP Bay Area provides both engages and organizes parents, however,

because the team only has a few staff members, it cannot do both alone. Therefore, on the engagement side, it partners with organizations that offer trainings in topics parents are interested in. For example, earlier this year, several parents wanted clarity about President Trump's immigration order; as such, Anthony and the parent leaders organized a training session with a local non-profit organization that specialized in immigration.⁵⁶ Partnering with other organizations allows Anthony and his team to focus on parent organizing. Importantly, Anthony's team is selective in which organizations it works with.⁵⁷ He stated: "we want to ensure the partner organizations are focused on development. In other words, we look for organizations that are committed to empowering parents to then become leaders in their communities."⁵⁸

Regarding parent organizing, KIPP Bay Area takes a very different strategy

from the two previous organizations. Firstly, because his team is small, Anthony does not hold several 1-1 home meetings to identify issues that matter to the community.⁵⁹ Instead, he works through the KIPP schools to meet parents as a group and gauge their needs and desires.⁶⁰ Secondly, because it has a limited budget, KIPP Bay Area does not host a year-long training program. Instead, KIPP Bay Area organizes parents for specific events such as testifying at a school board meeting about a proposal affecting charter schools, or calling state legislators about a particular education-related bill.⁶¹

Despite these differences, KIPP Bay Area's Parent Engagement Team still succeeds at organizing power. The process begins with Anthony visiting schools to meet with parents. During these meetings, Anthony and his team try to identify important issues and potential parent leaders.⁶² Anthony then has conversations with the parents who seem most interested.

During these individual conversations, Anthony looks for which parents have followers.⁶³ That is, he always asks parents how many people they can bring to the organization's next event. After these meetings, Anthony and the parent leaders organize events to collectively decide a strategy regarding the selected issue.⁶⁴

These events are crucial for several reasons. (1) They help determine how many people care about this issue and are willing to take action. (2) They help Anthony and his team to determine which parents are truly leaders in that they can mobilize others to attend. (3) They help crystallize the strategy for action (usually testifying before the school board or the legislature). (4) They offer parents an opportunity to practice telling their story about the issue. This is crucial; because KIPP Bay Area does not host in-depth trainings regarding how to testify, the limited practice opportunities help parents feel more comfortable when

talking to the elected officials. After these events, parents take an action such as testifying for or against a particular bill.

KIPP Bay Area has had legislative victories either in supporting a bill's passage or blocking a bill that would have negatively affected families of KIPP students. Anthony, however, reiterated that success in parent organizing is more than just scoring a legislative victory or blocking a school board action.⁶⁵ Success also encompasses developing parents and inspiring them to believe that they do have power. More specifically, he stated that helping parents feel confident by telling their story to the legislature and feel part of the political process are important wins.⁶⁶ He views organizing as a long-game and one that is not won and lost on each legislative bill, but instead is won overtime by slowly building power and making incremental gains.

D. Parent U-Turn

Parent U-Turn is based in California and was founded in 2001 out of the UCLA Parent Curriculum Project.⁶⁷ The UCLA Parent Curriculum Project⁶⁸ is a program that develops parent leaders to become active in the Los Angeles County School District. Parent U-Turn's mission is to share data with parents so they better understand the realities in their children's schools and can then use that data to enact change.⁶⁹ The narrative that follows comes largely with my conversation with Mary Johnson, the Co-Founder and CEO of Parent U-Turn.⁷⁰

In 2001, a group of 20 low-income parents enrolled in a leadership seminar at the UCLA Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access as part of the UCLA Parent Curriculum Project. During the seminar, parents studied Los Angeles County School District data regarding access to high-quality teachers, graduation data, and standardized test scores. Comparing the results of underserved

schools and the wealthy schools within the Los Angeles County School District left Ms. Johnson and other parents stunned at the achievement gap. One parent even stated “we knew the data was bad, but we didn’t know how bad.”⁷¹ Perhaps most importantly, through the seminar, the 20 parents whose children went to different schools in the district, realized that it was not just their child’s school that was failing. Instead, nearly all the schools in low-income neighborhoods were failing. Thus, solutions should not be focused at the school-level but instead at the district-level.

Once the seminar ended, parents were inspired to organize for change, and they created Parent U-Turn to engage with even more parents. Each parent leader focused on their own school and organized the parents there. Through conversations with parents, one issue that came up was access to textbooks. The district claimed it provided textbooks to all students, but

parents were skeptical. Parent U-Turn decided to focus on the textbook issue and began surveying students and parents about it. Once the parents had information regarding the lack of textbooks, they requested a meeting with the school district. At the meeting, the parent leaders received assurances that the following school year, every child would receive a textbook. This initial success convinced Ms. Johnson, and other leaders, of two things: “(1) always be ready to present data to policymakers because they care more about data than individual stories, and (2) that collectively parents can have an impact on policies that prevent low-income, often minority, children from succeeding in school.”

After this initial success, Ms. Johnson and Parent U-Turn took several steps to create a replicable model that would institutionalize parent organizing. (1) Parent U-Turn nominated a Parent Leader for each school, and created Parent Centers, where

parents could meet with the Parent Leader and learn more about Parent U-Turn. (2) Parent U-Turn began a certification program with UCLA so that any member could build her research, data, and advocacy skills. Parent U-Turn secured a grant from AT&T, so the class was free for low-income parents. These trainings helped develop more parent leaders who could then go out and raise awareness of the program and recruit other members. (3) Parent U-Turn began attending every School Board meeting. Ms. Johnson and other parent leaders always sat in the front row and sometimes spoke on issues before the School Board. Ms. Johnson underscored the importance of being at the meetings; “the Board Members need to see us and know that we are watching.” (4) Parent U-Turn members have group t-shirts that they wear to every school board meeting. When Ms. Johnson stated this, I was skeptical of its value. Ms. Johnson, however, explained that t-shirts and bumper

stickers built a sense of community among the hundreds of parents who are part of Parent U-Turn. She emphasized that this sense of the collective is crucial for sustaining momentum. (5) Parent U-Turn forged relationships with local churches, which increased membership and provided greater credibility to the movement.

All in all, Parent U-Turn has succeeded at organizing for change. Its membership is in the thousands and there are often several busloads of parents attending a school board meeting. Moreover, district policymakers often consult with Parent U-Turn *before* enacting a policy change. This level of influence is unmatched in any of the other parent organizations I studied. Finally, whether by increasing textbooks, boosting the number of college counselors, or improving the quality of teachers, Parent U-Turn has helped enact real policy change.

E. La Familia Initiative

La Familia Initiative was a parent organizing movement that began at one middle school in California. Unlike the other organizations described, La Familia Initiative focused initially on making change at one school. The narrative that follows draws on secondary research.

La Familia Initiative grew out of a frustration with the school's existing parent engagement efforts.⁷² Ms. Duran, one of the parents, explained that she attended a Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meeting, yet because it was in English and she only spoke Spanish, she could not understand anything. She left the meeting feeling isolated and frustrated; however, as she spoke to other parents, she met others in the same situation.⁷³ This initial group of parents began meeting at Ms. Duran's home and launched La Familia Initiative with some key principles: a relentless focus on improving achievement for the lowest-performing students, an independent

structure that met outside the school, an open, transparent organization that was welcoming of any parent interested in joining.

Once the organization cemented its principles, the eight founders hosted an event to introduce the organization to other parents within the school. At this meeting, the parents came up with issues where they wanted to see change. The group then formed sub-committees to brainstorm each issue and identify policy recommendations or specific changes the school could make. This point is crucial because many of the other parent organizations I studied (not profiled in this paper)⁷⁴ did not identify specific demands and thus were unsuccessful in creating lasting change.⁷⁵ Once the committees identified their preferred solutions, the parents demanded a meeting with the school principal, Mr. Jones, to discuss the problems and offer their solutions.

At the meeting with Principal Jones, the parents did not adopt an antagonistic tone; instead, they viewed him as a partner. During the meeting, the parents highlighted the issues they wanted changed and offered specific solutions for each one. Principal Jones promised to discuss the changes at the school's next staff meeting and then enacted several of the parents' recommendations. For example, the school organized more after-school tutoring to support students, the school improved its nutritional offerings at the cafeteria, and the school promised to translate all documents into Spanish so that the families could understand them. While these changes may seem small, for La Familia Initiative, they represented real progress.

Although La Familia Initiative did enact change and improve opportunities for students at this one school, there are several reasons why it was unable to expand. Firstly, the initial group of eight parents all

had kids attending the same school, so the focus never rose to the district level. Secondly, the group never sought out officials at the district level; they only concentrated on working with Principal Jones. Paradoxically, their success at the school level may have prevented them from looking to the district. Thirdly, the parents began focusing on parent involvement such as volunteering in the school itself, as opposed to broader district-level parent organizing. Fourthly, La Familia Initiative never trained parents on power structures and how the district controlled funding for the school, and thus, major policy solutions would have to come from the district level. This discussion is not meant to criticize La Familia Initiative, for even school-level parent engagement is important. Instead, I raise these concerns to show that although La Familia Initiative hoped to organize parents to advocate for change, it may not have reached this goal.

4. Lessons Learned and Application to SWAG To College

Studying these five organizations—and the several others that I did not profile in this paper—helped me identify some lessons regarding successful and unsuccessful parent organizing. In this section, I offer those lessons and explain how SWAG To College will apply each one to develop its framework for parent engagement and organizing.

1. Working together with other organizations is more effective than working alone.

Although this statement seems rather self-evident, several of the organizations I studied did not follow this advice. For example, La Familia Initiative never embraced other organizations or parents outside of its own school, and therefore, never made change at the district level. Moreover, Ole, a New Mexico organization that I researched but did not profile, tried to

do everything in-house and was thus unable to expand or successfully secure policy change.

In sharp contrast, KIPP Bay Area and (PACT) partnered with other organizations in order to have a greater reach. For example, KIPP Bay Area had limited funding and therefore partnered with other organizations that specialized in immigration or legal aid to provide trainings the parents requested. Similarly, PACT joined the national PICO Network, which provided PACT organizers with not only curriculum for local trainings but also resources for the local chapter.

Given SWAG To College just launched and has limited funding, we will partner with other organizations. For example, many SWAG To College mentees and their parents face immigration challenges, so we will partner with FIEL, a local Houston organization that provides immigration services.⁷⁶ Similarly, SWAG

To College will work with Neighborhood Centers, a community center that provides wrap-around services to low-income individuals.⁷⁷ Finally, because we are new, we will try to learn from other successful organizations like OneHouston.⁷⁸

2. Letting parents identify the organizing issues is more effective than external actors determining the issues.

Every organizer I interviewed reiterated that parents themselves must determine the issues to build around, and four of the five organizations profiled followed this model.⁷⁹ For example, PACT conducts 1:1 house meetings with parents to identify which issues are important to them. Parent U-Turn surveys both its parents and high school students about important issues. La Familia Initiative asked its parents about what it should change at the local middle school. Finally, KIPP Bay Area provides parents

some autonomy to select the issue within a pre-selected set of possibilities.

This method of engaging parents is crucial for three reasons. (1) Asking parents what issues they want to focus on builds the organization's credibility and buy-in among parents. (2) While organizers should make every effort to learn about the challenges facing the communities they are serving, the parents and the children who daily endure the structural inequalities can provide the best insight into the burdens that must be addressed. (3) Non-profit organizations ultimately exist to serve their constituents; therefore it seems paradoxical if an organization does not recognize and value the opinions of those whom it aspires to serve.

SWAG To College has been most effective and successful when we have listened to the feedback and advice of students and parents who live in the communities we serve. We will hold

individual meetings with parent leaders to learn about the issues they view as important and then host a larger issue assembly to ask our broader parent and student community which issue we should focus on.

3. Presenting issues that are supported by data and specific solutions is more effective than offering vague generalizations.

All five organizations supported their issue positions and policy solutions with data. For example, during its organizing cycle, PACT has a specific Research phase when parents and organizers meet with experts both within and outside the school district. Parents gather data and based on the data offer policy recommendations.

Similarly, Parent U-Turn, building on the teachings from the UCLA seminar the initial parents took, analyzed data and used statistics to guide their decisions. For example, Ms. Johnson gathered data on

school textbooks and used it to make her issue demand.

SWAG To College will also utilize data to guide our discussion of issues and policy solutions. For example, one issue we may study is the shortage of college counselors in high schools. For this issue, we would collect data on college counselors per campus and compare wealthy schools with low-income schools. Our policy solutions would then be informed potentially what other successful school districts are doing. Regardless of the specific issue, SWAG To College's Parent Coordinator will work closely with our Data and Research Analyst to ensure our decisions and choices are grounded in data.

4. While data are important, any issue campaign must also contain stories of people's lived experiences.

Marshall Ganz, a current professor at the Harvard Kennedy School and a former community organizer, begins his class on

organizing with lessons on telling one's story.⁸⁰ As he writes, "[o]rganized communities learn to tell their story, a public narrative, of who they are."⁸¹ Several of the organizations I studied applied storytelling as a means to shape legislation. For example, Parent Ambassadors helps its parents tell their stories at the State Legislature. Similarly, both KIPP Bay Area and PACT encourage their parents to attend school board meetings and testify about a particular bill. Frank, the organizer at PACT, told me that "stories are often what swings a person from opposing to supporting."⁸² Stories, especially those involving kids and families, are especially powerful because everyone can relate. That is, almost every elected official is a parent herself or himself and therefore can empathize with another parent's situation.⁸³

SWAG To College will focus on storytelling as we organize parents. For example, we plan to record parents of

students who have graduated college discussing their child's journey and the challenges their child faced. We also hope current parents whose children are still in the school district will share their stories to help create change. Finally, because all the SWAG To College mentees are in high school, we hope to solicit their stories as well. We think the students themselves can lend a uniquely powerful voice that is often neglected when organizing parents.

5. Successful parent organizing initiatives explicitly build power by identifying parent leaders and leveraging those parents' networks to recruit more parents.

Successful parent organizing seems to rely on two interrelated pieces—a core group of parent leaders and then a broad base of parent support. For example, Frank at PACT explained organizing needs 10-20 core leaders and then hundreds of supporters who will show up to events and display

power. Similarly, La Familia Initiative formed a Steering Committee and then had several other supporters.

Both La Familia Initiative and PACT seem to have followed a similar path to recruiting members. First, these organizations held several individual meetings during which it became clear who was interested in investing time and becoming a leader. Second, both organizations asked those parent leaders to invite their friends to the organization's events. Multiple organizers mentioned this as crucial because it helped them gauge which parents actually had followers and which did not. The strategy's risk is that often the original parent leaders remain the only ones deeply committed to the organization, which can hinder the organization's long-term development.

In sharp contrast, Parent U-Turn asks parents to serve two-year terms on its Steering Committee and then rotates in new

members. Recruiting new members helps build the organization and generate new ideas. Similarly, Parent Ambassadors has a new cohort of parent leaders each year and therefore it trains and develops many more leaders than other organizations that have limited representation. Moreover, the past members of the Steering Committee or cohort do not all of sudden stop caring about parent organizing; instead, they become mentors and support future parent leaders.

While we hope to reach Parent U-Turn's and Parent Ambassadors' levels, SWAG To College will initially follow La Familia Initiative's and PACT's models. We are already building our Parent Board, and we plan to host meetings with them during summer 2017 in order to gauge interest in being leaders. We will then ask those parents to invite their friends to our meetings. This will help us develop a larger support network that is committed to our

issue and will attend events to help display solidarity.

6. Training is crucial to the success of parent organizing.

The five successful organizations all held trainings for their members. For example, every group held sessions to help parents understand the power structure within education, such as the power differences among a school principal, a school board member, and a state legislature. Ms. Johnson, the leader of Parent U-Turn, told me that “it is important parents know the levers of power, so they know where to advocate for what.”⁸⁴

Moreover, several of the groups held trainings on scheduling meetings, running meetings, and following-up after meetings. Frank from PACT explained that some of his parents do not know how to send an email to schedule a meeting. His organization therefore helps parents learn about how best to craft the email and what

the subject should be. Before the meetings, the organizers role-play the conversations with parents and trains them on how best to lead the conversation. These trainings are crucial because it both builds parent buy-in as they gain key skills and ensures parents are ready to be leaders on their own.

For SWAG To College, this will be especially challenging for two reasons: (1) we do not have the capacity to hold in-depth trainings and (2) because we just began organizing, there will be an impulse for us as an organization to do more rather than slow down and teach parents and build their own capacity. To overcome these two challenges, SWAG To College will take the following steps. (1) As discussed above, we will partner with other organizations to offer the trainings we cannot do. (2) We will build our capacity internally to offer such trainings. (3) We will create a five-year parent organizing plan with manageable

goals for each year so as to reduce the impulse to rush through the process.

7. Successful parent organizations begin with small goals that can generate quick wins that build momentum.

For example, Parent U-Turn initially focused on the relatively more minor issue of textbook provision before moving onto the more weighty issues of standardized tests and college counseling. Moreover, La Familia Initiative initially advocated for small changes to the cafeteria's options. In fact, several of the other organizations that Professor Warren and Mapp profile in their book A Match on Dry Grass also focus on small initial successes.⁸⁵

Focusing on these “teeth-cutting”⁸⁶ issues wherein parents can see the immediate results is crucial for two reasons. (1) Seeing the initial successes builds momentum and, perhaps more importantly, staying power. Parents are more likely to

join an organization and continue participating if they see it has been successful. (2) An initial success builds credibility with policymakers and elected officials. If a school-board member or a principal sees an organization effectively advocate for policy change, she is much more likely to listen to the suggestions of that organization.

SWAG To College will initially select more “winnable” issues. Our first issue will therefore not be increasing the number of college counselors in low-income schools in Houston, for this is a massive issue with many obstacles. Instead, our first issue could be ensuring school district communication is available in Spanish and English or disseminating more information about the financial aid process through schools.

8. Frequent communication with parents is imperative to successful organization.

Every organizer I spoke to stressed that parents, particularly those from low-income backgrounds, have several other obligations (multiple jobs, childcare, etc.) that prevent them from being as active in organizing as they may want to be. As such, these organizers focus on frequent communication, even if just by text message, to check-in on parents and to remind them of what they could do. Moreover, as Ivy Hest, an organizer with PACT, noted, these text messages were very specific and actionable for parents. As such, instead of asking parents “[H]ow is everything going; how do you want to help us?” her texts read: “[H]ow is everything going; please respond YES if you can attend our event next Monday at 6:00pm at the Vinson Library.”⁸⁷ Similarly, the Parent Ambassadors’ coordinators checked-in every other week with parents via Google Hangout. While these virtual conversations may not be as effective as in-person

meetings, they can certainly help keep parents accountable. Parent U-Turn also had a Parent Center at each campus where parents could come in and meet a parent leader.

SWAG To College is already communicating with parents through bi-weekly text messages. However, these text messages do not engage parents; they merely provide information (i.e. “please submit the FAFSA with your child” or “please ask your child if he or she registered for the SAT.”). As we begin organizing, we will have a Parent Coordinator who meets every month with our parent leaders and has conversations with them every other week. This frequent communication will help us stay connected to parents and ensure they are taking steps to help build their leadership so they can advocate on their own behalf.

9. Successful parent organizing does not have to be city-wide; it could be a few schools within a small district.

When I initially conceived of parent organizing, I imagined thousands of parents marching for change and testifying at the state legislature. This view is certainly possible—and some organizations like Parent Ambassadors and Parent U-Turn—are realizing a vision somewhat similar to this. However, successful organizing can also occur at a smaller scale. For example, one organizer at PACT noted that he is working with parents in a school district with only three middle schools. As such their organizing is focused on those three schools. Moreover, KIPP Bay Area focuses on the relatively few KIPP schools in the Bay Area. Although there is certainly a fine line between bona-fide parent organizing and advocating for change at one school, focusing on a smaller community is not necessarily evidence of unsuccessful organizing. On the contrary, successfully advocating for a change in a small school district that removes the systemic barriers

those 2,000 students faced is something to be celebrated.

SWAG To College will likely begin small out of necessity—we have limited funds and limited personnel—however, considering the experiences of other organizations this strategy can be effective. SWAG To College may begin with organizing parents at a couple of schools that are geographically close-by, likely in Southwest Houston. Once this initiative has succeeded, we can then move on to more neighborhoods in Houston with the ultimate goal of becoming Houston-wide.

5. Conclusion

Parent involvement, at its core, is a story about helping parents improve educational outcomes for their children. We can define this as ranging from simple involvement—attending parent teacher conferences—to sustained organizing—leading and advocating for issues. Although all forms of parent participation improve

student outcomes, parent organizing is the most comprehensive driver of student achievement and systemic change.

In this paper, I profiled five entities organizing parents, and while each is unique, they are all successful. Most successful organizations: (1) listen to parents before determining what issues to advocate for, (2) empower parents to lead meetings themselves, (3) focus initially on small, manageable wins to boost momentum, and (4) balance both data and stories in appeals for change. These lessons, among several others, are the hallmarks of effective parent organizing.

Students With Ambition Go (SWAG) To College, the non-profit mentorship organization my former students and I run, will leverage these findings as we develop our own parent organizing model. While we already send parents biweekly text messages about how they can help their children on the pathway to college, we know

we can and must do more if we hope to dismantle the systemic barriers preventing underserved students from succeeding.

Building on this research, we will launch our parent organizing program in August 2017.

We will create a Parent Board with 10-20 parents who are committed to helping lead this work. We will then meet individually with each parent to hear her concerns.

Through this process, we will collectively select an issue and then develop a plan to advocate for change that one issue. We know this work will be challenging, difficult, and slow; however, we also know this is the only way to improve outcomes for all students.

Beyond SWAG To College, this issue personally drives me because of my teaching experience. Thinking about my students who almost failed pre-calculus and whose parents—many of whom did not speak English, had not attended college, and did not understand their child's school or the

educational system at-large—reminds me that parent engagement and organizing matters. Low-income parents and families face numerous challenges to reaching their educational aspirations; however, by informing them and empowering them to lead their communities, we can narrow the achievement gap, expand equality of opportunity, and ensure every student and parent is fully informed and able to make their own educational choices to reach their own educational dreams.

¹ My parents were very involved in my education by attending parent conferences, helping with homework, and supporting me throughout the process.

² I served as a Teach For America Corps Member at YES Prep Southwest. YES Prep Southwest is a public charter school in Houston that serves students from low-income backgrounds (over 95% of the students received Free or Reduced Lunch). Moreover, over 90% of the students are Latinx or African American.

³ In hindsight, I should have contacted parents earlier; however, as a first-year teacher, this was one of the several mistakes I made.

⁴ Out of the twenty students, eighteen graduated with their classmates. The two students who failed took the class in the

summer and received their high school diplomas in August.

⁵ See e.g. Nat Hentoff, *Black Parents Fail Their Kids*, BLOOMBERG (2011), <http://www.villagevoice.com/news/bloomberg-black-parents-fail-their-kids-6431609>.

⁶ Research also supports my anecdotal evidence; See e.g., Nancy Feyl Chavkin & David L. Williams Jr., *Low-Income Parents' Attitudes Toward Parent Involvement in Education*, 16 THE J. OF SOC. AND SOC. WELFARE 17, 19-20 (1989), <http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1905&context=jssw>.

⁷ Again, research supports my anecdotal evidence. See e.g. Joyce L. Epstein, *Building Bridges of Home, School, and Community: The Importance of Design*, *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 6 J. OF EDUC. FOR STUDENTS PLACED AT RISK 161, 162-64 (2001), http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1207/S15327671ESPR0601-2_10.

⁸ CQ Transcriptions, *President Obama's Address to Congress*, NEW YORK TIMES (2009), <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/24/us/politics/24obama-text.html>.

⁹ See John Rogers, *Forces of Accountability? The Power of Poor Parents in NCLB*, 76 HARV. EDUC. REV. 611, 612 (2006).

¹⁰ I taught at YES Prep for two years in Houston before coming to law school. *KIPP Commitment to Excellence*, YES PREP PUBLIC SCHOOLS, http://www.kipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/KIPP_Commitment_to_Excellence_Sample.pdf.

¹¹ Achievement First's website states: "At Achievement First, we know parents are kids' first and most important teachers." Moreover, Achievement First asks all parents to sign a contract that "outlines a shared commitment" between parents and teachers to ensure a child's academic

success. *Parents*, **ACHIEVEMENT FIRST**, <https://www.achievementfirst.org/about-us/profiles/parents/> (last visited Apr. 9, 2018). KIPP also has a detailed contract parents must sign, which includes statements such as “We will review our child’s homework every night. ... We will make arrangement so our child can remain at KIPP throughout our extended day and to be picked up on time.”

<http://www.kippla.org/sol/commitment-to-excellence.cfm>. Finally, YES Prep conducts parent surveys and also asks parents to sign a contract similar to that of KIPP. *Parent Survey*, **YES PREP PUBLIC SCHOOLS**, <http://www.yesprep.org/parentsurvey> (last visited Apr. 9, 2018).

¹² Anne T. Henderson and Karen L. Mapp, *A New Wave of Evidence, The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement*, Annual Synthesis 2002. National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools.

¹³ COMMITTEE ON THE PREVENTION OF READING DIFFICULTIES IN YOUNG CHILDREN, *STARTING OUT RIGHT: A GUIDE TO PROMOTING CHILDREN’S READING SUCCESS* 10 (National Academy Sciences, 1999).

¹⁴ NATIONAL PTA. 2000. *BUILDING SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIPS: A GUIDE FOR DEVELOPING PARENT AND FAMILY INVOLVEMENT PROGRAMS*. Bloomington, Indiana: National Education Service, 11–12.

¹⁵ Erin Harris et al., *Helping older youth succeed through expanded learning opportunities*, GLOBAL FAMILY RESEARCH PROJECT (2011) <http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/publications-series/ncsl-harvard-family-research-project-brief-series-elo-research-policy-practice/helping-older-youth-succeed-through-expanded-learning-opportunities>.

¹⁶ See generally KEITH ROBINSON & ANGEL L. HARRIS, *THE BROKEN COMPASS: PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT WITH CHILDREN’S EDUCATION* 44 (2014).

¹⁷ See, e.g., ANNE T. HENDERSON & KAREN L. MAPP, *A NEW WAVE OF EVIDENCE: THE IMPACT OF SCHOOL, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT* 24 (Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2002); ALMA FLOR ADA, *A MAGICAL ENCOUNTER: LATINO CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IN THE CLASSROOM* (Pearson, 2002); Joyce L. Epstein & Susan L. Dauber, *School Programs and Teacher Practices of Parent Involvement in Inner-City Elementary and Middle Schools*, 91 THE ELEMENTARY SCH. J. 289, 292 (1991); David R. Topor, et al. *Parent Involvement and Student Academic Performance: A Multiple Mediation Analysis*, JOURNAL OF PREVENTION & INTERVENTION IN THE COMMUNITY 183, 184 (2010)..

¹⁸ Jane Graves Smith, *Parental Involvement in Education Among Low-Income Families: A Case Study*, 16 SCH. COMMUNITY J. 44 (2006); See also MARIA EULINA DE CARVALHO, *RETHINKING FAMILY-SCHOOL RELATIONS: A CRITIQUE OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLING* SOCIOCULTURAL, POLITICAL, AND HISTORICAL STUDIES IN EDUCATION 9-27 (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 2001).

¹⁹ Annette Lareau, *Social Class Differences in Family-School Relationships: The Importance of Cultural Capital*, 60 SOC. OF EDUC. 80 (1987), https://sociology.sas.upenn.edu/sites/sociology.sas.upenn.edu/files/Lareau1987_Family-School_Relationships.pdf; ANNETTE LAREAU, *HOME ADVANTAGE: SOCIAL CLASS AND PARENTAL INTERVENTION IN ELEMENTARY EDUCATION* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000).

²⁰ Laura Abrams & Jewelle Gibbs, *Disrupting the Logic of Home-School Relations: Parent Involvement Strategies and Practices of Inclusion and Exclusion*, 37 URB. EDUC. 387, 399-404 (2002) (providing that low-income mothers would like to be more involved, but feel restricted because of issues such as language barriers, lack of power, and feelings of exclusion compared to white, high-income mothers). *See also*, Sorca O’Conner, *Voices of Parents and Teachers in a Poor White Urban School*, 6 J. OF EDUC. FOR STUDENTS PLACED AT RISK 175, 178 (2001), http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1207/S15327671ESPR0603_2; Joyce Epstein, *School/Family/Community Partnerships: Caring for the Children We Share.*, 76 PHI DELTA KAPPAN 701, 701 (1995), <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ502937> (proposing partnerships between parents and their children’s professors to ensure academic success).

²¹ Williams, *supra* note 6, at 20-21; *See e.g.*, Stephen Kleinberg, *African-Americans are the Most Likely to Value Post-Secondary Education*, RICE UNIVERSITY NEWS & MEDIA (2013), <http://news.rice.edu/2013/11/12/african-americans-are-the-most-likely-to-value-postsecondary-education/>.

²² NORM FRUCHTER, *NEW DIRECTIONS IN PARENT INVOLVEMENT* (Academy of Educational Development, 1992).

²³ Concha Delgado-Gaitan, *Involving Parents in the Schools: A Process of Empowerment*, 100 AM. J. OF EDUC. 20, 22 (1991), www.jstor.org/stable/1085651.

²⁴ Richard Riley et al., *Overcoming Barriers to Family Involvement in Title I Schools. Report to Congress*, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION OFFICE OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND IMPROVEMENT 30 (1997), <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/e5f4/c4c5178c9e580995b501c9741ba618c27733.pdf>

(providing that although some parents did not complete high school or college, studies show that they will work harder to ensure the same does not happen for their own kids; however, since they view themselves as less intelligent than their child’s teacher, they avoid trying to help to avoid a potentially embarrassing situation).

²⁵ *See* Erin Horvat et al., *From Social Ties to Social Capital: Class Differences in the Relations Between Schools and Parent Networks*, 40 AM. EDUC. RES. J 319, 320 (2003); *See also* ROBERT PUTNAM, *OUR KIDS: THE AMERICAN DREAM IN CRISIS* 207 (2015).

²⁶ *See* Riley, *supra* note 24, at 32.

²⁷ John Rogers, *Forces of Accountability? The Power of Poor Parents in NCLB*, 76 HARV. EDUC. REV., 612 (Winter 2004).

²⁸ Rand Quinn, *Thoughts on the Power and Promise of Parent Organizing*, 10 PENN. GSE PERSP ON URB. EDUC., 1-2 (2013).

²⁹ Ada Sanchez & Ron White, *Parent Organizing as a Strategy for Sustainable Policy Change*, 6 MAKING THE LINK 1, 2 (2011).

³⁰ *Id.* Schools, to the extent they even have a parental component, are at the parent involvement level. Schools will provide parents information (sometimes not even in their own language). Even when schools engage parents more deeply, it is on the school’s terms (the school decides the priorities, the school sets the agenda, and the school determines the location and logistics of any meetings).

³¹ *Id.*

³² Quinn, *supra* note 28, at 1. Importantly, parent organizing does not occur at only one school; instead, it occurs across a school district or, more likely, across the state or the nation.

³³ *See generally*, MARK R. WARREN & KAREN L. MAPP, *A MATCH ON DRY GRASS: COMMUNITY ORGANIZING AS A CATALYST*

FOR SCHOOL REFORM (Oxford University Press, Inc., 2011) (showing that parent organizing, which usually encompasses the basics of parent involvement and engagement, not only improves outcomes for a parent's child but also the entire community).

³⁴ See *About PACT*, PACT, <https://www.pactsj.org/en/mission-and-vision/>. (last visited April 10, 2018).

³⁵ Interview with Frank Ponciano, Organizer, PACT (Mar. 17, 2017).

³⁶ *Id.*

³⁷ See *The PICO Community Organizing Model*, PICO NATIONAL NETWORK, <https://www.piconetwork.org/about/model> (last visited April 10, 2018).

³⁸ Interview with Frank Ponciano, Organizer, PACT (Mar. 17, 2017). Because PACT is an established organization schools are often willing to work with them to help identify potential parent leaders. It is unclear how PACT would find parents without the initial recommendations from teachers at the local school.

³⁹ *Id.*

⁴⁰ *Id.*

⁴¹ *Id.*

⁴² *Id.*

⁴³ *Id.*

⁴⁴ *Id.*

⁴⁵ *Id.* Importantly, this idea almost certainly came up during the research meetings with School Board members. Nevertheless, that is by no means a requirement.

⁴⁶ *Id.*

⁴⁷ See *About the Office of Head Start*, HEAD START EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING & KNOWLEDGE CENTER, <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/hs/about>. (last visited April 10, 2018) (showing that part of the mission of Head Start is to work with parents to ensure programs are effective; thus, the state has a legal mandate to work with parents).

⁴⁸ See *Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program*, WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF EARLY LEARNING, <https://del.wa.gov/providers-educators/early-childhood-education-and-assistance-program-eceap> (last visited April 10, 2018) (explaining that the Early Childhood Assistance Program is Washington State's "pre-kindergarten program for low-income 3- and 4-year-old children and their families)..

⁴⁹ See Sanchez, *supra* note 30, at 3

⁵⁰ Telephone Interview with Katy Warren, Deputy Director, Parent Ambassadors (Jan. 30, 2017).

⁵¹ See Sanchez, *supra* note 30, at 3

⁵² See *Results, National Report Card*, KIPP, <http://www.kipp.org/results> (last visited April 10, 2018).

⁵³ *Id.* Research from the non-profit Mathematica has also found that KIPP has a positive statistically significant impact on students. Christina Tuttle, Phillip Gleason, et. al., *Understanding the Effect of KIPP as it Scales: Volume I, Impacts on Achievement and Other Outcomes Final Report of KIPP's Investing in Innovation Grant Evaluation*, KIPP (2015), http://www.kipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/kipp_scale-up_vol1-1.pdf.

⁵⁴ See *Welcome Families*, KIPP, <http://www.kipp.org/families/> (last visited April 10, 2018) (explaining that KIPP asks its students' parents to sign contracts signifying their commitment to do whatever it takes to support their child through their educational journey).

⁵⁵ Interview with Anthony Wilson, KIPP Bay Area (Mar. 6, 2017); Interview with Mike Espinoza, Community Organizer (Feb. 21, 2017).

⁵⁶ Interview with Anthony Wilson, KIPP Bay Area (Mar. 6, 2017).

⁵⁷ *Id.*

⁵⁸ *Id.*

⁵⁹ *Id.*

⁶⁰ *Id.*; Evan Lips, *Flanked by Baker, charter school proponents lobby Beacon Hill lawmakers*, NEWBOSTON POST (2016), <http://newbostonpost.com/2016/01/19/charter-school-proponents-lobby-beacon-hill-lawmakers/> (identifying critique of KIPP's parent engagement that it often centers around issues of charter school funding or caps on charter schools). This is true in Massachusetts, for example, where the engagement focused solely on increasing the cap on charter schools. Moreover, in Texas, KIPP focuses on increasing funding for charter schools, which lags behind funding for traditional public schools. Aliyya Swaby, *Thousands of school choice advocates expected to rally at Texas Capitol*, THE TEXAS TRIBUNE (2017), <https://www.texastribune.org/2017/01/24/texas-activists-gear-school-choice-fight/>.

⁶¹ Interview with Anthony Wilson, KIPP Bay Area (Mar. 6, 2017).

⁶² *Id.*

⁶³ *Id.*

⁶⁴ *Id.*

⁶⁵ *Id.*

⁶⁶ *Id.*

⁶⁷ John Rogers, *Forces of Accountability? The Power of Poor Parents in NCLB*, 76 HARV. EDUC. REV. 612 (2006).

⁶⁸ <https://centerx.gseis.ucla.edu/parent-project/>.

⁶⁹ See Rogers, *supra* 51

⁷⁰ Telephone Interview with Mary Johnson, Co-Founder & CEO of Parent U-Turn (Jan. 31, 2017).

⁷¹ *Id.*

⁷² Pablo Jasis and Rosario Ordonez-Jasis, *Convivencia to Empowerment: Latino Parent Organizing at La Familia*, 88 THE HIGH SCH. J. 32 (2005).

⁷³ *Id.*

⁷⁴ There were several other parent organizations that I researched but did not

highlight. I will, however, draw on that research in my Lessons Learned section.

⁷⁵ In the Lessons Learned section, I will highlight this lesson further.

⁷⁶ FIEL HOUSTON, <https://fielhouston.org/> (last visited April 15, 2018).

⁷⁷ BAKERRIPLEY, <http://www.bakerripley.org/> (last visited April 15, 2018).

⁷⁸ *OneHouston*, FACEBOOK, <https://www.facebook.com/ONEHouAction/> (last visited April 15, 2018).

⁷⁹ Parent Ambassadors is the exception, as the issues are pre-determined.

⁸⁰ Marshall Ganz, *Organizing: People, Power, Change*, Spring 2016, Syllabus.

⁸¹ *Id.*

⁸² Interview with Frank Ponciano, PACT Organizer (March 17, 2017).

⁸³ Of course this empathy is not unlimited and not every elected official is a parent. Nevertheless, the general point seems to be true—stories are more important than data. Research from Stanford, for example, supports this conclusion. Jennifer Aaker, *Harnessing the Power of Stories*, STANFORD UNIVERSITY (2014), <https://stanford.app.box.com/s/f8cjtezifga853e3fildhem492yklhdb>.

⁸⁴ Telephone Interview with Mary Johnson, Co-Founder & CEO of Parent U-Turn (Jan. 31, 2017).

⁸⁵ See WARREN, *supra* note 34. For example, One LA, which is an affiliate of the Industrial Areas Foundation, initially focused on asking the school to provide a crossing guard during the pick-up and drop-off times. While this seems like a minor issue, the parents noted “this was a great thing that we were able to accomplish.”

⁸⁶ *Id.* at 91.

⁸⁷ Interview with Ivy Hest, PACT Organizer (Feb. 24, 2017).