HOW WE GO

Family Leadership and the
GO Advocacy Campaign
Framework
Who Are We?

GO Public Schools is a nonprofit organization that envisions a day when all schools prepare every child regardless of skin color, family income, home language, or neighborhood to succeed in our rapidly evolving world. To that end, GO works with families, educators, and community allies to win advocacy campaigns that promote equitable education systems and transformational schools. We were founded in 2008 in Oakland, California, and have since expanded to West Contra Costa County and Fresno. Over the last decade, GO’s community-driven campaigns have resulted in hundreds of millions of dollars in new local funding for public school students and teachers, significantly shifted district fiscal and data practices, and developed leaders who will continue to influence and shape our state’s public schools on behalf of students.

What Can I Expect to Get Out of This Paper?

This resource is designed primarily for fellow advocates who share our belief that the voices and leadership of families are critical to making lasting change in our education system. We hope that by sharing our learnings and current strategies from more than a decade of pursuing local education policy change, we will support others in accelerating their impact.

This resource has three components. First, we walk through our family leadership programming, with a focus on our Family Leaders Program (FLP) and Family Leaders Action Group (FLAG). Second, we zoom out from family leadership and put those programs in the context of our Advocacy Campaign Framework. Finally, we illustrate how the first two components weave together through a case study of our Data in Action campaign, in which family leadership was critical in pushing the West Contra Costa Unified School District (WCCUSD) to adopt new policies expanding their use of data to drive their decision-making.

Whether you work on education policy at the local level — like us — or in the state or national arenas, we sincerely hope that you are able to put this document to use making change in your community. We have links to additional resources in the How To Learn More section of this document, including contact information for our family leadership team. Please reach out with thoughts, questions, feedback, or just for a conversation about how the fight for educational equity is going in your community.
GO's Theory of Change

At GO we work with families, educators, and community allies to win advocacy campaigns that promote equitable education systems and transformational schools. Ultimately, we seek to improve opportunities and outcomes for students in our communities, and across California.

A Note on Our Terminology

Family Leaders: At GO, we talk about Family Leaders (rather than parent leaders) because you do not need to be a parent to have a public school student you are ready to fight for. Our Family Leaders are often moms and dads, but they are also grandparents, aunts and uncles, siblings, godparents, or other guardians.

Family Leaders Program (FLP): GO’s signature ten-week fellowship program in which parents and other family members learn to harness their innate power by developing skills and strategies to support their advocacy efforts.

Family Leaders Action Group (FLAG): A group of Family Leaders Program alumni who continue their leadership development by regularly gathering to: a) refresh and expand on the learnings from the FLP, b) grow their personal and advocacy networks, and c) take action to improve their schools and education system.

Leadership Council: Each of our three local GO teams — in Oakland, West Contra Costa, and Fresno — has a leadership council, made up of community members who guide and shape the direction of each regional team. These leadership councils provide strategic guidance and approve our teams’ campaigns and goals.

Grassroots: Individuals with positional or organizational power in our communities, including elected officials, school district staff, leaders of community-based organizations, and labor leaders, among others.

Data Talk: An engagement opportunity designed to offer parents, educators, and community members the space to interact with relevant student achievement data.

These campaigns are built on — and driven forward — by community leadership, aligned networks of community members who support the campaigns, and public communications that improve understanding, bring new leaders into our work, and direct public discourse. Our partner organization, GO Public Schools Advocates, supports our network to elect aligned political candidates and pass revenue measures to create the conditions for successful advocacy campaigns and policy implementation.
Why Do We Believe in Family Leadership?

Family leaders are natural advocates with a vested and urgent interest in creating lasting change in our schools.

Erika Cruzes had an idea of what she wanted for her children’s education when she arrived in the United States. After all, her family was deeply involved in local schools in her hometown of Chihuahua, Mexico; her uncles were teachers, her mother was a secretary, and her father was a high school dean. But when she arrived in the United States, she found a system that fell completely different from the one she knew.

Erika discovered a public education system with complex policies and minimal room for authentic parent engagement. She quickly learned that she was not the only parent who felt isolated and frustrated by the lack of accessible information. She made a commitment to learn more, and to make sure that every family, no matter their background, native language, or income, had access to resources that would help them best support their children in school, and in life.

“Isn’t it just about my children, but about every other student that learns, eats, and plays alongside my kids.”
— Erika Cruzes

As a graduate of the FLP and a core member of GO’s Family Leaders Action Group (FLAG), Erika has found a path to making an impact at the school her children attend, as well as at the district and state levels. In her role as president of a primarily white and English-speaking parent-teacher association (PTA), Erika convenes meetings in Spanish, refusing to let language act as a barrier to her leadership.

She has also joined GO advocacy campaigns, testifying in front of both her local school board and the California State Board of Education.

You don’t have to speak English perfectly to make change. You don’t have to be an expert in content. We no longer have to be afraid to advocate for the needs of our students, our families, and our schools. We can truly be changemakers.”
— Erika Cruzes

Family leadership is a moral issue for us at GO. We believe that those most impacted by systems of oppression should be the ones driving the changes that will improve those systems. Many of the Family Leaders we work with went to schools in the same districts where we advocate — sometimes at the very same schools that their children now attend and often with outcomes that have barely improved despite the many years that have passed.

It is also our experience that Family Leaders are natural advocates. Family Leaders have existing networks in their communities, whether through relatives, friends, colleagues, members of religious congregations, or simply other parents at their children’s schools. While teachers in the communities in which we work regularly leave within their first five years of employment, Family Leaders are likely to be in our school systems for a full K–12 cycle — and that assumes they only have a single child. It is obvious then, why our families have a vested and urgent interest in disrupting cycles of inequity and improving our school system. While school board members and district leaders will come and go, Family Leaders remain a force for change, holding new staff accountable to previous commitments and preventing backsliding or loss of momentum during these shifts.
Family Leadership at GO

Our programs support Family Leaders to harness their innate power, grow their skills, and lead advocacy campaigns.

When we first began developing our family leadership programs, we found that most of the existing programming — like local Parent University programs or school-based parent clubs — built capacity at the classroom level to help parents navigate the system as it exists. But there was almost no avenue for families with an interest in changing or transforming the education system for all children. We have intentionally designed our program to both fill that void and complement existing programming, allowing family members to learn about, and engage with, systemic issues that affect not only their students, but all students in our communities.

We convene two major family leadership programs at GO. The first is the ten-week Family Leaders Program (FLP): a structured, cohort-based experience in which Family Leaders learn to harness their innate power by developing skills and strategies to support their advocacy efforts.

Once graduated from the FLP, Family Leaders frequently pursue systemic change through a school- or district-level leadership role, join GO’s advocacy campaigns through the Family Leaders Action Group (FLAG), or — ideally — both.

This chapter walks through the entire family leadership journey, from a prospective leader’s initial contact with GO through their participation in systemic advocacy work.
Building the Pool

Developing a strong pipeline of potential Family Leaders through referrals, one-to-ones, and presentations at school sites ensures the long-term success of the Family Leaders Program and the Family Leaders Action Group.

Family Leaders rarely make their way into our structured programs without some sort of initial engagement with our team. While we do advertise the program on social media and send network emails, we find that the leaders who come to us through a trusted voice are more likely to matriculate into the Family Leaders Program.

Referrals from Current Family Leaders

Referrals are our primary source for potential Family Leaders Program participants. We find that people are typically honored to discover that someone thought they would be a good fit for the FLP, and are willing to have a conversation with a member of our team to find out more. The majority of these referrals come from current Family Leaders or FLP alumni; however, we also put out calls for referrals through our social media and email channels. Finally, we conduct direct outreach to principals and School Community Outreach Workers, who are among our most effective referrers. We find that they have a good understanding of the kinds of Family Leaders who are hungry to disrupt the current system.

Sourcing from One-to-Ones

As advocates and organizers, GO staff members are regularly out in the field meeting with community members. Sometimes we directly meet with family members, but we just as frequently meet with educators, district staff, elected officials, or other community allies. As often as possible during one-to-ones, we try to ask people to connect us with Family Leaders who would be a good fit for FLP.

Presentations at School Sites

GO’s work regularly takes us out to school sites to meet with family members who may or may not have heard about our work. For instance, our West Contra Costa team held twenty “data talks” last spring to walk family members through their newly-produced Kids Can student outcomes report. At these meetings, we try to ensure that potential Family Leaders are hearing about our FLP programming and are able to sign up for more information.

You can find the Kids Can student outcomes report in our online toolkit at bit.ly/howwego

Family Leaders Program

The GO Family Leaders Program (FLP) is a structured, cohort-based experience in which Family Leaders learn to harness their innate power by developing skills and strategies to support their advocacy efforts. We hope that at the end of each cohort’s first phase with us, the following is true:

- Families have enhanced knowledge and understanding of educational systems, policies, and programs and know how to influence them.
- Families believe they play a multidimensional, active role in their child’s education.
- An increased number of families and staff from diverse backgrounds take on formal positions of leadership at school and district levels, and in the community.
- Power dynamics dramatically change between families and district staff.
- Education policy is directly shaped by family leadership.
FLP Scope and Sequence

The core of FLP is a ten-session education and training curriculum focused on a wide range of important topics; below, you will find a brief description of each session that we conducted for our most recent cohort. You will also find a sample session plan and materials for one of our FLP sessions in our online toolkit. These sessions are generally the same between cohorts, but evolve as we continue to learn, gather feedback, and improve our model. They are also tailored for GO’s approach to advocacy — we do not expect them to work off the shelf for every organization. We encourage you to modify sessions to match your own goals and approach.

**ORIENTATION**

Family Leaders learn more about the FLP. They review the scope and sequence, understand the goals of the program, and are clear about the program’s time commitment. Family Leaders share their personal stories — as well as their challenges and hopes, beginning to build trusting relationships with one another. Staff model this vulnerability by sharing what brought them to this work and what keeps them motivated.

**NORMS AND VALUES**

In this session, Family Leaders do work to begin to identify personal barriers that may get in the way of advocacy. Whether stemmed from their own educational history or personal life experiences, identifying these barriers and gaining the tools to work past them enables Family Leaders to step into their own leadership. Family Leaders also work together to establish group norms to create a safe and positive learning environment and identify their individual values that motivate them to engage in this work. Additionally, we spend time in this session thinking about individual versus systemic advocacy. Many of our Family Leaders come into our program feeling understandably outraged about the education their child is receiving, and we do want the skills they develop during the FLP to help them improve the situations at each of their individual schools — if all of our Family Leaders can do that successfully, we will have achieved a significant systemic impact. But we also want to support our leaders to think beyond their individual students, and about how their advocacy can improve outcomes for all students. That conversation weaves through the entire ten-week curriculum, but begins here.

**GOVERNANCE AND BUDGET**

Family Leaders learn about how school district governance works, including the roles and responsibilities of the superintendent and school board, as well as school site staff. From an advocacy perspective, this session provides key content knowledge to help Family Leaders begin to think about who the target of their advocacy should be for different kinds of issues. We also begin to delve into how schools are funded in our communities and how budgets are set. Since change often requires funding, many of our advocacy campaigns are somehow related to the budget. The more Family Leaders understand about school and district budget systems, the better equipped they will be to advocate.

**EDUCATION DATA AND LEVERS FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE**

At the start of this session, Family Leaders engage in role play that helps them understand the difference between equity and equality. This activity helps Family Leaders internalize the idea that there is no such thing as “other people’s children” — all children are our shared responsibility. During this session, Family Leaders closely examine the education that their students receive by using our Kids Can data report. They learn to read and understand school-related data, and apply those skills to their advocacy through research meetings with school or district leaders. We also help Family Leaders to understand some of the systemic change levers that we believe are most impactful in improving outcomes for our students.

**ORGANIZING AND ADVOCACY**

This is the first of a three-session arc dedicated to building Family Leaders’ organizing knowledge and skills. In this session, Family Leaders learn about core organizing concepts, including the development of power and the organizing cycle. The session ends with Family Leaders beginning to develop their story of self, which is a personal story that will help others understand who they are and why they are committed to changing our education system. They will use this story of self as they conduct one-to-ones and house meetings.

**BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS AND WORKING ALONG LINES OF DIFFERENCE**

In this session, Family Leaders create and examine identity maps as a starting point for discussing systems of oppression and how that relates to education. They also learn how to conduct an effective one-to-one, an organizing technique used to build relationships, gather information, and invest stakeholders in your work.
HOSTING HOUSE MEETINGS AND LEADING STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS

House meetings — also known as house parties — are a core organizing tactic in which leaders bring together members of their community to discuss issues that matter most to them. In this session, Family Leaders learn about the structures that make for an effective house meeting and engage with sample tools that they can use to plan their own house meetings. Family Leaders are also given agenda templates, group norms, and meeting minutes as well as work time to prepare an agenda for any other formal meeting they would like to host, including research meetings with decision-makers.

PUBLIC SPEAKING AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Family Leaders learn about two key forms of communication during this session. We discuss key components of great speeches and Family Leaders practice making their own public statements. We also discuss challenges that get in the way of strong communication and strategize about how to overcome them. Finally, we discuss some basic social media tactics and share general guidelines about how to effectively use social media.

PRESENTATION GUIDANCE

Family Leaders spend this session preparing for their graduation. They engage in a discussion about which sessions felt most impactful and then opt-in to a group based on the session that most mattered to them. These groups develop posters that explain why the topic felt particularly relevant, why it is important to their children and in their community, and how they can use the knowledge they gain in this session as advocates and leaders. At the graduation ceremony, Family Leaders discuss their posters with attendees and field questions about what they learned.

PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

During this celebratory session, Family Leaders reflect on what they learned throughout the FLIP and consider what they would like their leadership trajectories to look like now that they are graduates of the program. They also hear from Family Leaders Action Group (FLAG) leaders about possible next steps working within a current GO campaign, and give our team valuable feedback about how to improve the program moving forward.
FLP Graduation

The Family Leaders Program Graduation Ceremony is the culmination of our leaders’ hard work over their ten-week fellowship. This event helps Family Leaders to further internalize the takeaways from the program and to see themselves as the powerful advocates that they are.

The preparation for graduation begins with session nine, when Family Leaders identify their favorite sessions, prepare the posters they’ll be presenting at the graduation, and practice fielding questions. This is an important processing activity — it helps leaders to reflect on why they want to be advocates and how they’ve grown through their fellowship.

The graduation attendees matter as much as the activities. In addition to their families, we give Family Leaders tickets to give to potential applicants, and teachers or administrators at their school sites. We believe that good organizers excel at bringing other people into the work. Inviting potential applicants and educators helps Family Leaders to both practice their pitch and to be seen as advocates in their school communities. GO staff also invite other important community stakeholders, like school board members and district leaders, who can help reinforce that this event is an important achievement.

We treat this event like a true graduation ceremony. The fellowship is time-intensive and requires a high level of dedication — Family Leaders deserve to be recognized for their commitment. The event always includes a graduation speaker who champions the importance of family leadership and value that it brings to communities, and is regularly attended by a school board member, district cabinet member, and/or school leader. After the speaker finishes, we call each participant up to receive their completion certificate, a shirt formally identifying them as a GO Family Leader, and a small, aligned gift: a gift certificate to Starbucks to go have their next one-to-one on us.
Family Leaders Action Group (FLAG)

An avenue for alumni of our Family Leaders Program to deepen their knowledge, grow their networks, and take action.

After our first few Family Leaders Program cohorts graduated, we observed that our alumni were struggling to put what they had learned from the program into practice. We heard from some Family Leaders that they did not yet feel confident enough in the skills we had covered to begin advocating. Others had already earned leadership roles at their school sites in parent-teacher groups or on school site councils, but did not feel that those bodies offered enough opportunity for real change. At the time, we didn’t have consistent ways for FLP alumni to engage in our advocacy campaigns beyond one-off advocacy opportunities or board actions.

These challenges led to the development of the Family Leaders Action Group, or FLAG. FLAG is a monthly convening of FLP alumni who want to continue to build their skills and engage in advocacy campaign work. Unlike the FLP, which has a set curriculum that we try to execute to fidelity, the FLAG is not as structured.

The FLAG intentionally adapts along with the needs of a campaign or our leaders. One session might be a refresher on how to execute a house party in preparation for an upcoming listening campaign, while the next week might be a planning session for a board action. Ultimately, we want the FLAG to support Family Leaders toward the following three goals:

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**Family Leaders are deepening their knowledge**

The FLAG is intended to be an avenue for FLP alumni to continue to practice the skills they learned during the fellowship and to build their confidence as advocates. The FLAG meetings regularly include “refresher” sessions on key skills, with deeper opportunities for real-world practice. For instance, the Organizing and Advocacy FLP session touches on the importance of research meetings. Through the FLAG we will review that content while getting ready for a research meeting that Family Leaders will actually lead. We also often bring outside experts to FLAG meetings, especially when delving into topics with significant complexity, like district budgeting.

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**Family Leaders are taking action**

While the FLP is truly a learning experience for families, the FLAG is the program through which our leaders turn those learnings into action. We often describe the FLAG as our local organizing committee: FLAG leaders help us select campaign issues, investigate potential solutions, and publicly advocate for change. Through the FLAG, Family Leaders conduct research meetings with key district officials, plan public actions, write op-eds, gather signatures for sign-ons, host house meetings, or do whatever else the campaign needs to move forward.

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**Family Leaders are growing their own networks and, at the same time, GO’s network**

The FLAG is an opportunity for Family Leaders to build connections. Some of this occurs during actual FLAG meetings, which bring together leaders from multiple FLP cohorts and many different schools who wouldn’t otherwise know each other. But FLAG leaders also build their networks within their own school sites. FLAG members are asked to conduct learning sessions at their schools, including annual data talks, where they bring together other family members to review student achievement data for their school and the district at large. Leaders also grow their networks by pursuing formal leadership roles at their schools or district-wide committees.
FLAG Goes to Sacramento

At a FLAG meeting in early 2018, members were exploring California’s new school data tool, the California School Dashboard, and quickly realized that the tool was inadequate. Family Leaders found the data to be convoluted and were appalled that the tool was only accessible to non-English-speaking families through a Google Translate button, leading to an error-ridden translation.

These Family Leaders spearheaded GO’s inaugural state-level action to the State Capitol in May 2018 to share their concerns about the new tool with the State Board of Education. In a room of decision-makers and surrounded by lobbyists, FLAG members’ testimony served as an important reminder of the need for families to share their experiences and demand action at all levels of our education system. As the tool’s intended users, Family Leaders called out the Dashboard’s confusing rating system, the lack of parent engagement around the tool’s overall effectiveness, and — most importantly — the release of the tool without proper translation.

In September 2018, we were thrilled to learn that the California School Dashboard would be re-designed and translated. With more accessible and user-friendly data, parents will be better equipped to use student data to assess current school and program offerings and advocate for change.
Logistics Matter

On top of all of their other responsibilities, our Family Leaders work hard on our campaigns. When we host an FLP or FLAG meeting, we want the logistics to be flawless so that Family Leaders feel taken care of and ready to engage in the content.

Timing
We have found that weekday morning sessions are usually best for our leaders, since they often have obligations after school hours, but this varies from cohort-to-cohort. To ensure that we’re not excluding potential leaders because of the timing of our program, we have also hosted evening and weekend cohorts. No matter when the cohort is taking place, we always cross-reference potential fellowship dates with the local school calendar.

Child Care
Many of our leaders have children who are not yet school-aged. Providing child care during FLP sessions allows participants to more fully engage with the content.

Translation
When hosting Spanish-language FLP cohorts, translating our own materials is obviously essential. But we also work to ensure that when an English-speaking guest attends a session, families’ needs stay at the forefront. That means asking monolingual English speakers to wear translation headsets rather than Family Leaders.
GO Advocacy Framework

Our high-level approach to advocacy campaigns: we find the right issue, build our network and develop solutions, advocate for change, and ensure effective implementation.

GO’s family leadership programs are one component of our broader advocacy strategy. Each of our campaigns includes a mix of community leadership development, building a strong grassroots network, and producing communications to support our advocacy.

We initially developed the GO Advocacy Campaign Framework to help our teams conceptualize how a GO campaign works from start to finish. It presents a bird’s-eye view of a GO campaign — it is not meant to capture the nuance or uniqueness of any individual campaign. Different campaigns will emphasize different elements of the framework based on their context. This tool is meant to give us a common language to discuss campaign progress, both internally and externally.

One component of the GO Advocacy Campaign Framework is developing a campaign plan. This plan will describe how your particular campaign will operate. It will include strategies (your theories of how you will accomplish specific goals within your campaign) and tactics (the activities performed to implement your strategies). You can find a template campaign plan in our online toolkit at bit.ly/howwego.

Guiding Values

This framework is grounded in three core values. The first is community. We believe that we have a responsibility to work in collaboration with our community leaders and to rely upon their guidance. This is both a moral issue for us as well as a tactical one: we can’t exert political pressure to achieve our goals if we do not have a robust, diverse base behind our work. Creating such a base with integrity means working on campaigns that are meaningful to our community. Our leaders are involved in campaign development from the earliest stages of the framework, guiding our selection of issues and the development of initial, hypothetical solutions. The framework also contains regular check-in points with our local leadership councils to ensure that our planning and actions are aligned with their perspective and needs as community and organizational leaders.

This framework also values flexibility. This is partially necessary because GO operates in three unique communities; however, it’s also the case that different campaigns require very different sets of tactics. A highly technical campaign, like getting a district to pass more sustainable budget policies, requires a different approach than a campaign to reform a district’s exclusionary discipline policies, which will have broader public interest. This means that some of the components of our framework that feel most core to campaign victory — like Take a Stand or Take Action — are actually quite nebulous, allowing teams the leeway they need to achieve their goals. We also explicitly build planning and reflection into the action phase of our campaigns, to encourage teams to adjust course when necessary.

Finally, this framework is meant to value realism. Planning the most intricate, detailed campaign is useless if those plans aren’t grounded in what it actually takes to make change for young people. This is most relevant in the fourth phase of our campaign framework — Hold System Accountable — which focuses on policy implementation. If a school board passes the right resolutions were enough, then we would have already achieved our mission. We know that once those high-level policies are in place, we need to regroup and figure out how we’re going to get teachers, school leaders, and district staff members to actually execute on the changes.

### Evaluate Opportunity

A. Choose an issue  
B. Hypothesize initial solutions  
C. Identify resources  
D. Write campaign plan

### Develop Campaign Base and Solutions

A. Engage existing network  
B. Expand the base  
C. Influence grassroots  
D. Take a stand

### Advocate for Change — And Win

A. Take action  
B. Evaluate progress  
C. Capture learnings and celebrate wins  
D. Assess student impact

### Hold System Accountable

A. Determine ongoing strategy  
B. Write ongoing workplan  
C. Ensure policy becomes practice  
D. Assess student impact
Phase 1: Evaluate Opportunity

Informed by your community’s context and vision, develop an initial campaign direction. After testing your direction with the community, create a campaign plan.

At GO, we are clear that we are at our best when we are well-planned. The Evaluate Opportunity phase is all about getting ready to run a smart, impactful campaign. That process starts with selecting the right issue. We want to make sure that, whatever issue we end up working on, is one where:

- Our network is invested in addressing the issue,
- A win will make a significant impact on our community,
- GO will have a unique value add on the problem, and
- The timing is right to address this issue.

We actually decide on an issue through a collaborative — but often informal — process, which typically involves testing ideas through one-to-ones with members of the GO network and dedicated time with our fellowship cohorts and alumni. Ultimately, any new campaign must be approved by our local leadership council.

Once settled on an issue, we move to developing initial policy solutions. These could change over the course of the campaign, but it’s difficult to develop a campaign plan without a clear advocacy goal. In partnership with our leaders, we conduct research to help shape the goal, frame the problem, and find promising solutions. That includes gathering learnings from similar issue campaigns, locally or across the country, and conducting research meetings with local decision-makers to get their take on the issue. We also explicitly collect feedback from a diverse cross-section of our network, which usually looks like either a one-to-one listening campaign, a house meeting cycle, or engaging a study or leadership team to meet over a series of weeks to fully investigate the topic.

As we’re developing solutions, GO staff members do the necessary internal work to get ready for a new campaign. Which staff members are going to work on this campaign? Do we have the resources we need to successfully execute this campaign? If not, how can we procure them?

Finally, we begin working through our campaign plan template. This is not meant to be a tedious exercise in filling out paperwork — the intent is for teams to make sure they have fully thought through the various elements of their campaign. The plan asks teams to consider many of the tactical questions that will guide the next phases of the campaign, including developing their ideal outcome, examining who currently supports or opposes our position on this issue, determining the targets who we need to move to advance our campaign, and developing a strategy and set of tactics that will get us there. We also think through an internal work plan outlining goals, staff areas of responsibility, timing, campaign milestones, and internal structures that will help us to communicate efficiently and be as impactful as possible.
Gathering Community Input and Facilitating Action

GO is committed to ensuring that our community’s voice shapes the ongoing development of our campaigns. In addition to discussions with the Family Leaders Action Group, we often convene a dedicated group of community members to investigate the campaign issues that we are considering, align on potential solutions, and develop and execute campaign strategy.

**GO Fresno’s Transformers Program:** In the early stages of a campaign called Choosing Our Future, the GO Fresno team brought together a group of twenty educators for a four-month exploration into how we might transform schools to better meet the needs of all of our students. The cohort took part in interactive seminars that exposed them to the latest ideas in school transformation, visited innovative schools across California, and developed a vision of the future of Fresno schools, which they presented to leaders and educators from across the city.

**GO West Contra Costa’s Data in Action Study Team:** To kick off their first-ever campaign, GO West Contra Costa assembled a team of families, educators, and community allies to investigate how their school district could use data to drive decisions for students. The study team conducted months of research, held several conversations with stakeholders, and developed a set of initial campaign recommendations to kick off GO’s advocacy campaign. To learn more about this study team’s work, check out the Bringing It All Together section of this document.

**GO Oakland’s Campaign Action Team:** GO Oakland’s Campaign Action Team is the heart of their 1Oakland campaign, which seeks to increase quality, equity, and sustainability across Oakland’s public schools. This diverse group of Oakland stakeholders includes recent Oakland public school alumni, parents, grandparents, teachers, and other allies, and is divided into subgroups which focus on advocacy, outreach, and communications tactics for the campaign. These campaign activities have led to multiple 1Oakland-aligned policy wins.
Phase 2: Develop Campaign Base and Solutions

Build a campaign base, made up of previously engaged community members and people new to the organization, in preparation for making public campaign demands.

We do not have power if we do not have a strong community network behind us. Develop Campaign Base and Solutions is primarily about maintaining the health of our network, both in terms of their numbers and their knowledge about our issue.

We always start developing a campaign by re-engaging our past leaders. Once settled on a topic, we start ramping up our network communications to ensure that our committed and regular supporters are informed on our campaign, participating in early tactics, and providing feedback on the campaign’s direction. By this point in the campaign, our FLAG leaders will have already been deeply engaged, and likely have reached out to current and past FLP participants. If we’ve used “study team” tactics in Phase 1, we typically continue those meetings as a venue for our strongest supporters to continue their engagement.

From experience, we know that it’s simply the case that some members of our regular base will opt out of any given campaign, due to competing interests or busy personal lives. That means that we need to use every campaign as an opportunity to grow our network, not just engage the participants we relied on during our last campaign. This might include house meetings with current supporters who want to help us grow the network, one-on-ones with people who are interested in GO, organizing speakers on our issue to come speak to a public audience, and/or a robust digital media campaign aimed at getting new followers to engage with our campaign.

In addition to building our grassroots base, we also spend time strengthening Grassroots support during Phase 2. We need to ensure that the individuals who are most influential on education decision-making in our communities are informed about the campaign and have opportunities to give feedback on campaign direction. This helps us to identify key leaders whose support will make our campaign more viable. We also try to engage “inside champions” — supporters from previous campaigns with positional power — who can provide us with progress updates and support the implementation of the new policy after we win.

Once our grassroots base is ready to activate and we have lined up an initial set of Grassroots supporters, we take a big, public stand on our issue.

That will include sharing the precise policies we want to see changed, often in conjunction with a digital media campaign, launch event, earned media mentions, or a low-lift action, like a petition.

Phase 3: Advocate for Change — and Win

Execute your campaign plan with the support and leadership of your base, adapting to new conditions as they arise. Once you’ve won, capture your learnings and celebrate with your community.

When people hear “advocacy campaign”, the first thing that comes to mind is the big public moment, the rally, the protest, or the pivotal vote. In fact, this moment is only possible when we execute the strategies and tactics that have been identified in our campaign plan in the earlier phases and build the momentum and base necessary to have power in the ecosystem.

Whatever tactics we choose to reach a win, one non-negotiable element in our campaign plan is frequent communication to our network about how the work is progressing and how individuals can meaningfully engage. This not only supports the success of our chosen strategy and tactics for this campaign, but ensures that community members who are unable to participate stay connected and engaged with our work.

During this phase of execution, we continue to monitor the impact and efficacy of our strategies to make sure that we are on track for success. We pulse check with key stakeholders and decision-makers who are engaged in our work, monitor the engagement of our network and the broader public in the issue, and evaluate whether we’re gathering the right evidence and data that we need to guide our work. We may also choose to set new interim goals or shift strategy entirely as we put our planning into practice and the situation on the ground evolves.

In our context, Phase 3 usually leads to a vote or a series of votes where our proposed solutions are put up for approval through a governing body. Once action has been taken on our proposed solutions — whether the outcome be a win or a loss — we always take time to capture our learnings. We gather as much evidence as we have available to us and try to answer the following questions:

- Which tactics successfully moved decision-makers and influencers? Which tactics didn’t?
- Which tactics best engaged the GO network to take action and invested them in our campaign? Which didn’t?
- Which tactics worked to elevate public awareness? Which tactics didn’t?
- Which tactics worked to influence other grassroots allies? Which didn’t?
- Which tactics worked to engage funders? Which tactics didn’t?

As we reach this significant milestone of the campaign, we set aside time to celebrate the journey with our network. Whether or not we achieved what we set out to accomplish, there will be a next campaign that will require our network’s attention. We meaningfully engage our network in the debrief and learnings. Additionally, we have found that a happy hour, holiday party, or barbeque can go a long way toward keeping our network energized and engaged.
Phase 4: Hold System Accountable

Ensure that your policy change translates to student achievement by monitoring implementation, developing sustainable community leadership, and communicating about progress.

It’s tempting to think that once the school board votes on your policy, or the parcel tax you have been working on passes, your work is complete — but this is far from the case. We find that our campaigns regularly face their most serious challenges during implementation. Campaigns get stuck here because the implementation of a new policy is often the responsibility of individuals who are less susceptible to public political pressure than the elected officials who originally passed the policy.

We think of Phase 4 as a microcosm of the full campaign framework. We begin by stepping back to think about what a new, implementation-level campaign plan looks like. We often need very different tactics to accomplish our goals during implementation. The people responsible for executing the new policy may be apathetic toward the shift, think that the old way of doing things was better, or have a genuine lack of expertise in the new policy. No matter the hurdle, large public actions are rarely as effective during implementation as they are in getting a policy passed.

One particular consideration for implementation is the need to develop durable community leadership dedicated to the issue. As issues in our communities evolve and our priorities shift, we need to ensure that there’s a dedicated group of community members, beyond our staff, that help the issue stay on track through implementation. This is easiest when there is some sort of commission or oversight committee built into the original passed policy.

We also seek to take time, while planning, to think about how we are going to monitor the ongoing impact of our campaigns on student outcomes. Teams should have done the work to account for this need on the front-end of the campaign, establishing a regular reporting schedule as part of the passed policy and investing high-level decision-makers in the importance of progress monitoring.

Once our plan is set, we begin working to ensure that the policy we passed is implemented effectively. Just as in Phase 3, we continue to regularly assess whether our tactics are having the impact we sought and monitor support or opposition from key stakeholders and the public. We also seek to ensure that we are continuing to dedicate an appropriate amount of energy to the campaign, ideally tapering over time to allow community leaders to take full ownership to steward the work forward.
Bringing it all Together:
GO West Contra Costa’s Data in Action Campaign

Now that we have made it through our family leadership programming and the GO Advocacy Campaign Framework, it is time to bring it all together. In this final section we will share a case study of a full GO campaign, from Phase 1 through Phase 4.

The campaign we’re profiling is GO West Contra Costa’s Data in Action campaign. This campaign was launched in recognition that data is a foundational need, critical to both informing school and district decision-making and effectively supporting increased student achievement. Alongside members of the community, GO West Contra Costa chose to take on this work because of our shared belief that students deserve access to the most effective programming, scheduling, and use of limited resources, and the reality that we cannot make such decisions without evaluation of program and staff effectiveness.

Throughout this profile, we try to draw specific attention to the ways that our family leadership programs show up throughout the course of the campaign. But this is an instance where we were building the plane as we were flying it: the Family Leaders Program (FLP) and Family Leaders Action Group (FLAG) did not exist when we began this campaign.

We chose to profile this campaign because we think it gives particular insight into the continued evolution of our family leadership activities and why we have chosen to invest so deeply in our Family Leaders.

Phase 1: Evaluate Opportunity

The Data in Action campaign was born through a community data walk that we hosted specifically focused on African-American student achievement. At this data walk, community members were rightfully appalled by the information they saw and also shocked that they hadn’t seen the data before. In ad-hoc conversations, attendees communicated that they felt as though the district was hiding information from them by failing to publicly disaggregate data and recognize their failure to serve African-American students.

At the same time, we were also hearing a similar refrain in our one-to-ones with educators, who were feeling like they had limited access to the data they needed to be effective in their roles. They reported having little to no support in gathering or analyzing student data, and having to go to multiple district departments to get their hands on assessment results because of confusion about who was responsible for holding and disseminating the information.

We began to notice this pattern at school board meetings as well. Trustees were rarely given what we believed to be adequate information to make decisions. They were asked to approve programmatic and staffing shifts without a full accounting of the goals of the program, benchmarks to monitor success, or even detailed fiscal implications.

Phase 2: Develop Campaign Base and Solutions

This campaign launched before we had developed the Family Leaders Program (FLP), therefore we developed our campaign direction by assembling a “study team” of parents, educators, and community members representing schools from across West Contra Costa. That team conducted multiple months of research and held several conversations with stakeholders. The group was in search of a programmatic recommendation to increase African-American student achievement. Each time a proposed solution was raised, the roadblock was a lack of sufficient data to understand what was, or was not, currently working. This raised a critical question: if we could not make confident recommendations, how could our elected leaders possibly be making informed and impactful decisions?

At this point our campaign direction became clear: we needed a suite of policy solutions that would improve the district’s use of data from the classroom to the boardroom. We tested this idea with our leadership council and the community members who had helped guide the campaign’s direction, and received sufficient positive feedback to move the campaign forward. The team then developed the initial Data in Action policy recommendations for WCCUSD.

Our experience leading this study team was critical to the development of the FLP. We found that the parent participants on the study team really struggled to engage. Their content knowledge wasn’t as strong as the other participants (many of whom were educators or non-profit leaders in the education sector), and they lacked experience navigating these formal spaces where data, budgets, and research were contemplated to drive policy recommendations.
Together, these two items affected parent confidence to share individual perspectives, experience, and expertise. In many ways, the content in the first FLP cohort — which was founded shortly after the study team began meeting — was built to address these issues. We wanted Family Leaders to know that their voice was critical when designing policy solutions and we tailored our sessions to both build our Family Leaders’ confidence and their policy knowledge about education issues.

After the study team crafted their recommendations and we facilitated our first two FLP cohorts in early 2017, it was time to take a stand. Through our study team, we had assembled a number of representatives from influential organizations in our community. With that foundation, we were able to draft a coalition letter calling for changes to the district’s use of data that was signed by 16 different organizations and over 100 individuals. We then publicly presented that letter and the study team’s recommendations at a board meeting at the end of the 2016-17 school year. While many organizations had signed on to our letter, no group was more visibly present at this board action than our FLP participants.

Phase 3: Advocate for Change — And Win

After the first board action, our Family Leaders became the public face of the Data in Action campaign. About ten Family Leaders Program alumni began participating in weekly meetings with two West Contra Costa Unified board members who were interested in championing a data-use policy. This was in many ways the informal launch of the Family Leaders Action Group (FLAG). These ten leaders held pre-meetings to prepare for their time with the board members and to continue to build their policy and meeting facilitation skills. Ultimately, Family Leaders and the WCCUSD co-constructed a resolution asking the district’s use of strategic data to drive decision-making and to produce “timely and actionable data” that would be “readily accessible by educators, families, the community, and decision-makers.”

While Family Leaders and board members were working on the new resolution, GO West Contra Costa staff worked to maintain public attention on our issue. We leveraged our weekly network emails and social media channels to push out a petition inviting community members to sign on to the same coalition letter presented at the first board action. This work not only drew in new supporters, but also helped give members of our network a shareable opportunity to bring their own networks into the work.

Once Family Leaders and board members finished the resolution, our full network of families geared up for more public advocacy to win the vote. The Family Leaders who helped craft the data resolution presented it at a board of education meeting in the fall of 2017, and were supported by a crowd of fellow FLP participants and alumni.

This second board action led to the GO WCC network’s first major victory in the campaign: unanimous support from the school board for the data resolution and the allocation of new funding committing the district to equity-focused, strategic use of data.

Phase 4: Hold System Accountable

Despite the passage of the data resolution, West Contra Costa Unified staff’s actual behavior did not immediately shift. Staff continued to come to the board with presentations that were severely lacking in evidence to guide decision-making, including proposals like a request to shift many of the district’s K-8 schools to K-8 without any accompanying information. In response, we began leveraging a modified version of Harvard’s Strategic Use of Data rubric to publicly critique the district’s work.

The full critiques were too detailed for many members of our broader network to engage with. However, in this instance they were not the intended audience. The overall score or rating was enough to clearly indicate to the broader public that the reports were inadequate and to build momentum and pressure for a change in practice. Additionally, they served as an important resource for school board members trying to hold the superintendent and his staff accountable for improving the information they were receiving. We regularly supported board members to grow their own capacity to better understand our evaluations and the key areas for growth through ongoing one-to-one’s.

While we were conducting public evaluations and coaching board members, we were also in the early stages of founding our Family Leaders Action Group (FLAG). The FLAG’s early meetings centered around the district’s slow implementation of the data policy, with time spent reviewing the poor rubric evaluations. As the lack of progress continued into early 2018, the FLAG became frustrated with board members’ ineffectiveness at holding staff accountable. They decided to pursue another public show of force in hopes of demonstrating to the elected officials that they were still paying attention to this issue, and turned out families to a board meeting in April 2018.

This pressure led to almost immediate updates to WCCUSD public dashboards, as well as reaffirmed commitments to uphold the resolution by multiple board members, sharing of a draft tool providing data on LCAP strategies, and conversations and collaboration between the superintendent and GO leaders to increase effective data practices.

The work did not end there. We have continued to drive towards full implementation of the 2017 resolution. Through board actions, ongoing ratings of staff proposals, feedback on the superintendent’s strategic plan, and community engagement and learning opportunities, we have grown a large base of community allies and supporters who have joined the call to action. In August 2019, the board passed a change to their formal bylaws to mandate that all staff reports and contractor agreements include a robust set of data aligned to best practices lifted up in the Harvard Strategic Use of Data rubric.

Without dedicated Family Leaders who feel real ownership over this work and confidence navigating the complex content, we would have faced a far more challenging path to advancing these changes and maintaining the necessary stamina to persist through the long campaign cycle.
Lessons Learned and Ongoing Challenges

Lessons Learned

Knowing is Different from Doing

We formed the Family Leaders Program to help build the confidence and skills of the family members in our network. But many graduates of the ten-week program still did not feel confident and ready to take on advocacy roles at their school sites nor prepared to engage in systemic campaign work with GO. This led us to create the Family Leaders Action Group, where alumni of the FLP could continue to grow and develop and gain more experience applying the skills they had learned through the FLP program.

Onboard Leaders Effectively

Just like in a job, we have learned that it is critical to both select and onboard new Family Leaders effectively. For a program like the FLP, it is important to ensure that each participant will contribute positively to the culture of the cohort. We seek to foster a culture of openness, curiosity, growth, and conviction, and we have found that if even one person is not committed to that same culture and aligned to our organizational values, the whole group suffers.

To this end, we take the time to connect with each participant before they have walked in the door, both to build positive culture and to be clear with our leaders about the expectations for participating in the program. We also employ a rubric (included in our online toolkit) that helps us ensure prospective Family Leaders have the mindsets necessary for success in the program.

Ensure that Facilitators Get Appropriate Professional Development

Our first-ever FLP facilitator was a former educator and a county-wide teacher of the year. Despite her strong instructional background, she felt that additional professional development was critical to her success leading the FLP program. Facilitators need coaching on adult learning techniques and regular feedback on their session execution, especially in the early days of the program. Some of that feedback can come from participants, but there is no substitute for a dedicated observer spending time in the room observing the facilitator’s technique.

Ongoing Challenges

Leader Burnout

Our most motivated Family Leaders are often involved in other programs, activities, or leadership roles, which can lead to initiative fatigue. We are working to help our leaders stay balanced, while simultaneously building a base of committed core members with the capacity to contribute to our work long term.

Nearly All Monolingual Spanish

So far all but two of our FLP cohorts have been conducted exclusively in Spanish. Yet we are clear that there are many non-Spanish-speaking student groups that are being underserved by the schools in our communities. We must do a better job establishing relationships and trust with other parent communities; however, we also know that once we do we will face the logistical challenge of bringing together a FLAG where participants speak different languages and come from different perspectives.

Getting Buy In From Partners and Other Family Members

The FLP and FLAG can be significant time commitments, which can leave Family Leaders’ partners and family members frustrated. That frustration is taxing for our leaders. We are currently exploring ways to engage Family Leaders’ families in the work through a short “bootcamp,” which we hope will ensure partners and family members better understand the work and its importance to our communities through firsthand experience.
How to Learn More

Whether you’re building a brand new family leadership organization or are trying to improve an existing program, we want to help!

1. Check out our folder with more detailed resources at http://bit.ly/howwego, which includes:
   - Family Leadership Fellowship Program scope and sequence, sample lesson plans, and session materials
   - Sample Family Leaders Action Group agendas, action plans, and experiences
   - Our full Advocacy Campaign Framework, with details on each of the fifteen subphases, and a planning tool to help new campaigns get off the ground
   - Other resources on the topics covered in this paper that have guided our thinking

2. Talk with us! We’d love to hear more about the work you’re doing and talk to you about our experiences in-person, over video chat, or on the phone. Send an email to howwego@gopublicschools.org to connect with us.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In 2016, GO West Contra Costa (WCC) envisioned a program designed to help parents develop the skills needed to sit beside decision-makers at tables of power. When the first cohort of Family Leaders graduated that same fall, GO WCC had no idea just how impactful this program would become. Now over 230 alumni strong, the Family Leaders Program and the Family Leaders Action Group are essential to all of GO Public Schools’ work. We want to thank GO WCC for pioneering this work and for helping to establish a Family Leaders’ presence in Fresno, and now, across the country.

We are eternally grateful to every Family Leader who has participated in our program, informed the evolution of our curriculum, and dedicated time and effort to improving outcomes for young people in the communities we serve.

We also want to thank GO staff — past and current — who have meaningfully contributed to the programs and frameworks detailed in this report. Getting to this point was a team effort and many individuals played a critical role.

We are especially thankful for Mariana Abdalla, whose graphic artistry brought this report to life. You can find out more about her work at www.marianaabdalla.com.

This publication was made possible by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. The statements made and views expressed are solely the responsibility of GO Public Schools. We are grateful to the Carnegie Corporation and their team for their belief in this cause and dedication to spreading these tools and lessons learned to others working on behalf of our nation’s students.
About GO Public Schools

GO Public Schools is a nonprofit organization that works with families, educators, and community allies to win advocacy campaigns that promote equitable education systems and transformational schools. We envision a day when all schools prepare every child regardless of skin color, family income, home language, or neighborhood to succeed in our rapidly evolving world. We aim to equip all children for a world none of us can fully envision. That means schools that prize knowledge, creativity, and habits of mind and heart to solve new problems in new ways — and that recognize we do not have a single child to lose.

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