



PROMOTING PARENT AND COMMUNITY ADVOCACY AND ACTION FOR EDUCATION EQUITY

The South has a long and persistent history of racism and social inequality which far too often prevents children of color and low-income children from accessing real opportunity within the education system and beyond. Despite students of color and those from low-income families being a majority of the public-school populations in the South – and increasingly across the nation – a growing number of states are directing public funding away from public schools to support attendance at majority-white private schools. Twelve of the 17 southern states are currently using voucher and tax credit programs to shift public funds into private schools while six states in the South invest less than \$10,000 per student in public schools, well below the national average of \$12,602.¹ These and other policies contribute to significant and persistent achievement gaps between children of color and their white peers.

Because parents and communities of color and low-income communities have experienced the systemic barriers that sustain and reinforce inequities, they can and should be key partners in efforts to overcome them. The Southern Education Foundation (SEF) is supporting comprehensive, multi-faceted approaches to strengthen local and regional infrastructures that support community advocacy and action, including focused efforts to engage and support parents and communities.

Through **Parent and Community Engagement Pathways to Advocacy (PCPA)**, SEF is building the capacity of families and communities to drive efforts to eradicate the policies and practices that allow race and class to be the most reliable predictor of student success. PCPA is:

- Equipping parents and community leaders with the skills necessary to navigate the complex landscape of public education;
- Supporting parents and community members in being a voice for equity and excellence in education;
- Linking students, parents, families, schools, and community stakeholders in learning opportunities that move them from individual involvement in school improvement to collective advocacy and action.

PCPA builds on pilot efforts that have been leveraging the Atlanta Public Schools (APS) system’s GO Teams to help parents promote equity and excellence in education. GO Teams engage parents, educators, and community members in the decision-making process, including approving school budgets and selecting principals. Since 2016, SEF has been investing in tailored training opportunities for the GO Teams in two APS school “clusters” – including the high schools and all of the elementary and middle schools that “feed” into them. The trainings are designed to deepen team members’ understanding of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and state and local ESSA implementation plans and help them use data to advance equity and excellence in local schools.

Responding to requests from community groups across metro Atlanta for similar training opportunities, SEF is exploring partnerships with other family leadership and engagement programs that could work with parents in other metro area school districts. It is also planning to leverage the statewide network of communities engaged in the Get Georgia Reading Campaign, Georgia’s statewide third grade reading strategy. With local campaigns in more than 100 communities, SEF can support leaders in those local efforts in promoting parent leadership and racial equity. As it expands and refines these parent- and community-focused efforts across Georgia, SEF plans to integrate them into programs it is implementing in other states across the region.

¹ National Education Association. “Rankings of the States 2018 and Estimates of School Statistics 2019.” April 2019. Accessed on August 27, 2019 at: <http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/2019%20Rankings%20and%20Estimates%20Report.pdf>.