**Parent Engagement**

*Chapter Goals: After reading this chapter, you will be able to:*

* Explain the importance of parent engagement and identify some strategies to find shared experiences and values
* Differentiate between advocacy and mobilization
* Discuss different tacts for parent engagement

Part I - Your Position as a Leader for Parent Engagement

As a parent, you are uniquely positioned to be an advocacy leader for school choice. Your connection to the issue is clear - you want the best education possible for your children and the children in your community. In reading this curriculum and in getting involved in advocacy efforts to support school choice, you are already demonstrating your investment and commitment to the cause of education.

If you are going to be a leader in a social movement to improve education, you can’t just rely on yourself. You have to bring others into the arena as well. In this chapter, *we will focus on engaging other parents to build an effective advocacy effor*t.

We define **parent** **engagement** **as getting parents involved, excited, and passionate about a school choice issue in your community**. Parents might show their engagement differently. Some parents might be able to attend a school board meeting alongside you, while others might be more limited in how they can get involved. As a leader of an advocacy effort, you should be constantly thinking about how you can get parents more interested and invested in your work. While every parent might not be equally involved, you should be building many different opportunities to get parents engaged with your advocacy work and meet them where they are.

There is no better person to lead parent engagement work than you. We will discuss ways that you can leverage your experiences, network, and values to create a strong ground game of parents excited to change the future of education for their children. Also, check out our [Parent Engagement Guide](https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1mgUPaBhUtt-bHvf6J4A9W90lEDQCnPhe) for some creative ideas around how to best get parents involved with your campaign for school choice.

Part II - Lead with Stories

In Chapter 6, we discussed why storytelling is an effective tactic when doing advocacy work. Keep that in mind when you are trying to engage other parents with advocacy. Think about your story and about what parts of your story other parents might be able to connect with.

You and other parents already have a **shared experience** - you all have children. It’s also safe to assume that other parents will have the shared values of wanting the best education possible for their children.

This is a great place to start with your engagement. When you are reaching out to parents about your advocacy efforts, use language that highlights this shared experience and shared values. Use stories that you think other parents will relate to - maybe they’ve also experienced a particular frustration or experience with a school.

If you are looking to gain some more additional information about the experiences and values of parents, it might be helpful to lead a **conversation series**. These conversations can take a few different formats - they can happen over the phone, on Zoom, or even in-person.

During your conversation series, you should be looking to learn about the experience and values of other parents. Additionally, you should be listening to their interest in education advocacy work and the potential for them to get involved in your advocacy efforts.

To help you with these conversation seriesmeetings, we put together this list of questions that you can use to help you plan your conversations with other parents. These conversations should be natural, so no need to follow these questions exactly. You can pull the questions that are most aligned to your advocacy effort.

During these conversations, we recommend taking notes. That way when you conclude yourconversation series, you can review your notes and pull out some additional shared experiences and shared values that seem to be common in your community. As you identify these shared experiences and values, you will want to align your engagement to them. Use language, tell stories, and bring up ideas that you are having a conversation with.

**Tips and Tricks**: It can also be helpful to write **a** **synthesis** of your conversation series. A synthesis is where you pull the different themes, stories, experiences, and values that you heard in your conversation series and discuss them in a document. While this will require an investment of time on the frontend, this document will be helpful as you try to further engage parents. It will be your guide for bringing in more parents to your advocacy effort.

Part III - Advocacy and Mobilization

In pursuing a parent engagement strategy that is rooted in shared experience and shared values, we are looking to train and transform parents into advocates. We want parents to become independent leaders who are researching school issues and taking actions on their own. As advocacy leaders, our charge might be earning the initial interest of other parents and giving them the tools to get started. Longterm, we will help train and transform parents into advocacy leaders.

The reason for this strategy - strength in numbers. Our movement for educational choice will be much stronger and durable if we have a cadre of leaders who are all inspired to be advocacy leaders within their communities. Instead of just a few people serving as leaders, the goal of an advocacy effort should be to have a deep bench of leaders who can sustain the movement. This is true effective advocacy work.

Quality advocacy work focuses on turning others (in this case other parents) into leaders. Sometimes, advocacy is lumped in with the term **mobilization**. Mobilization is a term that has its roots in the military. The term describes preparing and deploying individuals to take a specific action.

**Advocacy** and **mobilization** are not synonymous. While advocacy is focused on building people into champions and leaders of a cause, mobilization is focused on getting people to take one specific action (often showing up to a rally or signing a petition).

Mobilization isn’t a bad thing. Some of the best advocacy leaders will use mobilization tactics to get people to take one time actions. Advocates will mobilize volunteers to attend a protest, show up at committee meetings, or participate in a letter writing campaign.

We are differentiating between the two terms because you should be aiming to turn parents into advocates, not just mobilizing them. While your advocacy efforts can have moments where you temporarily mobilize other parents, you should always be aiming longterm to turn other parents into advocates. This will make the movement for educational choice stronger.

Part IV - Advocacy Tactics

Now that we’ve given you a background on parent engagement, we will provide an overview of some helpful tactics for parent engagement. Read these different tactics below and pick the advocacy tactics that best align with your campaign goals:

* **House Meetings** - This is a group version of the individual conversation in your conversation tour. In a house meeting, you want to host a small group of friends, family, neighbors, and acquaintances. In house meetings you want to give time for everyone to introduce themselves and share stories about their experience with the education system. The goal of house meetings is usually to build and understand shared experiences and values. You can also use these house meetings to tell small groups of people about your advocacy effort. You want to build community in these meetings, so it can be nice to host these meetings in your home. While the size of these meetings can change, you want to make sure that everyone has enough time to share (usually between 5-10 is best). You can also host meetings online if that is easier for people that you want to invite.
  + **Activity:** Plan your first House Meeting. Think about a group of 5-10 friends that you want to invite to discuss education in your community. Where do you want to have the House Meeting? Your house? A coffee shop? Maybe the library? You can start building an agenda and think about the topics that you want to cover. You want to make sure you are giving people time to introduce themselves, share their experience with the education system, and talk about why they are interested in engaging in an advocacy campaign around school choice. Maybe even think about a date when you could hold this first meeting and put it on your calendar.
* **One-on-one** - One-on-ones are a great follow-up to the conversation that you have with someone in the conversation series. One-on-ones are a key part of any community organizing effort. In a one-on-one, you want to discuss the goals of your advocacy effort with the person that you are meeting with. Additionally, you want to discuss ways that you can engage the person in your organizing effort.
* [**Newsletter**](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1PnGMgSy72BOTKp-JbbgPAOOto0hijN0cHaqwPbJNlL0/edit) - Newsletters are a great way to keep other parents informed about your advocacy efforts. In your newsletter, you want to identify the goals of your advocacy effort, provide updates, talk about progress on goals, and give readers a clear way to get involved. You want to set up a consistent cadence for your newsletter. While you want to make sure that people are staying updated on your work, you also don’t want to overwhelm yourself.
* [**Blogging/Vlogging**](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ENRmTGidMEehrxEwOEoH0zfaGMq_fLMDlWGptYuF3As/edit) - This is another great way to provide written updates to other parents. There are a number of excellent free or low cost providers that you can use to launch a website or blog. Similar to newsletters, you want to keep your blog focused on the goals of your advocacy effort, provide updates, talk about progress on goals, and give readers a clear way to get involved. If you would rather use video instead of writing articles, vlogging can be an excellent option. Vlogging is even more inclusive and easier to access than blogging. Similar to blogging, you want to focus on goals, updates, progress and ways to get involved.
* [**Social Media Guide**](https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1mgUPaBhUtt-bHvf6J4A9W90lEDQCnPhe) - Social Media is a great tool for communicating your story and updating others about the progress of your school choice advocacy efforts. There are some best practices to keep in mind as you think about using social media as a tool for your advocacy campaign.

*After reading this chapter, we hope that you have deepened your understanding of why parent engagement is important. This chapter included some ways to learn more about the shared values and experiences of parents you are attempting to engage. We also distinguished between advocacy and mobilization and talked about why you should be aiming for advocacy in your parent engagement efforts. We have also included some tactics to inspire your efforts to engage other parents.*