**Creating Influence**

*Chapter Goals:*

* Review three different case studies of successful community advocates and learn more about the influence that they created
* Identify strategies for building influence

Part I - Introduction

In starting to think about advocacy for a school choice issue in your community, you are starting to think about influence. Advocacy and influence are deeply intertwined. The best advocates not only have substantial influence (they can persuade important leaders, other parents, and community members), but they know when to strategically exert that influence.

**Influence is the ability to shift others’ values, beliefs, and decisions**. When you are thinking about influence in the context of advocacy, it often means shifting hearts and minds. The advocacy that we are focusing on is parent advocacy. In your position, it’s critical to be able to influence other parents.

We will start this chapter off with three case studies of parents from across the country who excel at creating influence. Then we will identify some commonalities and give you a clear picture around how to create influence in your community.

Part II - Case Studies

Below, we describe three parents that have been effective in creating influence in their own community. We have changed their name and locations for the purpose of this curriculum, but their stories and experience are pulled from the field of education advocacy work. After we describe these three advocates, we will identify some commonalities that they share and these should give you an idea around how to create influence in your community.

* **Eva** - Although the school choice community in Eva’s state is small, everyone in that community knows Eva. Eva successfully navigated a different school choice option for each of her three children. Each of these options served that particular child well. Eva had to fight hard to get each child the specific type of education experience that matched their needs. In understanding the choice options in her state, Eva amassed a substantial amount of information. While Eva is an everyday parent, her wealth of information has positioned her to build relationships with leaders across her community and her state. She knows what’s going on behind closed doors at the State House. Eva is also well known by school providers; she is known by leadership at district offices and within schools. Eva spent a significant amount of time becoming an expert and eventually a resource for other parents. Besides knowing a lot about the policy and laws that govern school choice in the community, Eva knows when and where to tell other parents to show up to advocate for the school choice cause. As a result of this wealth of information, Eva doesn’t back down. Whether it’s standing up to elected leaders or to other parents who might be challenging her dedication to school choice, Eva knows the law, policy, and information, and she wields that knowledge to be an influential advocacy leader in the state. Since she doesn’t back down, Eva has come to be known as a lightning rod around the state. As more schools have looked to expand to Eva’s community, they are outwardly seeking Eva as a validator. Education providers are looking to have Eva on their side and the network of people that look to her with her knowledge and advice. Eva is seen as an important coalition partner for any education advocacy campaign in her community.
* **Travis** - Travis resides in a big state with significant school choice options. Parents across the state know Travis well because of the wealth of data that he has access to. Travis has a significant amount of data at his disposal. Travis has information on topics ranging from school choice, to school discipline, to participation in after school programming, Travis knows where to find the data. Additionally, Travis does a great job breaking down and analyzing data for parents who might be less familiar with school choice issues. Travis has created a number of resources that breaks data down into forms that parents can read and understand. Across the State, Travis is known as the data expert by both education leaders and community members. Travis is often invited into conversations because of his expertise and he is trusted by a variety of important groups.
* **Sophia** - Sophia is a parent leader at a charter school in a big city. She loves sharing stories. Whether it’s telling the stories of how she helped her four kids navigate charter schools throughout the city, or using her Facebook to spotlight other parents around the city, Sophia is constantly sharing the experiences of parents and students. Sophia is a regular at school board meetings and she often testifies to provide parent input and perspective. When the local news is reporting on a local education story and they are looking for a parent’s perspective, they often ask Sophia. Because of Sophia’s involvement and her storytelling abilities, she was recently offered a board position at one of the city’s largest charter school networks. She is currently deciding whether to run for school board. Many of the parents she meets and talks with are always encouraging her to run. Sophia often hears, “You get it! You would be the perfect voice for parents like us on the school board.”

Part III - What is takes to create influence

While we selected three case studies to explore, there are thousands of parents out there doing important and effective work for kids. These are not the only ways to make change in a community. Instead, we thought these profiles have some characteristics that will be helpful to understand as you are starting out as an advocate for school choice in your community.

From the three stories above and in supporting advocates across the country in building influence in their communities, we have noticed that there are some things in common amongst the people who’ve successfully built that influence.

Some tactics that have allowed people to create influence in the past include:

* **Knowing your superpower** - Each of the people in the three stories in this chapter have a clear superpower. Eva’s superpower is the information that she knows and wields. Travis is a data expert. Sophia has the power of story. All of these three advocates have a clear superpower and they know how to use it. They leverage their superpower to build trust and create relationships with other parents and important civic leaders. Their superpower gives them confidence in their leadership and allows them to build influence. You don’t have to have one of the superpowers described in this chapter. Your superpower could be relationship building, convening people, connecting with teachers, or something not in this list. It’s important to know your superpower and to leverage it as a community leader. If you are still looking to figure out your superpower, ask the people you trust the most. What do they think makes you an effective leader? Whatever that superpower is, leverage it as you prepare to build influence.
* **Having a clear position** - All of these leaders are clear in their support of school choice. They also know the issues well enough to have clear positions on all of the laws, policies, and regulations involved with school choice. Their superpowers and their networks have given them the information and experience they need to form a clear position on the important education issues. If you are still looking to define your position on some of the key education issues in your community, think about who you trust. Also consider who is a respected local leader on the issues that you care most about. Then, try and connect with them and ask them their position. Ask them how and why they formed that position. Utilize your network to try to become as informed as possible. With a clear position, you can think about who you need to build influence with and what tactics you will pursue to build that influence.
* **Being a connector** - All of three of these people are connectors. Whether it’s using their superpower to provide people with information like data, or using stories to make connections, someone with influence has a strong network and they know how to connect people. They know how to wield their network to “powermap” or plan to build connection and influence with someone. Check out your template on power mapping and you can even try doing some power mapping of your own. A key part of influence is not only having a strong network of people that you know, but also having a plan and strategy for meeting and forming relationships with people that you don’t know yet.

**Activity**

Think about how you are well positioned to create influence. Think about the following:

* **What is your superpower?** If you aren’t quite sure yet, think about what your super power could be.
* **What is your clear position?** Why do you support school choice? What are the school choice issues that you particularly want to focus on?
* **Be a connector** -In your existing network, who can you connect people with? Is it other parents? Is it a particular community leader? While it’s important for you to think about who you want to connect with, you should also have a strong understanding of who you can connect other people with.

**Tips and Tricks**: Speaking of connecting people, **don’t underestimate the power of an introduction**. When you are meeting with a variety of different stakeholders and you are thinking about the goal of a meeting or a possible next step from a conversation, an introduction is a great answer. If you are consistently and strategically introducing people to one another, you should have a steady stream of new people that you are meeting. This will help you build influence. If you are looking to connect with a well known leader, you might ask someone in their network for an introduction. While we don’t recommend starting the conversation by asking someone for an introduction to a local leader, once you develop a relationship with someone, asking for a recommendation in that person’s network is a great ask. Acknowledging the power of the introduction will help you build influence and improve the power of your own network.

To help you create influence, we developed [this template](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1oaHLNFKchNafdPtkyMvCbNtYI8f23hnY/view?usp=sharing) for Power Mapping. Power Mapping is a technique for building a strategy to create influence. In Power Mapping, you create a plan for creating a relationship and influencing specific stakeholders. Power Mapping will show you exactly who you need to build relationships with to create influence. If you complete a sample Power Map, you will know who you will need to ask for specific introductions and connections. Doing the planning at the start will pay off as you move forward with your advocacy effort. You can also check out [this sample power map](https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1mgUPaBhUtt-bHvf6J4A9W90lEDQCnPhe) that we created.

*We hope that the stories and profiles in this chapter were helpful. As you think about building influence to become an effective advocate, think about how you can use your inner superpower, form a clear position, and also serve as a connector. Leverage is critical to successful advocacy - you are helping shape the hearts and minds of people. In the next chapter, we will dive deeper into storytelling. Storytelling is an excellent tactic for shaping hearts and minds and building influence.*