RESTORATIVE JUSTICE AND PARENT ORGANIZING IN THE EASTERN COACHELLA VALLEY

A Case Study of the Successes and Challenges of a Parent-Led, Systems-Change Effort

SEPTEMBER 2020
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Advancement Project California would like to thank Alianza Coachella Valley’s parent leaders who openly shared their experiences in our focus group and generously collected surveys from other parents in the Eastern Coachella Valley. Their partnership, as well as collaboration from Alianza Coachella Valley staff, helped form the core purpose and design of this case study. We would also like to acknowledge The California Endowment for their generous support of Alianza, which allowed us to help advance a more equitable Coachella Valley.

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PHOTO CREDIT: Alianza Coachella Valley parent leaders

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INTRODUCTION

Coachella Valley is an agriculture-rich and culturally diverse region in Riverside County, bounded to the west by the San Bernardino Mountains, to the north by Joshua Tree, and to the east by the Salton Sea. The Valley encompasses well-known cities such as Coachella, Indio, and Palm Springs yet there is also a sizeable and often forgotten community in the eastern part of the Valley made up of unincorporated communities such as Mecca, Thermal, Oasis, and North Shore, known as the Eastern Coachella Valley (ECV). Residents there are more likely to be Latinx immigrants who primarily work in the dominant agriculture industry. For decades these communities have been ignored, leading to high rates of poverty, lower high school graduation rates, and residents who are more likely to live in poor housing conditions and in close proximity to environmental hazards; and yet, the elected leaders, police officers, and teachers who serve these communities often do not represent the diverse makeup of the region.
FIGURE 1: EASTERN COACHELLA VALLEY COMMUNITIES
In 2010, The California Endowment’s 10-year Building Healthy Communities (BCH) initiative chose the ECV as a focus region due to the highly-salient needs of communities of color in the region. Alianza Coachella Valley was formed out of the need to unite the people and organizations of Coachella Valley and the ECV to counter decades of disinvestment. Their vision is one of a healthier and more prosperous community, accomplished through resident leadership that successfully influences local policies and funding priorities. They drive change through a community-led systems change model incorporating community building and leadership development as key components. Within a decade, residents have been successful at obtaining cleaner water, improved public roads and public transportation routes, and more positive learning environments in schools.

This case study focuses on Alianza’s efforts to transform the school climate of Coachella Valley Unified School District (CVUSD) through the parent-led Restorative Justice (RJ) Campaign. It highlights the successes of Alianza’s leadership development model by shedding light on how this campaign changed systems, improved the relationship between parents and district officials, and led to personal transformation for parent leaders.

Alianza’s mission is to transform the socio-economic conditions of the Coachella Valley so that people in all communities have opportunities to prosper.

We envision one vibrant, healthy, and thriving Coachella Valley where people have a seat at the table for decisions that affect their daily lives.
THE CONTEXT

It was 2014 and there were growing concerns over the alarming rate at which CVUSD was suspending middle school students. In 2013-2014, schools serving grades 7 and 8 in CVUSD suspended 10% of students, nearly twice the suspension rate at high schools in the same year (6%). At the time Latinx students represented 98% of the middle school student population. Parent leaders also found school staff were indifferent towards the learning of their mostly-Latinx students and uninterested in meaningful engagement with parents. In 2014-15, the California School Climate Staff Survey, a survey developed by WestEd for the California Department of Education and administered in districts throughout the state, found that only 48% of middle school staff in CVUSD said most or nearly all adults at the school believed every student could be a success.

“There was a disconnection between the staff, parents and students. One example was when a child was not attending classes for two months because their mom was a field worker that would travel up north to work. The District had no idea that this child was missing school. The District didn’t do much beyond sending one letter home.”

—Alianza parent leader
Intensifying matters was the unwelcoming environment created by school staff towards the mostly Latinx parents attending school meetings. Parents reported several instances where their requests for meetings were denied by school administrations. In many cases, parents reported that school staff did not make meaningful attempts to build relationships or listen to their concerns. District staff equally dismissed parents and their efforts to advocate on behalf of their children. Barriers were set up to limit parent involvement at district meetings and when parents did attend, they experienced prejudice and discrimination.

“We didn’t need to hear negative words [from District staff], simply by scheduling meetings at times when folks were working, and when there was no translation provided all signals that we weren’t really wanted. District staff would make comments undermining us by asking if we knew why we were there and what we were doing.” —Alianza parent leader
At the time parent leaders were involved in the 2014 Proposition 47 campaign, a statewide sentencing reform initiative that reclassified non-violent offenses as misdemeanors rather than felonies. Parent leaders saw how harsh school discipline policies mirrored the discriminatory policing and sentencing practices found in the criminal justice system. After watching a training video on RJ hosted by Alianza, parent-leaders decided RJ would finally put an end to school suspensions. More importantly, parent leaders saw RJ as interrupting the school-to-prison pipeline they had learned about while on the Proposition 47 campaign and through Alianza’s leadership trainings. Given that parent leaders were already primed for organizing they were able to quickly pivot and lead a RJ campaign at CVUSD.

**RESTORATIVE JUSTICE:**

Restorative Justice in schools is about a culture shift away from zero-tolerance and overly punitive disciplinary systems and towards a restorative model. Restorative Justice in schools uses the practice of dialogue in circles as both a proactive practice to prevent conflict as well as a practice to respond to conflict and disciplinary matters. Instead of suspending, expelling or citing youth on campus, staff and students rely upon Restorative Justice practices. This involves asking the student to take responsibility for their actions, helping the harmed person to heal, and involving the community as a whole to prevent a recurrence of the behavior.
METHODS

Advancement Project California collaborated with ECV parent leaders to define the core activities of Alianza’s parent leadership model and key measures of success of the RJ campaign. We use community-reported data along with publicly available data from the California Department of Education and the California School Climate Survey to evaluate the successes and challenges of the campaign and parent leaders’ efforts. We compare conditions and outcomes from the year the RJ campaign kicked off (2013-14) until now or the most recent year of data available (2018-19). Because secondary data can be slow to capture the effect of an intervention and does not always reflect on-the-ground experiences, we purposefully combine quantitative data with the experiences and anecdotes of the parent leaders who were the main champions of RJ. Parent leaders collected 113 surveys through calling parents who had been involved in the campaign and distributing the survey at parent events. We also held one focus group with five parent leaders who had been engaged in the RJ campaign for a year or more and whose children had attended a variety of CVUSD middle schools.
THE CAMPAIGN: ECV PARENT LEADERS IGNITING ACTION

Throughout the multiyear RJ campaign, Alianza's leadership model provided parents with the necessary tools to increase RJ investments and bring about change in CVUSD. Leadership development is one piece of Alianza's broader strategic approach to community-led systems change. Adapted from FSG's systems change framework, Alianza's approach is grounded in the understanding that while systems are held by institutions, systems change requires investment and engagement of impacted communities beyond the institutional conditions holding existing systems. This case study details Alianza's parent leadership model, a part of Alianza's broader approach. By building the leadership capacity of parent leaders, Alianza helps change institutional and community conditions, and build towards structural and then transformational change. The leadership development model includes three core areas of activities that parents participate in throughout the year: direct leadership development activities and trainings, community outreach and base building, and advocacy with decision-makers.
LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Through Alianza’s program, parent leaders engage in a variety of issue-specific and skill-based trainings to build their leadership capacity and understanding of the school system and RJ. Trainings began at the onset of the campaign in 2014 and have continued throughout implementation of RJ. Issue-specific trainings focus on building parents’ knowledge of RJ, the district’s Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) and budgeting process, and the historical context of major legislation, like Proposition 47. Other trainings target parents’ leadership skills and other capacities, including communications.

These trainings serve an important basis for parents’ leadership development. Directly, they build parent understanding of RJ and its core practices, making them experts in the topic for which they are advocating. They also build parents’ awareness of systemic issues in the district, providing them the context needed to understand the power dynamics and structures they seek to change. Lastly, trainings serve an important foundation for parents as they engage their broader community. Multiple times parents credited trainings for building their confidence and awareness, and for motivating them to move forward in their efforts even through challenges.

“The trainings give me confidence because knowledge is power” —Alianza parent leader
COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND BASE BUILDING

Since 2014, parent leaders have mobilized and engaged the broader community through community outreach and base building activities. These activities build community support for RJ and create new parent advocates. Throughout their efforts, ECV parent leaders and Alianza organizers built innovative, creative outreach spaces that were tailored to community and parent context.

Through Lunadas, Zumbas, and Noches Familiares, parent leaders use cultural spaces to bring together parents, connect them to systems-change efforts, and introduce them to education topics, like RJ. These events are held in each ECV community to delve deeper into school-specific issues and recruit new parents from each school. The ECV parent survey completed as a part of this case study demonstrates the reach and importance of these activities. In the past year, 62% of parents on Alianza’s contact list participated in Zumbas, 59% in Noches Familiares, and 50% in Lunadas.10

Community outreach and base building serve two important roles. They directly connect new parents to the campaign and Alianza’s programming, but they also contribute to parent leaders’ own development. Parents credit engaging and witnessing changes in their peers as important motivators for persisting in advocacy and as leaders in the community.11

“Allianza has been a turning point for me to empower others”
—Alianza parent leader
Leadership development is one condition necessary for community-led systems change. It also directly affects the other conditions necessary to achieve structural and transformational systems change.

FSG’s framework identifies 6 conditions changemakers should be aware of affecting systems change work. Alianza expands this framework by identifying equally important conditions foundational to community-led systems change work.

*Model adapted from FSG’s systems change framework.*
FIGURE 3b: ALIANZA’S PARENT LEADERSHIP MODEL

**Leadership Development**
*Who:* Parent leaders

**Activities**
- Issue-specific trainings: Restorative Justice, LCAP, and school budget trainings
- Capacity building trainings: Communications and leadership trainings

**Outcomes**
- Greater parent consciousness to understand systemic issues
- Greater parent understanding of RJ, district LCAP and budget
- Greater parent confidence and capacity to engage the broader community

**Advocacy**
*Who:* Parent leaders and parent members

**Activities**
- Meetings with district officials, board members, and superintendent
- Meetings with school administrators and staff
- Participation in public meetings (LCAP and budget meetings)

**Outcomes**
- Changed district narratives about parents
- Inclusion of parent voices and recommendations in district decisions
- New community-driven practices, like Restorative Justice

**Community Outreach and Base Building**
*Who:* Parent leaders, parent members, and community members

**Activities**
- Zumbas: Health and fitness events with Restorative Justice principles integrated.
- Lunadas: Community events for parents to practice and learn about Restorative Justice and the LCAP.
- Noches Familiares: Community trainings on LCAP.
- School-site parent meetings

**Outcomes**
- Greater community connections
- Increased parent knowledge about CVUSD issues
- Increased parent leadership
ADVOCACY

The final aspect of Alianza’s leadership model is advocacy with decision-makers. Parent leaders strategically engage in multipronged advocacy with decision-makers and administrators to gain support for RJ across the district and in schools. Parents engage in advocacy at all levels of the district—from schoolteachers and administrators to board members and the district superintendent.

At the school level, parents meet individually with principals and staff to talk about RJ and look for ways to integrate it at the school. Community-wide, parents organize candidate forums during election years to create spaces for the community to speak to potential district board members about RJ at the schools. At the district level, parents attend public meetings, like LCAP and budget meetings, and facilitate individual meetings with district staff and elected officials. Instituted in 2013 by state law, all school districts must develop an LCAP, a three-year planning tool, where districts describe how they plan to support student outcomes. Districts set their priorities and budgets through the LCAP process. Parents and Alianza have strategically focused on the LCAP as an avenue for raising district investments in RJ because it requires CVUSD to engage parents and provide budget transparency.
Advocacy is the most challenging aspect of leadership development for parents. It is where parents cite encountering the most resistance and doubt about their leadership. However, parents also acknowledge their advocacy directly helps to change narratives about parents in the district, with them representing their community firsthand. Their advocacy helps to prioritize RJ as a practice across teachers, administrators, and district officials with the unique position of RJ being a parent-driven solution.

Who are the parents in the restorative justice campaign?

- RJ parents live in...
  - Salton City (38%)
  - Thermal (18%)
  - Desert Shores (16%)
  - Coachella (12%)
- 79% are female
- They are mostly between the ages of 35-44 (44%), and 45-54 (33%)
- 69% have had a child attend middle school in CVUSD
- Most have children between 14-18 years old (60%), 11-13 years (49%), or age 10 and under (55%)
- 55% have been involved in the RJ campaign for more than a year
- 65% participate in RJ activities at least once a month
- 67% heard about the RJ campaign through another parent

“We are no longer at peace, we have a constant urge to change conditions and systems.”
—Alianza parent leader
**FIGURE 4: RESTORATIVE JUSTICE TIMELINE PART ONE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RJ CAMPAIGN STARTS. Parent leaders participate in a training and see a video about RJ.</td>
<td>January 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent leaders host a play about RJ for the community.</td>
<td>July 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RJ IS INCLUDED IN THE LCAP. RJ is incorporated into the LCAP for the first time though it is only included as a part of other interventions.</td>
<td>January 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RJ becomes a community priority.</td>
<td>July 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE BOBBY DUKE DEMONSTRATION BEGINS. The program runs for 10 weeks with 10 teachers and is funded by the school and Alianza.</td>
<td>January 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARENT LEADERS KICK OFF A COMMUNICATIONS CAMPAIGN. The campaign is focused on the LCAP and district accountability, and includes television and radio ads.</td>
<td>July 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE CVUSD BOARD AND SUPERINTENDENT CHANGE. New CVUSD board members are elected and a new superintendent is hired moving back progress the campaign had made.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CVUSD EXPANDS RJ IN THE LCAP. The RJ Teacher Lead stipend model begins and RJ Task Force created.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent leaders host a candidates forum with CVUSD school board candidates focused on RJ.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent leaders host breakfasts between schools and the community to talk about RJ.</td>
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</tbody>
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**KEY**
- Leadership Development Activity
- Community Outreach & Base Building Activity
- Advocacy Activity
- Flashpoint
FIGURE 4: RESTORATIVE JUSTICE TIMELINE PART TWO

January 2017
- Parents host a Lunada with parents in the community where they begin to integrate RJ into their own meetings.
- Parent leaders continue to attend monthly CVUSD Board meetings.

July 2017
- Parent leaders participate in a capacity building training by The California Endowment and in LCAP trainings.

January 2018
- A new superintendent is appointed.
- CVUSD expands commitment to RJ, paid fully by the LCAP. Lead Teacher stipends continue, RJ professional development days begin, and CVUSD receives the CA Learning Communities for School Success Program Grant.
- Parent leaders participate in Harm & Conflict training.
- The CA Conference for Equality and Justice begins RJ trainings with teachers.

July 2018
- Parents begin utilizing RJ circles with parents in the community.
- The CVUSD board votes to end a contract with the Sheriff's Department for high school resource officers. Board members cite the need for more restorative forms of school discipline.

January 2019
- Parents have an interview with Empire Network about the RJ campaign.
- The CVUSD board members are elected and a new superintendent is hired moving back progress the campaign had made.
- Parents participate in LCAP trainings. The first 5 parents are trained on the entire arch of RJ to sustain local implementation.

July 2019
- Parents begin utilizing RJ circles with parents in the community.
- The CVUSD board votes to end a contract with the Sheriff's Department for high school resource officers. Board members cite the need for more restorative forms of school discipline.
- The LGBT Center of the Desert, Lideres Campesinas, and Youth Leadership Institute join the positive school climate campaign. This shows an increase in support and advocacy from traditional service providing organizations.
- The RJ campaign in partnership with Advancement Project California host the first intergenerational LCAP training with youth organizing members and parents.
- The RJ campaign submits letters and supporting documentation to the CVUSD Board with regards to questions, comments, and concerns that have been raised on the adoption process of the new LCAP and budget.
- RJ is expanded, RJ is expanded to include 4 high schools, paid through LCAP funds.

The RJ campaign begins RJ trainings with teachers.

Parents have an interview with Empire Network about the RJ campaign.

A comparative LCAP study was conducted to assess CVUSD as well as Desert Sands and Palm Springs Unified School Districts.

The CVUSD board votes to end a contract with the Sheriff’s Department for high school resource officers. Board members cite the need for more restorative forms of school discipline.

The LGBT Center of the Desert, Lideres Campesinas, and Youth Leadership Institute join the positive school climate campaign. This shows an increase in support and advocacy from traditional service providing organizations.
THE OUTCOMES

Through their leadership, community outreach, and advocacy, ECV parent leaders have begun transforming education systems in Coachella Valley to the benefit of schools, youth, and district-community relationships.

DISTRICT CHANGES

RJ as a Policy and Practice
Since parents began their advocacy, the district has increased its investments in RJ. What began as marginal investments tied to other programs has turned into a targeted approach focused on implementing RJ practices as a part of its support to students. In the year immediately following the launch of parents’ RJ advocacy, the district started incorporating RJ into other district positive school climate strategies and trainings for staff. One middle school, Bobby Duke, moved faster than the district—starting a 10-week demonstration program in January 2015 funded by the school and Alianza—due to focused advocacy by parents and a supportive administrator. In 2016-17, the district made concrete investments in RJ for the first time. The district launched an RJ Task Force to oversee implementation of RJ practices, hired one counselor to work with school sites on implementing prevention and intervention models like RJ, and adopted a Lead Teacher stipend model. Lead Teachers were trained on RJ and the tiered-intervention framework, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, to facilitate implementation of these practices at their schools.
By 2018-19, the district continued funding the Lead Teacher stipends and began working with outside entities to train staff and implement RJ practices, separating funding streams for RJ from other programs. Through the California Conference for Equality and Justice (CCEJ) and the California Learning Communities for School Success Program Grant, the district began implementing RJ circles and holding staff development days to train teachers and administrators on RJ practices. These investments mark significant policy victories for parent leaders and Alianza after years of working to incorporate RJ into district budgets.

**FIGURE 5: CVUSD RJ INVESTMENTS OVER TIME**

Data Source: Based on Advancement Project California’s analysis of CVUSD’s LCAP documents from 2014-15 thru 2019-20.
Notes: Beginning in 2015-16, RJ was only mentioned and incorporated as a part of other district interventions, including PBIS, until 2018-19.
**Parent Voices at the Table**

District investments in RJ reflect another success achieved by parent advocacy—respect for parent voices in district decision-making. With the power of parent leadership, relationships between parents and the district have transformed since 2014. In the focus group and surveys, parents agree that since RJ started, the district has improved in its relationship with parents. Over 3 in 4 parents say that the district has improved in how it treats parents with respect (81%), listens to parent voices when making decisions (78%) and communicates opportunities for parent involvement (76%). In the focus group, parents elaborated that the Superintendent and board members now engage parents directly and ask them for their input. Parents attributed this change to their advocacy. By having parents be the leaders of the RJ movement, they were able to change district narratives about ECV parents and create spaces for them.

**FIGURE 6: SINCE RESTORATIVE JUSTICE HAS STARTED IN THE DISTRICT, WHAT HAS IMPROVED, STAYED THE SAME, OR GOTTEN WORSE?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Gotten Worse</th>
<th>Stayed the Same</th>
<th>Improved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The district treats parents with respect.</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The district listens to parent voices when making decisions.</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The district clearly communicates opportunities for parent involvement.</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Based on parent responses to the question – Since Restorative Justice started in your child’s school district, has each of the following improved, stayed the same, or gotten worse?
School Changes

SCHOOL DISCIPLINE
While RJ is relatively new to CVUSD with only four years of limited resources, school discipline outcomes within middle schools are showing signs of progress. Since 2014, the gap between middle school and high school suspensions has decreased and suspensions for willful defiance have dropped. In 2013-14, the average suspension rate for schools serving grades 7-8 in was 1.8 times the average suspension rate in high schools, but by 2018-19, the suspension rate in schools serving these grades was just 1.3 times the rate in high schools.

FIGURE 7: DIFFERENCES IN SUSPENSION RATES BETWEEN SCHOOLS SERVING GRADES 7-8 AND HIGH SCHOOLS

![Graph showing suspension rate differences between 7-8th grade and high school](image)

Notes: The percentage point gap represents the difference between the total middle school suspension rate and the total high school suspension rate in CVUSD. Middle schools include all schools serving grades 7-8.
Additional analysis shows the impact on suspension rates does vary by school with some middle schools experiencing increases in some years and others decreases. Anecdotally, Alianza parent leaders and staff have tied fluctuating suspension rates to changes in school administrators—including the level of dedication each incoming administrator has had to implementing RJ successfully—as well as community-level issues, specifically the rise in student vaping and drug use during similar periods.\(^{17}\)

Overall, middle schools have shown promising results having started using positive discipline practices over zero tolerance policies. By 2018-19, CVUSD middle schools suspended zero students for willful defiance compared to 2.8 percent of students in 2013-14.\(^{18}\) Based on school staff responses to WestEd’s School Climate Staff Survey, from 2014-15 to 2017-18 fewer middle school staff agreed that their schools were enforcing zero tolerance policies and more staff agreed their school encouraged students to understand how others think and feel. ECV parent leaders similarly reported observing school administrators and teachers using suspensions less frequently to discipline students.\(^{19}\)
FIGURE 8: CHANGES IN TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF DISCIPLINE IN CVUSD MIDDLE SCHOOLS

School Relationships

Relationships between students and teachers are also showing signs of improvement. Prior to RJ, parents described teachers as being uninterested in students or as not caring about their success. Reflecting on relationships within the schools now, parents report more respectful, caring relationships depending on the degree of RJ implementation. In cases where teachers and schools are using RJ practices, parents have witnessed better relationships and trust amongst students and teachers. Some parents have seen teachers walk away from RJ trainings with a new perception of students—describing teachers crying by the end of the training as they have become aware of their shortcomings in truly seeing their students.
Results from WestEd’s School Climate Staff Survey provide support for these anecdotes. Nearly 3 in 4 school staff (72%) agreed or strongly agreed that adults at their school believe every student can be a success in 2017-18 – a sharp increase from 2014-15 where only 48% of staff agreed with the highest two categories.

**FIGURE 9: CHANGES IN TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS IN CVUSD MIDDLE SCHOOLS**

Data Source: California School Climate Staff Survey: Coachella Building Health Communities Reports, 2014-2015 & 2017-18. WestEd Health & Human Development Program for The California Endowment

Notes: Based on the percentage of staff responding to the top two categories in each survey year. Agree/Strongly agree in 2017-18 and Nearly all adults/Most adults in 2014-15.
These initial outcomes from RJ implementation in CVUSD mirror findings from more in-depth studies about the benefits of RJ to school discipline and climate. RJ programs in other districts have been linked to:

- Decreases in exclusionary discipline practices, out-of-school suspensions and expulsions;\textsuperscript{21}
- Improvements in student conduct;
- Reductions in chronic absenteeism;
- Improvements in school climate, including student-teacher relationships;
- Reduced office referrals for disruptive behaviors;\textsuperscript{22}
- Improved emotion regulation, conflict resolution, and empathy among students;
- Improved reading levels and graduation rates; and
- More school days spent in school.\textsuperscript{23}
CHANGES IN PARENT LEADERS

Parent Confidence, Knowledge, and Leadership

A core measure of success for Alianza’s parent leadership model is the transformation of parent leadership. Alianza parent members are remarkably engaged and confident in their ability to advocate for their children. The majority feel confident interacting with their children’s teachers (89%) and with school staff and administrators (93%). Nearly all parents also know of resources to advocate for their children (93%) or believe they have the power to achieve a change in their child’s education (94%).

FIGURE 10: ALIANZA PARENT LEADERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR CONFIDENCE, LEADERSHIP, AND KNOWLEDGE

Notes: Based on the percentage of parents agreeing or strongly agreeing with each statement.
Alianza parent members’ confidence in their advocacy and leadership directly links to experiences they have gained from being a part of the RJ campaign. When asked about what positive changes they have seen in themselves since being involved in RJ, nearly 3 in 4 parent members (72%) agree they have a greater sense of confidence and self-esteem. Over 1 in 2 agree they feel more confident advocating for their children (58%), have a greater understanding of the school system (56%), or see themselves as a leader in their community (53%).

**FIGURE 11: TOP 5 CHANGES ALIANZA PARENT MEMBERS SEE IN THEMSELVES AFTER THE RJ CAMPAIGN**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Percentage of Parents Responding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have more knowledge about Restorative Justice Practices.</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I see myself as a leader in my community.</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a better understanding of the school system.</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel more confident advocating for my children.</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a greater sense of confidence and self-esteem.</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Source: Advancement Project California & Alianza. “Restorative Justice and Parent Organizing in the ECV Parent Survey.” Survey. 2019-2020. Notes: Based on the question -- Since participating in the Restorative Justice campaign, what positive changes have you seen in yourself? Percentage is based on the number of parents who marked each response out of the total number of parents who responded to the question.
**Parent Engagement and Advocacy**

Being a part of Alianza’s leadership development model has also increased parent engagement in the district as reported by ECV parents. In surveys, about 3 in 5 parents reported they started attending district meetings (62%) or LCAP meetings (61%) only after getting involved in RJ. And, 1 in 2 parents began recruiting other parents to make change in their children’s education (56%).

*“This confidence has to be passed on to motivate another person. It’s how you create change”*  
—Alianza parent leader

**FIGURE 12: PARENT-REPORTED ENGAGEMENT BEFORE AND AFTER RESTORATIVE JUSTICE**

Data Source: Advancement Project California & Alianza. “Restorative Justice and Parent Organizing in the ECV Parent Survey.” Survey, 2019-2020. Notes: Based on parents responding to the question – Thinking of each of the following activities in your school district, which did you start doing before or after getting involved in the Restorative Justice campaign.
CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While it is still too soon to see the full impact of the RJ program, key school climate and academic indicators point to the need for increased investments in RJ. While middle school suspensions have shown some promise, as seen in the reductions in suspensions from four years prior compared to increases in high school suspension rates, middle school suspensions still have yet to fall below 2013-14 level. For example, student suspension rates at middle schools in 2019 are at 9.9%, the same rate as in 2014. Comparatively, chronic absenteeism rates increased from 2017 to 2019, from 16.4% to 18.2% respectively. In addition, while middle school academic achievement rates have increased in both English Language Arts and Math achievement, rates still lag behind high school rates.

Studies show that a well-implemented RJ program can lead to improvements in school attendance, reduce serious on-campus incidents, and increase feelings of school connectedness. A review of the District’s expenditures on RJ programs demonstrate a reluctance to fully fund the program, hindering it from truly improving student outcomes. Anecdotes from ECV parent leaders also indicate the need for stronger district and school leadership when it comes to implementation. District staff need to commit fully to the RJ program beginning by increasing investments and overseeing consistent implementation across schools. This level of commitment is needed for middle schools to see reductions in chronic absenteeism and suspension rates. Based on the parent focus group conversations, a review of student performance data, and a RJ funding analysis, the following recommendations are required for full implementation of RJ:
I. **Fully invest in RJ and improve transparency.**

For several years, the District has combined funding for RJ with PBIS making it difficult for parent-leaders to understand the true investment in the program. Moreover, temporary outside grants and minimal investments from LCFF Supplemental and Concentration funds, which are additional state education funds provided to districts with high concentrations of high-need students, has not been enough for this program to realize its promise. Based on this information we recommend the District:

- a. Dedicate a steady and sizable stream of LCFF Supplemental and Concentration funds on an annual basis and not solely rely on outside grants to support the program. Outside grants fluctuate and create uncertainty in program implementation.
- b. Create greater transparency for the program, by creating a distinction between PBIS and RJ when accounting for how dollars were spent, and providing more performance data to report how many teachers accessed these funds, and how many students were served.
II. Establish RJ as the new culture across the District.

School implementation of RJ varies wildly on a school-by-school basis. In many instances parent-leaders relied on administrators and teachers, sympathetic to their demands, to implement the program. Where RJ was implemented, suspension rates decreased and relationships with parents and students improved. Parents also reported having positive experiences engaging their schools when administrators worked with parents and followed through on RJ. For example, in 2014, Bobby Duke Middle School, the first school to willingly pilot the program, had a 13.5% suspension rate but by 2019 the rate dropped to 9.2%. In other cases, parent-leaders described instances of administrator and staff transitions shifting the priority away from or delaying the implementation of RJ on campus. Finally, some parent-leaders felt that there were teachers who did not believe in the benefits of the program. Based on this information we recommend the District:

a. Set expectations across all schools and staff that RJ is the new standard within the district. This expectation is a call to action for administrators, school staff, and teachers to change their approach to school discipline.

b. Communicate the benefits of RJ to administrators and teachers who are questioning the merits and efficacy of the program. The District can do this by providing greater investments in teacher and administrator trainings and resources. This approach can also serve to alleviate the strain schools may feel in carrying out the program on their own.
III. Parents need continued support to sustain their advocacy.

While all parent-leaders reported being personally transformed because of their involvement in RJ, the challenging nature of the work – battling against prejudice and stereotypes – over time has taken its own toll. Based on this information we recommend the District:

a. Invest in parent leadership development and create the time for authentic community engagement. Parent-leaders often reported being unheard by the District during stakeholder meetings with little follow up on items important to them. In order for any school to succeed, the District must truly invest in parent involvement and that starts with authentic two-way communication between parents, school staff, and administrators. This approach is a key to sustain parent involvement in systems change.

“I would be shy and scared to attend school board meetings. They would treat you badly, it would affect my motivation and in those moments, it made me feel small. But I didn’t let those feelings stop me, instead I let them push me to keep going.”

—Alianza parent leader
CONCLUSION

ECV parents’ journey toward systems change in the Coachella Valley demonstrates the power and challenges of a parent-led movement. With the support of Alianza’s parent leadership model, ECV parents have begun transforming the dynamics and relationships within Coachella Valley. Their experiences and stories also highlight the unique challenges and barriers to establishing the voices of parents of color in a system designed to quiet them. The support of organizations, like Alianza, meant to bolster their leadership and expand their awareness, has proved vital to sustaining parent-driven efforts and ensuring parent voices are included in decision-making.

The outcomes of ECV parent leaders’ efforts also show the long-term nature of a community-led systems-change effort. Relationships, suspensions, and school climate have started to improve, but RJ requires stronger commitments and investments to bring about the program’s full benefits in the Coachella Valley. Anecdotes from parent-leaders as well as evidence from the literature indicate that given more resources and consistency in implementation across schools, RJ in CVUSD could yield additional benefits and potentially greater improvements in school discipline and climate with partnerships between parents, schools, and the district at the center.
ENDNOTES


2 Advancement Project California, RACE COUNTS, Riverside County. https://www.racecounts.org/county/riverside/

3 The Building Healthy Communities (BHC) is a 10 year, $1 billion comprehensive community initiative launched by The California Endowment in 2010 to advance statewide policy, change the narrative, and transform 14 of California’s communities devastated by health inequities into places where all people and neighborhoods thrive.

4 California Department of Education, California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS), 2014.


6 To compare middle schools to high schools, we group schools based on grade level served. In most cases, schools in Coachella Valley Unified School District serve only grades 7-8 or grades 9-12. West Shores High School serves both middle schools and high schools. Given that Alianza is focused on West Shores as a middle school, we group the school into the middle school rate.

7 Alianza parent leaders, focus group, November 14, 2019.

8 Ibid

9 Alianza parent leaders, focus group, November 14, 2019.


11 Alianza parent leaders, focus group, November 14, 2019.

12 Ibid


15 Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is another evidence-based positive school climate model. It uses a multi-tiered approach to social, emotional, and behavior support to improve student engagement, behavior, and outcomes. The district began this approach prior to RJ. Parents report that as they brought attention to RJ in CVUSD, the district simultaneously began investing more in their current intervention strategies, like PBIS.


17 Alianza parent leaders, focus group, November 14, 2019.


19 Alianza parent leaders, focus group, November 14, 2019.

20 Ibid


26 Alianza parent leaders, focus group, November 14, 2019.


28 Alianza parent leaders, focus group, November 14, 2019.