

The Kaiser Permanente Community Fund (KPCF) at Northwest Health Foundation was founded in 2004 with an initial \$28 million investment by Kaiser Permanente to improve conditions for health. As we learned how to best partner with community organizations, we made pivotal decisions that changed how we operated. In this story, we tell how Salem/Keizer Coalition for Equality taught us to put new insights into action.

New Approaches to Community Partnership: SKCE

Before Estela Flores joined the programs offered by the Salem/Keizer Coalition for Equality (SKCE), she did not understand the grading system at her children's school. Estela did not graduate elementary school and moved to the United States with the hope of a better future for her children. However, she did not know how to navigate the bureaucracy of the school district, she couldn't help her children with the homework they were assigned, and she was not familiar with the meaning of an "A," "B," or other grades the teacher gave.



Mother and son practice reading together at SKCE's *Leyendo Avanzamos* program.

"I remember back when I was young and see how far we have come, how far my mom has come," said Estela's daughter, Celia Flores. "I just feel so thankful that she has had the opportunity to attend workshops and events and become part of the group of Latino parents with the coalition. One of the most important ways I saw my mom change was when she learned not to be afraid. She didn't know English, and she didn't know much about the school system, but she learned how to make sure we were doing well in school." ([You can read more about the impact of SKCE's parenting programs in this infographic.](#))

SKCE's motto is backed by solid research: parents are the key to their child's educational success. For years, SKCE has worked to inspire and equip Latino parents to get involved in their children's education and schools and change the dynamics that influence academic success for students of color.

When SKCE first connected with KPCF, SKCE wanted to address Latino student education success through parent program support and increased advocacy. They worked to activate more

Spanish-speaking parents to get involved in their children's education, focusing on absenteeism and mental health. At the same time, SKCE also knew that direct intervention with parents was not enough; they needed to advocate more and work to change school district policies and practices by partnering with districts.

We saw an opportunity to invest in SKCE in a way that brought together many of the lessons we learned throughout the life of our fund. Instead of funding a specific program, we provided SKCE with flexible funding, coaching, and technical assistance that allowed the organization's leaders to hire administrative staff and step back from day-to-day operations. By doing so, they could focus on building capacity to deepen relationships, develop partnerships, and create the community-led infrastructure for systems change advocacy.

SKCE increased the size and resources of their advocacy program budget to campaign for a more equitable and culturally responsive

education workforce. 38% of the district's students are Latino, but only 6% of their teachers are, and SKCE knew students would benefit from seeing themselves reflected in their educators. It is well-documented that when students see their race, ethnicity, and culture reflected in their schools, their educational success, health, and attendance significantly improve. In addition to funding staff time for advocacy activities, committee participation and professional development, KPCF provided critical technical assistance to conduct a community assessment, clarify strategies, and use developmental evaluation to track community change.

Building strong relationships with district administrators and leaders was a key component and took lots of time. SKCE was able to hire more people and parents from the local Latino community and develop their leadership. With their new capacity, they had the ability to attend the school district's decision-making committees, testify more at school board meetings, and meet consistently with district leaders. Together with district leaders, they identified specific changes the Salem Keizer School District needed to make in their recruiting, hiring, and training practices.

Annalivia is excited: "I started bringing Latino parents and staff to committees. I've got staff that are trying to learn English, and they're boldly going forth and trying to figure out how to get in this committee and say something. KPCF had an understanding that we have to pay low-income, underrepresented people to do what you would expect other white organizations to do with volunteers."

With SKCE's expert Latino parent voices, the district adopted their first Safe and Welcoming School Resolution, created a new office of Equity and Student Advancement, and promoted a long-time principal of color to direct it. The new office began the work of training principals and teachers in cultural awareness and responsiveness, and developing long-term plans for continual professional development in these areas. Latino students and parents began feeling more welcome and safe at school.

With flexible funding, SKCE was also able to hire Spanish-speaking parents to plan a systems

change strategy with their constituents. They focused on partnership development and continuously showed up to district meetings as they grew into a trusted partner of the district. The highlight came in the summer of 2017 when the district awarded SKCE a contract to conduct a teacher training institute in collaboration with the district's human resources department. Hosted at SKCE's office, 17 educators attended the pilot Language and Culture Institute, learning Spanish in the morning (taught by the district) and spending the afternoon doing activities with Latino parents and staff. SKCE staff also worked with the district to host job fairs where they hired Latino employees.

The relationship between the district and parents of SKCE has grown strong, in part due to the openness of Superintendent Christy Perry and the people she hired. Last year, SKCE was recognized as the district's partner of the month at the school board meeting. "I feel like we have finally reached our goals of being a partner to the district, of being truly valued as a Latino organization. This literally happened because KPCF," said Annalivia.

Without the capacity and technical support of KPCF, Annalivia says they never could have maintained the steady growth, and the steady planning and accountability meetings needed to reach many of their goals. Annalivia added, "We are changing school and district culture, and we will never stop, and we will become a part of their culture so what was radical 20 years ago is best practice and innovative and highly praised now."

KPCF is proud of our flexibility in keeping up with the latest research and trends, not just in health but in the nonprofit sector, in education and in and equity issues in general. We found that our culturally specific nonprofit partners were more than ready to take their work to a higher level of systems change as soon as we stepped up to help them make that possible, and other foundations are following suite. Culturally specific organizations are often led by people who are affected by the social justice issues KPCF wants to fund. We are investing in these organizations as the most effective way to improve health and education equity in our society.