

5 Tips for Organizing Parents to Fight for Racial Equity at Their Children's Schools

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At **Kindred** (kindredcommunities.org), we have mobilized hundreds of parents in Washington, D.C. to engage each other across lines of race and class in the fight for racial equity in their children's schools. Although every school is different, we've found the following guidelines for organizing parents effectively apply widely.

#1

Ensure that your parent group is representative of the entire school community.

We want to create inclusive school communities that push toward equity, and the ideas that will best address the disadvantage created by inequity will come from those who have experienced it most. When creating a parent group at school, actively recruiting parents who do not feel a strong sense of belonging in the school is critical for cultivating a community that embraces diversity, achieves inclusivity, and advances equity.

#2

Everything starts with trust; take the time to build it and sustain it.

American society is rooted in racial oppression, and people of color continue to be treated as less important than white people. Families who haven't been well-served by our schools are less likely to believe that actively engaging them will have positive results for them and their children. We address this distrust by reaching out to families personally and lovingly at least seven times, as needed. We do what we say we will do (e.g., "I will call you back in 15 minutes" or "I will meet you at the school at 8:15"), and we go above and beyond to meet the personal needs of families and to create meaningful engagement opportunities for parents and children. Building authentic relationships with parents enables us to help them build real community with each other.



#3

Ask parents what they need. Explicitly.

Center your work on parent input, and create opportunity and structure for parents to drive the work. While data about the causes of inequity are important to consider, so is the direct experience of the parents who live it. We create spaces where parents dialogue across lines of race and socioeconomics about their perspectives and experiences in education so that they can figure out together how to address disparities. We then support conversations about what they can do collectively to address these differences in opportunity and work toward educational equity.



#4

Build genuine connection with each parent you serve.

Every one of us carries biases and very few, if any, of us know what all of these biases are. However, when we take the time to build connection by understanding what is happening in someone's life, our biases and our communication shift. This presence of mind, being and connection allows us to be present fully with each other when we struggle so that we do not struggle alone. It also allows us to see our struggles, as well as our successes, as interconnected, thereby supporting the development of true community. This is beneficial for us as well as for our children, as parent engagement in school communities predicts better outcomes for students, while social isolation is a risk factor.

#5

Take time, and a lot of it, to process your own identity.

Processing identity is an ongoing project that has no endpoint, as identity is ever-evolving. When we process the biases we carry and the oppression we have experienced, we can prevent transmission of these experiences to our children. We can become more responsive to our children and the needs that they express because we have processed what triggers us. Research shows that positive identity and advocacy can shield us to some degree from the negative impact of discrimination. This can be done individually among friends and colleagues, in therapeutic settings, and/or in dialogue groups facilitated by people who have done substantial identity processing themselves.