The James Irvine Foundation launched the Families Improving Education (FIE) initiative to support parental involvement in K–12 educational policymaking. The central premise is that parent engagement fosters more responsive, appropriate policies that enhance student success. Key insights drawn from the FIE initiative include:

### Engaged Parents Are Influential Advocates

FIE organizations and their networks of parents have contributed to a number of local and state educational policy changes.

- **Change**: Parents and grantee organizations with data and information about models and best practices gained respect as informed and credible partners.
- **Parent-led advocacy efforts** often had a greater effect on policymakers and decisions than other approaches.

### Data and a Culture of Inquiry Strengthen Advocacy Efforts

Interpreting and using data is a powerful way for parents and community organizations to:

- Build credibility
- Focus advocacy efforts
- Inform decision making at school and district levels

### School Board Members Are Vital Champions

Involving school board members and community leaders in learning events generates ardent local champions. Board members value connecting with peers in other regions to discuss common challenges and best practices. They also benefit from training and capacity building to become stronger advocates.

- **Involved school board members:**
  1. Provided increased access to organizations and parents
  2. Fostered more inclusive decision-making practices
  3. Promoted improved local policies

### Regional Networks Strengthen Local Advocacy Efforts

Cultivating collaboratives helps focus and increase coordination of advocacy efforts among multiple organizations in the same district. Despite the challenges of reconciling different approaches, styles and agendas, there are benefits of a regional approach.

Regional and statewide events are powerful opportunities to apply advocacy training and develop leadership.

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Families Improving Education. In 2008, The James Irvine Foundation funded 11 community-based organizations in California’s Central Valley and Inland Empire. Families In Schools, a Los Angeles-based advocacy organization, served as the technical assistance provider and grantmaking intermediary. The Irvine Foundation hired Harder+Company Community Research to conduct an evaluation of this initiative in 2011 and 2012. For more about the initiative and findings, and to access the full evaluation report, visit irvine.org/FIE.