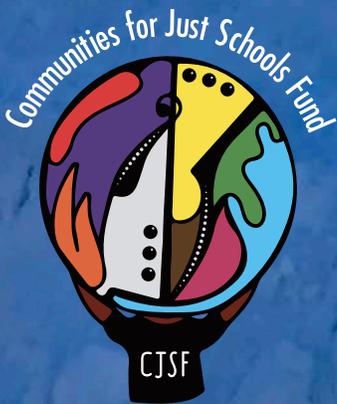


FALL 2022



Living on a Learning Edge: **CJSF's Impact on Education Justice**

Acknowledgements

This report was authored by Seema Shah, Ph.D., Eleanore Lee, and B Balmer of COMM|VEDA Consulting. COMM|VEDA Consulting provides research, evaluation, and writing services to mission-driven organizations and centers its work in the power of community-generated wisdom.

The authors extend their appreciation to the CJSF squad — Jaime Koppel, Cierra Kaler-Jones, Alexis Smith, Allie McCullen, Marianna Islam, Briana Perry, Kate Price, Kimberly Ellis, and Jose Santacruz — who deftly guided the development of this evaluation with care, attention to detail, and an unwavering commitment to organizational learning and growth.

We also extend our gratitude to the spirit and legacy of Allison R. Brown, CJSF's founding director, who left an indelible imprint on the organization and whose vision for education justice continues to serve as a north star.

Most of all, we thank the more than 60+ people from CJSF's community who took time to participate in interviews, focus groups, and surveys to share their reflections on CJSF's work, all in the spirit of strengthening the movement for education justice and to ensure that all of our children have the resources needed to thrive.

Report prepared by:



Front cover: Zakiyah Ansari, Alliance for Quality Education, in Nome, Alaska in February 2020 as a part of our Community of Practice.

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Foreword

When Allison R. Brown took the helm of leadership at Communities for Just Schools Fund in 2015, little did we all know how profoundly our lives would be impacted by all that was to come. We were certain though about the importance of grounding our contributions to education justice in strong relationships that center trust, authenticity, and love.

Here we are more than seven years later and while this evaluation looks back at only the last few years, there is no question that every experience the CJSF squad has had since 2015 is reflected in the opportunities and calls-to-action for CJSF that our partners, members, and friends shared in the interviews and surveys summarized in this report. Together, we have been invited to do what Ruth Wilson Gilmore names above... “build the future from the present, in all of the ways we can.”

As we move into the future, we must hold on to our learning about the centrality of healing and wellness. These last few years have taken so much from us and simultaneously taught us so much about the imperative of and power in centering wellness and healing.

Today, the “fragments and pieces” of possibility lie before us all as an invitation. In honor of Allison’s vision and legacy, in support of our partners, and in collaboration with our members, Communities for Just Schools Fund intends to answer the calls-to-action you will find in this evaluation. We will do our part to resource and conspire with the movement for racial justice in education as they point us all toward the possibilities and imperative of liberatory education spaces that center love and belonging. We hope you will join us!

Thank you to the COMM | VEDA team - Seema Shah, Eleanore Lee, and B Balmer for guiding us on this journey of reflection. Thank you to our partners, our members, and our friends for the trust you offer us. Thank you to current and former CJSF squad for the love and care you pour into this family. Thank you, Allison R. Brown, for shining bright as our North Star.

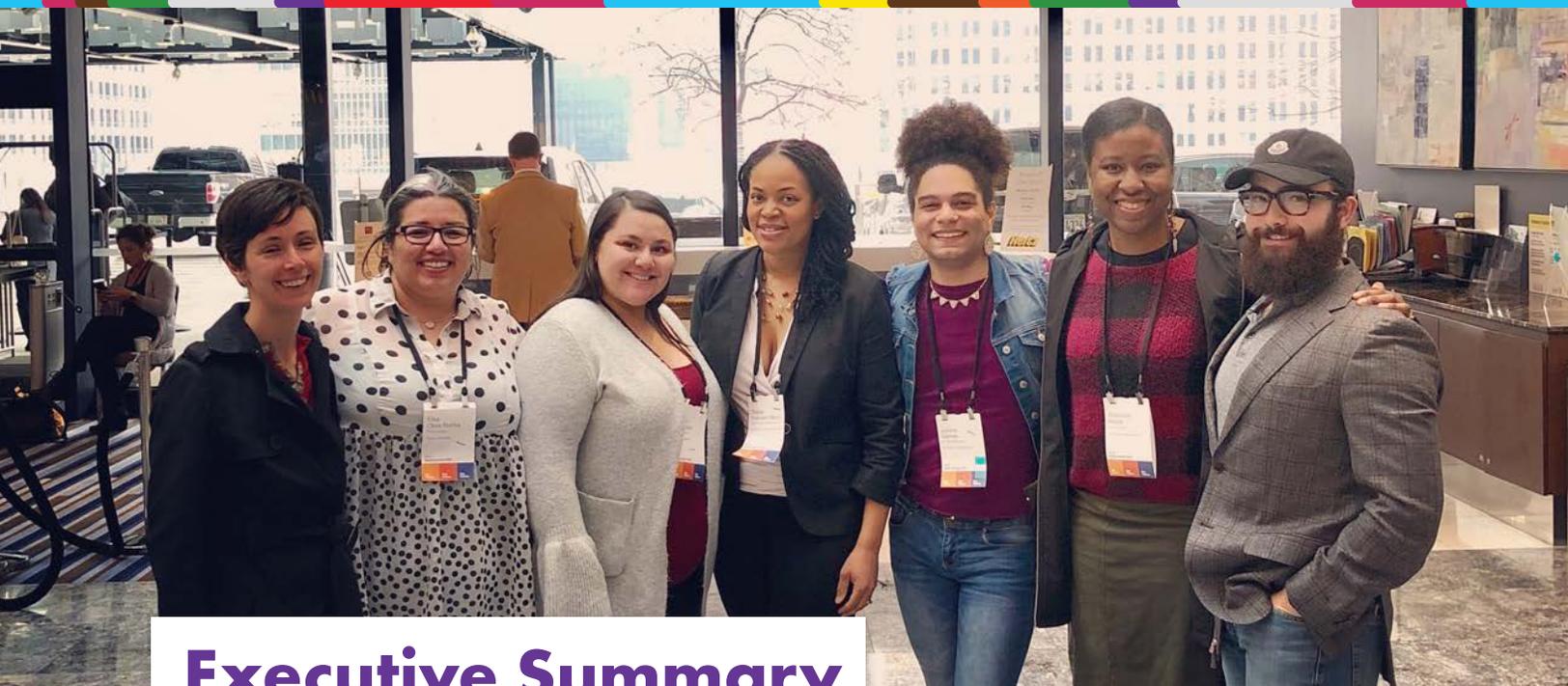
From my heart,

Jaime T. Koppel
Co-Director



Abolition requires that we change one thing, which is everything. Abolition is not absence, it is presence. What the world will become already exists in fragments and pieces, experiments and possibilities. So those who feel in their gut deep anxiety that abolition means knock it all down, scorch the earth and start something new, let that go. Abolition is building the future from the present, in all of the ways we can.

- Ruth Wilson Gilmore, 2018



Executive Summary

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Grassroots community organizing is a necessary and vital force for transformative social change. It is this belief that animates the mission of the Communities for Just Schools Fund. From its inception, CJSF sought to ensure that it was accountable to its grassroots partners, centering the leadership of Black and Brown organizers. At the same time, CJSF nurtured relationships with donors (members), philanthropic support organizations, officials in federal government, researchers, and education leaders across the country.

With its deep connection to work on the ground, combined with a birds-eye view of the education justice landscape, CJSF's current co-director, Jaime T. Koppel, observes that one of CJSF's unique contributions to the education justice landscape is "to see both the opportunities and the challenges of the future." In doing so, CJSF leans into collaborative and generative relationships with its partners, members, and allies, or as Koppel describes it, "living on a learning edge."

It is in this spirit of learning, accountability, and reflection that CJSF, in 2021, commissioned COMM|VEDA Consulting to conduct an evaluation to take stock of its work to date. Drawing from an internal document review, as well as survey and interview data, this evaluation solicits reflections on the current challenges and strengths within the education justice landscape and gathers perspectives on the opportunities that lie ahead for CJSF and its partners, members, and allies as they collectively seek to strengthen the movement for education justice.



Fund



Build



Connect



Lead

LOOKING BACK: CJSF'S IMPACT ON EDUCATION JUSTICE ORGANIZING

CJSF's impact has been far-reaching, touching on each of its four strategic pillars: Fund-Build-Connect-Lead. Partners, members, and network allies alike noted that CJSF holds deep content expertise in education justice, operates from a place of moral conviction, and invests deeply in building trusting relationships. Data from our evaluation show that CJSF has influenced the field of education justice in the following ways:

RESOURCING EDUCATION JUSTICE AND SHIFTING PHILANTHROPIC PRACTICE

As a grantmaker, CJSF's value proposition is that grassroots organizing is among the most impactful, yet the least supported, strategies for achieving social and educational justice. To this end, CJSF has played a critical role in raising awareness among donors about injustices in schooling, the role of grassroots organizing in building, winning, and sustaining a new, affirmative vision for education, and the importance of funding such efforts. In addition to catalyzing shifts in funding, CJSF seeks to model equitable philanthropic practice and what it looks like to be in community and partnership with grassroots organizations.

CURATING RICH AND GENERATIVE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

CJSF has created a variety of opportunities to promote collective learning and action, building a community of practice through conferences, learning exchanges, podcast episodes, webinars, original reports, and regular e-newsletters. These efforts are designed to highlight partners' expertise, create space for connection and synergy across groups, and equip partners with information and tools to inform their organizing praxis and campaigns for holistically safe schools.

ADVOCATING FOR POLICY AND NARRATIVE CHANGE

In addition to engaging with its members and partners "internally," CJSF plays an important public-facing role as an advocate for education justice, elevating partner campaigns and perspectives within the media, as well as in discussions on federal policy. In this role, CJSF has helped connect local and national work and bring greater attention to issues of education justice.

INVESTING IN BASE-BUILDING AND POWER-BUILDING

CJSF prioritizes sustained funding and support, with a commitment to providing multi-year general operating support grants. Importantly, this funding model allows organizing groups to invest in the long-term, foundational work of base-building, leadership development, political education, and power-building beyond shorter-term campaign cycles.

CATALYZING POLICY WINS

CJSF's funding support, as well as the spaces it has created for learning and collective strategizing, have helped partners achieve policy and practice changes, particularly in school discipline and policing in schools and deepen their organization's political education offerings and access. Many of these campaigns have been going on for years, with varying degrees of success. A number of partners were able to leverage the racial justice uprisings of 2020 and their longstanding organizing gained traction as policymakers and school officials in some places were more receptive to partner demands and calls for police-free schools that were once deemed "too radical."

CURRENT CONTEXT

As CJSF looks ahead to its next season, we asked interviewees to take stock of recent shifts in education and education organizing. It is clear from their reflections that the present moment demonstrates tremendous challenges, reflecting political, cultural, and social shifts that threaten the progress that has been made; and at the same time, there are equally **formidable strengths within the education justice movement to harness**.

CHALLENGES AND THREATS

Across the board, leaders fighting for education justice find themselves up against monumental, and sometimes unprecedented, challenges and threats, including:

- **Intense political backlash** stemming from the current political climate and embedded in white supremacy, structural racism, and other systemic forces;
- **Attacks on public education**, including an influx of funding for privatization of schools, attacks on school curricula, and teacher fatigue and attrition;
- **Cycles of political inertia and upheaval** as conservative local school boards implement damaging policies, local jurisdictions backtrack on commitments to remove or reduce police and policing tactics in schools, and lack of political will stalls progress on education justice priorities;
- **Ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic** including difficulty engaging their base, battling unresolved trauma and fatigue, and renewed efforts to harden schools and surveil students;

- **Mercurial and myopic philanthropic support** entrenched in practices such as inconsistent and siloed funding priorities, narrowly defined wins taking priority over fundamental organizing needs, and unwillingness to support ‘controversial’ organizations; and
- **Power dynamics among movement leaders**, transitioning long-time education justice leaders and finding support for new leadership, and constantly operating in survival mode.

STRENGTHS

Organizing Landscape

Interviewees lifted up a number of strengths in the organizing landscape, including:

- **Palpable shifts in language and discourse**, as partners saw their position on education justice, police-free schools and efforts to end the criminalization of Black and Brown youth shift from an extreme view to one that has become more normalized in the field;
- **Bigger and bolder demands**, with an even greater sense of urgency, spurred by policy wins and subsequent backlash;
- **Increasing attention and resources towards youth organizing** as organizations shifted away from youth development;
- **Increasing facility with digital organizing skills** developed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic; and
- **Attention to rest and wellness** as a radical and necessary act, as well as a way to sustain movements for justice.

Philanthropic Landscape

Interviewees also highlighted promising changes within the philanthropic landscape, including:

- A “racial awakening” in philanthropy that has translated into more support for organizing and for Black and Brown-led organizations;
- Gradual shifts toward trust-based and transparent philanthropy, and away from strategic or transactional grantmaking; and
- Shift towards more multi-year, general operating support grants, especially in the wake of the pandemic.

CALL TO ACTION FOR PHILANTHROPY AND FOR CJSF

Reflecting on the current landscape of education justice organizing, the message is clear: Philanthropy is stepping up, but there is much more that needs to be done. In that spirit, interviewees offered their perspectives on how both CJSF, and philanthropy more broadly, can play an important role in advancing these efforts.

BUILD NARRATIVE POWER

The stories that get told help shape our values and beliefs, which in turn influence action. For far too long, inequities and harm in education have been propelled and exacerbated by policies that have been influenced by a host of harmful narratives perpetuated by the right and by popular media narratives. Our conversations with CJSF's partners and members reinforce that there is a rich appetite for developing affirmative communications and messaging strategies that build power and create public and political will for culturally affirming curricula, police-free schools, attention to the well-being of LGBTQ+ students, and more. To this end, philanthropy can support organizers to advance affirmative narratives for what our schools can look like and how they can nurture the gifts and talents of Black and Brown students.

CREATE SPACES FOR COLLECTIVE STRATEGIZING AND POWER-BUILDING

Interviewees identified the growing connectivity among organizing groups across the country, including efforts from CJSF, as a strength of the education justice movement. Donors and partners alike called for an expansion and deepening of such spaces, including spaces that are inclusive of a broader range of actors, recognizing that collective strategizing can build greater power and accelerate progress in both local and national arenas.

INVEST IN ORGANIZING INFRASTRUCTURE

While funders are often focused on "outcomes," such as tangible campaign wins, organizers remind us that the systems and structures they are trying to change have been in place for decades, if not centuries, and can similarly take decades to dismantle. To that end, ongoing investments in building the infrastructure for organizing are critical to progress on educational justice issues. Support organizing groups for the long-term so they can invest in building the youth, parent, and community leadership needed to sustain progress.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CJSF

CJSF has already engaged its team, partners, and members in a process of planning and visioning, laying out a set of priorities that builds on its previous work, while carving out ambitious new bodies of work, particularly around narrative power-building. Interviewees provided additional insights and critical reflection on how CJSF can amplify its impact.

- Donors called for increased strategy-focused, action-oriented member engagement that more deeply explored the roles of members, engaged the "persuadable middle," and explored opportunities to engage more community and regional foundations.
- Reflections on partner engagement brought up appreciation for and a want to increase spaces for collective learning and strategizing, interest in a more cohesive set of capacity strengthening opportunities, and a need for increased grant amounts with longer grant terms. Further, some partners suggested that

CJSF pay greater attention to rural and Native organizing, engage partners as co-designers of convenings and other learning opportunities, and consider providing fiscal sponsorship for partners.

- Suggestions for bolstering organizational development included a desire to see CJSF elevate its visibility and “brand” within philanthropy, disseminate research, data, and policy in more digestible formats, incorporate regular evaluation mechanisms into its work, and consider an endowment.
- Interviewees suggested priorities for field engagement, such as maintaining focus on challenging school discipline, continuing to make connections between local and national work, raising awareness about local school boards, and making explicit connections between CJSF’s focus on holistically safe schools, the value proposition of public education, and democratic principles.

CONCLUSION

Carrying on the legacy of its founding director, Allison R. Brown, this evaluation demonstrates the wide-ranging impact CJSF has had on the field of education justice. CJSF has successfully:

- Helped increase resources to the field (CJSF has moved more than \$26 million in core support to partners since 2016));
- Encouraged funders to become more equitable and relational in their philanthropic practices;
- Curated a rich suite of learning opportunities for donors, members, and other stakeholders;
- Served as a vocal advocate for education justice through federal policy work, as well as through media outlets;
- Invested in crucial base-building and power-building efforts; and
- Catalyzed powerful policy wins.

The current context carries with it both formidable challenges as well as promising strengths. Importantly, this evaluation shows that through years of thoughtful relationship-building, CJSF has earned the trust of partners on the ground who are on the frontlines of this work.



Introduction and Background

It is impossible to tell the story of the Communities for Just Schools Fund (CJSF) – what it has accomplished and how it hopes to evolve and grow in the future – without acknowledging the imprint Allison R. Brown, its founding director, left on the organization. In 2020, Allison transitioned to the ancestors, but the values, ethos, and approach she seeded in the early days of CJSF continue today.

Before being tapped as the founding director of CJSF in 2015, Allison had established a strong reputation as an education and civil rights leader through her years of service in both government and philanthropy. Notably, in her role as a trial attorney for the U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, she worked on a court case against the Meridian Public School District in Mississippi, in response to citizen complaints that Black students were being disproportionately disciplined and incarcerated for minor school infractions. Allison’s work on the case led to a historic settlement with the school district and raised national visibility around the school-to-prison pipeline.¹

By any measure, this was a major victory, but Allison understood that it was just the beginning. As the agreement was finalized, she wrote in the Washington Post, “We cannot believe...that a court order is the end of the story...[I]t has merely opened the door for hard-core, focused advocacy fueled by the particulars of the decree. Advocates, youth, and communities now have to ride the momentum of the Meridian agreement and do the difficult work necessary to make sure that the spirit of the agreement is reflected in the treatment of black students and, importantly, in the perception of black students.”²

1 The NEA. (2021, February 8). *For the media, stories from the field: Education justice champion honored for tireless work to support children and civil rights*. <https://www.neafoundation.org/ideas-voices/education-justice-champion-honored-for-tireless-work-to-support-children-and-civil-rights/>

2 Brown, A. (2013, April 8). *Building a youth movement from Mississippi lessons*. The Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/therootdc/post/victory-in-miss-school-discipline-case-shows-fight-for-equality-in-classrooms-continues/2013/04/08/19711042-9e23-11e2-a2db-efc5298a95e1_blog.html

ABOUT CJSF

In 2010, a group of funders committed to education justice organizing launched the Just and Fair Schools Fund. JFSF supported organizations in 15 states, working at the local, state, and national levels to eradicate harsh school discipline policies and promote positive school climates.

Originally hosted at NEO Philanthropy, in 2015 the Fund re-launched as the Communities for Just Schools Fund (fiscally sponsored by the New Venture Fund), a move that allowed the entity to deepen and expand its grantmaking, as well as its support for grassroots organizing groups.

Today, the Fund supports 80 grassroots organizations and national networks as partners across 25 states (plus Puerto Rico, D.C., and Canada), has engaged as many as 24 foundations as members in a year, and is expected to maintain and grow an annual grantmaking budget of more than \$5 million a year with the majority of those dollars moving to partners as general operating support.

Importantly, over the years CJSF has quietly removed the term “donor collaborative” from its materials, describing itself today simply as a “collaborative” – a shift in language that honors the contributions of both its donor members (referred to as “members”) and grantee partners (referred to as “partners”).

As a national collaborative, CJSF brings together the resources of philanthropy with the power of grassroots organizing to ensure that all schools welcome students and nurture their full potential. Collectively, CJSF’s priorities reflect its theory of change that changing the system of education to create equitable, healthy, safe, and nurturing schools and learning environments requires youth, parent, & teacher-led perspectives and voice.

To this end, CJSF organizes its work around four key pillars:

- Fund organizations that change schools through community organizing and advocacy
- Build capacity of partners and create space for collective learning and action
- Connect and foster relationships between partners and other stakeholders
- Lead efforts to make school discipline reform and positive school climate a priority

It is this belief, that **grassroots community organizing is a necessary and vital force for transformative social change**, that animates the mission of the Communities for Just Schools Fund. Allison infused the organization with a clarity of purpose, striving to ensure that our schools create a culture in which all students, especially Black and Brown students, can thrive. Allison named anti-Blackness from the onset as the pernicious root of educational disparities and brought a deeply relational approach to grantmaking,

ensuring that values of equity, inclusion, and care were reflected in how CJSF showed up in its myriad roles, as funder, advocate, partner, and ally.

From its inception, CJSF sought to ensure that it was accountable to its grassroots partners, centering the leadership of Black and Brown organizers. At the same time, CJSF nurtured relationships with donors, philanthropic support organizations, officials in federal government, researchers, and education leaders across the country. With its deep connection to work on the ground, combined with a birds-eye view of the education justice landscape, CJSF's current co-director, Jaime Koppel, observes that one of CJSF's unique contributions to the education justice landscape is "to see both the opportunities and the challenges of the future and name them before they're in the public drinking water." Koppel describes this work as "this soft thing we're holding, gently inviting folks to see it with us and to help shape it." In doing so, CJSF leans into collaborative and generative relationships with its partners, members, and allies, or as Koppel describes it, "living on a learning edge."

It is in this spirit of learning, accountability, and reflection that CJSF, in 2021, commissioned COMM | VEDA Consulting to conduct an evaluation to take stock of its work to date, solicit reflections on the current challenges and strengths within the education justice landscape, and gather perspectives on the opportunities that lie ahead for CJSF and its partners, members, and allies as they collectively seek to strengthen the movement for education justice.

This report draws upon insights gleaned from 57 in-depth interviews, 1 focus group with 6 members, a partner survey (32 respondents), a member survey (14 respondents), as well as an extensive review of CJSF's internal documents, including notes from member meetings, documentation from partner calls, and strategy documents.³

³ See Appendix A for a detailed description of the methodology.



Looking Back: CJSF's Impact on Education Justice Organizing

CJSF's impact has been far-reaching, touching on each of its four strategic pillars, Fund-Build-Connect-Lead. Partners, members, and network allies alike noted that CJSF holds deep content expertise in education justice, operates from a place of moral conviction, and invests deeply in building trusting relationships.

And while CJSF is deeply connected to the work happening on the ground, its relationships across different sectors – government, nonprofit, philanthropy, and research – allow CJSF to have a holistic and expansive view of the education justice field. This unique perch allows CJSF to identify emerging trends, make strategic connections, and offer a nuanced analysis of the issues of the day.

This combination of attributes undergirds the ways in which CJSF has made a mark in the field of education justice. Specifically, our data show CJSF has influenced the field of education justice by:

- Resourcing education justice and shifting philanthropic practice;
- Curating rich and generative learning opportunities;
- Advocating for policy and narrative change centering the voices of those most impacted;
- Investing in base-building and power-building; and
- Catalyzing policy and practice wins.

RESOURCING EDUCATION JUSTICE AND SHIFTING PHILANTHROPIC PRACTICE

The strategic pillars of Fund-Build-Connect-Lead mean that CJSF provides a range of resources and supports to its members and partners, but “Fund” intentionally comes first. As a grantmaker, CJSF’s value proposition is that grassroots organizing is among the most impactful, yet the least supported, strategies for achieving social and educational justice.

To this end, CJSF has played a critical role in raising awareness among donors about injustices in schooling, the role of grassroots organizing in building, winning, and sustaining a new, affirmative vision for education, and the importance of funding such efforts.

In addition to catalyzing shifts in funding, CJSF seeks to model equitable philanthropic practice and what it looks like to be in community and partnership with grassroots organizations. Indeed, members noted how they have drawn upon CJSF’s example to inform their own practice.

CJSF has consistently increased its funding for grassroots organizing over the years, from \$2.8 million in 2016 to \$5.1 million in 2021 and \$5.3 million in 2022. Reflecting this growth in grantmaking, the member table has grown from 13 members in 2016 to a high of 24 members in recent years and 22 members at the end of 2022. The steady growth of CJSF’s grantmaking budget is a testament to the inroads CJSF has made within philanthropy to engage a growing cohort of donors to support grassroots organizing for education justice. Of note, several foundations have made multi-year commitments spanning

CJSF’S IMPACT

Through its grantmaking and field support, CJSF is:

- Resourcing education justice to the tune of \$5.1 million/year (and growing) and encouraging donors to adopt more equitable grantmaking practices
- Curating a rich suite of generative learning opportunities that are fostering new relationships and strengthening strategies and tactics for education organizing
- Advocating for policy and narrative change by centering the perspectives of Black and Brown youth, parents, and those who are most impacted by educational injustices

Through multi-year general operating support grants, CJSF is

- Investing in base-building and power-building efforts that strengthen the movement for education justice
- Catalyzing policy and practice wins related to police-free schools, restorative justice, culturally affirming-curricula, and more



“They’ve been instrumental in...bringing philanthropic dollars to the field as well as convening important players and actors from the philanthropic space to help them better understand what is needed to address school discipline and eliminate inequities.”

- Network Partner

“Multi-year funding for a small nonprofit really makes a difference. It gave us a longer runway of planning.

Also, our work in schools has had to shift during COVID and so having money that we could re-allocate to doing hybrid programs and doing virtual programs with young people gave us flexibility to be able to pivot.

It gave me a little bit more spaciousness to ask different questions about how to best support young people and how to best support the team.”

- Partner

three, four, and even five years, and others, like the Hewlett Foundation, have increased their support substantially over time. The consistent and growing support of members allows CJSF to maintain its commitment to provide partners with sustained funding over time.

In addition to the contributions of its members, in 2022, CJSF also received an unrestricted gift of \$10 million from MacKenzie Scott. The award, an unsolicited gift, recognizes CJSF’s authentic connection to community and in [Scott’s words](#), its efforts to “support the ability of all people to participate in solutions.”⁴ The award bolsters CJSF’s ability to resource organizing for education justice in a sustained fashion, while also allowing CJSF to invest in its own organizational development so that it can better support organizing efforts on the

ground through its suite of offerings, from technical assistance to learning exchanges, and build a sustained pot of resources to pursue its funding strategy into the future. CJSF hopes that other funders will accept MacKenzie Scott’s invitation and deepen investments in grassroots community-led organizing.

Through its grantmaking budget, CJSF currently supports 80 organizations in 25 states, plus DC, Puerto Rico, and Canada. This represents substantial growth — when the Just and Fair Schools Fund morphed into CJSF in 2015, CJSF inherited 28 grantee partners. By the end of its first year, CJSF had invited additional organizations to its network, supporting 45 partners in 2016 with a base-level of support of at least \$100,000.

CJSF has provided crucial multi-year, general operating support to its partners, allowing partners to do their work more effectively. Given the long-term, and sometimes unpredictable, nature of campaigns for social justice, as well as the

4 Scott, MacKenzie. (2022, March 23). *Helping any of us can help all of us*. Medium. <https://mackenzie-scott.medium.com/helping-any-of-us-can-help-us-all-f4c7487818d9>

84%

of partners said grant funds allowed them to do work they would not have been able to do otherwise

72%

of partners said CJSF funding helped them leverage funding from other sources

importance of investing in leadership development among communities that are most impacted by injustice, organizers consistently assert the importance of unrestricted, multi-year funding to be able to do their work without the added stress of frequent, laborious grant proposals and reporting.

As standard practice, CJSF awards two-year general operating support grants ranging from \$100,000 to \$400,000 and seeks to sustain funding for partners over the long-term in acknowledgement of organizing being longtime work. CJSF maintains long-term relationships with partners. Given that many of CJSF’s partners have organizational budgets below \$1 million, these grants represent substantial investments. Such unrestricted, sustained funding allows partners to build capacity within their organizations, increase outreach within their communities to build and sustain a strong base, and be nimble in the face of changing political, economic, and social conditions.

In addition to general operating grants, CJSF has resourced education justice movement organizations via rapid response support and bespoke organizational strengthening support. In times of unexpected need, CJSF has provided rapid response grants and organized its members and other funder colleagues to do the same. In 2022, CJSF moved 14 rapid response grants and contributions, totaling \$256,347. Those efforts included healing and wellness supports, resources for climate crisis response efforts, police free schools organizing, ending predictive policing, support for a sunseting organization, and more. In 2021, CJSF moved 11 rapid response grants, totaling \$150,000, which included support for grassroots groups in the Gulf Coast in the aftermath of Hurricane Ida, support for leadership transitions, and resources for organizations to invest in mental health supports for their staff in the aftermath of providing support to communities dealing with violence perpetuated by police. CJSF invited members and friends to do the same. In 2020, CJSF distributed \$70,000 in rapid response grants, which included direct aid to youth and families, support for transitions to digital organizing, and youth stipends amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2019, CJSF awarded \$143,000 in rapid response funding.

CJSF's Rapid Response Grants



 [CJSF] is the largest funder that we have for our youth programming so it's incredible and pretty vital... that was the seed of what we have now.

We didn't have a very formalized [youth leadership program] and that only happened because we received CJSF funding."

- Partner

In addition, CJSF provides capacity strengthening support to organizations beyond the grant. This includes funds to support strategy development, professional development for organizing staff, and other needs, such as succession planning and leadership transitions, as they arise. One organizing group described CJSF's technical support to them as "super helpful," noting that "CJSF has access to those high-level professionals that can just answer questions or have perspective." Also, as part of its capacity strengthening efforts, in 2022 CJSF began offering a series of skillshares to provide support in data collection, analysis, and writing, helping to position partners as experts by developing their skills to tell their own stories with evidence.

CJSF has helped expand the ecosystem of organizing for education justice, supporting organizations in geographic areas and communities that are often overlooked by mainstream philanthropy. CJSF seeks out partners in places where grassroots organizing has historically been under-resourced, including the Southwest, the South, and Puerto Rico. As one strand of CJSF's strategy, CJSF has a place-based cohort of partners working in places where there has been less philanthropic investment in grassroots organizing - including Mississippi, Florida, and Washington, DC. Likewise, CJSF supports emerging organizations

56%

of partners said CJSF connected them to new funders

*Based on 32 survey responses indicating a 4 or 5 rating on a 5 point scale

that may not yet be on the radar of mainstream philanthropy, helping to bring visibility to their work.

By making investments other funders may deem too risky, CJSF has helped organizations build and seed new programs, expanding the reach of grassroots organizing for education justice. In many cases, these early grants served as a gateway to funding from other donors. Indeed, several members reported making new grants to CJSF partners who had not previously been a part of their grantmaking portfolios, after having been introduced to their work by CJSF.

CJSF's philanthropic advocacy work has helped funders deepen their understanding of education justice, in some cases influencing members' strategic priorities. Through its quarterly member meetings, attendance at philanthropy and education conferences, funder briefings, and one-on-one connections, CJSF engages with donors to bridge the worlds of philanthropy and organizing.

Members shared that CJSF helps them "think more broadly and more inclusively about what education justice means," "expose [them] to people with new and different ideas about how to do the work," "help to frame [the work] nationally," and "better understand the role of young people and parents in organizing." More specifically, donors appreciated a deep dive into issues of the day

buzz issues and “helping people to unpack it better and understand, ‘what exactly is this and how does it relate to policing?’”

In addition, particularly for funders newer to the work, CJSF’s deep knowledge of organizing and its close relationships to groups on the ground provide valuable insights into understanding the role of organizing in advancing education justice. One donor member shared, “I think what has been most helpful is the intimacy with organizing and really supporting folks to have a mental model of what is organizing, what is the value of organizing, how it is distinct from advocacy... Creating greater space for our trustees to understand those distinctions has been really helpful.”

In particular, members said that hearing directly from students, parents, teachers, and community organizers provided them with a deeper understanding of lived experiences and a better sense of who is doing what work. As a result, members indicated they could return to their own institutions better poised to advocate for giving that is more aligned with the local needs of partners. For example, one member noted that exposure to grassroots groups through CJSF allowed them to go back to their institution to advocate for solutions advanced by local organizing efforts, saying, “It’s very counter to so much of philanthropy that assumes that solutions come from the national level and have to be imposed on everyone.”

In the realm of strategy, one member shared that CJSF provided them the framing to have deeper conversations within their foundation about criminalization in education spaces, which helped them better advocate around this issue. Another member described how CJSF’s framing of current issues (such as policing and socio-emotional



“They are really good about bringing fund members along the ladder of engagement.”

- Member

“To hear... their perspective helped us [to]... push for supporting organizing... [while] trying to develop a shared understanding and framework of what power building is and why that matters if we really want to make change that’s meaningful in the system.”

- Member

“Their meetings are experiences. You’re not coming in for the update. You’re coming in for an experience, which actually puts us in movement. We’re there to build movements.”

- Member

“I love that the Fund provides a way to see the work up close and personal without feeling like you are burdening [grantee partners] for a one-off.”

- Member

learning) has broadened their understanding of the structures and systems contributing to injustices, resulting in a shift in their strategy.

Members said CJSF helped them shift towards more equitable grantmaking practices, consider the power dynamics between funders and grantees, and develop deeper and less transactional relationships with grantees. Equity and inclusion are not just about what is being funded, but how the grantmaking is being done. While many of the funders at the CJSF table already center equity and inclusion in their grantmaking practices, others are in earlier stages of their work. For these members, CJSF provided a safe and affirming space to ask difficult questions and to learn in community with others, which in turn helped them advocate for shifts in grantmaking practices within their foundations.

For example, several members shared that CJSF helped them understand the burden of reporting requirements, prompting them to streamline requirements within their own foundation to reduce the amount of time needed on paperwork. Foundations described other changes as well, such as: offering general operating support, loosening application requirements, and increasing funding for organizational capacity.

Beyond the nuts and bolts of grantmaking, members noted that CJSF curates spaces that model authentic engagement with community, create ample room for collaboration and co-creation, and demonstrate respect for the time and expertise their partners bring to the table.

Given the power dynamics present in philanthropy, this is not always easy to do. Members reported that they learned from the “authentic” ways in which CJSF shows up in partnership with

“The thoughtfulness in the way [CJSF] talks about the work and the way they present their work and the work of [grassroots] organizations has been really helpful for me in... bringing information back to my team and even [thinking about] how we structure our own internal meetings.

They are very thoughtful about how they create the space and hold the space and ask for input from different folks, and I really appreciate that.”

- Member

“My analysis and relational practice has been so informed by the CJSF team – their intentional and relational approach to grantmaking, field building, and funder organizing, [along with] their clarity of political analysis and their ego-free centering of the work of movement.”

- Member



organizers, helping them consider how they, too, can deepen their own practices around collaboration and inclusion.

MEMBER PERSPECTIVES ON CJSF

Data are based on responses from 14 members, out of 31 active members (45% response rate).

Percent of Members Indicating Strong Agreement with the Following Fund Attributes (rated 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale)

Helped me deepen my understanding of the work it funds.	93%
Helped me learn more about the Fund’s partners and their perspectives, priorities, and needs.	85%
Meetings are informative and beneficial.	72%
Fostered relationships between donor members.	58%

Percent of Members Indicating that CJSF Has Been More Likely than Other Collaboratives to:

Approach their work in a relational way	79%
Make good use of its resources.	71%
Provide support to grantee partners they would not get elsewhere.	71%
Make steady progress towards its goals.	50%

Percent of Members Indicating Strong Agreement with the Following Fund Achievements (rated 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale)

CJSF has achieved or is on track to achieve its goals.	100%
CJSF has added value to the educational justice ecosystem.	100%
CJSF has been an overall success.	100%
CJSF has brought more attention and action to their work they’re supporting.	95%

Percent of Members Indicating Moderate to Significant CJSF Influence on Individual Behaviors

I have become a more vocal advocate for education justice within my foundation.	64%
I have advocated for changes in our foundation’s grantmaking processes that align with grantee partners needs and priorities	57%
I have been motivated to examine my own racial equity journey.	50%
I have become more active in organizing or advocacy efforts for education justice in my community.	35%

Percent of Members Indicating Moderate to Significant CJSF Influence on Foundation Practices

Increased support for grantee partners’ organizational capacity and leadership development	42%
Helping grantee partners secure funding from other sources	38%
Reduced reporting requirements	35%
Placed a greater priority on education justice	29%
Shift to trust-based/relational philanthropy	21%
Streamlined application process	21%
Moving more general operating support to grantee partners	21%
More support for grassroots organizations	21%

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: ANDRUS FAMILY FUND

When Nyoka Acevedo joined the Andrus Family Fund (AFF) as a program officer in February 2020, one of her first responsibilities was to work with CJSF to plan their jointly sponsored convening, Education Anew Shifting Justice, in Mississippi. Only weeks later, they had to cancel the in-person convening because of COVID. Acevedo and the CJSF team asked partners, “What is the need? What are the spaces people want us to hold?” The resulting virtual convening was responsive to the needs of partners.

From this initial set of interactions with CJSF to her eventual role as an executive committee member, Acevedo expressed an appreciation for how CJSF engages members and partners.

Acevedo shared, “First and foremost, I appreciate how the team really leads with care. There’s an intention, a thoughtfulness around creating these collective spaces... that really sets the tone and the culture. Particularly for donor members that are coming from different cultural, philanthropic spaces, it feels always very warm and welcoming.” In Acevedo’s view, this culture of care stands out. She shared, “There are so few spaces in my two years in philanthropy that exist like that.”

Acevedo also singled out the way in which CJSF designs its donor meetings, noting that the staff spends a great deal of time preparing for meetings, ensuring that members have relevant materials ahead of time, and curating content to center partner perspectives and to learn from their work on the ground. Acevedo said, “So much of what they offer during these donor member meetings are learning opportunities for philanthropy – to bring philanthropy along and to give us strategies on how to bring these learnings back to our foundation.” At the same time, despite their level of pre-planning, CJSF skillfully facilitates meetings to allow for member priorities to be addressed, “[The meetings] are more intuitively led. There is a knowing of where the conversation needs to go. There’s not a resistance to flow.”

Acevedo believes that, through its relationship with CJSF, AFF has learned important lessons about how to collaborate effectively and how to connect the dots more clearly around its work on youth justice and the specific campaigns related to education justice that CJSF supports. She shared, “CJSF is really great at connecting the threads and giving us language and frames to talk about the work more broadly.”

Moving forward, Nyoka hopes to see CJSF share its model and approach more broadly across philanthropy – “It’s a way of doing things differently. It’s not the same old stuff.”



Nyoka Acevedo
Andrus Family Fund

CURATING RICH AND GENERATIVE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

CJSF has created a variety of opportunities to promote collective learning and action, building a community of practice through conferences, learning exchanges, podcast episodes, webinars, original reports, and regular e-newsletters. For example, CJSF has hosted 9 webinars over the past two years which have reached over 3,500 educators, funders, organizers, and education stakeholders. These efforts are designed to highlight partners' expertise, create space for connection and synergy across groups, and equip partners with information and tools to inform their organizing praxis and campaigns for holistically safe schools.

CJSF has cultivated a generative and trusting network for learning and growth – one that is rooted in a culture of care. Interviewees noted that CJSF establishes safety and prioritizes trust-building in its meetings, convenings, and virtual sessions, key ingredients of what both members and partners said makes CJSF's learning spaces generative and powerful spaces for participants.

What does this trust-building look like in practice? Both partners and members lifted up CJSF's ability to create a community of care, with attention not only to the importance of the work, but also to the people doing the work and a recognition that culture and lived experience are deeply embedded in how we show up in our professional lives.

For partners, it has meant that CJSF staff takes the time to get to know partners informally and to embed values of gratitude, grace, and partnership

How Partners Describe CJSF

Peers

Co-Conspirators

Organizers

Family

Funders

Inclusive

Not-Judgmental

Understanding

 I really love the way that everyone on the CJSF team [shares] their full presence. It feels so different. It doesn't feel like typical philanthropy.

It feels like here's a partner in the struggle that's showing up and sharing space and allowing me to be authentic and willing to grapple with difficult questions and seeing me as a human being and not just the funder."

- Member

 CJSF has had an organizing mindset of how you hold relationships. There's trust, there's development, there's a practice to it."

- Partner

in all of its communications, challenging the norms of white dominant culture and traditional power dynamics within philanthropy. One partner described the CJSF network this way, “We literally call ourselves family... they actually live into that value.” Another partner appreciated that CJSF “helps to break down the power dynamics that oftentimes [are] at play when you think about the grantor-grantee relationship.”

Noting that philanthropy can sometimes be extractive in its work with grassroots partners, one of CJSF’s partners observed, “Every time I show up in [a] conversation as a grantee speaker, it’s very trust-based. I feel like the work has already been done and we’re not being propped up as some funders might do with us...they’ve already tilled the soil and prepared funders to hear us. That level of practice and solidarity is really, really priceless.”

Likewise, members noted that CJSF excels at creating community within their network by connecting with members on a personal level, conducting one-on-one check-ins, carving out time for reflection and introspection in meetings, and modeling vulnerability and openness in discussions. As CJSF co-director Jaime Koppel stated, the larger meetings often work in tandem with one-on-one conversations, “allowing [us] to revisit the things that are hard,” and demonstrating “a commitment to building something together.” Several members noted that collaborating with CJSF “feels more like a thought partnership” than working with other collaboratives.

One member described the way that CJSF connects members to partners as transformational, rather than transactional. For example, in one virtual convening, the member felt transported to Mississippi when a keynote speaker led with a song that is significant to the region and its history and engaged the group in open discussion. “From the very beginning, with the music and everything, it literally put people, their bodies and spirits, in that space of what they’re facing in Mississippi and why we have to fight. And I love the fact that CJSF created that space.” Likewise, the presence of a Spanish-English translator at a convening in Long Beach, California created an environment of inclusivity that was representative of the community they were visiting. For members and partners alike, this human-first approach of centering community and contextualizing place served as a model to their own work.

Regular partner calls have fostered a sense of community, cultivated learning, and created space for collective strategizing. Partner calls are organized to create space for collaboration across systems and sectors, while breaking down issue-area silos and geographic barriers. Partners said they valued the opportunity to come together with fellow organizers to exchange information, resources, and strategies, while also getting much-appreciated “moral support.” One partner, in sharing their appreciation for bimonthly partner

80%

of partners said CJSF support helped them engage in helpful political education and learning

meetings, said CJSF is “very intentional about creating space for us to come together, but in a way that adds value to us as opposed to just sucking up time.” Another partner stated that building relationships with fellow organizers “opened our minds to all of the different people who were doing different work across the country,” while another mentioned the value of being able to take quick action collectively when urgent issues arise.

Indeed, there are tangible examples of connection coming out of partner schools. One partner, located in Pennsylvania, connected with another group in Kentucky to exchange strategies about their respective efforts around immigration justice in schools. “We were able to connect in a meaningful [way], even though we were in different states and different communities,” said the partner. Another partner expressed that “learning from each other and understanding the context — what’s different, what’s similar,” informed their organization’s local work, while another partner mentioned being able to get support from fellow organizers on a national campaign they were launching.

Members and partners praised CJSF for creating meaningful opportunities to learn, engage, and strategize with others through convenings and webinars. While partner calls allow organizers to connect with one another as peers, CJSF convenings and webinars bring together individuals and organizations across the education justice network — members, partners, and other allies and stakeholders. By doing so, CJSF creates opportunities for mini-networks to sprout through collaboration across geographies, issues areas, and network roles. These convenings result in deepened relationships across the network as partners, members, and stakeholders move

 The power of relationships can never be understated... CJSF has played a key role in being [a] point of contact with some of the national entities... They’re kind of like a glue that helps to bring some unity between different folks.”

- Partner

 CJSF definitely facilitates moments where we can come together and you’re meeting other people in the work you might collaborate with in the future, whether it’s a job opportunity or a joint project. I think that’s been helpful.”

- Network

 They’ve been connectors for us, allowing us to have space with folks across the country, to be able to talk about things that we’re working on.”

- Partner

beyond surface interactions to deeper conversations that foster trust by sharing experiences and struggles in the work.

Relationships across federal/policy, philanthropic, and grassroots levels are most notably forged when opportunities for engaging in small group and one-on-one conversations occur. As a result, partners are better able to coordinate strategies and leverage resources in the field, members have greater understanding of key issues and needs on the ground, and policymakers and federal entities can make decisions that are informed by experiential knowledge and better understand impacts at local levels.

Learning exchanges have helped organizers forge new connections, refine strategies, and imagine what is possible. CJSF has hosted a series of learning exchanges over the years – site visits to communities and organizing groups that offer opportunities for high-touch, interactive engagement among organizers. Interviewees highlighted these as especially impactful experiences.

A critical mass of partners highlighted a learning exchange in Toronto with Latinx, Afro-Latin-America, Abya Yala Education Network, formerly known as the Latin American Education Network (LAEN) as especially powerful. At the time, LAEN was a lead organizing group in one of the few examples of a coalition that had won a campaign for police-free schools in a large school district. Through the learning exchange, partners got to do a deep dive into the strategies that LAEN used in its ten-year campaign and the lessons they learned. One partner said their organization’s participation in the learning exchange “set off a ton of different, very strategic developments” in their work, which “would not have happened had it not been for CJSF.”

Similarly, another partner shared that participation in learning exchanges helped them leave with tangible learnings, “I can take these conversations or these tools or this strategy and add it into a training... it’s helped me to figure out what our next move will be.” Another partner mentioned how the learning exchanges helped them expand their vision of what was possible, “[The learning exchanges] have been useful in bringing organizers and justice organizers together around sets of issues that maybe they hadn’t thought about or thought about organizing together” which has “generated some political will and some political action together.”



Any [publications] that they put out, we’ve had the opportunity to seriously weigh in on... Being able to pull those up, utilize them, and drop them in policymaking spaces is very helpful.”

- Partner

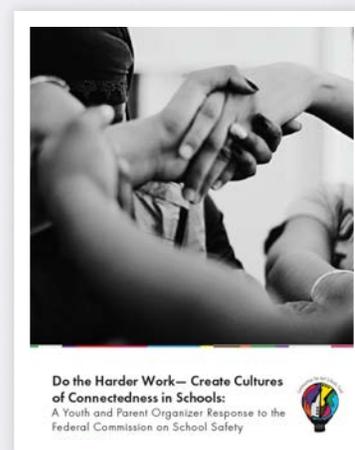
Through original research and analysis, CJSF has illuminated connections across local organizing efforts, while also providing grist for emergent efforts. Of note, CJSF has produced two reports: *Do the Harder Work* (2018)⁵ and *Reclaim Social-emotional Learning* (2020),⁶ both of which lift up partner campaigns and perspectives for decision-makers in education. The reports connect experiential perspectives from local organizing groups to discussions at the federal level. In these reports, partners conveyed overwhelming opposition to the hardening of schools and offered youth- and family-supported

5 Communities for Just Schools Fund. (2018, December 5). *Do the harder work– Create cultures of connectedness in schools: A youth and parent organizer response to the federal commission on school safety*. https://www.cjsfund.org/files/ugd/bbf-2c5_37e40e3b39e14ecfb5f91c36de452502.pdf?index=true

6 Communities for Just Schools Fund. (2020, October 23). *Reclaim social-emotional learning: Centering organizing praxis for holistically safe schools*. <https://www.cjsfund.org/reclaimsel>

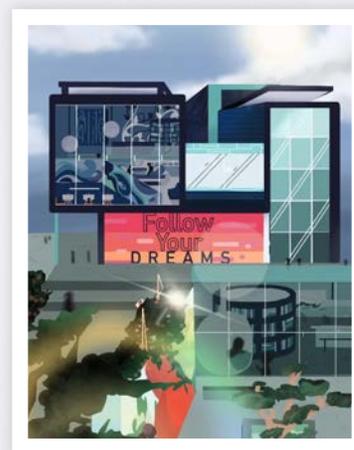
DO THE HARDER WORK

In 2018, CJSF released *Do the Harder Work: Create Cultures of Connectedness in Schools*, a report in response to calls from the Federal Commission on School Safety and other parties to harden schools in the wake of the Parkland tragedy. Based on work by CJSF partners and organizers, the report issues a call-to-action for states and local districts to engage in the “harder work of fostering ‘cultures of connectedness’” in schools through practices such as restorative justice, culturally relevant curricula, diverse school staff, mental and emotional health supports, and more. [Download and read the report here.](#)



RADPORT: RECLAIM SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING

In a move to counter harmful narratives around school safety, CJSF released *Reclaim Social-Emotional Learning: Organizing Praxis for Holistically Safe Schools in 2020*. The radport (“radical report”) presents findings from CJSF’s year-long Community of Practice, including survey data from partners on their school safety and SEL work, site visits, and learning exchanges and webinars, with the intent of centering organizers’ perspectives on holistic, culturally-affirming SEL and school safety. *Reclaim SEL* highlights examples of SEL from organizers, pushing back against current frameworks of SEL that are used as another tool to police Black and Brown youth. [Download and read the report here.](#)



recommendations for creating safe and supportive schools that all students deserve. In addition, the reports named harmful narratives about safety with a call to move towards a more holistic approach inclusive of culturally affirming social-emotional learning.

Time and time again, interviewees named these reports as critical resources in their work, ones that helped them shape their analysis, spark critical dialogue, and provide critical data to policymakers and other people in positions of power. As of 2021, *Reclaim Social-Emotional Learning* alone had almost 1,100 downloads by users in more than 31 states. Of those who identified themselves when downloading the report, there were 376 educators, 164 researchers, 118 organizers, and 80 funders. In discussing the report’s impact, one partner said, “[It’s] something I refer back to often when I’m thinking about my own work and how to talk to school board members or our superintendent about the importance of centering culturally affirming, culturally responsive [practices] as a part of their SEL work... [the report] has been invaluable.”

EDUCATION ANEW SHIFTING JUSTICE CONFERENCE 2018

Like many brilliant ideas, Education Anew Shifting Justice Conference was borne out of a conversation at a New York City bar. In 2016, Leticia Peguero, then executive director of the Andrus Family Fund, and Allison R. Brown of CJSF met for a drink and



discussed the power of bringing together their respective partners working in the justice system and the education system, who too often did not have the opportunity to connect with another. The first conference took place just four months later in Memphis. The location was not an accident. From the onset, the vision was to convene in places in the South and the Global South, which are among the most challenging environments for both criminal justice and education justice organizing.

In 2018, following Hurricane Maria, Puerto Rico was a natural choice for the next conference – one that could bring attention to the island’s fight for liberation, while making connections to campaigns on the mainland. CJSF and AFF were intentional about ensuring that the convening reflected partner priorities and was grounded in historical and cultural context. For example, partner organizations sat on the planning committee, serving as co-designers in identifying conference topics and themes. In addition, to build relationships prior to the convening, participating organizations collectively engaged in learning about disaster capitalism and colonialism in Puerto Rico through a pre-conference event in New Orleans, allowing organizers to create space for shared movement-building, while understanding the unique political and social context in Puerto Rico.

Attendees of EASJ heard from organizers, students, youth leaders, parents, and teachers who offered first-hand perspectives on current challenges, strategies, and successes in the field across the continental US and Puerto Rico. Partners and members alike praised CJSF for its ability to convene participants representing diverse roles and geographies. As one partner put it, “It’s something that organizers and groups couldn’t do themselves.”

Unlike mainstream conferences, this convening prioritized relationship building within its network as well as healing, rest, and reflection. Tapping into the island’s network of healers, the conference integrated wellness into the conference design, rather than offering it as an add-on. Between the natural beauty of the Puerto Rican landscape and planned moments of no obligation, participants had opportunities to soak in their learnings, reflect on topics most relevant to their work, deepen relationships with others in the field, and indulge in a break from the day-to-day of organizing that is seldom afforded.

 They're always on the leading edge of different issues that are emerging.

The fact that they are so proactive in their thinking about what...groups are grappling with on the ground and how to frame that broadly is key.”

- Partner

ADVOCATING FOR POLICY AND NARRATIVE CHANGE

In addition to engaging with its members and partners “internally,” CJSF plays an important public-facing role as an advocate for education justice, elevating partner campaigns and perspectives within the media, as well as in discussions on federal policy. In this role, CJSF has helped connect local and national work and bring greater attention to issues of education justice.

CJSF has published op-eds and received coverage in a variety of media outlets with a national audience. CJSF has used its platform to advocate for greater resourcing of education justice and lift up partner campaigns and wins in the national media. This includes essays in Medium, notably “[‘Flood of Money’ to BLM is a Racist Deception](#)”⁷ and “[When SEL is Used as Another Form of Policing](#),”⁸ both published in 2020 and receiving 1,200 and 192,000 views to date respectively.

Additional articles have appeared in the [School Library Journal](#),⁹ [National Education Association News](#),¹⁰ [The Chronicle of Philanthropy \(opinion piece\)](#),¹¹ and [The Sillerman Center \(Social Justice Funders Spotlight\)](#).¹² CJSF has also penned a number of op-eds, including two in NewsOne (one on the [intersections of reproductive justice and police-free schools](#)¹³ and another on [school safety](#)¹⁴) and one in [Philanthropy News Digest](#).¹⁵

7 Communities for Just Schools Fund. (2020, July 7). ‘Flood of money’ to BLM is a racist deception. Medium. <https://medium.com/@justschools/flood-of-money-to-blm-is-a-racist-deception-11c42e07695c>

8 Communities for Just Schools Fund. (2020, May 7). When SEL is used as another form of policing. Medium. <https://medium.com/@justschools/when-sel-is-used-as-another-form-of-policing-fa53cf85dce4>

9 Taylor, K. R. (2021, June 9). The push for police-free schools continues amid debate. School Library Journal. <https://www.slj.com/story/the-push-for-police-free-schools-continues-amid-debate>

10 Álvarez, B. (2021, May 27). We need to teach the truth about systemic racism, says educators. National Education Association. <https://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/we-need-teach-truth-about-systemic-racism-say-educators>

11 Williams, N. C. (2020, September 15). How to make giving for racial justice count. The Chronicle of Philanthropy. <https://www.philanthropy.com/article/how-to-ensure-the-billions-of-foundation-dollars-for-racial-justice-make-a-difference>

12 Wald, J. (n.d.). Social justice funders spotlight: Communities for Just Schools Fund. The Sillerman Center. <https://heller.brandeis.edu/sillerman/pdfs/spotlights/communities-just-schools-fund.pdf>

13 Perry, B., & Kaler-Jones, C. (2022, June 25). Op-ed: Police-free schools are critical to reproductive freedom. NewsOne. <https://newsone.com/4361604/police-free-schools-critical-reproductive-freedom/>

14 Koppel, J. T., & Kaler-Jones, C. (2022, July 17). Op-ed: School safety requires deep investment not more police. NewsOne. <https://newsone.com/4373932/school-safety-requires-deep-investment-not-more-police/>

15 Kaler-Jones, C., & Koppel, J. T. (2022, July 19). It's time to fully invest in our schools and community organizing. Philanthropy News Digest. <https://philanthropynewsdigest.org/features/commentary-and-opinion/it-s-time-to-fully-invest-in-our-schools-and-community-organizing>

CJSF is in the process of doubling down on these efforts, working with Jennifer Farmer, a media and public relations expert and communications consultant who is supporting partners to position op-eds and the like in national media. For example, CJSF supported Black Organizing Project in drafting and placing an op-ed in [NewsOne](#).¹⁶ In the wake of pushback to police-free schools wins across the country, CJSF hosted a [press conference](#)¹⁷ to uplift the importance of police-free schools and visions for holistic safety. This work led to an editorial board meeting with editors at USA Today. As one partner shared, “I think that [CJSF] have been really helpful advocates in amplifying storytelling and messaging.”

CJSF has engaged partners in strategic federal policy discussions, further making linkages between national and local conversations. CJSF keeps a pulse on federal policy developments and through its newsletters and action alerts, informs its network of opportunities to act, whether through signing a petition, offering public comment, or giving testimony. CJSF has been particularly well-positioned to engage in this work because both Allison R. Brown and Jaime Koppel came to the Fund with experience working at the Department of Justice. One partner stated, “They came with relationships connected to policymakers, and to be able to put us in that space, to be able to slide the work into that space was quite helpful.”

Both partners and members expressed appreciation for these updates, acknowledging that their day-to-day commitments did not always allow them to stay aware of relevant developments. In addition, such efforts offered opportunities to connect local campaigns to federal work, while also making such work feel more accessible.

In addition to keeping its network abreast of developments in federal policy, CJSF has made efforts to ensure that partner perspectives are a part of decision-making conversations. At the federal level, this includes engaging in supportive and leading roles in federal strategy efforts, including: the Federal School Discipline and Climate Coalition (FedSDC) and the following FedSDC working groups: Corporal Punishment, Exclusionary School Discipline and Climate, among others. CJSF also works with their partners to craft statements that speak directly to federal strategies. In 2020, for example, they wrote a [transition memo to the Biden-Harris Administration](#)¹⁸ on school climate and submitted a [comment letter](#)¹⁹ in support of the U.S. Department of Education’s proposed American History & Civics Ed Grant Priorities.

16 Parker, M. (2022, September 3). *As classes begin, a reminder why police in schools aren't the answer to students' safety*. NewsOne. <https://newsone.com/4400382/police-free-schools/>

17 Communities for Just Schools Fund. (2022, June 8). *Press conference: The importance of police-free schools and visions for holistic safety* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ydv9Qg8OurE&t=299s>

18 The Communities for Just Schools Fund. (2020, December 18). *Recommendations on school climate, discipline, and safety* [Unpublished letter].

19 Communities for Just Schools Fund. (2021, May 19). *Comment request; Proposed rule, proposed priorities – American history and civics education, docket no. ED-2021-OESE-0033* [Unpublished letter]. https://bbf2c557-f815-4c64-a27f-04cfd4e28a6b.usfiles.com/ugd/bbf2c5_77f427184df04809bde3ee5a2d1403f8.pdf

Having conversations with the DOJ, having us be able to be at those conversations, that would not happen without someone like CJSF who's able to bridge that gap for us... that's been a very clear big picture way that CJSF has come through for all of us."

- Partner

52%

of partners said CJSF support helped them influence and participate in federal strategy discussions and action

By engaging partners in working group conversations, CJSF has created the opportunity for partner stories to breathe life into reform efforts and, as one partner stated, "give the national work relevance" through their testimonies.

For example, after CJSF partners participated in a federal listening session with the U.S. Department of Education and Justice on school safety, a federal official said of the event, "The partner presentations were so powerful and offered critical perspectives on the impact of school policing and school hardening policies and practices, the causes or what drives the practices, and practical alternatives to increase safety in schools. These perspectives and voices were invaluable in our work."

Notably, CJSF has the ability to mobilize partners to give testimony in federal hearings and offer feedback on drafts responding to policies. One partner who has engaged in both shared, "I think they've made it much more democratic than it would be for a lot of folks that work on the Hill and don't have those real local connections."

In spring 2022, CJSF relaunched the CJSF federal brownbag initiative. These brownbag lunch sessions are virtual learning conversations that engage federal agency staff and CJSF's philanthropic network in conversations with CJSF partners leading change efforts at the grassroots level. CJSF's Federal Brownbag events offer participants an opportunity to engage in intimate conversation with CJSF, our partners, and each other about the issues facing the public education system and the solutions and demands partners are advancing.

CJSF builds conversations about national and local alignment into its regular work with partners. For example, grant reviews integrate questions surrounding how partner programs would like to engage in federal spaces but lack capacity to do so. CJSF holds space in partner calls to discuss alignment of local efforts and demands with new legislation at the national level. One partner offered, "It really helps us be up to speed on what's happening at the Federal level so that we can really analyze what is happening... especially in the partner calls, learn from each other and understand the context, what's different, what's similar, and having the trainings that they are able to provide, on ESSA and other Federal strategies, help us direct our local level work."

Funders also expressed appreciation for CJSF's role in making connections between federal and local work. One member voiced, "I think CJSF does a phenomenal job at demystifying and translating what is happening at the federal level, not only for the local organizations that they support but also for us funders, too." Another member shared, "I think one of the things that a group like CJSF does so well is bridging what's happening at local levels with what we need to be paying attention to federally as well. The bi-directionality of these two pieces... helps us have confidence that what they're moving forward is really grounded and situated in the lived experiences of folks locally."

In addition to involving partners in conversations at the federal level, CJSF is intentional about elevating partner perspectives across its network and beyond. CJSF's network is broad, extending beyond donors and organizers to include policy-makers, researchers, educators, as well as social justice leaders. Many partners shared that CJSF staff have served as "connectors" to one another, often creating opportunities for partners to share their strategies, successes, and needs with a diverse array of stakeholders.

One partner shared CJSF's efforts in communicating local knowledge at the national level facilitates strategic coordination, "Whether or not you're affiliated with a network, you can still be connected to national work that's happening [through CJSF]." This not only amplifies partner organization visibility in the field of education justice, but it increases their opportunities for collaboration and funding.

88%

of partners said CJSF helped them increase their visibility, positioning them as leaders to a wider audience



In this spirit, another partner offered, "CJSF has been in solidarity of getting us and others in front of funders, but I think more of that, just making sure that the funders help make the work that we're doing visible, because we're often so busy doing the work that we're not as good at painting a picture of it."

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT: NOLLIE JENKINS FAMILY CENTER

Nollie Jenkins Family Center (NJFC) is the type of organization, stated one CJSF member, that “most foundations avoid.” Located in Mississippi, the small organization faces constant threats to its work, a reality that makes its very survival tenuous. For many funders, the organization’s small size and the hostile social and political conditions in which it works, mean that a grant to them is a risky investment. And yet this is exactly why the organization’s work is so vital. As the same CJSF member noted, “There’s no other group in Mississippi like Nollie. It’s a tiny organization that’s covering an entire state... screaming [their] heads off trying to get people to understand why education justice is critical.”

Since the organization’s founding in 1994, NJFC has evolved from providing direct services to children and families to the grassroots leadership, education, and training organization it is today, grounded by a belief in the power of individual transformation and collective movement building. The small but mighty woman and Black-led organization defines power as “the ability to make things happen.” For NJFC, this means valuing children and parents’ voices in a culture where “children should be seen and not heard.” As Ellen Reddy, co-founder of NJFC asserts, “We wanted our children to be heard.”

CJSF has been in partnership with NJFC since the Fund’s inception, and much of its support has gone beyond grant dollars. Over the years, CJSF has provided the organization with interns and fellows in policy work to amplify its efforts, connected NJFC to the Federal Discipline in School Climate Committee to be a part of conversations about federal legislation, uplifted its initiatives (e.g., International Day to #EndCorporalPunishment) by offering space to inform the network about its work and how to get involved, and offered opportunities to travel to amplify their message (e.g., presenting at the Education Anew Shifting Justice conference in Puerto Rico and in 2022, at the Women’s Convention in Houston). Further, CJSF has provided assistance in writing and submitting grant proposals and connected NJFC with new funders to support their work.

NJFC has also appreciated the opportunity to connect with other partners in a meaningful way. Kameisha Smith, a Swiss Army Knife to the organization who coordinates and recruits for youth programs, develops curriculum, and provides technical assistance and training, shared, “Sometimes when you get funded by different foundations, the partners work in silos. Everyone is doing their own thing.” But working with CJSF has consistently proven the opposite. “CJSF has strategically done their partner calls so that we can learn from each other’s work. And that’s been going on for years.”

Beyond that, NJFC voiced that CJSF is a full and present partner. Janice Harper, a community organizer and family advocate with NJFC, shared, “They’re a different kind of funder... they do fund our work, and they’re very supportive of the work, but it is a true partnership.” As Reddy put it, “The CJSF team allows you to learn and grow with them.”

As the partnership continues to deepen, CJSF is providing behind-the-scenes support to Nollie Jenkins to develop a docuseries as a part of its narrative power-building efforts focused on ending corporal punishment in the state, as well as nationally. This docuseries will share stories and testimonies of some of the girls and young women they support, as well as learnings from elders in their community.

84%

of partners said grant funds gave them freedom and flexibility to try new outreach strategies

60%

of partners said CJSF support helped them pursue intersectionality in their work

INVESTING IN BASE-BUILDING AND POWER-BUILDING

CJSF prioritizes sustained funding and support, with a commitment to providing multi-year general operating support grants. Importantly, this funding model allows organizing groups to invest in the long-term, foundational work of base-building, leadership development, political education, and power-building beyond shorter-term campaign cycles.

Partners expanded their bases, in part through general operating support dollars. They were able to engage new constituencies in their fight for educational justice, particularly those who have been historically excluded from decision-making processes in education, including low-income students and parents, students and parents of color, and educators.

In Mississippi, CJSF partner Southern Echo engaged more than 75,000 people in 31 counties through outreach efforts to educate individuals, families, and communities about the Every Student Succeeds Act²⁰ and the Mississippi Parental and Community Engagement Councils (P-16 Council).²¹ Southern Echo also partnered with Sunflower County's P-16 Council to facilitate the re-establishment of the council and encouraged it to be more inclusive of parents and other community members.

In 2020, Californians for Justice recruited its biggest core leader cohort in recent history (140 youth, compared to 115 in typical years) and had an overall membership of 265 youth leaders, which was up from 250 the prior year. By continuing to build its core group of leaders, Californians for Justice noted, "Our youth are positioned to play an active role in regional and state-level decision-making bodies as [our] visibility increases and we gain more access to policymakers."²²

CJSF's view of power-building has been closely aligned with those of its partners, who frequently conducted training, outreach, and advocacy through an intersectional and multi-issue lens. While many foundations focus their grantmaking narrowly on specific issue areas or populations, CSJF's partners lauded the Fund's understanding of how systems of oppression are intertwined, recognizing that fights for education justice are

20 U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.). *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)*. <https://www.ed.gov/essa?src=rn>

21 Mississippi Department of Education. (n.d.). *P-16 Community-based Engagement Council*. <https://www.mdek12.org/OSI/P-16>

22 Cohort 2 Renewal Application, 2020

intimately connected to campaigns for economic justice, reproductive justice, climate justice, etc.

In Pennsylvania, for example, the work of CJSF partner Juntos exists at the intersection of immigrant and education justice. Juntos has held trainings for families on their rights when in contact with police and ICE. They have also trained over 450 school counselors, teachers, and ESL teachers on how to best support undocumented youth with college access and on various issues from cultural competency, language access and the criminalization of youth of color.

In a similar vein, Girls for Gender Equity led a series of events under #SchoolGirlsDeserve to draw attention to how girls and transgender/non-conforming youth are negatively affected by school discipline polices.

By supporting and advancing an analysis that its partners share, CJSF has echoed the call for more general operating support funds that allow groups to be authentic to lived realities on the ground, ultimately amplifying impact. In its own learning spaces, CJSF often begins with historical context, shining a spotlight on the ways in which structural racism and anti-Blackness permeate across issue areas, as well as highlighting the ways various social justice issues impact one another. For example, CJSF has lifted up the ways the lack of clean water in Jackson, Mississippi and the phenomenon of disaster capitalism in places like New Orleans and Puerto Rico harm young people and their communities.

Partners have been building power by cementing their role and reputation within communities and forming stronger relationships with key decision-makers. General operating support also

 I think it's really important, the voice and the role that CJSF plays in saying, 'This is how educational justice connects to [reproductive] justice, connects to trans and queer justice, connects to economic justice.' And this is why it's important to keep funding [that] side of it as well, especially when we're looking at things like school push out and how that impacts all of these other areas of people's lives. The critical need is in educational justice, in order to keep young people in safe and supportive school environments."

- Partner

 We're really trying to build a broader field of knowledge so that people don't see youth justice and education and mental health and social services systems as different, because that's part of the problem. We are constantly trying to push this holistic view of what young people need to succeed and how we eradicate youth prisons, starting at the school level."

- Network

allows organizations to build long-term staying power in communities, giving groups time and space to develop relationships with decision-makers and establish themselves as essential voices in conversations around education justice.

For example, CJSF partner Power U noted that they are "now being viewed as a place that the community can come to when things like Parkland

happen.” School board candidates have been reaching out to them for policy recommendations and the teacher’s union has approached them about collaboration. Another partner, Freedom, Inc. in Milwaukee observed that the framing of its work around community control is gaining traction in local conversations, generating deep and spirited debate, and demonstrating the power of their analysis.

Partners are building coalitions and networks to build collective power. General operating support funding also supports organizations to engage in coalition work – work that may not always be funded directly. Local, state, and national coalitions can be critical to building power and gaining traction on campaigns for education justice. As one partner stated, “Coalition work has played a big role in our successes. Being able to build genuine relationships with coalition partners and [being] clear about your common goals [is key].” In California, for example, the Dignity in Schools Campaign California has brought together groups across the state, including a critical mass of CJSF partners, to address the school-to-prison pipeline.



CATALYZING POLICY WINS

CJSF’s funding support, as well as the spaces it has created for learning and collective strategizing, have helped partners achieve policy and practice changes, particularly in school discipline and policing in schools.

Many of these campaigns – for police-free schools, for restorative justice, and for changes in school discipline practices have been going on for years, with varying degrees of success. Across the board, partners reported that the racial justice uprisings of 2020 made policymakers and school officials more receptive to their demands. Indeed, calls for police-free schools that were once deemed “too radical” became part of the mainstream conversation.

It is important to recognize, though, that these were not overnight wins – they were only possible because of the years of diligent base-building, political education, and direct action that preceded the 2020 racial justice uprisings. And as with the consent decree in Meridian, Mississippi described in the opening of this paper, policy wins are often only the beginning. Organizing efforts are essential to holding the line to ensure implementation and accountability.

LEARN MORE

Resourcing the Education Justice Movement: A Field-Level Assessment of School Discipline & Climate Campaigns details recent policy wins by partners and the lessons learned from these campaigns.

The section that follows offers some high-level highlights of the policy wins achieved by CJSF partners. This list, though not exhaustive, illustrates how sustained funding over time that helps strengthen organizing capacity and infrastructure can result in tangible victories.

Partners continued to make significant strides towards police-free schools. This included terminating or preventing the renewal of police contracts or MOUs with schools, increasing police accountability, developing police-free responses to mental health, and removing school resource officers (SROs) from schools.

For example, in June 2020, the San Francisco Board of Education voted in favor of [Resolution 206-23A3](#) *“In Support of Black Lives in SFUSD and the Abolition of Armed Law Enforcement in Schools,”*²³ drafted and organized by Coleman Advocates for Children & Youth, a CJSF partner. The resolution voids the memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the school district and the police department, calling for an investment in “life affirming services to build healthy communities that includes health services, housing and education.”



We came out against police in schools in 2015 and that was a very extreme position at that point in the field. And now, I wouldn't say it's exactly the default, but I feel like the organizations that don't have that position kind of hide it...that's just such a huge shift and the way people talk about it, it's unbelievable really. And a lot of real victories have happened.”

- Partner

Similarly, in Rochester, New York, the Rochester City Council voted to remove SROs from the district's schools and defund the school policing program, the first district in the state to do so. This victory was secured by CJSF partners Alliance for Quality Education, Citizen Action New York and a powerful Community Task Force of parents, youth, and community organizers.

The groundwork for these wins had been laid through many years of both local organizing and national coordination. For example, in 2018, CJSF partner Alliance for Educational Justice (AEJ), a national network of 30 youth-led and intergenerational groups across 12 states and 14 cities, along with The Advancement Project, published, [We Came to Learn: A Call to Action for Police-Free Schools](#),²⁴ a report examining the historical roots of school policing (the suppression of Black and Latinx movement and the criminalization

23 Collins, A. M., Sanchez, M., & Lam, J. (2020, June 23). *Resolution No. 206-23A3: In support of Black lives in SFUSD and the abolition of armed law enforcement in schools* #BlackLivesMatter #DefundThePolice #InvestInCommunities #BlackMindsMatter. [https://go.boarddocs.com/ca/sfused/Board.nsf/files/BQR5TB11C341/\\$file/Collins%20Sanchez%20Lam%20Support%20Black%20Lives%20in%20SFUSD.pdf](https://go.boarddocs.com/ca/sfused/Board.nsf/files/BQR5TB11C341/$file/Collins%20Sanchez%20Lam%20Support%20Black%20Lives%20in%20SFUSD.pdf)

24 Advancement Project. (n.d.). *We came to learn: A call to action for police-free schools*. <https://advancementproject.org/weca-metolearn/>

of Black childhood). An accompanying action kit²⁵ gave organizers practical tools to advance local campaigns. AEJ and The Advancement Project continue to provide technical assistance and media/communications support for local organizations working on police-free schools campaigns.

Partners have also secured key financial investments in school safety and restorative practices, in part by divesting school budget funds previously allocated towards police. As partners advance a vision of what holistic safety (intellectual, physical, and emotional) looks like in schools, some have successfully won investments in restorative practices that promote healthier school climates. For example, in 2021, Reimagine Richmond and allies, including CJSF partner RYSE, successfully removed the vacant Community Safety Officer positions from the Richmond Police Department budget during a City Council budget meeting and secured a reallocation of those funds to the [Reimagine Richmond](https://www.reimagine-richmond.org/)²⁶ implementation plan, which promotes “life-affirming services and resources,” as well as “community-based solutions.” The City Council also approved the allocation of \$6.3 million for five new safety programs. In another significant win, CJSF partner Californians for Justice secured \$28.3 million in the 2018-2019 state budget for family engagement and school climate.

25 Advancement Project. (n.d.). We came to learn: Action kit. <https://advancementproject.org/wecametolearn/>

26 Reimagine Richmond. (n.d.). <https://www.reimagine-richmond.org/>

SPOTLIGHT: BLACK ORGANIZING PROJECT

Founded in 2009, the Black Organizing Project (BOP) is a grassroots, member-led organization based in Oakland, California that works to build Black community power and leaders in Oakland and the Bay Area. A vital component of their work is dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline and the criminalization of Black students, the focus of a nearly 10-year campaign for police-free schools in Oakland.

On June 24, 2020, BOP made history when the Oakland Unified School District unanimously voted to pass the George Floyd Resolution (GFR), which eliminated the school district’s police department, making it the first school district in the country to do so. Funds previously allocated to police officers (around \$6 million) will instead be re-distributed to student supports and resources, including school-based social workers and restorative justice practitioners.

Since then, BOP and other community members have been navigating district process by centering community voice and needs in the process of ensuring the long-term implementation of GFR in the school district. The new safety plan includes a policy for responding to mental health emergencies and a Culture and Climate Department to train Ambassadors in restorative justice practices. Key outcomes since the passage of the GFR include a 90% decrease in police calls; however, challenges remain, such as resistance from school administration and staff, and the disproportionate targeting and pushing out of Black students through formal and informal processes (i.e., suspensions).



In addition, partners have gained significant ground in school discipline changes and expanded positive social supports. Partners have fought for and won reductions in disciplinary practices and disparities (i.e., numbers of suspensions, harshness of disciplinary actions, law enforcement referrals and arrests) and successfully advocated for the implementation of restorative justice programs.

In Mississippi, CJSF partner Nollie Jenkins Family Center won the elimination of corporal punishment in Holmes County School District. While corporal punishment is illegal in most states, it is deeply entrenched in some Southern states (Mississippi, Alabama, Arkansas, and Texas).

In June 2019, CJSF partners in New York City — won the overhaul of punitive discipline policies and the implementation of citywide restorative justice in New York City schools. This included funding for 85 new social workers, a capping of suspensions to 20 days, and ending arrests and summonses for low-level infractions in city schools. Much of this work happened via the Dignity in Schools Campaign – New York, of which a number of NYC-based CJSF partners are a member, and years of youth organizing.

Beyond achieving key policy wins, partners have also played a role in ensuring public accountability for policy changes. Partners worked to secure policy wins by keeping the pressure on to ensure that changes were being implemented. For instance, in June 2021, CJSF partner Juntos secured a victory when the Philadelphia Board of Education unanimously passed a sanctuary schools resolution, which included a community accountability table to monitor implementation. Juntos continues to fight for its five-point platform for sanctuary schools, a key part of which is community ownership of schools, further centering the importance of accountability.

SPOTLIGHT: TWIN CITIES INNOVATION ALLIANCE

A new and emerging form of policing students is the way that technology, big data, and algorithms are being used to digitally surveil and track students. School districts have begun to implement systems that use deficit-based and racially-biased indicators, such as absences and suspensions, to identify 'at-risk' students in violation of their privacy. Indeed, as the 2020-21 school year commenced, there were alarming reports of Black youth policed in their homes as they navigated the new virtual reality of online learning. One leader in the fight against the 'school to prison algorithm' is Twin Cities Innovation Alliance (TCIA).

Twin Cities Innovation Alliance is a technology entrepreneurship body and cross-sector social venture based in the Twin Cities (Minneapolis and Saint Paul), Minnesota. The 'school to prison algorithm' sits at the intersection of two crucial parts of their work: 'algorithmic justice' and police-free schools. TCIA advocates for the use of 'liberatory, human-centered, and community-driven data' in schools and elsewhere.

TCIA has emerged as an early leader in the fight against the 'school to prison algorithm', beginning with their work in Saint Paul, Minnesota. From 2018-2019, through the Coalition to Stop the Cradle to Prison Algorithm, TCIA led a powerful campaign that succeeded in dissolving a Joint Powers Agreement (JPA) between the City of Saint Paul's County Prosecutor's office and Saint Paul Public Schools intended to implement predictive analytics that would identify 'risk ratios' for students and predict those most likely to 'fall' into the criminal justice system.

Because the use of big data and algorithms in schools was not yet widespread or well-known, TCIA faced challenges attracting buy-in, including from community members who didn't understand the terms used, and from funders who failed to see data surveillance as a threat. TCIA has since worked with CJSF and others to amplify this work, particularly to funders. In 2019, CJSF and TCIA hosted a learning exchange for CJSF's partner network during the Free Minds, Free People convening which included a session on the 'school to prison algorithm.' The session explored the school safety data trends that are used to criminalize students and families of color, as well as organizing tactics to counter such policies or programs. The same year, TCIA and CJSF also co-presented a session at the Grantmakers for Education Convening. Amplifying the work has helped draw attention from funders and other organizers, and contributed to TCIA's initial win against the JPA in Saint Paul schools.

TCIA continues to drive the fight to counter the harmful ways that data are being used to police students of color. As school policies around the 'school to prison algorithm' become increasingly common, TCIA plans to build out this work on a national level. In recent years, and moving forward, TCIA has leaned into coalition work. This year, TCIA has begun work with the People Against the Surveillance of Children and Overpolicing (PASCO) Coalition in Florida. Together, they plan to host a "No Criminalizing Tech in Education" Summit and release a report on the existing harms and community solutions to criminalizing tech in schools. In late 2022 they launched the national NOTICE Coalition made up of individuals and communities impacted by the use of predictive policing, threat assessments, student activity monitoring, and early risk warning systems. The coalition reflects impacted communities from Texas, Tennessee, Illinois, Florida, Minnesota and continues to engage with new communities regularly.



Current Context

As CJSF looks ahead to its next season, we asked interviewees to take stock of recent shifts in education and education organizing. It is clear from their reflections that the present moment demonstrates tremendous challenges, reflecting political, cultural, and social shifts that threaten the progress that has been made; and at the same time, there are equally formidable strengths within the education justice movement to harness.

“ I don’t know that there’s been a moment – and I’m really not trying to use hyperbole – where public education and racial justice conversations have been under attack as much as they are now, since probably the 1960s.”

- Network Partner

CHALLENGES AND THREATS

Across the board, leaders fighting for education justice find themselves up against monumental, and sometimes unprecedented, challenges and threats. Intense political backlash, attacks on public education, and cycles of political inertia and upheaval, all often embedded within dynamics of systemic racism featured prominently in partner and member interviews. Moreover, partners and members lifted up the myriad ways that ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic remain a challenge to organizing efforts. Overlaying these concerns was also a worry that philanthropic practices, while evolving and improving, were not equipped to meet the moment. The following section comprises reflections from CJSF’s partners, members, and its broader network on the challenges and threats facing the education justice movement.

INTENSE POLITICAL BACKLASH

Interviewees named the current political climate – embedded in white supremacy, structural racism, and other systemic forces – as one of the main challenges threatening progress around education justice. Following the murder of George Floyd in 2020, virtually all sectors – from business to philanthropy to

nonprofits – made public commitments, financial and otherwise, to advance racial justice. As many predicted, though, the backlash has been equally intense, with the political right using schooling as ground zero for conservative policies and practices, rooted in the rhetoric of fear and hate. Indeed, many interviewees cited backlash from local school boards and state legislatures that implemented a wide range of policies creating harmful social, intellectual, and physical environments for young people – among them, those that limit or forbid mentioning race and racism in curricula, harden and militarize schools in the name of safety, and marginalize LGBTQ youth.

Some partners expressed frustration about feeling forced to take a defensive posture in response to these developments. One network partner lamented, “So many of our organizations are not able to dedicate time and energy to forward thinking campaigns, to imaginary campaigns. We’re literally trying to defend wins that we thought we solidified in the 1960s.” Another partner shared, “I think we’re all at a point right now where we’re seeing the backlash and how limited our power is. This is a challenging moment for us.”

Consistent with the overall political zeitgeist in the United States, partners witnessed an unprecedented level of targeted personal threats and attacks, especially in more conservative communities. Experiences from partners included being doxed, targeted with racist vitriol online, and verbally attacked in public meetings. For example, one leader of a partner organization, a Black woman, shared that a white man at a school board meeting hurled racist slurs at her while she spoke during the public comment portion of the meeting.

 Increasingly, foundations are going to have to recognize that the current attacks [are] actually a backlash to the murder of George Floyd and the response to that to send resources to communities mobilizing around racial justice, police accountability, and the removal of police from schools.

Now, the right has pivoted... And they’re literally attacking [the] very foundation of public education. That is a game changer for so many young people. If we don’t have a true public education that is rooted in teaching the truth, it’s going to have real consequences.”

- Partner

Such threats add stress to roles that are already demanding and can compromise the personal safety of organizers on the ground. According to partners, this backlash puts them on the defense and threatens to thwart important progress made in the education justice movement. Moreover, in the age of disinformation and misinformation, this has sparked concern among leaders that their words will be twisted into ‘fake news’ and propel further attacks on teachers and youth.

ATTACKS ON PUBLIC EDUCATION

Partners and members are worried about the influx of funding (both public and private) for the privatization of schools, leaving public schools in the lurch. Partners and members alike noted ongoing efforts to dismantle public education. This was attributed in part to the remote learning industry that sprung up during the COVID-19



It's a moment for folks to either embrace public education as an important civic institution that anchors communities or to reject it."

- Member

pandemic, as well as government endorsement of school vouchers for charter schools. One member shared, "The money that is being raised to privatize schools is growing exponentially faster than the funding to protect public education. It's so terrifying. I feel like we're even losing the cultural war of getting people to understand that charter schools are not the answer."

Following the surge in political backlash, attacks on school curricula, especially discussions on race, gender, and sexuality, have increased in prevalence and intensity. Discussions on race, gender, and sexuality in schools are in the process of being criminalized through state legislation, which one partner described as "pedagogical redlining." Partners and members frequently brought up efforts to ban books and critical race theory (CRT), naming them as a threat to both democracy and the integrity of public education.

Indeed, Chalkbeat [reports](#) that to date at least 36 states have passed or introduced legislation to limit instruction about race and racism in schools.²⁷ One partner noted that its core curriculum centers Black feminism and is inclusive of trans, gender non-conforming, and non-binary youth. As a result, this partner said, "I'm sure it would have been coded as critical race theory...literally our core curriculum is not something we could use in different parts of the country."

²⁷ Imadali, E. (2021, April). CRT map: Efforts to restrict teaching racism and bias have multiplied across the U.S. Chalkbeat. <https://www.chalkbeat.org/22525983/map-critical-race-theory-legislation-teaching-racism>

EXAMPLES OF LEGISLATION CRIMINALIZING CULTURALLY AFFIRMING CURRICULA

Following the passage of Florida's 'Don't Say Gay' bill into law in March 2022, a deluge of copycats bills have ensued. Over 12 states, including Alabama, Louisiana, South Carolina, and Ohio, proposed similar bills that banned instruction on sexual orientation or gender identity in schools (Jones & Franklin, 2022) For instance, a bill introduced in Kansas would make classroom materials depicting 'homosexuality' a class B misdemeanor (Sachs & Friedman, 2022).

As of August 2022, there are 17 live 'educational gag' bills pending in states across the country, according to the PEN America Index of Educational Gag Orders. Moreover, 7 bills have passed into law. Here are just a few examples:

Georgia's HB 1084 bans teaching of nine 'divisive' concepts, including that the US is fundamentally racist.

A proposed bill (HB 5494) in Illinois prohibits K-12 schools from promoting 'certain ideas' in their curricula related to race or sex, including 'special instruction' related to socialism, Marxism, and related ideologies. Potential penalties include loss of state financial support and loss of accreditation.

Michigan bill, SB 460, would ban public school curriculum that includes CRT and the 1619 project, among other 'anti-American and racist theories.'

Sources:

Jones, D., & Franklin, J. (2022, April 10). Not just Florida. More than a dozen states propose so-called 'Don't Say Gay' bills. NPR <https://www.npr.org/2022/04/10/1091543359/15-states-dont-say-gay-anti-transgender-bills>

Sachs, J., & Friedman, J. (2022, February 15). Educational gag orders target speech about LGBTQ+ identities with new prohibitions and punishments. PEN America. <https://pen.org/educational-gag-orders-target-speech-about-lgbtq-identities-with-new-prohibitions-and-punishments/>

Between the stress of the pandemic and threats on public education, teacher fatigue and attrition are a growing concern. As an August 2022 New York Times article documented, school districts across the country are facing teacher shortages, resulting from a combination of increased demands and low pay.²⁸ Unsurprisingly, schools that serve low-income students and Black and Brown students are feeling the pain most acutely, exacerbating longstanding inequities. Districts are responding in a variety of ways, including loosening credentialing requirements, shortening work weeks, and increasing class sizes.

28 Fortin, J., & Fawcett, E. (2022, August 29). How bad is the teacher shortage? Depends where you live. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/29/us/schools-teacher-shortages.html>

One member described the demands placed on teachers as untenable, “One of the greatest concerns in the education ecosystem right now is about what is happening with the teaching workforce, and that there are educators leaving the field in droves and for very good reasons. They cannot teach truth. They cannot speak truth. The pressures on educators of the past few years have been so overwhelming.”

POLITICAL CYCLES OF INERTIA AND UPHEAVAL

Conservative local school boards are exacerbating already existing divisive, anti-Black, anti-indigenous, transphobic and queerphobic politics to implement policies that hurt Black and Brown youth. In recent years there has been a concerted effort by the right to run for school board seats and introduce policies that are hardening schools, challenging the teaching of accurate history in classrooms, and politicizing public health issues, such as masking and vaccinations.²⁹ As one member observed, “Education is indeed local... because we can have the federal policy, we can have the money, but if the school board does not have a will and a heart to do justice by its students,” then the education system fails its youth and communities. Another partner worried that the conservative takeover of local school districts has the potential to “overpower work that’s been done over the past decade to create more supports for young people.”

Local jurisdictions are backtracking on commitments to removing or reducing police in schools. Lack of political accountability, even in the face of hard-fought wins, was a recurring theme in interviews. Several partners noted that their municipalities increased police budgets, even in “progressive” places where there had been commitments to decreasing those budgets. This was due in large part to the perception of rising crime during the pandemic, fueling a backlash to “defund the police” campaigns. As a result, one member observed, “There’s a lot less political appetite for restorative justice, police-free schools work in policy right now.”

Lack of political will stalls progress on education justice priorities. Politicians must focus on winning their next election, which means that too often short-term priorities take precedence over longer-term solutions. In addition, elected officials are often beholden to the corporate interests that often have a financial stake in hardening schools or privatizing education. As a result, interviewees said, there is often a lack of political will to fund public education, support police-free schools, or advance gun control legislation.

RIPPLE EFFECTS FROM COVID

The criminalization of Black and Brown students and the hardening of schools continues to be a pervasive threat. Both the COVID-19 pandemic and the latest round of school shootings have contributed to policies and practices to harden schools. Partners and members highlighted the extension of the school-to-prison pipeline into students’ homes with the emergence of new digital surveillance and monitoring technology that accompanied the rise of remote schooling. One partner witnessed firsthand the way

29 Nierenberg, A. (2021, October 27). *The conservative school board strategy*. The New York Times.



Right now, it feels like there's been a rollback of a lot of the progressive school discipline measures under COVID. I think that there's that kind of danger of schools that have been hardened in the name of safety."

- Member

that the pandemic was used to further the hardening of schools in their area, saying "We keep seeing proposed models of schools with separated desks and screens. Schools...already look like prisons and it seems that they are promoting militarization. One of our big worries is that they'll use this as an opportunity to militarize schools." In some areas, teachers' unions pushed for the ability to administer harsher punishments in classrooms.

In addition, highly publicized school shootings, helped propel rhetoric about school safety that has resulted in a hardening of schools across the country, especially in schools that serve Black and Brown youth. Indeed, after the mass school shooting at Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, Congress set aside \$1 billion for school security measures.³⁰ Yet, there is no evidence that such measures are effective.³¹ In fact, numerous efforts provide evidence of their negative impact on students of color and students with disabilities.³²

30 Ruger, T. (2019, March 25). Congress set aside \$1 billion after Parkland. Now schools are starting to use it. Roll Call. <https://roll-call.com/2019/03/25/congress-set-aside-1-billion-after-parkland-now-schools-are-starting-to-use-it/>

31 Dunklin, R., & Pritchard, J. (2018, October 2). How security industry, lawmakers pushed "school hardening" since Parkland. The Mercury News. <https://www.mercurynews.com/2018/10/02/how-security-industry-lawmakers-pushed-school-hardening-since-parkland/>

32 Mitchell, Corey & Ferriss, S. (2021, September 8). When Schools Call Police on Kids. <https://publicintegrity.org/education/criminalizing-kids/police-in-schools-disparities/> (Analysis call on federal data analyzed by the Center for Public Integrity)

SCHOOL HARDENING TRENDS

CJSF and its partners continue to mobilize against the threat of school hardening, which has only increased in prevalence and severity as the rate of gun violence in schools has risen. In the wake of tragedies such as those in Parkland and Uvalde, those at the federal, state, and local level have injudiciously called for increased security and law enforcement presence in schools, resulting in a school securities industry that grew to \$3.1 billion in 2021 (up from \$2.7 billion in 2017; Morabito, 2022). And still, the industry, and those calling for its growth, show no signs of slowing down, despite repeated warnings from CJSF, its partners, and other members of the education justice ecosystem:



- Under the 2018 STOP School Violence Act, the DOJ has awarded over \$410 million to local governments and schools to implement tactics such as threat assessment, and coordination with law enforcement (Bureau of Justice Assistance, 2022; Morabito, 2022)
- The percentage of schools using video surveillances has increased from 20% to 70% in 14 years (1999-2013) ([Omdia, 2018](#))
- Over one million students attend schools with law enforcement, but without a school counselor (Office for Civil Rights, 2016)
- Most recently, President Biden signed the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act into law in June 2022, which would allocate \$300 million towards 'school safety' (Office of Management and Budget, 2022)

Sources:

Bureau of Justice Assistance. (2022, April 19). Students, teachers, and officers preventing (STOP) school violence program. <https://bja.ojp.gov/program/stop-school-violence-program/overview>

Morabito, C. (2022, July 6). The school security industry is valued at \$3.1 billion. Here's why that may not be enough. CNBC. <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/07/06/the-school-security-industry-was-valued-at-3point1-billion-in-2021.html>

Office for Civil Rights. (2016, October 28). 2013-2014 civil rights data collection: A first look. U.S. Department of Education. <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/2013-14-first-look.pdf>

Office of Management and Budget. (2022, June 23). Statement of Administration Policy: S. 2938 – Bipartisan Safer Communities Act. Executive Office of the President. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Bipartisan-Safer-Communities-Act-SAP-1.pdf>

Omdia. (2018, February 26). School security systems industry – US market overview. Informa PLC. <https://omdia.tech.informa.com/OM002098/School-security-systems-industry—US-market-overview>

Partners found it difficult to engage their bases amidst the pandemic. Although some organizations were able to maintain or increase their bases during the pandemic, other organizations found that their base-building efforts were adversely affected. Reduced access to schools made it challenging to recruit and organize youth and parents. In addition, the demands caused by the pandemic stretched the capacity of partners, who found themselves in direct aid mode with less bandwidth to engage in organizing as many shifted to meeting the direct needs of their communities. Some organizing groups struggled with bringing their technology systems up to speed to shift to digital organizing, and still others felt they lacked skills and experience in digital organizing to do it effectively. These challenges were further compounded by lack of reliable broadband access, particularly in lower-resourced communities and rural areas. And for those organizations that adapted, Zoom fatigue sometimes made it hard for communities to stay engaged and motivated.

On a related note, though there was a large influx of federal funding to schools as part of the American Recovery Act, partners called for increased transparency in the spending of these COVID relief funds, questioning why the needs of students continue to go unmet. As one partner put it, "If we get accountability, we could still make a dent in a lot of education [priorities] that we already had the policies for, but we always said we didn't have the money for."

MERCURIAL AND MYOPIC PHILANTHROPIC SUPPORT

Support for 'trending' issues amongst funders has led to inconsistent funding for partners, as funders continually re-orient towards hot-button topics in philanthropy. Across the board, partners

“Our youth justice work is very entwined with education justice and the school-to-prison pipeline, but it's been a weird time recently because we just don't have the connections that we had built at schools... that just all fell apart, so we've just been in crisis mode.”

- Partner

“We experienced this very traumatic moment in the world's global history, and we went right back to school as if it was business as usual.

[We] did not have the social-emotional supports in place for anybody, even for educators...And then on top of that, the grief that people had to experience, the loss of loved ones to COVID.”

- Partner

reported an increase in funding following the racial justice uprisings in 2020. At the same time, partners noted that in the past, winds in philanthropy can shift quickly and funding could dry up as foundations take on other issues that are en vogue. For example, one partner has already started noticing that some of its funders are shifting their focus to electoral work, in lieu of organizing efforts.

Funders tend to support siloed issue areas, which can make it difficult for partners who work at the nexus of multiple issues to receive funding. Though many foundations have dedicated portfolios to education, it can be hard to fit intersectional and cross-sectional education organizing into those portfolios. As one partner explained, they find it difficult to get funded

 **We may end up using the money and protest against you. Our work doesn't make people feel good."**

- Member

because their work is "not a traditional social-emotional learning approach," but rather "It's this blended thing that's tied to organizing, liberation, and racial justice, but then also tied to curriculum and what's happening in the classroom. Figuring out how to turn the interest in philanthropy into sustained funding for that type of work [is] really important."

Philanthropy prioritizes 'big' and narrowly defined wins over the base-building that is fundamental to building sustainable movements. While foundations may be interested in funding particular campaigns consistent with their areas of focus – funding for public education or the integration of ethnic studies in curricula, for instance – they may not be interested in funding organizations over the long-term to build their bases and provide leadership development support to community members. As one partner observed, "I think there's a lot of funders that want to fund big wins...and not necessarily the day-to-day work that has to happen to build leadership or build a campaign." This perspective was shared by a member, who lamented philanthropy's lack of support for movement-building, "If there's no strong social movement, whether or not [organizations are] winning or losing, there's no real transformative change that's possible."

Partners have difficulty getting funds from foundations who worry about supporting "controversial" organizations. Both partners and members expressed worries that partners have to 'toe-the-line' or pull back on more 'controversial' stances for fear of losing their funding, given the risk-averse nature of philanthropy. This is indicative of a broader challenge that both members and partners identified: as a whole, foundations are not moving fast enough or boldly enough on issues of racial justice.

CHALLENGES WITHIN THE MOVEMENT

Partners have had to navigate uncomfortable power dynamics among fellow movement leaders.

Several partners candidly offered that, as with any movement, there can be tensions among allies, even though they may share common goals. For example, some grassroots partners noted that larger and more mainstream organizations sometimes remained silent on key issues to maintain their power and preserve their funding, even as grassroots organizations put themselves on the line. In some places where the organizing ecosystem is strong, such as California, partners reported that some former organizers who now held positions of power in local and state government posed roadblocks to campaigns for educational justice as they navigated the political realities of their new roles. This left grassroots organizers navigating difficult power dynamics. As one partner stated, "It can be difficult to challenge your own folks."

Partners noted recent leadership transitions of long-time education justice leaders and sought resources for supporting new leadership. A critical mass of executive directors in the past year have announced their departures, many of whom have been organizing for fifteen to twenty years. Not only do these leaders have expertise in the art of organizing, they hold much of the history of what it took to wage successful

It's gotten so hard out here in these streets to just hold the line...it's really a struggle.

CJSF does a really good job at reminding us to take a moment to breathe, to care for ourselves."

- Partner

campaigns. They have also served as valuable mentors to newer organizers, both within and outside of their organizations. Although leadership transitions are normal and healthy, one new incoming executive director articulated the need to support the incoming crop of leaders to set them up for success, "Leadership transitions are always challenging. For me, moving into an executive director role for the first time, any support that's available, would be [helpful]."

Partners describe themselves as constantly being in survival mode. The fiscal realities of running a grassroots organization can lead to a feeling of constant stress to ensure there is enough funding to support staff, as well as to resource base-building, leadership development, and campaign strategy and development. Moreover, the nature of organizing is not a 9-5 job, it is one that requires responding to crises and serving the multi-faceted needs of community, often in roles that pay modest salaries and provide inadequate benefits. It is no surprise, then, that burnout and staff turnover were cited as a common challenge to sustainable organizing.

It took 10 years for folks to talk about getting police out of schools. [It] took years for those to become mainstream conversations. And we saw it across the nation. And so I think our strength is in united strategies and narratives."

- Member

STRENGTHS

ORGANIZING LANDSCAPE

Building on successful campaigns for police-free schools and restorative justice, the language and discourse have palpably shifted. Partners saw their position on police-free schools and efforts to end the criminalization of Black and Brown youth shift from an extreme view to one that has become more normalized in the field.

Although much work remains to be done to achieve police-free schools and dismantle policies that criminalize youth across school districts, the growing success of these efforts has paved the way for conversations about what the alternative looks like – implementing healing justice and restorative

DEFINITION OF POLICE FREE SCHOOLS

Dismantling school policing infrastructure, culture, and practice; ending school militarization and surveillance; and building a new liberatory education system.

<https://www.policefreeschools.org>

justice practices. As one partner explained it, “Not just [saying] ‘we want to remove police,’ but ‘what is it that we want schools to provide.’” Partners are transitioning their work towards the next steps in supporting healthy school communities, including ‘healing through justice.’

For example, CJSF partner Communities United, in partnership with other organizations including CJSF partner, Community Organizing and Family Issues (COFI) POWER-PAC, has championed a reinvestment of over \$3.8 million from police towards holistic and healing-centered approaches to school safety in Chicago Public Schools.

In 2021, another CJSF partner, the National Black Women’s Justice Institute, in partnership with The Children’s Partnership, launched the Hope, Healing, and Health Collective. The collective is a youth-led policy collaborative that will focus on providing healing-centered care to young people and their communities, including culturally competent and gender-responsive mental health and well-being services.

Policy wins, as well as the backlash to them, are spurring bigger, bolder demands. Many partners, and some members, noted a shift from reform-oriented demands to bigger, bolder justice-oriented demands with an even greater sense of urgency. As one network partner observed, “I think the field is increasingly becoming stubborn – in a good way – to recognize and understand that it is not about getting what we can now and waiting 30 years for things to get much worse.” Another partner asserted, “We’re using this opportunity to [get] more people out to our school board [meetings] and take up space to look out for Black and Brown children.”

One way that bigger, bolder demands are being seeded is through campaigns, that are increasingly focused on not just dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline, but on abolition of the prison-industrial complex altogether. Partners like Dream Defenders have explicitly laid out their ideology in a publicly available statement.³³ They start by saying “We are abolitionists. We are fighting for a world without prisons, policing, surveillance and punishment. We know that prisons aren’t about safety or accountability but about control and domination over large segments of the population, especially Black people, in order to make a profit. We are different from prison reformers because reformers often create situations where incarceration becomes even more entrenched in our society. Instead, we are fighting for solutions that will produce decarceration, fewer people behind bars and a future world without prisons. This is why Dream Defenders will never fight for the conviction of a police officer: prisons are not about safety, accountability, or justice. In order to get us closer to this vision, we must begin to build community alternatives to dealing with harm and violence. Dream Defenders practices transformative justice, an abolitionist way of dealing with conflict and holding people accountable in opposition to the punitive nature of the prison system that treats people as disposable, locks them up and throws away the key.” Their approach resonates with the work of a number of other CJSF partners including groups like Freedom, Inc. and Black Organizing Project - both of which center their work in calling for sanctuary³⁴, liberation, and freedom.

33 <https://www.dreamdefenders.org/ideology>

34 Black Organizing Project, Black Sanctuary Recommitment Pledge 2021, <https://blackorganizingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Black-Sanctuary-Recommitment-Pledge-Final.pdf>

Increasing attention and resources are being devoted to youth organizing. Both partners and members noticed increased commitments to youth organizing, which they viewed as a strength. Several partners said they had seen a critical mass of organizations shift their work from youth development to youth organizing, building youth power and engaging with youth in less transactional ways. Indeed, several CJSF partners highlighted the ways their own organizations had expanded to integrate youth organizing. One partner extolled the “trend toward uplifting the leadership of young people who experience the day-to-day impacts of the educational system on their lives.” The partner continued, “As long as we see that continue, the movement will only strengthen.” Another partner shared, “Young people are the experts and really do hold the solutions. [They] need to be trusted to lead change in new ways.”

In response to COVID-19, organizing groups integrated innovative new practices into their toolbox, including deepening their digital organizing skills.

Partners described the pandemic as having a significant impact on how they did their work. In the wake of the pandemic, partners shifted their tactics towards virtual events and digital organizing. While organizers are looking forward to re-engaging with in-person organizing, many were able to expand their outreach and engagement strategies through mobile and online avenues. By building this new muscle, organizers have been able to amplify their work in new ways that they plan to integrate into their post-pandemic organizing.

There is increasing attention to wellness and its role in sustaining movements for justice. Partners are continuing to develop best practices for sustainable organizing. In interviews, partners acknowledged

 Now we are expanding our programming to an explicit focus on youth organizing as well. And through that work, we will [be hearing] directly from young people about what things they think we need to focus on within the public education space. Our work may shift and grow and morph as a result.”

- Partner

 As is often the case in times of crisis, new opportunities emerge. The explosion of virtual events including townhalls, webinars, and Facebook Live has inspired [us] and shown us the immense power of engaging our stakeholders online.”

- Partner

the importance of rest in ensuring the longevity of their work, an idea that has gained more traction since the onset of the pandemic. Partners also see taking intentional time to heal as a radical and necessary act in opposition to white supremacist norms of productivity. Several partners have enacted intentional wellness weeks or periods of rest. As one partner observed, “People are no longer working 24/7 in the name of organizing,” signaling what they described as a shift in the culture.

PHILANTHROPIC LANDSCAPE

In recent years, and especially after June 2020, philanthropy has experienced what some described as a racial awakening – one that has translated into more support for organizing and for Black and Brown-led organizations. Across

Due to the rebellion of 2020 our traditional sources of grant income have shifted. There has been intentional direction setting by funders to fund organizations that are led by BIPOC leaders and have direct impact with BIPOC community.”

- Partner

We are finally being recognized for our influence in the field and funders are asking us more about who, what, and how to fund. The work is more collaborative. CJSF was out front leading this shift.”

- Member

the board, partners reported an increase in funding in recent years, attributing the shift to changes in the social/political context, and in particular, increased philanthropic commitments to racial justice. A critical mass of partners mentioned that as foundations have made public commitments to racial justice and Black- and Brown-led organizations, they have been able to secure greater entrée into philanthropic spaces and have been able to access new funding.

Partners and members alike noted shifts in philanthropy that indicated a better understanding of the parlance and methodology of organizing, and how grassroots community organizing can be an important level for advancing change. For example, one partner said of a new donor, “I think them naming racial and economic justice as a funding focus is pretty new, [and] they’re allowing education justice to fall under the racial and economic justice. And so that’s how we’re able to fit now where we wouldn’t have before.”

Another partner noted shifts in language, “Across the board, [we saw] foundations shifting from ‘we’re going to talk about diversity’ to ‘we’re going to talk about anti-racism.’ [They were] talking about white supremacy – language you wouldn’t have heard before.” The partner added, “It remains a question how long that’ll be sustained, but certainly in the last two years, we’ve seen that greater commitment.”

There has been a shift, albeit gradual, away from strategic or transactional grantmaking towards trust-based and transparent philanthropy. Trust-based philanthropy centers what it means to be in relationship and partnership with grantees. This has implications for how donors are responding in real time to the needs of partners, how they view their own role in strategy-setting, and how they communicate with partners. As one member shared, “I think there increasingly are ways in which we are being transparent about how we engage with our partners, to the extent to which those partners are prioritizing those that are most impacted being in positions of power to define what’s on the agenda and what kids prioritize.”

Relatedly, there has been a shift to more multi-year, general operating support grants. A critical mass of partners said that they were receiving more flexible, reliable funding from foundations. They attributed the shift to a variety of factors, including more discussion and awareness in the philanthropic field about how such grants catalyze effectiveness and increasing adoption of the principles of trust-based philanthropy. But perhaps the biggest catalyst was the pandemic. In a time of unprecedented crisis, philanthropy responded by converting restricted grants to unrestricted ones and loosening application and reporting requirements, with many foundations continuing the practice after the immediate state of crisis passed.



Call to Action for Philanthropy and for CJSF

As the previous section highlights, the current moment is fraught, with seemingly endless threats to hard-fought victories and daily assaults on the very foundation of public education.

At the same time, the work of the last two decades in education justice has borne rich fruit. A critical mass of organizing groups that have been doing this work for upwards of two decades serve as examples of what it looks like to build sustained community power.

Indeed, of partners who responded to our survey, 71 percent of organizations said they had been organizing for education justice for upwards of 15 years. Meanwhile, new groups are emerging out of shared frustration and sheer necessity, particularly in regions of the country that have been under-resourced.

Across the board, organizing groups are engaged in the fundamentals of building power – developing the leadership of young people, parents, educators, and others to lead campaigns for educational justice – while also working in new and innovative ways through social media, multi-media, and storytelling to advance a shared vision for holistically safe schools.

Reflecting on the current landscape of education justice organizing, the message is clear: **Philanthropy is stepping up, but there is much more that needs to be done.** In that spirit, interviewees offered their perspectives on how both CJSF, and philanthropy more broadly, can play an important role in advancing these efforts.

Three broad areas of action and opportunity emerged in our interviews, including the importance of: 1) shifting harmful narratives and building narrative power; 2) creating spaces of collective strategizing for education justice among longstanding allies, as well as with new partners; and 3) investing in a strong, sustainable organizing infrastructure.

BUILD NARRATIVE POWER

The stories that get told help shape our values and beliefs, which in turn influence action. For far too long, inequities in education have been propelled and exacerbated by policies that have been influenced by a host of harmful narratives perpetuated by the right and by popular media narratives – that Black and Brown youth are dangerous, that public schools are ineffective, that public schools are demonizing white people by teaching anything related to race, that putting police in schools makes them safer, just to name a few.

Just as harmful narratives inform the public discourse, so too can affirmative narratives. Our conversations with partners and members reinforce that there is a rich appetite for developing affirmative communications and messaging strategies that build power and create public and political will for culturally affirming curricula, police-free schools, attention to the well-being of LGBTQ+ students, and more.

Moving ahead, supporting both partners and members in narrative power-building is a key focus of work for CJSF and one that philanthropy at large can support.

Affirm the humanity of Black and Brown youth.

Much of the current mainstream narrative portrays young people of color as “the other,” and often criminalizes their behavior. Putting forth positive stories and images of Black and Brown youth, and affirming their fears, hopes, and culture can help counter this narrative.

Advance affirmative narratives about what healthy and safe school climates look like.

Following the uprisings for racial justice in 2020, the predictable backlash seized on school

PHILANTHROPIC CALL TO ACTION

Philanthropic resources to support education justice are growing but have yet to meet the urgency of the current moment, much less the longer-term vision of what it will require to create schools in which all students, especially Black and Brown students, can thrive.

Here’s how philanthropy can support the movement for education justice:

Build Narrative Power

Stories shape our values. Our values influence action. Support organizers to advance affirmative narratives for what our schools can look like and how they can nurture the gifts and talents of Black and Brown students.

Create Spaces for Collective Strategizing

Organizers are more connected than ever. Support them to engage more deeply with one another and also with unusual suspects to build power in new ways.

Invest in Organizing Infrastructure

Political will for education justice is generated from the bottom up. Support organizing groups for the long-term so they can invest in building the youth, parent, and community leadership needed to sustain progress.



“It’s insane how much ground is being lost right now at all levels, literally, across many issues, race, identity, it’s crazy, so there’s a lot to defend.

And I think being in a defensive stance can be problematic. It’s necessary because these things are real and people are being hurt, but it isn’t driving towards a vision and I feel like you have to do both/and. You have to play defense... but you have to play it in an offensive way.

It has to be visionary, it has to be clear on what you’re working toward to bring people on to what we’re working toward, as opposed to what we’re trying to fight against, because that gives more power to the folks who are chipping away.”

- Member

shootings and increased media attention to crime in communities, leading to a resurgence of “tough on crime” rhetoric and school safety measures and a call for policy changes that would continue the hardening of school campuses. Organizers for education justice not only have an opportunity to push back against this narrative, but they can also advance an affirmative, community-based vision of what holistically healthy schools look like and how such schools can foster physical, intellectual, social, and emotional safety.

Reify the importance of critical thinking and the teaching of accurate history. Renewed attacks on critical race theory have led to new legislation and policies that limit what teachers can teach and say in the classroom. Topics related to race, racism, and sexuality are increasingly under scrutiny, causing harm to young people who do not receive a full and accurate teaching of history. Shifting the narrative entails lifting up the importance of advocating for culturally affirming and historically accurate curricula. Importantly, there are opportunities through participatory action research and other community-based data gathering strategies to ensure that communities themselves are defining what culturally-affirming pedagogy looks like.

Support organizing groups to tell their own stories and to craft and disseminate affirmative narratives.

Ninety-six percent of respondents to the CJSF partner survey indicated a desire to receive training and support related to communications, messaging, and narrative power-building. In a workshop held in the summer of 2022, CJSF’s Director of Storytelling, Cierra Kaler-Jones, and more than 30 participants began developing their own storytelling muscle by walking through tools that helped them reflect on “persuadable” constituencies in their local communities and how those individuals could be effectively reached. In our interviews, in addition to workshops such as this, organizers also asked for support from communications consultants who could help them strengthen messaging, write and place op-eds, and create multi-media content to amplify their work. Likewise, organizers can be supported to receive media training and to become part of speakers’ bureaus, so they are tapped for media appearances, conference presentations, keynotes, and the like.

CREATE SPACES FOR COLLECTIVE STRATEGIZING AND POWER-BUILDING

Interviewees identified the growing connectivity among organizing groups across the country as a strength of the education justice movement. Groups have come together through national entities such as the Alliance for Educational Justice, the Dignity in Schools Campaign, Journey for Justice, as well as countless local and state coalitions. In addition, CJSF has brought together groups through its partner calls.

Donors and partners alike called for an expansion and deepening of such spaces, including spaces that are inclusive of a broader range of actors, recognizing that collective strategizing can build greater power and accelerate progress in both local and national arenas. In reflecting on the potential for collective action and impact by bringing different constituencies together, one member said excitedly, “There’s gold in them there hills!”

Re-examine, as a movement, a vision for public education. Many noted that we are currently at a critical crossroads. The pandemic upended traditional models of learning in many ways, and public education continues to be dismantled. This is a time to re-assert collectively, the value proposition of a public education and to demand the resources needed to bring a collective vision to fruition. In addition, a growing cohort of organizers are exploring the possibilities of liberatory education models, creating new opportunities to define what it means to design schools for and with Black and Brown children and families at the center.

Build partnerships with the ‘unusual suspects.’ A critical mass of interviewees expressed interest in exploring partnerships with new, and perhaps, unexpected partners. One member, for example, mentioned that she works with several groups whose aims are aligned with that of CJSF and its partners, yet they use different language and different frames to approach their goals. By bringing such groups together, there could be an opportunity to translate and learn from one another’s approaches and find common cause.

Some interviewees also lamented the ways in which parents and youth are too often pitted against educators and teachers’ unions. While there are legitimate and deep differences in some places, some felt there were potentially powerful opportunities to build creative partnerships with labor unions and educators, particularly in light of added demands on teachers and attacks on curricula, to find common ground and develop shared strategies to challenge the current status quo.

One member highlighted the work Communities United and VOYCE have done in Chicago to secure more behavioral health supports for young people and how they have engaged medical professionals and a local hospital in their work. “Those cross-sector partnerships are really critical and we need that in more places in the country,” said the member.

Connect to broader organizing efforts around community safety and economic justice. The struggle for educational justice is inextricably connected to broader battles for community safety and economic justice.

What investments, policies and mindset shifts are needed to create the social and economic opportunities that help fuel thriving and healthy communities and how do these influence values around public education? While many of CJSF's partners are making those connections and working across issue area silos, there are opportunities for funders and organizers alike to do this at a deeper and broader level.

INVEST IN ORGANIZING INFRASTRUCTURE

Time and time again, history has shown that fights for social justice have required bottom-up grassroots organizing to generate political will for change. While funders are often focused on “outcomes,” such as tangible campaign wins, organizers remind us that the systems and structures they are trying to change have been in place for decades, if not centuries, and can similarly take decades to dismantle. It is not uncommon for there to be progress, followed by setbacks. Even in the absence of obvious success, organizers say, there are lessons to be learned to inform future campaigns. At the core of all successful campaigns, though, lie the ability to engage youth, parents, and community members in political education, leadership development, and organizing skills. To that end, ongoing investments in building the infrastructure for organizing are critical to progress on educational justice issues.

Double down on long-term, general operating support for organizing groups. For many foundations, a two-year grant is considered a multi-year grant. While CJSF makes two-year grants, it consistently renews its grants, lifting up a model for what sustainable support for organizing looks like. Organizers say such funding equips them to do their work more effectively – to ensure adequate resources for hiring and retaining staff, to invest in the critical building blocks of organizing practice, such as leadership development and base-building, to plan and imagine – proactively – what it will take to organize for better schools, and to respond nimbly to an everchanging local, state, and national landscape.

Invest in leadership development and political education. Core to organizing is the ongoing development of grassroots leaders – youth, parents, educators, and others – who have a stake in the quality of public education and holistically safe schools. Leadership development includes training on the underpinnings and root causes of injustice. While most CJSF partners incorporate political education into their leadership development work, they expressed the need for shared opportunities and training centers that help do this at scale on an ongoing basis. What would it look like to create a centralized space where new and emerging leaders could learn about the history of public education, the racist underpinnings of modern-day school discipline policies, and the fundamentals of organizing practice, while learning from successful campaigns for educational justice across the country. How can funders come together to support this vision?

Support for staff in the “middle.” Too often, foundation investments focus on supporting executive directors or other senior leaders. Interviewees expressed the importance of investing in those that are newer to the work or those in junior roles to support a sustainable pipeline of leadership, particularly given recent leadership transitions among longtime organizers.

Prioritize wellness and understand it as a component of sustainable organizing. The demands of organizing have always been tremendous. In the last several years, with the racial justice uprisings of 2020, both the short-term and long-term ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic, and increasing attacks on Black and Brown communities, LGBTQ communities, and women, the stresses on organizers are greater than they have ever been.

By investing in models of collective care that integrate healing practices and rest into the work, philanthropy can help ensure that it is working proactively with organizers to mitigate the high levels of burnout and attrition in the field, supporting them to engage in campaigns for social justice over the long haul.

Investing in wellness also means supporting grassroots organizing with sizable grants that allow them to pay their staff living wages, provide health care and other benefits, and save for retirement – in the same way that any funder would expect from its employer.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CJSF

As CJSF moves into its next season, it finds itself at a moment where its capacity is expanding. This combination of both increased staff and financial capacity, however modest, offers new opportunities to support organizing for education justice.

CJSF has already engaged its team, partners, and members in a process of planning and visioning, laying out a set of priorities that builds on its previous work, while carving out ambitious new bodies of work, particularly around narrative power-building. To provide additional food for thought to this process, we asked interviewees for their insights and critical reflection on how CJSF can amplify its impact.

It is clear from this evaluation and learning process that CJSF does indeed “live on a learning edge,” and that its ongoing contributions to education justice will come from leaning further into the role.

Here are some of the opportunities interviewees identified for CJSF to deepen its support for members and partners, and to strengthen the field as well as itself as an organization.

MEMBER ENGAGEMENT

Members called for more strategy-focused, action-oriented conversations. Members expressed strong appreciation for how CJSF curates content. At the same time, some members have left the collaborative for various reasons and some current members felt engagement in two-day quarterly meetings was

 My hope would be that they will be in a continual place of learning and being on the edge of what’s possible – [that’s]... what made them unique and what drove them.

Every organization has to mature, so I’m not saying stay small and nimble, but paying attention to how you continuously learn and be on the edge of your field is important.”

- Partner



I value that one of [CJSF's] strategies is educating us as donors, but I wonder how can we move?... Could they be driving us towards action?"

- Member

too intensive and that the time and resources involved in planning those meetings could be better spent elsewhere. Specifically, members expressed a desire to dig deeper into strategic conversations with one another (perhaps organized by region or issue area) and build peer-to-peer relationships that would allow them to support organizing efforts more effectively. Members acknowledged this could be challenging, given the wide spectrum of donors at the table, but thought it would be worth the effort. As one member asked, "Could we be activated in a more proactive way?" For example, in response to the report, one member said they would have appreciated a clear call to action, with ideas for how as donors they could help amplify and/or build upon the report's findings.

Some members felt they could be better engaged as ambassadors for CJSF. A critical mass of members expressed openness in playing a more proactive role in spreading the word about CJSF and its partners to help resource education justice organizing. They felt they could be supported in these roles through social media toolkits that would allow them to leverage their foundation's communication channels or through participation in conference or other convenings.

Some called on CJSF to engage more deeply with the "persuadable middle" and to go beyond "preaching to the choir" to engage donors who they may not have traditionally engaged. By doing so, interviewees believed there was an opportunity to amplify reach and impact. To engage the movable middle, some members suggested publishing op-eds in the Chronicle of Philanthropy or other mainstream industry publications. On the flipside, others cautioned CJSF to be careful about diluting its moral positionality even as it engages new donors. What does it look like for CJSF to remain committed to its values, while engaging new actors who can help amplify the Fund's reach?

Explore opportunities to engage more community and regional foundations. The minimum donation to sit at the CJSF table is \$50K. Some members worried that this leaves smaller community and/or regional foundations out of the conversation, even though they potentially have much to contribute, given their deep connections to local communities. As CJSF seeks to increase support from individual donors as well, deepening relationships with community foundations can also create opportunities to engage individuals who have donor-advised funds at those institutions.

PARTNER ENGAGEMENT

Partners appreciated spaces for collective learning and strategizing and would like to have additional opportunities for engagement. Partners lauded existing communities of practice organized by CJSF, but like members, partners yearned for more opportunities to connect with one another for collective strategizing and learning. In addition to CJSF's current offerings, partners suggested campaign teach-ins,

online spaces (such as a closed Facebook Group, BaseCamp, or Mighty Networks), and/or a living repository of campaign strategies and successes. Partners felt they would benefit from having “replicable examples” of successful campaigns, such as those around restorative justice, as well as a space to generate ideas for new organizing tactics in the wake of an everchanging and increasingly complex social and political landscape. Partners also expressed an interest in opportunities not only for them as organizers, but also for parent and youth leaders to connect with one another.

Partners expressed interest in a more cohesive set of capacity strengthening opportunities. While CJSF provides capacity strengthening support, one partner described these opportunities as somewhat “haphazard,” and thought it would be useful to have a more cohesive way to access support. For example, partners expressed an interest in having a pre-vetted list of consultants, who share their values, that they could engage on a range of needs, from strategy development to financial and succession planning.

A critical mass of partners mentioned the desire for communications support (outside of narrative power-building) to help disseminate press releases, arrange for media coverage, create social media assets, and provide coordinated messaging support. For example, one partner mentioned a press release sent out collectively by partners following the shooting at Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School that fell flat because no one had relationships with reporters to help amplify the message. Similarly, for local campaigns, groups often lack capacity to develop their own communications campaigns. To this end, several partners wondered if CJSF could retain a communications firm with a bank of hours that partners could access as needed.

Partners also expressed a desire for capacity strengthening initiatives focused on healing and wellness that could help organizations weave such practices into their culture and organizational practices, beyond one-off wellness activities.

Which of the following offerings would be helpful to your organization?	Somewhat helpful	Very helpful
Learning exchanges designed for movement folks to share strategies and tactics	7.7%	92.3%
Narrative power-building work (including communications, storytelling, and messaging strategy, workshops, and support)	16.0%	80.0%
Finances/Fundraising	24.0%	72.0%
Creating liberatory and equitable HR policies	16.0%	72.0%
Building out secure technology systems	23.1%	65.4%
Research skillshares	29.2%	62.5%
Coaching/consulting support for leadership transition	25.0%	45.8%
Federal strategies that connect to local efforts	40.00%	44.00%

Based on 32 responses to the partner survey; responses not reported here were either “not helpful” or “not sure”

Partners would like to see increased grant amounts, with longer grant terms. Partners praised CJSF's two-year grants but given the breadth of current challenges in the landscape, as well as the length of campaign cycles, they felt three-to-five-year grants would further ease the burden of renewals. One organizer lamented, "Now, two years feels like absolutely nothing." Likewise, given inflationary pressures and the increasing demands of the work, partners hoped CJSF could increase grant sizes over time, while recognizing this would be contingent on CJSF's fundraising efforts.

Some partners wanted to see greater attention to rural and Native organizing efforts. Many lauded CJSF's support for organizing groups located in the South and the Southwest, given that those areas are often overlooked by coastal philanthropies. At the same time, some felt CJSF could do more to engage Native American organizers, as well organizing in rural areas. Of note, those located in cities (particularly the Bay Area and New York) also advocated for ongoing resourcing of their groups given recent backlash to their work.

Some partners expressed a desire to co-design convenings and other learning opportunities. Some partners felt it would be beneficial to include organizers as co-designers not only for larger convenings, but also for other offerings, to ensure that frontline perspectives and priorities are being reflected. At the same time, others acknowledged that bandwidth could be a barrier in taking on such roles.

Some partners said they would benefit from receiving fiscal sponsorship via CJSF. Given that CJSF currently has a fiscal sponsor, it would not necessarily be poised to do the same for other organizations in the field. However, if CJSF's structure changes in the future, this could be a potential offering to support smaller and emerging organizations who are seeking fiscal sponsors that are values-aligned.

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Elevate CJSF's visibility and "brand" within philanthropy. Even though CJSF has built strong relationships within philanthropy and with various philanthropy-serving organizations (PSOs), members described CJSF as "too humble," "low-key," with a culture of "not talking about themselves." Members believed CJSF could do more to increase awareness of its work among donors — being clear about its impact, presenting more at conferences, cross-posting blogs and other information on PSO websites, e-newsletters, and hosting joint webinars/events with unusual suspects.

As one member put it, "[CJSF] is sitting on a Mount Vesuvius level of information about advocacy and organizing. [They] have huge contributions to make to [philanthropic] meetings. [They] should go for it!"

Likewise, a partner stated, "The stronger their brand is in the philanthropic field, the more funding they [will] be able to bring in. I feel like investing in themselves would...bring some awareness from other funders towards the folks on the ground organizing around public education in their communities."

Disseminate research, data, and policy in more digestible formats. Members and partners alike appreciated CJSF's reports and e-newsletters. At the same time, both felt that this information could be condensed

and/or translated to speak more effectively to different audiences. For example, distilling key findings of the report into a brief or an infographic for policymakers would be helpful to groups in conveying key takeaways. Likewise, members said they would benefit from shorter, more pointed data on impact that they could easily share with colleagues internal to their foundations to continue making the case for supporting CJSF.

Some members suggested incorporating regular evaluation mechanisms into CJSF's work. Conversations around "impact" in the social sector are often flawed and short-sighted, particularly when it comes to organizing and long-term social change efforts. At the same time, several members believed CJSF could do a better job at communicating its impact more explicitly, given the reality that many have to justify their grant investments to their institutions. Some suggested a periodic survey of partner perceptions, for example. Some also said they would appreciate getting bite-sized updates on impact (versus deep dives) that they could then share with their institutions. The 2021 annual report and the current evaluation and learning report are laying the groundwork for this, but there are opportunities for CJSF to weave evaluation more regularly into its work, which could have the added benefit of supporting fundraising efforts.

Consider an endowment. While partners want to see increased resources to the field, some partners suggested that the MacKenzie Scott award could seed an endowment that would allow the Fund to support education organizing more sustainably over the long term.

FIELD ENGAGEMENT

Stick with challenging school discipline – the trendlines are not changing. Even as CJSF builds out a platform for what holistically safe schools look like, several partners encouraged CJSF to continue to bring attention to punitive school discipline measures. Despite wins both nationally and locally, the trendlines show that Black and Brown youth continue to disproportionately bear the brunt of harsh school discipline policies.

Continue making connections between local and national work. Both partners and members noted that CJSF occupies a relatively unique position in the field through its close connections with partners on the ground and its relationships in federal government. Helping local groups understand what is going at the federal policy level and ensuring that federal policy discussions are informed by grassroots leaders creates value for all actors.

Raise awareness about local school boards and provide learning opportunities on how to build strong school boards. With the increasingly conservative bent of school boards, particularly in the South, both partners and members sounded the alarm about the harm conservative school boards are inflicting on Black and Brown youth, whether it is through the hardening of schools and punitive school discipline measures or decisions about what can and cannot be taught in classrooms. Some felt CJSF could play a role in helping organizing groups strategize about ways to incorporate school board elections into their work.

Make connections between CJSF’s focus on holistically safe schools, the value proposition of public education, and democratic principles. Many members and partners were concerned about privatization of schools and the ways in which public education is being dismantled. They articulated that a strong public education system is deeply connected to what it means to have a strong democracy, which flourishes when there is an informed citizenry with robust processes for community and civic engagement. CJSF stakeholders believed that given CJSF’s focus on what it means to build community power that it could be more explicit about how its work is connected to broader concerns about ensuring access to high-quality public education and what that means for ensuring a thriving democracy as well.

CONCLUSION

Carrying on the legacy of its founding director, Allison R. Brown, this evaluation demonstrates the wide-ranging impact CJSF has had on the field of education justice. CJSF has successfully:

- Helped increase resources to the field (currently a minimum of \$5.3/million year);
- Encouraged funders to become more equitable and relational in their philanthropic practices;
- Curated a rich suite of learning opportunities for donors, members, and other stakeholders;
- Served as a vocal advocate for education justice through federal policy work, as well as through media outlets;
- Invested in crucial base-building and power-building efforts; and
- Catalyzed powerful policy wins.

The current context carries with it both formidable challenges as well as promising strengths. CJSF, along with philanthropy at large, has an opportunity to continue sharpening its learning edge to advance the fight for education justice by investing in organizing infrastructure, curating spaces for collective strategizing, and crafting an affirmative vision for how our schools support Black and Brown students to thrive.

Importantly, this evaluation shows that through years of thoughtful relationship-building, CJSF has earned the trust of partners on the ground who are on the frontlines of this work. Funders of all stripes have the opportunity to tap into CJSF’s community and to its expertise, whether they are just starting their journey or seeking to amplify their work. It will take a village – parents, young people, educators, policymakers, and yes, funders – to realize the ambitious promise public education represents for serving all of our children.



CJSF is still seen as an outlier. I want them to be seen as the norm.”

- Partner

CJSF PRIORITIES FOR 2023 AND BEYOND

Grantmaking: In 2021, CJSF moved \$5.1 million in general operating grants and contributions to the field. In 2022, CJSF grew from that new floor by moving \$5.3 million in general operating support and contributions. They aim to continue this upward trend while also advocating for its members and other donors to support grassroots organizing directly.

Community of Practice 2.0: CJSF is building on its collective learning efforts and continuing the effort to define holistically safe schools, holding space for partners to learn together about what culturally sustaining pedagogies should look like via organizer strategy and research skillshare sessions; collaborative community-based research; and technical assistance.

Federal Strategies: CJSF is working to ensure that the realities, needs, and demands of local organizers drive federal agendas rather than the inverse. One priority, in solidarity with partners, is to end the shameful use of corporal punishment in schools.

Technical Assistance & Capacity-Building: CJSF plans to prioritize support for leadership transitions, organizational development and skills-building, trainings, bespoke consultant supports, and partner wellness.

Narrative Change and Power-Building: CJSF will provide technical assistance to partners on storytelling strategy, including earned and owned media, story-sharing, and narrative power-building. This includes supporting partners' research efforts, and their efforts to translate their work to multiple audiences.

Member Program: CJSF plans to build out its staff capacity to engage with donor members more regularly, creating opportunities for convening and participating in strategy sessions, strategizing together about how to participate in and connect the dots to other opportunities members are curating, increasing opportunities for members' collective learning and messaging as well as for networking with movement partners and others.

Evaluation: As CJSF onboards new team members, they will ensure that evaluation is an embedded and ongoing component of learning spaces they convene as well as their grantmaking - prioritizing sharing content and learning in smaller, bite-sized chunks.



Appendix A: Methodology

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This evaluation began in August 2021 and continued through September 2022 with the aim of understanding the impact of CJSF's Fund-Build-Connect-Lead strategy, adopted in 2017. Our team sought to assess the impact of CJSF's work to:

- **Fund** organizations that change schools through community organizing and advocacy
- **Build** capacity of partners and create space for collective learning and action
- **Connect** and foster relationships between partners and other stakeholders
- **Lead** efforts to make school discipline reform and positive school climate a priority

Additionally, we sought to characterize the current ecosystem by identifying strengths, weaknesses, and areas of increased need within the CJSF ecosystem and the overall movement for racial justice in education with an eye towards understanding the role of CJSF in the years to come.

DATA SOURCES

Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected through confidential surveys and interviews with CJSF partners, members, and network stakeholders. Outreach was conducted via email and verbal invitation during partner calls and quarterly member meetings.

INTERVIEWS

Fifty-seven individuals were interviewed, including 27 partners, 22 members, 6 network stakeholders, and 2 CJSF staff. In addition, one member focus group, consisting of 6 participants, was conducted. Conversations took place between February and June 2022. Outreach was conducted via email using a list of potential interview participants identified by CJSF. Interviews were designed to understand the impact of CJSF in education justice and to identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas of need among its partners, members, and stakeholders. Interviews were conducted by the project lead (Seema Shah, PhD) using semi-structured interview protocols.

PARTNER SURVEY

The partner survey was distributed to all 64 of CJSF's partners and designed to gather a snapshot of CJSF's partner network and to understand partners' experiences with CJSF. Partners were invited to submit multiple responses per organization. Thirty-two respondents across 28 organizations participated in the partner survey, yielding an organizational response rate of 44%.

The 28-item survey included questions about partner organizations and member characteristics — such as resource mobilization, topics under which it organizes, and membership demographics. The survey also assessed partners' experiences with CJSF grantmaking and other supports, as well as interest in possible future CJSF offerings. Recognizing that surveys often fail to capture the nuance of respondents' experiences or perspective, partners also had the opportunity to provide open-ended responses to certain questions.

MEMBER SURVEY

The member survey was designed to gather a snapshot of CJSF's membership and to understand members' experiences with CJSF. Foundations were invited to submit multiple responses determined by individual member engagement with CJSF. Fourteen members out of 31 active members participated in the survey, yielding an overall response rate of 45%.

The 24-item survey gathered information on foundations' characteristics — including their size, grantee's issue areas, and support for education justice. Members were asked to respond to questions on their engagement and experience with CJSF, CJSF's influence on foundation- and individual-level practices, and their overall satisfaction with the fund. Members also had the opportunity to share additional experiences through open-ended questions.

LIMITATIONS

There were some limitations to our evaluation — namely, the small sample size and relatively low response rates to the partner and member surveys. Accordingly, survey results reflect the experiences or thoughts of a subset of CJSF's partners and members and cannot be generalizable to the rest of CJSF's network.

Moreover, although the scope of this evaluation assesses the last five years of CJSF's work (2017-2022), this evaluation captures a moment in time of CJSF's network, impact, and the broader trends within the education justice field. The education justice field operates within a rapidly shifting political, social, and cultural landscape, meaning certain observations on the current context may only reflect the time during which the evaluation was conducted.

Appendix B: Interviewees

*Affiliations listed are those at the time of the interview and may have changed.

PARTNERS

Zakiyah Ansari

Alliance for Quality Education

Jennifer Arwade

Communities United

Awo Okaikor Aryee-Price

Education for Liberation Network

Ginna Brelsford

GSA Network

Michelle Grier

Girls for Gender Equity

Natalie Chap

Dignity in Schools Campaign

Maisie Chin

*Community Asset Development
Re-defining Education*

Pamela Fong

*Families & Friends of Louisiana's
Incarcerated Children*

Kesi Foster

Partners for Dignity and Rights

Amanda Gallegos

Southwest Organizing Project

Janice Harper

Nollie Jenkins Family Center

Eric Mann

Labor Community Strategy Center

Deborah Menkart

Teaching for Change

Letha Muhammad

Education Justice Alliance

Nicole Newman

Critical Exposure

Erika Guadalupe Núñez

Juntos

Marika Pfefferkorn

Twin Cities Innovation Alliance

Ellen Reddy

Nollie Jenkins Family Center

LuzMarina Serrano

GSA Network

Kameisha Smith

Nollie Jenkins Family Center

Jonathan Stith

Alliance for Educational Justice

Cendi Trujillo Tena

Leaders Igniting Transformation

Kate Terenzi

The Center for Popular Democracy

Marlyn Tillman

Gwinnett STOPP

Carlos Valle

Community Asset Development

Re-defining Education

Neva Walker

Coleman Advocates

Chauncy Young

New Settlement Parent Action Committee

MEMBERS

Nyoka Acevedo

Andrus Family Fund

Manuela Arciniegas

Ford Foundation

Ilene Berman

Annie E. Casey Foundation

Kathryn Bradley

William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

Traci Broady

Annie E. Casey Foundation

Arianna Cisneros

W.K. Kellogg Foundation

Martha Davis

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Mathilda de Dios

Voqal

Alexia Everett

Stuart Foundation

Bethiel Girma Holton

Oak Foundation

Cathy Holahan

EducationCounsel

Jennifer Kaizer

The Nathan Cummings Foundation

Castle Redmond

The California Endowment

Thena Robinson Mock

Public Welfare Foundation

Gisele Shorter

Raikes Foundation

Sara Sneed

The NEA Foundation

Isabel Sousa-Rodriguez

Edward W. Hazen Foundation

Eboni-Rose Thompson

Charles and Lynn Schusterman

Family Philanthropies

Nahir Torres

The Hyams Foundation

Christi Tran

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Nat Chioke Williams

Hill-Snowdon Foundation

Judy Yu

Wellspring Philanthropic Fund

NETWORK STAKEHOLDERS

Keith Catone

*Center for Youth and Community
Leadership in Education*

Cyrus Driver

Partnership for the Future of Learning

Jenni Kotting

Partnership for the Future of Learning

Bethany Little

EducationCounsel

Ashley Sawyer

Advancement Project

Christopher Scott

Federal School Discipline and Climate Coalition

CJSF STAFF

Cierra Kaler-Jones

Director of Storytelling

Jaime T. Koppel

Co-Director



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