



## United Parents and Students

United Parents and Students (UPAS) assembles a powerful collective voice by and for the residents of underserved communities. We believe in ongoing, permanent organizing, not tied solely to the ad hoc and episodic cycle of elections. UPAS is a multi-racial, multi-generational, multi-issue community organization that realizes sustained changes on an urgent timeline by demanding high-quality schools; broadening access to affordable, healthy food; expanding guaranteed basic income programs; addressing critical safety issues; and growing civic engagement. Founded in 2011, our work to date has been focused in Los Angeles, CA, Memphis, TN, and Stamford, CT.

### Democratic Power is Relational Power

Powerlessness is the root of persistent poverty. People with power are seldom or never poor. Power does not reside solely or even primarily in the individual; power resides in the collective, is community based, and must be consistent and constant. Indeed, according to the late philosopher Hannah Arendt, a collective public voice is THE source of political power. Despite the proven importance of community, the modern social fabric is fragmented. We are in a crisis of isolation, with ties and associations frayed in a culture that overemphasizes individualism. Without well-nourished places where people gather and conduct real dialogue about their genuine self- and mutual-interest, individuals are susceptible to extremism and demagoguery.

The impact is felt most strongly by individuals in poverty. Low-income Americans experience the many facets of poverty simultaneously: living in substandard and yet unaffordable housing, lack of access to healthcare, long hours and low wages, limited access to healthy food, and concerns with public safety. Each individual has a different point of view, however many experience similar systemic effects of poverty. Many lack trust in their local institutions and do not believe that systemic change is possible.

### Building Self-Advocates: A Model for Achieving Sustained Change

UPAS engages in broad-based organizing, building power by building solidarity among groups of diverse community members. UPAS partners with strong mediating institutions that make up the social fabric of our local neighborhoods. To date, UPAS has primarily partnered with public schools to build an active member base of 13,500 plus. UPAS understands that the school is part of a community, and the community is in the school itself. What affects one affects the other. UPAS partners with school stakeholders to achieve local victories that are immediate and meaningful. These small, tangible changes in a community — for example, adding a new crosswalk, or moving a school bus stop from a gang-infested area to a safer location — build trust and momentum.

UPAS's model flourishes by emphasizing self-advocacy. UPAS utilizes core organizing practices — continually conducting 100s of one-on-one meetings and house meetings — to identify areas of mutual interest that become our issue platform. Then, UPAS builds the skillsets of members at Leadership Institute workshops with basic, intermediate, advanced, and youth tracks that teach the core principles

of community organizing, from how to conduct a meeting with a public official, to data analysis, and the development of public speaking skills — among many others. Graduates of the Institute become Parent Leaders who lead organizing activities, including meeting with public officials to make demands, draft petitions and letters, and speak at board meetings to effect change. Along parallel tracks, UPAS conducts voter registration and non-partisan voter turnout campaigns to increase participation in local and state elections.

Relational power is shared, democratic power, and UPAS members demonstrate its effectiveness time and again through continuous action. Annually, the UPAS Assembly convenes hundreds, sometimes thousands, of activated community members with elected officials at all levels of government, private sector business, and community-based non-profits. Residents make demands around key issues, securing commitments of money and action for transformative, sustainable change.

“As I became more involved with this organization and began to learn that I did have a voice, and saw [things] I wasn’t happy with, [I realized] I could actually get involved and make a difference.”

- *Vickey Vaughn, UPAS Parent Leader*

### Track Record of Success

United Parents and Students advocacy has achieved significant, sustained victories, including:

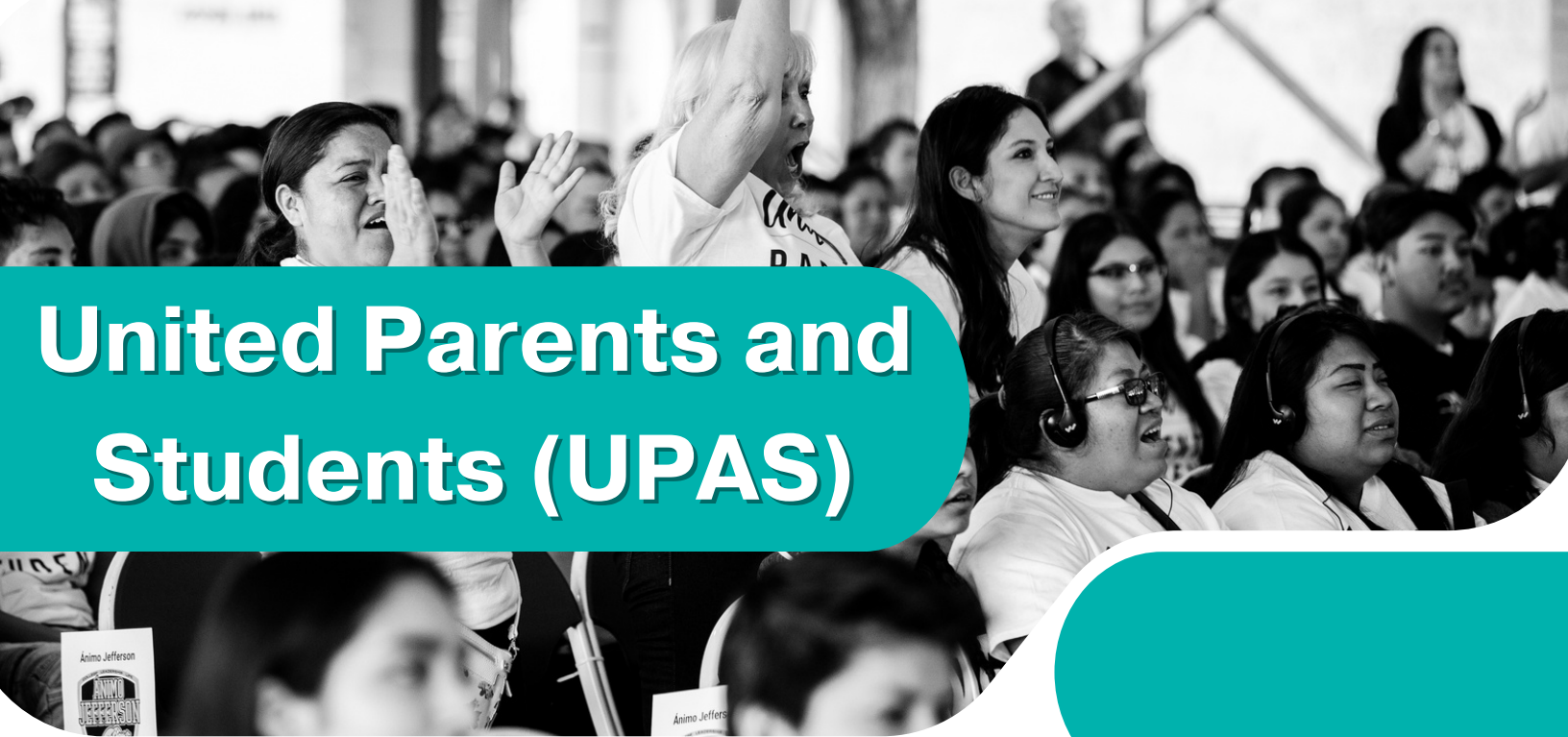
- Playing a key role with labor partners on the successful initiative to raise the Los Angeles City and County minimum wage to \$15/hour despite vehement opposition;
- Passing anti-pollution initiatives to reduce illegal dumping that blights low-income neighborhoods across LA County.
- Compelling the City of Los Angeles to translate the MyLA311 app to Spanish and Korean to broaden access to services like graffiti removal, pothole repair, and bulky item pickup for the 54% of residents who don’t speak English at home;
- Securing \$42 million in pandemic food support for residents experiencing poverty;
- Passing the Improving Supermarket Quality and Good Food Zone motions to increase healthy food access and improve grocery store health inspections.
- Registered 11,000 new voters since 2015.

Additionally, at the height of the pandemic, Supervisor Hilda Solis selected UPAS to distribute Los Angeles County’s grocery vouchers — trusting UPAS to leverage its extensive network of relationships and track record of effectively serving those most in need. In Memphis, UPAS’s relational policing program improves police-community relationships amidst escalating local violence. In Connecticut, a UPAS-led coalition passed House Bill 6663, guaranteeing protections for multilingual learners.

### A Vision for Systemic Change Through Collective Power

In the upcoming year, UPAS’s advocacy will achieve the following progress in our platform issues:

- Restoring successful Guaranteed Basic Income pilot in Los Angeles City (Big Leap program), and sustaining a similarly successful pilot in Los Angeles County (Breathe program).
- Campaigning regional and state governments on municipal Internet to provide government-sponsored, low cost access to Internet, especially by building broadband infrastructure in low-income communities that are ‘digital deserts’.
- Activating youth organizers on neighborhood public safety projects (for example stop signs, safe passages, speed bumps, etc.) and voter engagement campaigns.
- Advancing food justice by bringing more options for high-quality, affordable grocery options to ‘food deserts’, including new grocery stores and improving government policy on grocery inspections and quality oversight.



# United Parents and Students (UPAS)

## ABOUT US

United Parents and Students (UPAS) is an independent 501(c)(3) non-profit organization seeking to **empower low-income communities** to become **powerful self-advocates** for **sustainable neighborhood revitalization**. Through our work, we partner with local public schools, and community-based organizations to create training centers that teach families the formal skills of **community organizing** and authentic **civic engagement**.

As a result of this training, families are equipped to: **identify clear and actionable issues within their communities**, **unify to develop meaningful and community centered solutions**, and **organize to advocate for deep systemic change on these issues**. Our vision is to establish a national network of permanent, self-sustaining coalitions of informed and **mobilized community members**.

UPAS operates chapters in Los Angeles, CA, Memphis, TN, and Stamford, CT.



### GUARANTEED BASIC INCOME

We believe GBI is one of the most innovative policies in combating poverty. Our campaign for GBI is centered around two things: community education and legislative advocacy.



### DIGITAL EQUITY

Partnering with Digital Equity Los Angeles, we're advocating for policy reforms to hold internet service providers more accountable, fostering better service and fairer prices for all.



### FOOD JUSTICE

We aim to eliminate food deserts, promote sustainability, and empower individuals to make informed choices about their nutrition while fostering a sense of unity and resilience within our neighborhood.



### PUBLIC SAFETY

UPAS collaborates with LA County Public Works to enhance pedestrian safety by implementing crucial measures, including the installation of stop signs and crosswalks.



## United Parents and Students x ReSOLV

The **Research on Lowering Violence in Schools and Communities** (ReSOLV) study is a nine-year study of relationships between school safety and student outcomes with community and school-based factors in California published in a Special Issue of *The Journal of School Violence*, released in February 2024.

The study examined the association of school safety and student outcomes in three radically different environments: Hanford, a mid-size city in California's Central Valley; Mendota, a rural town in California's Central Valley; and urban Los Angeles.

**United Parents and Students Executive Director Larry Fondation** served on the ReSOLV Advisory Board and contributed key insights into the impact of risk and need in the community on student educational and behavioral outcomes and student success in school.



### Importance of Community Organizing in School Safety

- Bring stakeholders, diverse organizations and entities together, to develop multi-pronged strategies to alleviate the consequences of poverty.
- Make demands of the political establishment and private sector to help solve the institutional desert problem affecting low-income neighborhoods, which results in the absence of institutions that more affluent communities take for granted, such as health clinics and hospitals, banks, and full-service grocery stores.
- Work to reweave the social fabric in communities struggling to thrive, serving as catalysts for increased collective and individual well-being as well as improved quality of life.
- Help stakeholders recognize that risk and need in the community has a substantial impact on student educational and behavioral outcomes and student success in school will result in lower community violence.
- Engage more directly with responsible research organizations who understand how to best use research as a tool for change to support safe and thriving communities.

**The Research on Lowering Violence in Schools and Communities (ReSOLV) study is a nine-year study of relationships between school safety and student outcomes with community and school-based factors in California.**

**Principal Investigators: Patricia Campie, Ph.D., AIR & Anthony Peguero, Ph.D., ASU**

**Co-Investigators: Jonathan Scaccia, Ph.D., Dawn Chorus Group, Allyson Pakstis, Ph.D. & Roger Jarjoura Ph.D., AIR**

**Team: David Osher, Ph.D., Brittany Cook, Ph.D., Kenya Roy, Caleb Perlman, Shoshana Rabinovsky, Daniel Tei, Felice Trirogoff**

## STUDY GOALS

- To help schools understand how risk and need factors in the community influence student engagement and outcomes in school, while helping community leaders understand how violence prevention efforts in the community may benefit educational outcomes for youth, which in turn can prevent future violence.
- Provide insights on building the readiness for individuals, organizations, and the broader community to work together to address violence and safety issues using inclusive, equitable, and comprehensive strategies that are rooted in evidence of effectiveness.

## STUDY HYPOTHESIS

Schools operate within a broader ecological framework and risk factors in the community can negatively affect student and school outcomes if schools are not actively working to recognize and mitigate these influences.



## STUDY IMPLEMENTATION

- Study period: Jan. 1, 2014, to Dec. 31, 2022
- Study sites: Hanford, Mendota, and Los Angeles
- Study design: Three independent case studies
- Study methods: Mixed, quantitative (census, crime, geo-spatial, survey, achievement, discipline), and qualitative (documents, focus groups, interviews, observation, social media)

## STUDY RESULTS

- Crime and concentrated disadvantage had an influence on higher chronic absentee rates, lower graduation rates, higher suspension rates, and lower percentages of students scoring at or above the median on standardized test results for English Language Arts and Math.
- Community risk factors explained school and student outcomes much better than did measures of the internal school climate, including feelings of safety, relationships, engagement, and learning supports.
- School climate was universally worse in schools surrounded by the greatest amount of community risk and need.

## STUDY IMPLICATIONS

- It is not sufficient to simply “fix schools” in otherwise disadvantaged areas and expect to produce better safety and educational outcomes.
- To create safe and supportive learning environments within schools, equal attention must be paid to creating safe and supportive living environments using equitable strategies that engage a broader set of stakeholders.
- To this end, ReSOLV has developed an alternative response model for organizing school and community collective action. The model is forthcoming in the Journal of School Violence.

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