

SAINT PAUL PROMISE ADVOCATES COHORT



WE'RE SAINT PAUL PROMISE

An education partnership that puts children in the Frogtown, Rondo, and Summit-University neighborhoods of Saint Paul on the pathway to college and career success! Housed at the Wilder Foundation, our approach to closing the opportunity gap is inclusive, considers the well-being of the whole family, and recognizes the brilliance of the people we serve.

OUR MISSION

We exist to transform learning, improve educational outcomes and spark abundant opportunities from cradle to career - for all children and families in Saint Paul.

OUR VISION

We imagine a community that makes a promise of opportunity to all children and families.

A SUMMARY OF THE PROGRAM PILOT

Promise Advocates Cohort 1

In July 2023, Saint Paul Promise launched the first Promise Advocates Cohort (PAC) with 12 parents, caregivers, and neighbors. This summary report highlights what participants gained from the PAC, as well as insight into participants' civic engagement practices, advocacy aspirations, and understandings of systems change. The information in this report includes data from participant surveys that were completed before, during, and after the Cohort, as well as administrative data, and "session reflections" from PAC staff.



ABOUT PAC

The Saint Paul Promise Advocates Cohort (PAC) is a space to learn and work alongside fellow parents, caregivers, and neighbors to ignite participants' inherent political power, invest in their capacity as self-advocates, and act on opportunities to create real change grounded in lived experiences. The PAC adapted curriculum from the national Building a Parent Nation campaign. Through family-centered policy and advocacy efforts, the campaign seeks to change systems to deliver on the promise of opportunity for all - from cradle to career.

-THOSE CLOSEST TO THE PROBLEMS ARE ALSO CLOSEST TO THE SOLUTIONS.

The purpose of the PAC stems from Saint Paul Promise's collaborative approach to advocacy in believing those closest to the problems are also closest to the solutions.

This why Saint Paul Promise positions itself to fill a strategic need in engaging Promise Neighborhood families through the PAC to dismantle inequities in exchange for real solutions informed by the people most harmed by policy shortfalls. The Promise Advocates Cohort encourages community advocacy and empowerment of our families to change our systems for the better.

PAC PARTICIPATION

The PAC takes a whole family approach to engagement and provides support so that adults can fully participate. Saint Paul Promise provides several resources to PAC participants:

- **Children and youth programming** provided by staff on-site
- **Lunch provided for all** participating family members at each meeting
- **Transportation assistance** provided via a Lyft credit OR a Gas Card
- **Cash stipend** for attending all six meetings



The holistic engagement model resulted in high and consistent participation, as well as maximal use of resources like children's programming.

- The PAC maintained an **attendance rate of 83% to 100%** over the course of six sessions.
- **18 children and youth**, between the ages of one month and 15 years old, participated in on-site youth programming, with an average of nine participants per session.
- The PAC had **two families participate across three generations**, including children, a parent, and a grandparent.
- Nine of the families in the PAC have children **enrolled in Saint Paul Public Schools**.



PAC RESULTS: OVERVIEW

As a result of participating in the PAC, Saint Paul Promise participants feel more connected to their community, can imagine a society that better supports them and their loved ones, and have higher expectations of society. The majority of participants feel prepared to create change in their community and know how to create social change. Half of the participants feel more connected to their elected officials.

Participant Outcomes	Number of Participants Who:		
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree
Because of the PAC, I feel prepared to create change in my community.	8	3	1
Because of the PAC, I feel more connected to my community.	7	5	
Because of the PAC, I feel more connected to my elected officials.	3	3	6
Because of the PAC, I can imagine a society that better supports me and my loved ones.	5	7	
Because of the PAC, I have higher expectations of society.	8	4	
Because of the PAC, I know how to create social change.	4	7	1

PAC RESULTS: SESSION EXPECTATIONS AND LEARNING

THINK PROUD. THINK RADICALLY. THINK SAINT PAUL. THINK PROUD. THINK RADICALLY. THINK SAINT PAUL.

Participants had the opportunity to share their expectations and learning before and after each PAC session. The table (below) shows the key expectations and learning that most participants selected for each session. This table highlights the top two items that participants hoped to gain from each session, and what they actually learned as a result of each session.

Session	Expectations	Learning
1	<p>Explore different ideas and perspectives of a Parent Nation (6)</p> <p>Learn about the four upcoming PAC sessions (5)</p>	<p>Starting to understand and use the PAC program as a space for mutual support to share experiences and discuss why our current systems are not working for families and children (6)</p> <p>Beginning to develop trust amongst myself, fellow cohort participants, and Saint Paul Promise as a partner in collective advocacy work (4)</p> <p>Beginning to imagine a society that better supports my whole family (4)</p>
2	<p>Explore the idea and power of a collective identity (7)</p> <p>Explore how a sympathetic society can support the needs of families (5)</p>	<p>Will continue to participate in building a community of support (8)</p> <p>Learned who currently carries most of the responsibility of raising the next generation (6)</p>
3	<p>Explore roles in systems change and find which best matches my family's strengths and interests (8)</p> <p>Learn about five key roles needed in systems change (7)</p>	<p>I appreciate that everyone's talents and gifts are needed for systems change to happen (6)</p> <p>I appreciate the systems change role(s) I matched up with based on my unique strengths and interests (5)</p>
4	<p>Set the next steps for further engagement with Saint Paul Promise (7)</p> <p>Learn about organizations, historical events, concepts, and leaders – including parents and young adults – that impact families and think about how together, we can make more significant change (6)</p>	<p>Developed an appreciation of the many efforts – past and current – that impacted me and my family (7)</p> <p>Committed to helping build my ideal Parent Nation through systems change (6)</p>



THINK PROUD. THINK RADICALLY. THINK SAINT PAUL. THINK PROUD. THINK RADICALLY. THINK SAINT PAUL.

PAC RESULTS: KNOWLEDGE, POWER & RESPONSIBILITY

The PAC had an impact on participants' knowledge, skills, and power to make changes in their community.

Increased sense of power. A large proportion of participants did not feel like they had the power to make changes in their community before they joined the PAC. By graduation, a larger proportion of participants saw that they had some power to change their communities.

Increased knowledge. When participants began in the PAC, most did not feel like they had the knowledge required to make changes in their communities. By graduation, most participants had increased their knowledge about what it takes to make changes in their community.

Increased belief in the responsibility of society. When the PAC started, most participants believed that society has an obligation to support families, and that society was not meeting their needs as caregivers. By the end of PAC, the majority of participants believed that society has an obligation to support families, increasing from 67% to 83%. Participants want society to support them with more comprehensive and accessible resources, including support from community and government agencies, especially with better overall case management and housing assistance.

[I want] less hassle when it comes to the process of getting help. Having agents that are more compassionate and not being so dismissive and misusing authority over your case.

More affordable subsidized housing for single fathers.

I just have to find the resources. [Society can help me] by not making the resources so hard to find.

I believe they should have more mentors and provide therapy.

Continue to check up on us and continue to keep us updated with newfound resources.

Session Reflection: Recognizing Society's Responsibility to Families

Across multiple sessions, participating parents and caregivers expressed a need for access to support that will connect them with people who will be on their side and withhold judgment. As participants shared similar experiences with one another, a fellow participant grounded everyone back to a solutions-oriented mindset in stating how learning to accept and not be intimidated when it comes to accessing public support has changed her experiences. She went on to share that she challenged herself to find more "unexpected" community-based sources of support. In doing so, she has been able to connect with people who don't make her repeat her traumas in order to access what she needs, people who genuinely deliver on what they say they have to offer, and people who take the time to provide that emotional and mental support – which goes a long way.

THINK PROUD. THINK RADICALLY. THINK SAINT PAUL. THINK PROUD. THINK RADICALLY. THINK SAINT PAUL.

PAC RESULTS: COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT & CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Participants face barriers to being involved in their community. The majority of participants face barriers to getting involved in their community. Barriers include issues around childcare, skillset, and time.

Participants want to be more involved in their community. Before participating in the PAC, most participants said that they were not involved in their communities. However, when asked how they were involved in their community, most community members could identify multiple ways of involvement. The most common ways participants were involved in their community was through voting, encouraging others to vote, participating in events at their children’s school, and attending community events. Participants noted their desire to participate in events and at their children’s school, volunteering, and attending community events.

I feel pretty good and optimistic about [building a] better society in the future. But I wish I [knew] how and what I can do to move forward, other than reaching out to the organizations presented in the PAC workshops.

My society could better support me by giving me a platform to voice my concerns.

I feel there should [have] been more community information to be what they can do in the community. I do a lot of work in the community but I feel it should [have] been information on how to change the community. I think most information came from us even though we are in a community but staff should helped to. I think my community could better support love ones by not looking at race and single parents.

After participation in PAC, most participants still do not see themselves as involved in their community, despite many who vote and attend community events. However, participants shared their desire and numerous ways to get involved in their community now that the PAC has ended, including: staying connected with the PAC, Saint Paul Promise, and fellow cohort members, looking for volunteer opportunities, becoming an advocate, sharing resources with others, and continuing to participate in training opportunities.

Current Community Activities of PAC Graduates

Civic Actions	Total # of Graduates
I vote.	11
I attend community events.	10
I encourage others to vote.	8
I participate in events at my child’s school.	8
I take action as an advocate.	6
I learn/know about my elected leaders (such as local or state representatives).	5
I volunteer in my community.	4

THINK PROUD. THINK RADICALLY. THINK SAINT PAUL. THINK PROUD. THINK RADICALLY. THINK SAINT PAUL.

More participants want to vote in the next election. Almost all participants (10 out of 12) are registered voters who voted in a local, state, or national election, and one participant is not eligible to vote. While most participants have not experienced problems when trying to vote or register, three participants did indicate past problems they encountered regarding voting or attempting to register to vote. Prior to participation in the PAC, less than half of respondents noted their interest in voting in the next election. **After the PAC, the majority of participants who are eligible voters want to vote in the next election (73%)** and the remaining three participants said that they don't know; no participant said that they did not want to vote.

Participants don't always feel supported by their elected officials. Before and after the PAC, most participants shared that they do not feel supported by their elected officials. Participants want elected officials to take the time to listen to community members to understand their needs fully, and shared feedback about their expectations of elected officials.

Listen to the community when it comes to crucial changes that [are needed] for change. Especially ones that impact others in the community in a way that causes struggles.

By being more ethical, while listening to the concerns of the community.

By giving us the time to get on our feet by not taking our funding too soon. That is what causes setbacks.

I wish to understand how the society works at [a] much deeper level. Would it [be] possible to have a cup of coffee sit-down session with city council, county commissioners, and mayor sometime to have connection conversation? It would help me understand better and visualize. If I only know through news massively produced, then I would not be able to relate much, and I might just skip. Please help me help others.

Staff Session Reflection: Navigating the Benefits Cliff

"Navigating the benefits cliff came up organically by the fourth PAC session. Participating parents and caregivers expressed the same sentiment that "when they weren't working, they got everything – but then when they started working, everything got taken away." One parent put it as follows, "The handouts they give you are like, I'm gonna hold your hand so you get this... versus, when you get back out there I'm going to take away your childcare... even though you're out there trying to work... They take it away before you can really even afford the costs of getting back to work, which makes you fall back right where you started... essentially you become bound to the benefits and can't succeed on your own." Multiple parents agreed with this framing and added how they've found themselves having to visit food shelves, even when they're working two jobs, and that – more times than not – they end up quitting their job(s) because it becomes too much to juggle for too little pay and the large effect it has on their benefits. And then, when they turn back to the County for help, they're told "Well, you should've stayed down here if you didn't want to lose those benefits, or you should've turned in this paper so you could've gotten this to replace that now that you're making too much."

PAC RESULTS: EXPERIENCE

Participants rated their experience with the PAC across several indicators by stating their level of agreement with several statements. Overall, participants felt supported and welcome in the PAC, they enjoyed participating and felt it was a good use of their time. **All participants said that they would recommend PAC to loved ones or community members.**

Number of Participants Who:

THINK PROUD. THINK RADICALLY. THINK SAINT PAUL. THINK PROUD. THINK RADICALLY. THINK SAINT PAUL.

Participant Experience	Strongly Agree	Agree
I felt supported and welcome in the Promise Advocates Cohort (PAC).	12	
I was able to share my thoughts and opinions without fear of judgment.	4	8
I felt encouraged by my fellow cohort members.	9	3
The PAC matched my expectations.	8	4
I would recommend the PAC to my loved ones or fellow community members.	12	
The PAC was a good use of my time.	11	1
I feel connected with my fellow cohort members.	9	3
I enjoyed participating in the PAC.	11	1

Participants noted that the PAC provided community supports (e.g. knowing they are not alone) and resources, including specific resources from sessions and general knowledge of community resources.

...Involving yourself in the community, I learned that we all face the similar struggles and can help put each other on resources that we are unaware of. I also learned about more programs and organizations.

I'm not alone, I knew I wasn't but to see it, sincere people that truly care and help find resources.

Staff Session Reflection: PAC as Community

As we had families go around the room sharing what community supports they utilize to make ends meet, a parent asked “You all seem so plugged in, how do I get to where you are?” Without missing a beat, a fellow parent responded “You are here, this is where you start – with Saint Paul Promise. Saint Paul Promise is so connected. They’re folks you don’t have to be afraid of asking for help from. You should always reach out to them because chances are if they don’t know themselves, they probably know someone who does and can get you what you need.”



IMPROVING PAC: SUGGESTIONS FROM PARTICIPANTS

THINK PROUD. THINK RADICALLY. THINK SAINT PAUL. THINK PROUD. THINK RADICALLY. THINK SAINT PAUL.

The most common challenge to participation in the PAC was time. Participants said that the timing of the PAC sessions did not always work well for them and that they also had personal time conflicts. There was no clear consensus on ways to improve the PAC, but participants offered a number of suggestions, including:

- Increase the number of sessions
- Change the time of sessions
- Invite an elected official to come and speak
- Make PAC expectations clear
- Increase number of scenario exercises
- Diversify/change food selections
- Diversify ways to communicate ideas and show available resources

I enjoyed and am sad it's coming to an end. I love that I didn't have to worry about transportation and the incentives helped me so much. You also provided great meals, community, fellowship, resources, and I am so proud to be a part of SPPN. They have given so much to my life and I am so grateful. I loved energy activity, every member, facilitator, and I am elated. Thank you so much to the facilitators, childcare helpers, directors and everyone who made this possible. I'm excited to see what is next.

SAINT PAUL PROMISE

For more information about this report, contact Briellen Griffin at Wilder Research, briellen.griffin@wilder.org.

OCTOBER 2023



APPENDIX

Plan of Action Poster

