

Jeremy Lahoud
Executive Director, Californians for Justice
Coordinating Committee, Campaign for Quality Education
Plaintiff Organizations

For almost a decade, student and parent groups, including the Campaign for Quality Education, the Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment, Californians for Justice, and the San Francisco Organizing Project have tried to fix California's broken school finance system, which fails to provide districts across the State with the resources needed to prepare students for civic engagement, college, and a career.

We've met with legislators. We've supported school finance reform legislation. We've mobilized thousands of students and parents to Sacramento to share their experiences and struggles with an inadequate and inequitable school finance system.

Unfortunately, our efforts have been ignored, vetoed, or left stuck in the shortsighted paralysis that has overtaken Sacramento. We view litigation as a measure of last resort, but we can't wait any longer. We're losing a whole generation of students.

Our organizations have long demanded that the Governor and Legislature take action to fix California's broken school finance system.

In 2003, we supported development of the Quality Education Commission (QEC) by the State. However, the State never activated the Commission. Its mandate to "identify the educational components, educational resources, and corresponding costs necessary to provide the opportunity for a quality education to every pupil" was never pursued.

From 2005 to 2007, we supported the work of the Governor's Committee on Education Excellence and testified before it. The Committee reviewed dozens of reports issued by the State-commissioned *Getting Down to Facts* studies. It concluded that the school finance system was irrational, inefficient, and insufficient for students most in need. But the State never acted on the conclusions and recommendations of the Governor's Committee.

Since 2008, confronted with severe cuts to school funding, thousands of California public school students and their parents have come to Sacramento with the CQE to demand adequate and equitable school funding. CQE student and parent leaders have made over 100 legislative visits. We've provided testimony to the Assembly and Senate Education Committees. We delivered to the Governor 15,000 postcards from California public school students calling for fair funding so that all students receive an education that prepares them for college and a successful career.

Most recently, the CQE sponsored and built support for Assembly Bill 8, proposed by Assembly Education Chair Julia Brownley. It would have required a bipartisan working group to propose a new funding structure to the Legislature and make the system equitable, rational, and based on the actual costs of educating students. Although the State Legislature passed AB 8 with wide bipartisan support, it was vetoed.

In the face of this decade of activism, the State has failed to take any action to respond to the demands of parents, students, and voters to adequately and fairly fund our schools. The policymaking process is paralyzed, unable to enact a new and different school funding system—despite the consensus that such fundamental change is necessary. We are left with little choice but to bring our case to the courts and unblock the jammed political and legislative process.

**Arianna Antone-Ramirez
Youth Leader, San Francisco Organizing Project
Plaintiff Organization**

Hello my name is Arianna Antone-Ramirez and I am a youth leader with SFOP. The San Francisco Organizing Project is a federation of 30 congregations, schools and community centers, representing 40,000 families throughout 17 neighborhoods in San Francisco. We've spent the last 10 years working to improve schools in San Francisco. After months of working with the school district to stop inequitable budget cuts that significantly impacted schools serving students of color we made the decision to join this lawsuit as an organizational plaintiff because we've tried at the local level and know that school finance reform is a State issue.

I began working with SFOP two years ago when I was in the fourth grade. I used to attend Sanchez Elementary School but now I go to Roosevelt Middle School which is across the city from my house.

Sure there are quite a few middle schools that are closer to my house but I don't go to any of them because they are not as high achieving as Roosevelt. My mom and I looked at API scored in the district and **none** of the top 5 middle schools were in my neighborhood. This is not right. I should not have to travel halfway across town just to get to a school that does well. The state needs to fix this. NOW! There should be good schools in every part of town, in every part of California not just certain parts. I don't think the state realizes how hard it is to get up early everyday, catch three buses to school, then repeat this to come back home after school. This is very tiring and leaves little time for homework. Not only that but it is time consuming as well. Sometimes I get to homeroom with seconds to spare. Other times I miss homeroom altogether because it takes so long to get to school.

Another thing I would like to point out is the out of control class sizes. I came from a school with about eighteen students per class and all of a sudden I have

to adjust to being in classes with thirty five students or more. My teachers never have a chance to focus on me if I don't understand something. They are too busy trying to keep all the students in check. With all these budget cuts can you imagine what the class sizes will go up to?

I am not the only student facing these barriers:

- Of the students that started Mission High School in 2003—85% graduated but only 19% were prepared for College.
- In California only 51% of 8th graders take Algebra.
- At Denman Middle School (which is one of the middle schools in my neighborhood) only **16%** of 8th graders take Algebra.
- Why is this important?? Because the University of California requirements recommend 4 years of Math—students who are not proficient in Algebra by the end of 8th grade won't go to a UC school.
- Students in California's poorest schools are twice as likely to have inexperienced teachers as those in more affluent schools.
- Budget cuts affect East Side schools disproportionately. At schools like Sanchez and Malcolm X between 50% and 66% of teachers received pink slips. Though the district took back half of the pink slips, schools that experience low test scores and high teacher turnover will still see many of their beloved teachers go. The trusting relationships that are critical to our academic success will be gone.

I deserve a quality education. All of the students of California deserve a quality education. My generation and I are the future of San Francisco, of California, and of the world. When I graduate from a university, I want to be a teacher. BUT when the Governor's OWN Committee on Education Excellence concludes that the current finance system is "broken" and as a consequence, it "does not ensure that sufficient resources reach students according to their needs," it sounds to me like the state has given up on me and my dream and the future of California.

**Yesenia Ochoa
Student Plaintiff
San Francisco Unified School District**

Good morning. My name is Yesenia Ochoa, and I am going into 12th grade at John O'Connell Technical High School in the San Francisco Unified School District. I am here today because I don't believe the students at my school are receiving the quality education they deserve.

As a member of student site council, I sit on my school's budgeting committee. It's really depressing to watch the committee struggle with how to run our school with all of the budget cuts. Sometimes the committee had to decide whether to lay off core faculty members, like one of the best English teachers, or important staff positions, like the only full-time librarian or the nurse who runs the Wellness Center. I don't think schools should have to make those types of decisions. Each cut hurts me and my classmates because we're missing out on important resources. These budget cuts are preventing us from receiving the quality education we deserve.

My school wasn't always like this. When I was a freshman, O'Connell had so many more programs and courses to help us with our studies. But with all of the budget cuts in the last couple of years, it seems like my school barely has any active programs now. When I became a part of the budgeting committee, I learned that many of the programs we do have are funded by outside grants. Our entire after-school tutoring program is funded by grant money. My teachers are always applying for grants so that they can buy the resources and the materials that we need. Some of them even make sacrifices and spend their own money to close the gap, but I don't think this is fair to them or fair to us. Next year, O'Connell is losing some of its grants. I'm scared to think of the next thing we are going to lose. We've already lost so much.

I support this lawsuit because I believe me and my classmates deserve better. We deserve the opportunity to go to school for the whole year, not have our school year cut short by a week. We deserve summer school, and a full range of honors and elective courses. I really want to go to a prestigious college, like Stanford, but I honestly don't feel like my school has prepared me to be a competitive college applicant because my classmates and I don't receive the quality education that we deserve.

I am here today because I want to make sure the younger students in my community are given the opportunity for a brighter future.

Giselle Quezada
Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment
Executive Board Member, Plaintiff Organization

Hello my name is Giselle Quezada and I am an Executive Board Member of Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment. I speak today as a parent of four children and a grandparent to 6 grandchildren. Our first grandchild will be attending public school this fall.

As a parent and a community member, I have seen public school change to the detriment of our students. The neighborhood school, close to where I live had previously been underperforming and received funds to better their test scores. With the added resources, the school was able to show strong improvements. Unfortunately, now that they are doing better, the state has pulled the rug from under the staff and students and eliminated resources and key staff positions. Instead of praising and continuing support for this school, the drastic budget cuts are taking all that makes this school successful and stripping it to the bare minimum. What message are we telling our children and the schools about how we value their educational success?

Grassroots groups are advocating for the state to look at how much it takes to give every child a quality education, and reform the funding system based on key research. This is what our communities and our state need. Our children are not being provided the tools to succeed in today's economy, leaving them with few opportunities for a solid career and good income.

As grassroots organizations, we are the heartbeat of our communities and we are truly invested in the public education our children receive. This is why we feel it is crucial that grassroots organizations and communities need to be at the table playing an active role to ensure that every child has access to free high-quality education. A great education should not be just for those who can afford it, pay for private school or extra activities that academically help their child. It is important to create a balance so that all children receive an equal education, no matter what community you live in or from what part of the state.

ACCE leaders believe it is crucial that grassroots organizations are part of this lawsuit because it is our children and our communities that are suffering from the bad educational funding system. Additionally, ACCE leaders and other grassroots group represented in this case believe our voice must be heard as part of the discussion to improve school funding and educational opportunities for our children. We are students, parents, grandparents, aunties, uncles all working together to ensure our children and the future of California is given equal and fully adequate resources.

Vernell Crittendon
Alliance for Californians for Community Empowerment
Parent, Plaintiff Organization Members

Good afternoon, I am Vernell Crittendon a parent of a high school student who just graduated and a member representing ACCE, which stands for Alliance for Californians for Community Empowerment. I also operate a non-profit which provides counseling for youth and their families in the 9-Bay Area counties. Many of the youth I counsel are involved with the Juvenile Justice system between the ages of 10-18 yrs. old. As an ACCE member, a father and someone who works with bay area youth, I am here to provide a voice for those citizens not being heard; those families, which are the victims of an unjust educational funding system because they have been left behind.

We Californians are failing our children and youth when we allow statistics such as the teacher per student ratio ranked 49th in the Nation and 47th in spending per student in our public schools and with over 35% of our youth failing to graduate high school. This unjust system has caused school districts to become increasingly unstable and subject to such dramatic reductions to core educational programs and services, which are being dramatically reduced or eliminated. Where will these realities lead our families and where has it lead our State in the development of a qualified workforce? California not only has the largest prison system in the Nation but one of the largest prison systems in the industrialized world.

We must fix this unjust educational funding system and the fix requires grassroots organizations like ACCE. We represent the voice of low to moderate-income families most adversely affected by the deterioration of our public school system. California's educational system requires fundamental reform, creating some foundational policies such as providing adequate resources for teacher development, support programs for students, such as before and after school programs, and sufficient classroom materials so the burden does not go onto families who can't afford it. The school finance system has to change and the state must also identify a more stable funding stream to remain secure even in bad budget times. Grassroots organizations, the pulse of local communities, must be actively engaged in the restructuring process.

ACCE and our Grassroots partners SUPPORT THIS LAWSUIT IN PUTTING EDUCATION TO WORK FOR OUR CHILDREN, FAMILIES, NEIGHBORHOODS, AND STATE.

**Trish Taylor
Redwood City School District
Parent of Plaintiffs**

My name is Trish Taylor. My children attend Roosevelt Elementary School in Redwood City.

As a parent, I have watched Roosevelt Elementary struggle to serve its students, the majority of whom are low-income and English Language Learners. Our school cannot afford art. It cannot afford music. It cannot afford a full-time librarian or enough dictionaries for our students. In a community with so many high-need students, we have no psychologist. No nurse. This year, for the first time ever, Roosevelt has put a lock on the workroom door to control the amount of supplies being used in our classrooms, because paper has become a scarce resource at our school.

Still, Roosevelt Elementary is our home. We choose to stay because my children and I love our school. Members of our community have rolled up their sleeves and come together to try to plug the holes left behind by budget cuts. In a low-income community like ours, this is no small sacrifice, and it is not enough. The working parents of Roosevelt cannot begin to take the place of adequate funding from our State. My kids, and their friends, should not have to suffer because the Roosevelt PTA cannot raise as much money as PTAs in other schools. They deserve just as much as any other student in the State, and as much as any other student in the country. California needs to provide the funding to make a quality education possible for every student.

**Araceli Orozco
Parent Plaintiff
Hayward Unified School District**

My name is Araceli Orozco, I am the mother of four children who either attend or have attended schools in the Hayward Unified School District. I am also a leader in Familias en Acción, a grassroots organization in Hayward that is part of the Campaign for Quality Education. I want my kids to go to college but they are not being adequately prepared for a higher education by our State. Each year that passes, this dream is slipping away. I want that to stop. That is why I am supporting this lawsuit. I want to make sure that our state will more adequately fund our schools.

My eight-year-old daughter was fortunate enough to have a teacher who worked hard to get grants from independent donors so that her students had more resources. But it is not fair that the teachers have to raise money so that they can teach well. The State should be providing our children with the resources they need in school.

With the budget cuts, my daughter's 4th grade class next year will have 34

students. Last year she only had 23 students in her class. That's a huge difference. My child's education is going to suffer. A teacher will not be able to provide the individual attention that's necessary for thirty-four 4th graders.

I want to make sure that my kids have better opportunities than I had. We need to give every one of our kids the opportunity to succeed in life by giving them the best education possible. Education should be the number one priority for all of our kids. All means all—that includes less fortunate children.

Now is the time.

**Audrey Chiang
Plaintiff & Parent of Plaintiffs
Alameda Unified School District**

My name is Audrey Chiang. My children attend Edison Elementary School in Alameda. I feel extremely lucky that my children are at a school with excellent teachers and an incredible parent community. Despite budget cuts, my children are thriving because the parents of Edison tirelessly fundraise to ensure our students are not denied books, learning materials, science, and arts. Without our well-resourced parent base, I am not sure how my children would be doing. We know the situation is so much worse for our friends in neighboring communities.

As parents, we dream of college for our children. They need a quality education in order to get there. Yet, even here at Edison, we are increasingly feeling the strain of inadequate funding. We worry about our teachers being pink-slipped, our class sizes growing, and our programs being cut. With the recent failure of Measure E, a local tax that would have provided funding for Alameda schools, we are facing the real possibility that Edison may close.

**Rosario Giron
Parent of Plaintiff
Leader in Organizational Plaintiff San Francisco Organizing Project
San Francisco Unified School District**

Me llamo Rosario Giron, soy una mamá y miembro de la organización: "San Francisco Organizing Project." Estoy orgullosa de ser parte de esta causa, luchando por un futuro mejor para nuestros hijos. Las condiciones en nuestras escuelas públicas son absolutamente lamentables, y por eso, la educación que nuestros hijos reciben sufre mucho.

Nuestras escuelas necesitan dinero para asegurar que nuestros hijos alcancen la universidad. Necesitan mejores maestros y materiales. Las escuelas tienen que estar más limpias y servir almuerzos más saludables. Necesitamos estos recursos.

Quiero que mi hijo vaya a la universidad para tener un buen trabajo y futuro. Pero sin el primer paso en esta dirección--una educación de primaria fuerte--él no estará bien preparado.

Translation: My name is Rosario Giron; I am a mother and a member of the San Francisco Organizing Project. I am proud to be part of this cause, fighting for a better future for our children. Conditions in our schools are absolutely lamentable and our children's education suffers greatly as a consequence. Our schools need funding to ensure that our children make it to college. They need better teachers and better classroom materials. They need to be cleaner, and serve healthier food. We need these resources.

I want my son to go to college so that he has a good job and a bright future. But without the first step in this direction—a strong elementary education—he won't be prepared for this.

Jenny Zegarra
Parent, Hayward Unified School District
Member of PLAN, a Campaign for Quality Education Member Organization

Me llamo Jenny Zegarra, soy una mamá y miembro de la organización: "Bay Area PLAN" de el "Campaign for Quality Education." Para mi, esta campaña representa el poder de acción colectiva en contra de un sistema que no considera la necesidad básica de una educación buena para nuestros niños. Nosotros sabemos que la educación es un derecho fundamental. Pero el estado no da los recursos necesarios a las escuelas y a los estudiantes que los necesitan más.

Ahora es el tiempo de mejorar nuestras escuelas públicas con maestros bien preparados, clases más pequeñas, y programas de mayor variedad, como deportes, música, y arte. La calidad de educación para nuestros hijos y el nivel de su preparación para la universidad y una carrera afectará el resto de sus vidas.

Translation: My name is Jenny Zegarra; I am a mother and member of Bay Area PLAN of the Campaign for Quality Education. To me this campaign represents the power of collective action against a system that doesn't account for the basic necessity of a good education for our children. We know that education is a fundamental right. But the State doesn't provide critical resources to the schools and students that need them most.

Now is the time to improve our public schools with better-prepared teachers, smaller class sizes, and educational programs of a wider variety, including sports, music, and art. The quality of our children's education, and their level of preparation for college and career, will affect the rest of their lives."