

## PICO National Network Case Study

### Changing the Face of Education in Oakland

**O**akland Community Organizations (OCO) broke new ground in education reform when it partnered with the Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools to develop the first small autonomous schools policy for the Oakland School District in 2000. The policy prioritizes the development of new small schools in areas that are overcrowded, sets targets for the development of new small schools, defines small schools, establishes principles that govern the autonomy of small schools over hiring, budget, curriculum and instruction, and establishes support and accountability systems for small schools.



Led by parents and community leaders, the New Small Autonomous School Movement is changing the face of education in Oakland. Twenty-five new small schools have opened in the last four years because OCO organized parents and community leaders who worked to make it happen. New schools are making decisions about personnel, budget, and curriculum. The school district is reshaping itself to support this reform. The OCO goal is to create high quality small schools all across the city so that families can choose the best school for their child.

Early data from Oakland shows that New Small Autonomous Schools are outperforming comparable schools in the city. Attendance rates are higher and more students are succeeding on state achievement tests. More young people in Oakland are graduating prepared for college. Life Academy, the first small high school opened in 2001-02 under the small schools policy, graduated 100% of its seniors, far surpassing district averages. On measures including California college and university eligibility and California High School Exit Exam pass rates, the school outperformed its comparison high school and performed slightly better than district averages, despite a higher than average number of English Learners.

The OCO vision for school is simple. Every child needs to be known by name. They need to be safe. They need to be challenged to do their best. They need dedicated, well-prepared teachers. They need to be surrounded by a supportive community of caring adults. Parents, teachers and students are all essential partners. Thousands of parents along with hundreds of teachers have undertaken the hard work necessary at the school site and district level to make this vision a reality. Organizing provides the political will for this change, putting the public into public education.

While OCO is proud of what it has accomplished, its strategy is to transform the entire school district. Community-teacher design teams are creating plans and finding sites for new schools. As the small schools movement takes on a life of its own, OCO is working to make sure parents are fully engaged as partners in design teams so new small schools can be successful. OCO is also working with parents and

teachers to reconfigure large high school schools into small schools. And OCO is continuing to press the school district to re-engineer its central administration to serve this system of emerging new small schools.

At a state level OCO is helping lead a PICO California effort to pass new state legislation to support small schools. Through [AB 1465](#) (Chan), PICO is seeking to reverse the long-term trend in California to build large schools, by providing school districts with a financial incentive to build smaller schools and to reconfigure existing schools into smaller learning communities. Click [here](#) to learn more about PICO California's small school legislation.

Through the PICO National Network, OCO is helping communities, educators and foundations understand that organizing is essential to sustainable change in public education. PICO affiliates in San Jose, San Francisco, Denver, Baton Rouge and Philadelphia are involved in small schools campaigns in their own cities.

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