Education Equity Highlights from 2015

Public Advocates’ education equity team continues to play a leading role on statewide efforts to advance educational opportunities to learn so that every California student graduates college and career ready.

- **School Funding Case is on the Move.** Campaign for Quality Education v. State of California is scheduled for oral arguments on January 27, 2016 in the California State Court of Appeals. We’re excited to return to court to fight for adequate funding for California’s public school students! This lawsuit was filed in July of 2010 and argues that California’s public school students are not being provided the education they are guaranteed by the California Constitution. Plaintiffs include students, parents and community groups from throughout the state.

- **Delivering on the Equity Promise of the Local Control Funding Formula.** This summer, Public Advocates filed a lawsuit against the Los Angeles Unified School District challenging its illegal diversion of some $2 billion in funds intended for improving services for English language learners, foster youth and low-income students. This first-of-its-kind lawsuit was filed in partnership with the ACLU of Southern California and Covington & Burling, LLP. At stake is the way in which school districts throughout California will be allowed to calculate the investment the law requires they make into new services for high-needs students, involving billions of dollars over the coming years. Learn more about Community Coalition of South Los Angeles and Reyna Frias v. LAUSD and read the Los Angeles Times coverage.

- **Pressing for Tough and Equity-based Evaluation Standards with State Board of Education.** Public Advocates continues to lead the state Technical Working Group of the LCFF Equity Coalition to build consensus around critical proposals for how the state will evaluate school and district performance in meeting new standards for closing existing achievement gaps among school students in California. This is critical work to make sure
that there is real transparency and community engagement in the process of allocating billions of dollars in new funds for special-needs students. This year, the coalition wrote key recommendations for the state’s evaluation rubrics, which you can read about in this letter early this year, and another sent more recently as the process has unfolded.

- **Local School Spending Plans Under the Microscope.** For a second year in a row, we joined forces with Californians for Justice to review school district spending plans charged under the state’s Local Control Funding Formula with improving services for English language learners, foster youth and low-income students. PA partnered with CFJ and local parents to evaluate spending plans covering more than $1 billion in spending in 6 school districts including in San Jose, Oakland, Fresno, Sacramento and Long Beach. See a sample here. Overall, more than $10 billion in spending is at stake in the allocation of funds for high-need students under LCFF. Read the coverage in the San Jose Mercury News.

- **Protecting Students from For-Profit College Abuse.** Public Advocates co-led an effort to advocate at the state level for students who found themselves without an education and deep in debt after the abrupt closure of the Corinthian Colleges, which shut its doors in September of 2015. More than 13,000 students were left without information about what to do to continue studying and how to manage the debt they were left with. Public Advocates supported legislation that would have provided legal aid as well as financial supports to the Corinthian Colleges students and advocated to Governor Brown on their behalf, see here for a blog by Angela Perry; also, you can read the news coverage of the Corinthian Colleges effort.

- **Winning Protections for Parents Forced to Volunteer at School.** Early this year, the California Department of Education (CDE) issued an advisory (Fiscal Management Advisory 15-01) informing charter schools and school districts that the law prohibits them from requiring parents to donate “service hours” to a public school. The Advisory was issued as a result of a report and legal analysis by Public Advocates released in November, 2014. Entitled “Charging for Access” the report called into question the mandatory parent involvement policies of many charter schools across the state. The CDE’s guidance clarified that although parental engagement is undoubtedly a good thing, making parent participation mandatory is an unlawful fee in violation of the State Constitution’s Free Schools Clause and can disadvantage low-income families with less volunteer time available. The report received extensive media coverage, including by
the San Francisco Chronicle, the Los Angeles Times, The Sacramento Bee, and EdSource, just to name a few.

Public Advocates staff members were featured speakers this fall at prominent gatherings and important venues including:

- Managing Attorney John Affeldt, spoke at Harvard Law School as part of HLS’s Child Advocacy Program.
- Liz Guillen, Director of Legislative & Community Affairs spoke at the Policy Link Equity Summit 2015 on “Making Public Money Work for Equity: A California Success Story.”
- Law Fellow Angela Perry spoke at “Shaking the Foundations West Coast Progressive Lawyering Conference,” on Tackling Student Debt and For-Profit College Abuses: A Discussion with Legal Practitioners.