

YOUTH AND PARENT LEADERS ON WHAT COLEMAN MEMBERSHIP HAS MEANT TO THEM



“Being a PMAC member has taught me how to be a strong advocate for my kid and for all SFUSD students and parents. Having an African American son means I am constantly afraid for his future. I’m afraid for his life because of racist and violent police and I’m afraid for him in the schools because there are teachers and administrators who prejudge African American children – they have low expectations for them and assume they are aggressive and they assume that we as African American parents don’t care about our children’s educations. My son Joseph is a 7th grader now and he has always been a critical thinker with lots of ideas. In 6th grade, he was constantly being shut down and told to be quiet for asking questions in class. And when he tried to advocate for himself

or he got upset about being disrespected, he would get kicked out of the classroom. PMAC taught me how to advocate for my child and how to advocate for systemic change and both Joseph and I started fighting for change in his school and at the district level. We testified together before the Board of Ed and I’ve met with teachers and administrators at his school. I’ve helped to organize other parents to lead changes in his school, both in how conflict is dealt with and also the kinds of emotional and academic support students are receiving. I have learned so much from PMAC that now I am able to recruit and mentor other parent advocates and carry out educational workshops. So many parents are afraid to speak out and to say what they are going through. It is so important for parents to have a space where we are not prejudged and where we are believed and we can receive real empathy and support. There is no other space like Coleman where we can be fully authentic and express ourselves and share our experiences. It’s the same thing for the youth. Joseph has grown so much from being able to participate in YMAC and from getting so much love and support from Coleman staff and members. And saying you work with Coleman carries weight. People listen to you. **I really believe that if it wasn’t for Coleman, my baby would be in jail right now. But instead he just made honor roll and he is Vice President at his Middle School!”** – **Mildred Coffey, PMAC Leader-Organizer**



“YMAC taught me to never be afraid to ask questions and to always stand up for what I believe in. YMAC also taught me how to be a better facilitator. And I’m much more confident in my ability to have conversations with lots of different kinds of people and to express my opinions. A lot of the things I’ve learned are life skills that will help me to succeed in all aspects of my life, not just organizing. Also, I used to be a super impatient person and I learned patience from YMAC. I never knew how slow progress can be and how much hard work it takes to make real change until I helped to lead the Solutions Not Suspensions

campaign. I learned that even if it can sometimes feel like a lost cause, you have to keep trying and keep fighting because change doesn’t happen overnight. Coleman’s school discipline work is really important to me because I am someone who has had to deal with a lot of unfair suspensions and it really messed me up and made me feel unwelcome in my own school and so I was determined to change things so no one else would have to experience what I had. **I also realized how important it is that there are teachers that can relate to the experiences of their students and so I’ve decided that I want to be a High School teacher in SFUSD.”** – **Xochitl Montano, YMAC Leader-Organizer**

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“YMAC taught me how to be a leader. I’ve learned skills for handling problems in my own life and solving problems in my school and community. I’ve learned how to be really organized and how to do time management and how to create a campaign plan and facilitate meetings and workshops. Last month, I was nominated and got voted on to the Coleman Families Leadership Council. Being on the CFLC will make me an even stronger leader because I’ll get more training and I’ll be helping to make program and campaign strategies. Probably my most powerful YMAC experience ever was going to the Movement for Black Lives Convening in Cleveland last summer as a Coleman rep. It meant a lot to me that I got to have conversations

with people who are fighting for justice because their family member had been killed by the police – like the family of Oscar Grant and Mike Brown and I even met Emmet Til’s cousin. I left the convening feeling like I want to work even harder to make change and like I’m part of a national movement with real power.” – Carlos Linton, YMAC Leader-Organizer



“When I first got involved with PMAC I was very shy to talk about my experiences or feelings but now I speak all the time to other parents, to district leaders, at Board of Ed meetings, and door-knocking for elections – and I am not shy or ashamed. PMAC helped me to feel comfortable and confident and pushed me to speak even when I was afraid. I don’t speak very good English but I know that what I have to say is important and I have a right to express myself. I tell other parents even if they don’t speak any English, their voices are important and they have a right to be heard. Before I was in PMAC, I didn’t even know I had rights or that my child had rights. PMAC lets us know about our rights and gives us the tools we need to advocate for our children and fight for change because all our children deserve a good and equal education, especially our African American and Latino children who have been segregated and are not getting the support they need to

be successful. That’s why our new PMAC campaign *Saber es Poder: Knowledge is Power* is so important. We are educating parents and the district about what real parent engagement looks like and demanding better support from the district like parent workshops, parent summer school and community-building spaces for parents on campuses. I’ve met so many parents with the same struggles as me and the same ideas for change and we are so much stronger when we come together.” – Silvia Velazquez, PMAC Leader-Organizer