



Advocacy and Leadership— Tips for Families: You Are a Leader

Parenting skills have a lot in common with effective leadership skills (Saad, 2016). You use powerful leadership skills and abilities as you manage your household every day and guide your children in the little and big tasks of life.

There are many ways that these everyday skills can serve you as a parent leader or advocate whether at home, in your child’s school, or in your community.

Did You Know?

Your personal experiences as a parent are important. Research tells us that when parents speak up and act to make positive changes for their children, great things happen. Here are just a few examples of how many people benefit from parents’ advocacy efforts:

- Children experience greater opportunities, both at home and at school (Henderson, Kressley, & Frankel, 2016).
- Parents build knowledge and skills, make connections with others, and boost self-confidence (Henderson, Kressley, & Frankel, 2016).
- Programs and schools are more sensitive to ensuring that transitions to new classrooms are positive experiences for children and families.
- Early childhood programs, schools, and other programs are better able to meet the needs of the children, families, and the community they serve (Auerbach, 2010).
- Communities are stronger when they understand the needs of the people who live there (Henderson, Kressley, & Frankel, 2016).

Parent Leadership in Action

Your contributions can make a real difference, whether big or small. Parents who take on leadership roles can change their community—and the lives of their children and themselves for the better. Here are three stories about parent leaders and advocates making a difference in their community. How might these stories inspire you?

- **Chicago.** Parents in Chicago spoke with 475 of their neighbors about the importance of early learning. This led to higher preschool enrollments and attendance (Community Organizing and Family Issues, 2015).

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Parent Leadership in Action, cont.

- **Colorado.** A group of parents worked together in Colorado to get services for their children with dyslexia. They raised more than \$23,000 for extra opportunities, such as attending an academic dyslexic summer camp or receiving private tutoring from a Certified Academic Language Therapist. The group wrote letters to the editor of their local newspaper. They attended school board meetings to tell their stories and ensure their children’s needs remained in the public eye (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2009).
- **Washington.** Lisa Grenia started as a parent advocate by volunteering in her daughter’s Head Start classroom and attending parent meetings. She was eventually elected to be her state’s Head Start representative and participated in the Parent Ambassadors program in Washington state (Washington State Association of Head Start & ECEAP, 2018). Here is part of what she had to say about her Parent Ambassadors experience:

As an adult I never learned the basics of government. I did not know how to contact my lawmakers and why I, or anyone else, would even want to do such a thing. I did not believe that my voice could make a difference in my city, let alone in my state.

The Parent Ambassadors program has taught me self-confidence, the magnitude of legislation, the power of one person and how to reach a wide audience of like-minded people. I feel a change has been swirling inside of me.

I cannot go back to my old ways and I am proud to be showing my daughter the importance of volunteerism, diligence, and tactful leadership (Grenia, 2011).

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