

Case Study: Organizing for Literacy and Leadership in Riverton Unified School District

· Purpose

This case study is designed for labor organizers in U.S. public schools seeking to build exponential people power.

· Background

In 2018, a group of educators in RUSD began to notice alarming trends: rising student disengagement, declining literacy skills, and a lack of community involvement. Inspired by community organizing frameworks taught at national union trainings, two educators—Ms. Carla Jaimes and Mr. Luis Jaimes—began to organize.

· Building the Core Team

Carla and Luis began by recruiting a core team of educators, parents, and support staff through one-on-one conversations. The team included:

- 2 elementary school teachers

- 1 middle school librarian

- 3 parents from different neighborhoods

- 2 paraprofessionals

- 1 school counselor

The team committed to weekly meetings, trainings in organizing methodology, and a shared goal: to create a district-wide reading culture.

· Choosing the Campaign: ·Read Together, Rise Together·

Rather than focusing on test scores, the team chose to center their campaign on building joy and connection through reading.

They named the campaign ·Read Together, Rise Together· and set a strategic goal: 5,000 signed pledges from students, parents, and educators.

· Organizing Structure: The Snowflake Model

To scale their efforts, the team adopted a snowflake organizing structure:

Each core team member recruited a first-tier team (e.g., parent leaders, grade-level teacher teams, library staff).

Each first-tier team trained second-tier organizers to lead reading circles, host events, and collect pledges.

Teams were accountable to each other through weekly check-ins, shared metrics, and transparent communication.

This decentralized model challenged traditional hierarchies in the district, but it empowered more people to lead.

... The Parent Circles

One of the most successful branches was the Parent Circles, led by Ms. Angela Brooks, a mother of two and a teacher.

Meetings began with personal updates, followed by shared readings and reflections. Parents documented their experiences.

By the end of the campaign, the Parent Circles had:

- Hosted 120 gatherings

- Recruited 400 parents

- Collected 1,200 pledges

· The Educator Teams

Teacher-led teams focused on integrating reading for pleasure into classrooms. One elementary team invited parents to read with their children.

Challenges arose—some teachers resisted parent involvement, and others worried about deviating from scripted curriculum.

· Results and Reflections

By the end of the school year, ·Read Together, Rise Together· had:

- Collected 6,300 pledges

- Engaged over 1,000 families

- Distributed 500 ·Parent Voices· booklets

- Trained 85 organizers across three tiers

More importantly, the campaign built lasting relationships, developed new leaders, and shifted the culture of the district.

· Lessons for Labor Organizers

Start with stories: Personal narratives build trust and motivation.

Decentralize leadership: Empower others to lead and coach.