



**YOUR
SCHOOLS**

**YOUR
RIGHTS**

**YOUR
POWER**

A Grassroots Guide to Effective *Williams* Campaigns





WHO WE ARE

Public Advocates Inc. is a nonprofit law firm and advocacy organization that challenges the systemic causes of poverty and racial discrimination by strengthening community voices in public policy and achieving tangible legal victories advancing education, housing and transit equity. We spur change through collaboration with grassroots groups representing low-income communities, people of color and immigrants, combined with strategic policy reform, media advocacy and litigation, “making rights real” across California since 1971.

OUR VISION

Communities that were once excluded and marginalized are energized by their collective power to shape public decisions and achieve justice. As a result of that engagement, all Californians have the building blocks to thrive and to create vibrant communities – excellent public schools, affordable housing, reliable public transportation, quality health care, good job opportunities, and economic security.

OUR THEORY OF CHANGE

We believe that by engaging in strategic partnerships, policy and media advocacy and litigation, we will increase the capacity of grassroots organizations to shape public policy and discourse, and that we can also positively influence public opinion, the media, policy makers and courts to hold business and government accountable. We do this to promote the expansion of civil rights and resource equity and create a mobilized community base to ensure that all Californians have the fundamental rights and equitable allocation of resources they need to build vibrant communities. We choose to address areas such as education, housing, transportation and health that are fundamental to enabling individuals and communities to fulfill their potential, and we choose to challenge systemic problems in ways that will achieve maximum impact.

USING THIS MANUAL

When Eli Williams and the other plaintiffs agreed to be part of the landmark *Williams v. California* lawsuit, they could barely have imagined the far-reaching effect it would have. But today, thanks to these courageous young people, millions of California students now have better opportunities for learning.

The lawsuit was based on the belief that all students deserve the basic building blocks they need to learn: books to read and study from; clean, safe, and functional school buildings; and trained teachers. The “*Williams* settlement” reached with the State of California helped usher in a new era for public schools by creating new education standards and accountability systems to make sure the standards are met. The settlement also provided nearly \$1 billion in funding to help the lowest-performing schools meet these new standards.

One of the most important accountability tools created by the settlement was a process allowing

students, parents, teachers, and community members to file a complaint when students are denied sufficient textbooks, decent school facilities, or qualified teachers. By including mandatory timelines, the *Williams* complaint process also ensures that the problem will be promptly remedied.

While the *Williams* settlement was a significant milestone towards improving California’s schools, it was as much a beginning as an end. Because without parents, students and community members at the local level actively using their new power under the *Williams* complaint process to hold schools and districts accountable, these hard-won rights are empty.

This manual is intended to help you use the *Williams* complaint process to win tangible improvements in your schools and at the same time build a grassroots base of effective education advocates. Read it from beginning to end, or use it as a reference to answer specific questions.

CHAPTER 1 - page 4

A Brief Overview of *Williams v. California* provides an overview of the *Williams* settlement, including the *Williams* complaint process.

CHAPTER 2 - page 8

The *Williams* Complaint Process in Action shares stories of three very different, but equally successful, grassroots *Williams* campaigns.

CHAPTER 3 - page 26

The *Williams* Complaint Process: Nuts & Bolts describes in detail how the *Williams* complaint process operates.

CHAPTER 4 - page 36

Lessons Learned on the Ground: A Grassroots Organizer's Guide to Leading a *Williams* Campaign is a collection of "lessons learned" from grassroots *Williams* campaigns, providing a roadmap for planning your own campaign.

At the end we've included a list of resources you can use and where to find them.

We've also given you some sign posts to help you navigate this manual.



The computer icon means you can find the form or other referenced information on the *Williams* Resources web page at www.publicadvocates.org/williams/



The lightbulb icon refers to ideas to consider as you are planning your own campaign.

We hope you find this information useful and use it to create your own victories. Remember, you have the power to improve your schools!

“Just because I’m in a public school is not an excuse for me to not have textbooks. It’s not an excuse for the bathrooms to be filthy, for there to be broken windows... I care about my education, and if it takes this [a lawsuit] to get you [the State] to see that students care and maybe you should do something about it, then this is what I’m going to do.”

ALONDRA JONES

Williams v. California
Plaintiff

CHAPTER 1

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF *WILLIAMS V. CALIFORNIA*

WILLIAMS V. CALIFORNIA: WHAT WAS IT ABOUT?

The landmark *Williams* case took its name from the lead plaintiff, Eliezer Williams (Eli for short), a sixth grade student at San Francisco’s Luther Burbank Middle School. Nearly 100 individual student plaintiffs from around the state joined Eli in standing up for their right to equal educational opportunities. The *Williams* suit highlighted the fact that there were thousands of schools across the state without enough textbooks for students; with facilities that were overcrowded, in disrepair, and unhealthy for students; and that employed many under-trained public school teachers. At Luther Burbank, for instance, Eli and his classmates faced conditions that were all too familiar for many California public school students:

- Students could not take books home to do homework because their teachers had only enough for one classroom set. In some classes, students had to share books.

- Textbooks were nine or more years out of date. The social studies textbook was so old that it did not reflect the breakup of the former Soviet Union in 1991.
- The school was infested with vermin and students routinely saw mice in their classrooms.
- Two of the three bathrooms at the school were locked all day, every day, and the third was locked during lunch. There were times when there was no bathroom at all available for students. When the bathrooms were unlocked, toilets were frequently clogged and overflowing. Many times, they did not have toilet paper, soap, or paper towels.
- In winter, the school was so cold that students had to wear coats, hats, and gloves during class to keep warm.
- One-third of the teachers did not have a full teaching credential, and one-half were brand new to the school.



Eli Williams and Governor Schwarzenegger
Williams Settlement Press Conference, August 2004.

On May 17, 2000, the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California (ACLU-SC), Public Advocates Inc., the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF), and other civil rights organizations, along with Morrison & Foerster LLP, filed a class-action lawsuit on behalf of public school students against the State of California. In highlighting the state public education system's failure to provide all students the basic resources they need—sufficient textbooks and instructional materials, decent facilities, and qualified teachers—the case argued that students' fundamental right to education was violated as was their right to equal protection. The plaintiffs demanded that the state create standards for basic educational necessities and establish a management, oversight, and accountability system.

After more than four years of litigation, the parties agreed to settle in August 2004. Six weeks later Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signed the bills implementing the settlement, which took immediate effect and made significant changes to California's laws governing the education system. It was a resounding victory for the plaintiffs.

THE SETTLEMENT: WHAT DID THE PLAINTIFFS WIN?

The *Williams* settlement legislation established new standards and accountability systems to ensure all students have textbooks and instructional materials, and schools that are clean, safe, and functional. It also took steps toward making sure all students have qualified teachers. The settlement holds the state accountable for delivering these essentials, providing around \$1 billion to accomplish these goals.

The standards and many of the accountability systems established by the *Williams* settlement **apply to all California public schools.**¹ Each and every student has a right to “sufficient textbooks,” a school in “good repair,” and a qualified teacher. The lowest performing schools in the state—the schools ranked in deciles one through three on the Academic Performance Index (API)—receive additional funds and oversight.² Thanks to the settlement legislation, the State of California is obligated to provide \$800 million in installments of at least \$100 million each year to pay for emergency repairs in these “decile 1-3 schools.” In the first year of implementation, districts also received \$25 million to conduct comprehensive assessments of the facility conditions and needs in these schools, and \$138 million for new instructional materials for students attending schools ranked in the lowest two API deciles.

¹ Charter schools are exempt unless they choose to “opt-in” to *Williams*. Decile 1-3 charter schools that opt in both receive the benefits and must adhere to the standards and accountability systems established by the *Williams* settlement legislation.

² As of this printing, the API scores used to construct the list of decile 1-3 schools are 2006 Base API scores. The California Department of Education has compiled a list of these schools pursuant to Education Code § 1240. The list is posted at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/eo/ce/wc/wmsschools.asp>. The list of “decile 1-3” schools is updated every three years. Prior to July 1, 2007, the list of decile 1-3 schools was compiled using 2003 Base API scores.



Unsafe and unhealthy facility conditions at schools attended by the *Williams* plaintiffs.

ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS FOR ALL SCHOOLS

All California public schools are held accountable for meeting the *Williams* standards in the following ways:

- **Self-Evaluations** All districts must perform self-evaluations to ensure they comply with the textbook and facilities standards. School boards must pass public resolutions by the eighth week of school declaring whether sufficient textbooks exist.



The Office of Public School Construction has developed the “Facility Inspection Tool” for facility reviews, available at <http://www.documents.dgs.ca.gov/opsc/Forms/Worksheets/FIT.pdf>. The “FIT” is a straightforward and useful evaluation tool. You may consider performing your own self-evaluation of your school site.

- **School Accountability Report Card (SARC)** The overall condition of facilities, the availability of textbooks and instructional materials, and the number of improperly assigned teachers and teacher vacancies must be reported in annual SARCs for each school and made available to all parents and the public.
- **County Superintendent Review of Access to Qualified Teachers** A review of all teacher assignments at each school must be conducted once every four years, monitoring one-quarter of schools in the county in a given year. This is to ensure that teachers have the proper training and credential to teach the class to which they are assigned. Any misassignments

(i.e., where a teacher lacks subject matter, English Learner, or other required training or credential) and vacancies (i.e., where a classroom has no single, permanent full-time teacher but is instead staffed by a series of substitutes) are reported to the school district for correction. The California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) collects this data in a centralized database, submits biennial reports to the State Legislature concerning teacher misassignments, and imposes sanctions on any school districts that do not promptly correct identified misassignments.

- **Uniform Complaint Process (UCP)** Parents, students, teachers, and others use the UCP to ensure that all schools and districts meet the new standards and provide students with sufficient instructional materials, qualified teachers, and safe, healthy school facilities. The UCP is the subject of this manual and will be referred to as the “*Williams* complaint process” throughout.³

ADDITIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS FOR THE LOWEST-PERFORMING SCHOOLS

The schools ranked in deciles one to three on the API receive additional funds, oversight and support to help them meet the basic *Williams* standards. This includes:

- **Annual Visits by County Superintendents to Review Facilities and Textbooks** County superintendents must conduct annual visits and reviews to determine compliance with the instructional materials and facilities standards and to determine whether the school’s SARC accurately reports this data. They must complete their review of textbook sufficiency in these schools by the fourth week of the school year. At least 25% of the county superintendent visits must be “surprise,” or unannounced, visits.

- **Heightened Annual County Superintendent Review of Access to Qualified Teachers** Instead of once every four years, county superintendents must monitor, review, and report on teacher assignments and teacher vacancies every year. County superintendents submit the results to the CCTC, including information on whether teachers in decile 1-3 schools assigned to classes with 20% or more pupils who are English Learners have appropriate authorization or training to teach these students.⁴ As with misassignments identified during the four-year monitoring of all schools, any misassignments or vacancies identified are reported to the school district for correction, as well as to the CCTC.
- **Public Presentation of Annual Review Results to Local School Board** County superintendents must report the results of their annual visits and reviews to each school district’s governing board on a quarterly basis and submit an annual report in November to the governing board of each school district, the county board of education, and the county board of supervisors, describing the state of decile 1-3 schools in the county. These reports must include school-specific findings about student access to instructional materials, compliance with facilities maintenance requirements, teacher misassignments and vacancies, and accuracy of *Williams* data reported on the SARCs.

³ The Uniform Complaint Process allows individuals to file complaints about many types of problems in schools, not just *Williams* problems. For example, you can file a complaint if you feel you have been discriminated against or if you think your school or district is violating federal or state law (e.g., special education laws, No Child Left Behind). The UCP operates slightly differently (with different timelines) for these other types of complaints than for *Williams* complaints. For more information about filing these other types of Uniform Complaints, visit the website of the California Department of Education at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/rc/uc/>.

⁴ Appropriate authorization includes CLAD or BCLAD authorization, English Learner authorization, SB 1969 certificate, Certificate of Completion of Staff Development (through SB 395 training), or other authorization as authorized by statute. It is also important to note that the 20% standard is a data reporting requirement and not a threshold for determining a “misassignment.”

“What’s remarkable about the [PUME] campaign is how it’s really ordinary people achieving extraordinary things. It shows you don’t have to be someone in a position of obvious power to make a difference in your child’s life, to improve the quality of your child’s education. And I think that’s why it’s really inspirational. It really tells parents throughout California: ‘You can do it, too. Your child deserves a quality education, and you can be the one who makes that happen.’”

MÓNICA HENESTROZA

Public Advocates Policy Advocate
and PUME Organizer

CHAPTER 2

THE *WILLIAMS* COMPLAINT PROCESS IN ACTION

In large class action civil rights cases like *Williams v. California*, too often victories in the courts end up being victories only on paper. At Public Advocates, we know our work does not end with a court or legislative victory, but continues in the months and years that follow until changes in the law actually result in meaningful change on the ground.

To make the rights won under *Williams* real, community members—students, parents, teachers, grassroots community organizations—must understand those rights so they can take on the critical work of holding individual schools and school districts accountable for meeting the *Williams* standards. The *Williams* complaint process, described in more detail in Chapters 3 & 4, is one tool for communities to take action in their schools. It allows parents, students, and others to file a formal complaint when they lack sufficient textbooks or instructional materials, clean and safe school facilities, or qualified teachers and requires schools and districts to fix the problem within a specified time frame.

Public Advocates has partnered with many grassroots community organizations to support their efforts to launch campaigns using *Williams* as a tool to improve their local schools. We have trained

more than a thousand students, parents, teachers, and other community members, who have in turn trained hundreds of their fellow community members. Public Advocates also has provided technical assistance and strategic support to community organizations, including supporting the development of relationships with school, district, and state administrators, media advocacy, following up on individual complaints, and filing appeals when a district’s initial response is unsatisfactory.

This chapter tells the stories of three *Williams* campaigns led by active community groups and supported by Public Advocates. Each campaign followed a different path depending on several factors: whether there was an established grassroots organization to lead the campaign, the existing capacity and expertise of the grassroots members, the size of the grassroots base, and the level of support Public Advocates was able



PUME members and their children stand united on the day they filed over 80 *Williams* complaints. Huron Elementary School, March 2007.

provide. As these three case studies illustrate, when parents and students mobilize around a *Williams* campaign, they improve schools, gain skills for future advocacy, and mobilize their base.

PADRES UNIDOS MEJORES ESCUELAS (PUME) ORGANIZE FOR CHANGE

Huron, California

ABOUT THE COMMUNITY

With population growth concentrated in inland California, the academic opportunities for Central Valley students will influence the preparation of a growing percentage of California's communities and workforce. Huron is a small city in the San Joaquin Valley, located southwest of Fresno. The challenges and possibilities for parents' education advocacy in Huron mirror conditions throughout the Central Valley.

Almost 99% of Huron's 6,300 residents are Latino. Most are working poor Mexican migrant families who survive by picking crops, and many adults speak only Spanish. Adding to their challenges, few have cars or driver licenses.

Moreover, work in the fields requires long work days on irregular schedules in temperatures regularly rising above 100 degrees, resulting in high levels of fatigue for weary parents.

For more than five years, the public schools in Huron have consistently ranked in the lowest three deciles of student achievement. Despite these challenges, Huron parents continue to nurture great hopes for their children's futures and are committed to contributing to their children's academic success by being active participants in education reform.

CAMPAIGN BEGINNINGS

For more than twenty years the drinking fountains at Huron Elementary School discharged brown and flecked contaminated water. Despite vocal parent protest, the fountains had never been fixed. Confirming what parents suspected, laboratory tests revealed high levels of contaminants in the water, such as trihalomethanes and iron. Trihalomethanes, known as "disinfection byproducts," are formed when organic material reacts with chlorine during the water treatment process and are known carcinogens. Disturbed by the contaminated water and frustrated with the district's unresponsiveness, parents were sending their children to school with bottled water to cope with the heat.

At a fall 2006 Central Valley leadership forum convened by the Latino Issues Forum (LIF), Huron community members identified improving Huron Elementary School's water quality as their top

priority. LIF turned to Public Advocates to provide strategic and technical assistance to the Huron community members who were ready for a change. Together LIF and Public Advocates formed a coordinated bilingual project team. Targeting their assistance to the needs of the community, which lacked an organized base, the team devoted significant resources to support community members in their development as education advocates.

COMMUNITY MEMBERS LEARN THEIR RIGHTS

One of the first steps LIF and Public Advocates took was to develop a two-hour education rights workshop curriculum in Spanish based on district and school-specific facts. Seventy-four community members attended the multiple presentations, which were advertised widely in flyers and by local leaders.

Although parent concerns in these sessions covered a wide range of education quality issues, the greatest outrage centered on the lack of drinkable water at the elementary school. Parents also were concerned about the lack of access to instructional materials and qualified teachers throughout the K-12 system. Also apparent from these sessions was that parents felt blocked in their efforts because school administrators had a history of refusing to address their complaints.

To better understand the problems, Huron parents identified the barriers to engaging in their children's education and participating in local education governance.

- Parents had limited understanding of their education rights. Even those inclined to become involved had disengaged because of the administration's perceived disregard for their concerns.
- Most high school parents never had seen their children's school because it was 20 miles away and difficult to reach by public transportation. Only two parents had basic information about local education decision-making, and not one had ever been to a school board meeting. Many parents did not even know the names of their children's teachers.
- Further limiting parents' participation, the school district did not make translation services available for limited-English proficient parents at parent-teacher conferences or school board meetings.

Addressing this lack of critical information, Public Advocates provided know-your-rights training to parents on using the *Williams* complaint process. At these sessions, parents learned how the *Williams* complaint process holds the potential to change a

school governance culture by legally requiring administrators to rectify valid complaints in the three *Williams* areas—textbooks, facilities, and teachers.

PARENTS UNITE FOR BETTER SCHOOLS AND "PUME" IS BORN

Encouraged by the strong community interest, the Public Advocates-LIF team convened a group of core active participants. These community members organized into school site-based working groups, received nuts-and-bolts complaint process training, signed up for task-based committees (investigation, advocacy, and outreach), and began drafting an internal campaign timeline that expected results before the end of the academic year. The campaign targeted the three schools that serve Huron schoolchildren: Huron Elementary School, Huron Middle School, and Coalinga High School.

Encouraged by their growing sense of power, the parents named themselves Padres Unidos, Mejores Escuelas or PUME (Parents United for Better Schools) because they believed that united, involved parents and better schools go hand-in-hand. For more than nine months, 30 parents regularly attended PUME meetings.

The Public Advocates-LIF team provided skills-based advocacy trainings at these meetings

"There's a saying: If you don't speak, God won't hear you. . . . I have come to realize how true it is. Not until the community rose up, did they begin to make changes on these very important issues."

GRACIELA CRUZ
PUME Leader

“No one wanted to listen to me until I joined PUME.”

ELVIRA GODINEZ
PUME Leader

to help grow PUME’s organizing capacity. The four main skill sets included research, *Williams* complaint filing, media relations, and advocacy.

Research Parents held one-on-one conversations with their children about their educational experience to identify potential facilities, teacher quality, and textbook problems at the target schools. Each school site workgroup then conducted school site inspections of facilities problems, which included leaking classroom ceilings, broken drinking fountains, and unhygienic bathroom conditions. While generally there were enough textbooks per class, teachers often denied students their right to take books home. Graciela Cruz, whose daughter attended Huron Elementary School, explained: “One day, I went to pick my daughter up from school and she was holding a book. . . in a matter of seconds, the teacher comes out and practically tears it from her hands. And I asked myself, ‘Why take away a book that could help her?’”

Next PUME parents secured teaching rosters for each of their schools. The Public Advocates-LIF team used the rosters to check credentials registered on the Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) web site. The searches found that six teachers had not received the proper training and appropriate credential to teach a core course to which they were assigned. Unfortunately, PUME parents, most of whom had limited English proficiency, could not be involved in conducting the teacher credential search itself because the CCTC database is English-only.

Williams Complaint Filing After identifying specific problems with school conditions, PUME began to sort the problems by issue area. The majority of their concerns centered on facilities, textbooks, and teacher quality—the three educational necessities protected by *Williams*. The parents were ready to file complaints. The Public Advocates-LIF team provided parents a tutorial on how to fill out a *Williams* Uniform Complaint Procedure form, and continued providing assistance as parents filled out forms over the next three weeks. After reviewing the complaints to make sure they were complete and included sufficient details, a total of 81 complaints, the vast majority in Spanish, were presented in March to district principals.

Media Trainings & Advocacy To maximize the impact of their efforts, PUME parent leaders planned a press conference to create additional public pressure on the district to respond to their complaints. To prepare them for this key step in advocacy, the Public Advocates-LIF team created a series of spokesperson tutorials that helped them crystallize their message and present concise, personal stories.

The press conference was strategically held in front of Huron Elementary School to highlight the site where the contaminated drinking water was most severe. Twenty-five parents participated, with two providing compelling testimony on the substandard school conditions. The parents excitedly shared their stories to the media knowing that the larger community would hear their voices and learn of their inspiring advocacy. In front of television cameras and reporters, parents culminated their powerful media action by directly delivering their complaints to the school principal.

The resulting regional media coverage exceeded the parents’ hopes. It included TV news segments on Univision and NBC affiliates and articles in the *Fresno Bee* and *Vida en el Valle*, coverage that reached both English-speaking and Spanish-speaking audiences. The media actions did not stop there. Parent leaders were later interviewed and quoted by publications such as *New America Media* and *Children’s Advocate*.

District Advocacy Because of years of parents’ feeling ignored by the administration, the Public Advocates-LIF team determined it was necessary to focus on PUME parents’ fears of advocating for education change at the school site or district level. PUME parents learned how to structure arguments to effectively convey their message and maximize their moral and collective power. As PUME members developed and



Left: PUME members hand delivering *Williams* complaints at Huron Elementary School, March 2007. Right: At press conference.

implemented an advocacy strategy, they began to believe in their ability to win improvements for their children's education.

Meetings with school principals allowed PUME parents to establish their presence in the community as active education stakeholders, and in the case of the middle school principal, helped develop a lasting partnership between him and parents.

Building on their success, PUME parents also began advocating before their local school board, relying on Public Advocates' staff for translation because the school board itself failed to provide it. The parents demanded that improvements to their children's learning conditions be immediately addressed.

After seeing first-hand that the school board made decisions critical to their children's future and that their testimony could have influence, PUME parents continued monitoring school board meetings and became authoritative advocates. Since then, community leaders and school administrators have actively sought to cultivate PUME members as allies in education issues before the school board—a reflection of their recognized influence.

Partnership with the County Office of Education

PUME also worked in cooperation with the Fresno County Office of Education to make sure education rights at the school-site level were enforced. For instance, PUME leveraged the office's oversight of the Coalinga-Huron School District to compel the superintendent to issue a district-wide directive to all school principals and teachers clarifying students' rights under *Williams* to textbooks for use in class and to take home.

The parents' *Williams* complaints about teacher misassignments also prompted a partnership between the Fresno County Office of Education and the Coalinga-Huron Unified School District. In addition to requesting immediate assistance with their existing misassignments, the district began working with the county office for help on a multi-year teacher recruitment and professional development plan to address their staffing needs and prevent placement of under-qualified teachers in their classrooms.

PUME WINS IMPROVED EDUCATION CONDITIONS, INCLUDING CLEAN WATER

The PUME *Williams* campaign achieved dramatic results. Not only did the PUME parents win greatly improved education conditions for their children, they also developed strong education advocacy skills and built a lasting and organized group that continues to advocate on education issues in the district.

The impetus for the PUME *Williams* campaign—the contaminated drinking water at Huron

Elementary School—became a major victory. In September 2007, the school board unanimously allocated \$225,000 to treat the school's corroded pipes so students could drink the water at the school. The school's potable water lines were replaced in the summer of 2008 and new drinking fountains were installed during the first week of the 2008-09 school year. Additionally, the city of Huron was pre-approved by the California Department of Public Health for \$1,500,000 in water treatment plant renovations so that students and all other city residents could drink tap water.

But PUME's advocacy did not stop there. The complaints they filed about access to textbooks and qualified teachers, as well as others concerning facility conditions, resulted in concrete improvements across the district.

LASTING CHANGE: A SKILLED AND ORGANIZED GROUP OF PARENT ADVOCATES

Beyond the tangible improvements at schools, the PUME campaign achieved other long-term results. The campaign led to increased awareness of education issues throughout the community. More than 100 Huron/Coalinga community members received training on their education rights under the *Williams* settlement. Additionally, prominent regional media coverage brought the issue of poor, immigrant students' lack of access to basic learning conditions as well as their parents' willingness to take action to forefront of the San Joaquin Valley.

Perhaps most importantly, the PUME *Williams* campaign, with assistance from the Public Advocates-LIF team, incubated a skilled and organized group of 30 parent advocates. A core group of 15 PUME members developed even stronger leadership skills throughout the campaign. Parents have risen up and are now leading PUME on their own.

"PUME parents were able to get it out in the open and make [us] listen. They were brilliant!"

DOLORES SILVA

Former Coalinga-Huron
School Board Member

FAMILIAS EN ACCIÓN REFORM THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Hayward, California

ABOUT THE COMMUNITY

The city of Hayward, California is one of the Bay Area's many suburban communities comprised of diverse families from divergent economic backgrounds. Located on the freeway corridor between Oakland and San Jose, the Hayward Unified School District (HUSD) serves approximately 20,000 students. Just over half are Latino, while the other half is spread fairly evenly among various ethnic groups. More than half of Hayward's students are low-income, and 35% are English Learners (ELs). The district includes 23 elementary schools, five middle schools, and three high schools. Twenty-one of the district's elementary schools, three of its five middle schools, and all of its high schools are ranked in the lowest four deciles of student achievement when compared statewide.

CAMPAIGN BEGINNINGS

In the winter of 2006, an informally-organized group of Latina mothers came together, concerned about the district's plans to close some elementary schools due to declining enrollment. In particular, they were concerned about the effect of these school closures on low-income Latino parents who would be unable to drive their children to school in distant neighborhoods. When the

parents contacted Public Advocates, they learned for the first time about the *Williams* settlement and its potential for bringing new resources to Hayward schools. The impending school closures sparked a heightened level of parent interest and activism in the district. This small group of Latina mothers channeled that engagement into a concrete step that low-income, immigrant parents could immediately take to improve conditions in their schools: a *Williams* campaign.

The parents invited Public Advocates to come to Hayward to train the community about their rights under *Williams* and the *Williams* complaint process. They received permission from a supportive local elementary school principal to host an evening workshop in the school's auditorium and passed out flyers to interested parents and teachers across the district. Approximately 75 English and Spanish-speaking parents and teachers attended. Word of the workshop spread to the district level, and wary HUSD officials and administrators also attended.

PARENTS BECOME THE TRAINERS AND LEAD THEIR OWN CAMPAIGN


Following this workshop, five bilingual (Spanish-English) parent leaders collected over 40 *Williams* complaints from concerned parents addressing inadequate learning conditions at eight schools across the district. Araceli Orozco, a parent leader, described how they did it: "We didn't know our rights. We weren't educated on how to advocate for our kids. It was also kind of hard to manage my time with all these meetings, school, work, and family. But we each told a few people and those people told a few people, and soon we had collected over 40 complaints."

"The Williams complaint process was a great starting point because once we parents realized 'Oh, they responded to me in 30 days!' it had a domino effect. It gave us a feeling of power, and we started investigating other aspects of the educational system and what we see is not right."

MARIBEL HEREDIA
Familias en Acción

For a frantic three-week period, they set up shop in the evenings at one parent’s kitchen table to orchestrate the campaign. Standing in front of schools each morning and afternoon, they engaged parents—especially monolingual Spanish-speaking parents—in conversations about learning conditions in their children’s school, explained the *Williams* complaint process, and offered to help them file a complaint. Armed with their cell phone cameras, they documented unsafe facility conditions across the district. They collected complaints from parents who had attended the community training and performed “quality control” on the complaints, making sure each one contained the specific information necessary to allow the principal to adequately investigate and remedy the issue.

Concerned that many English Learner students were being taught by teachers who lacked the required training and credential to teach EL students, they requested teacher rosters at each school site. One mother took the lead for checking the teachers’ credentials on the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing web site, using Public Advocates’ manual.

 To navigate California’s complex system of teacher credentialing, she used *A Teacher Is Key*, available at www.publicadvocates.org/williams/

Public Advocates provided assistance and support to the parent leaders, consulting on campaign strategy, sharing best practices for tracking the complaints, assisting with the drafting of a press release, and answering questions about teacher credentials.



The mothers of *Familias en Acción* preparing their complaints.

The *Williams* complaints described bathrooms that were so dirty and unusable that children chose to “hold it” all day long; a drinking fountain outside the kindergarten classroom so stopped up that kindergartners often drank from a stagnant pool of dirty water; and English Learners struggling academically because they were being taught by teachers who lacked appropriate training to teach ELs. The mothers estimated that their 40 complaints represented the concerns of hundreds of Spanish-speaking Latino and immigrant parents across the district (including undocumented immigrants) who had previously not spoken up about their dissatisfaction with their children’s schools.

The mothers named themselves *Familias en Acción*. On April 5, 2006, on the same day the Hayward teachers union went on strike, they presented to the HUSD Superintendent and individual school principals more than 40 *Williams* complaints in both English and Spanish describing inadequate learning conditions at their schools. Despite the media’s preoccupation with the strike, the parents received coverage in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Oakland Tribune*, and on local radio station KPFA. *New America Media* also ran two features highlighting the parent activism in Hayward.

THE PARENTS GET RESULTS FROM THE DISTRICT

Because Familias en Acción filed their complaints late in the school year, they did not receive responses from the district until June—the end of the school year. Nonetheless, the parents won many concrete improvements that would benefit students during the next academic year.

- Drinking fountains were repaired and cleaned so as to be useable again.
- Bathrooms were repaired and cleaned.
- Dangerous ceiling panels were replaced.
- Playground repairs were completed including fixing uneven concrete and drainage issues, a dangerous tetherball pole with peeling paint, and bleachers that had caused splinters.
- The district purchased and delivered English Language Arts and Phonics books to a first grade class and English Language Arts workbooks to a Kindergarten class. Both classes had been without these instructional materials during the academic year.

ONGOING DISTRICT ADVOCACY LEADS TO ADDITIONAL SCHOOL IMPROVEMENTS

The Familias en Acción parents were not fully satisfied with the district's response. A number of complaints were submitted in Spanish, yet the district responded to parents in English only, effectively putting the burden on the bilingual parents to continue serving as liaisons to the monolingual Spanish-speaking parents. Also, the district's responses to many of the complaints concerning EL teachers who lacked the appropriate training and credential to teach ELs were inadequate and conflicted with the information about each teacher's credential on the CTC website. The parents requested meetings with senior HUSD officials to address these ongoing concerns.

Over the summer of 2007, the parents met with HUSD's Assistant Superintendent for Budget, Director of Maintenance and Operations, and Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources



File complaints as early in the school year as possible—ideally during the first semester—so that you can “start the clock” on your Williams complaints and make sure the district fixes the problem in time to benefit students during that same school year. This is especially important for textbook and teacher complaints. Students won't get much benefit if their books do not arrive or their permanent teacher is not hired until the final weeks of the school year.

to discuss outstanding complaints. Public Advocates assisted the parents in agenda setting, attended the meetings with the parents, and drafted letters to the district summarizing the outcomes of the meetings. This additional advocacy was successful.

- The district finally responded in Spanish to complaints initially filed in Spanish, and committed to doing so for all future complaints filed in Spanish.
- Two under-qualified EL teachers were placed on a professional development track to complete EL training and receive the appropriate EL authorization.
- The district admitted to two teacher misassignments identified by parents in the complaints—one teacher of ELs and one fourth grade teacher. These teachers were not rehired by the district after the 2006-07 school year.
- A complaint identifying a short-term substitute teacher mistakenly assigned on a long-term basis to teach an elementary school class prompted the district to strengthen its substitute monitoring system by purchasing new software to address this problem.
- The district opened more direct lines of communication with the parents, including providing them with the cell phone number of the Director of Facilities to report site problems immediately.

LONG-TERM RESULTS: AN EMPOWERED PARENT BASE

Familias en Acción's 2007 *Williams* campaign, with its concrete school improvements won over a period of five months, instilled a sense of hope among a previously-excluded group of Hayward parents. Their involvement gave parents the knowledge that they had the power to hold school leaders accountable and confidence that they could really improve their schools. They won the cautious respect of school officials, who now return their phone calls and emails and recognize that they represent a broader base of concerned parents.

The parents of Familias en Acción have taken their knowledge of *Williams* and built on the gains won during the spring and summer of 2007. They have led workshops for other parents—in English and Spanish—on the *Williams* complaint process and filed additional *Williams* complaints, this time at the beginning of the school year when the changes they win can have a more immediate effect for students.

For example, under the *Williams* settlement, districts are required to pass a resolution within the first eight weeks of the school year stating publicly whether they do or do not have sufficient textbooks for all students, and take any necessary action to ensure that all students have sufficient textbooks and instructional materials by the end of the second month of the school year. When the Hayward School Board heard its annual textbook resolution in the fall of 2007, Familias en Acción parents used the public hearing as an opportunity to highlight current textbook insufficiencies. Although the district claimed that they were providing sufficient textbooks to all students, parents spoke at the school board meeting and filed *Williams* complaints showing otherwise. Public Advocates provided assistance and support to the parents in these advocacy efforts.

As a result of this advocacy and with additional pressure from Public Advocates, HUSD began posting the list of adopted books on its website

and holding annual textbook fairs for parents. This allows parents to easily find out which books their children should have and hold their schools accountable for providing them. Additionally, the district trained all principals on the *Williams* textbooks standards to clarify that all students must be allowed to take their textbooks home.

The feeling of empowerment that Familias en Acción parents gained as a result of their experience with *Williams* has prompted them to engage other parents on a broader range of educational issues in the district. Familias en Acción members have begun leading parent education classes during a weekly “Café” at two local schools. The sessions, conducted in Spanish, teach parents how to advocate for themselves and for their children.

Their work on the *Williams* campaign—including advocacy with district officials and before the school board—crystallized for these parents the school board's critical role in determining district priorities and holding officials accountable for serving all students. Unsatisfied with the lack of responsiveness of the current Hayward school board to the needs of low-income students and ELs, two parents, Maribel Heredia and Araceli Orozco, ran for open seats on the board in November 2008. They called their joint slate the “Academic Success Team” and ran on a platform

“Williams showed us we have power. If we get together and work together, parents can get things accomplished. After our Williams campaign, more and more parents are stepping up to the plate and going to the board meetings to have their concerns addressed.”

ARACELI OROZCO
Familias en Acción



Californians for Justice members rally for better schools.

of parent engagement and district accountability. In what the local newspaper termed a “total makeover” of the school board, Maribel and a second reform candidate were elected, beating out a conservative incumbent. She is now the school board’s most vocal champion for EL students and their parents. Araceli and the other parent leaders of Familias en Acción are carrying on their strong parent advocacy work, this time with more friendly faces on the school board.

YOUTH GROUPS HOLD THEIR DISTRICT ACCOUNTABLE

Oakland, California

ABOUT THE COMMUNITY

In 2006, the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) was one of California’s largest school districts and one of its most troubled. OUSD produced dismal student performance; two-thirds of its schools were among California’s lowest-performing, and its record of dire financial mismanagement had resulted in a takeover by the state of California in 2003. The district serves a diverse student population of 44,000 students, more than two-thirds of whom are low-income. But it is also characterized by substantial inequities. The “hills” schools serve significantly higher percentages of affluent children and post



Use the school board’s public hearing on the sufficiency of textbooks in your district—held within the first eight weeks of the school year—as an organizing opportunity. Get your members to attend the school board meeting and testify about any classes for which they do not have their own textbook to use in class and to take home.

high student achievement, while the “flatland” schools have high concentrations of low-income students and the lowest-performing schools. OUSD exemplifies many of the inequitable school conditions that had led to the *Williams* case, and many of the *Williams* plaintiffs came from Oakland.

OUSD’s troubling record of educating students spurred its youth to action. The district has a rich set of established grassroots youth organizations working to improve the schools.

- **Asian/Pacific Islander Youth Promoting Advocacy and Leadership (AYPAL)** (www.aypal.org) is a collaborative of six Oakland community-based agencies organizing low-income Asian and Pacific Islander students from immigrant and refugee communities. More than 150 AYPAL members participate on a weekly basis in meetings and campaign work to improve the quality of life for young people and their families in Oakland.
- **Youth Together (YT)** (www.youthtogether.net) is a youth leadership organization focused specifically on improving public education, with site-based youth organizers based at six high schools in Oakland, Berkeley, and Richmond.
- **Californians for Justice (CFJ)** (www.caljustice.org) is a statewide grassroots organization of 1,200 youth who are working to improve their public schools and promote racial justice. One of CFJ’s four offices is in Oakland.

The *Williams* standards and complaint process gave these organizations a new rallying point. The students seized upon *Williams* as a way to organize and put pressure on the district. In fact, each organization used *Williams* as their core campaign over a two year period.

Over the course of three school years, with support from Public Advocates, AYPAL, YT, and CFJ students filed nearly 600 complaints at schools throughout OUSD, prompting the district to significantly improve students' access to decent school facilities, sufficient textbooks, and qualified teachers. At the same time, the *Williams* campaigns provided students opportunities to develop their leadership skills and build working relationships with district officials.

SPRING 2006: THE CAMPAIGNS BEGIN

AYPAL and YT joined forces on a joint *Williams* campaign in early 2006. In January, they invited Public Advocates to lead a workshop about the *Williams* settlement and new complaint process. Armed with this information, AYPAL and YT members fanned out to their various schools and began the hard work of educating other students about *Williams*. From February through April, students canvassed their classmates before school and during lunch, educating them about their *Williams* rights and providing them with complaint forms. AYPAL and YT also led trainings for more than 15 other youth groups from around the Bay Area, designed and published a student-friendly *Williams* complaint card, and hosted a community fair in Oakland's Fruitvale District attended by over 500 people, where the students educated community members about their *Williams* rights and collected complaint forms. Within three months, the students had collected almost 800 *Williams* complaints targeting schools throughout the East Bay, including almost 500 at OUSD schools.

On April 26, 2006, more than 150 AYPAL and YT students held a rally and press conference outside of OUSD headquarters. Wearing matching t-shirts, they led a mock graduation and protested the unfairness of requiring students to pass the California High School Exit Exam as a condition for graduation without first providing them with the basic resources necessary to learn. The students then went inside to deliver their box of hundreds of the forms targeting seven high schools and one elementary school, to the OUSD Ombudsperson responsible for *Williams* complaints. Organizers provided a cover letter to each school's principal summarizing the complaints. At some schools organizers delivered the complaints and cover letter in person and met with the principals to discuss

"We did massive education around the school to let students know that . . . we do have a right to complain. We do need clean bathrooms and qualified teachers. The PE teacher should not be teaching Spanish class."

SOPHOMORE TIFFANY PARKER
Youth Together Member



Left: AYPAL & YT students lead a rally and press conference to highlight their *Williams* complaints. Right: Delivering their box of complaints to district headquarters, April 2006.

them. At these schools, principals provided responses on the spot, and later followed through on their commitment to fix bathrooms.

The campaign caught the attention of the media, garnering coverage on local radio (KQED and KPFA), in local newspapers (*Oakland Tribune*), the ethnic press (*Sing-Tao Daily* and *World Journal*), and on the internet (CBS-5 webnews). Public Advocates supported the groups throughout the campaign, such as helping with press outreach and participating in strategy discussions about how best to present such a large number of complaints to the district without overwhelming administrative staff.

THE DISTRICT'S MIXED RESPONSE

On May 17, 2006, with the deadline for a response to their *Williams* complaints looming, 200 students confronted school district officials in a youth-organized “accountability session” to demand fixes for the problems raised in their complaints. Students planned the community forum, inviting key district officials and local education leaders. During the forum, the students presented a slide show summarizing the content of their complaints, dramatically illustrating the inadequate school conditions they faced with photographs of dead rodents in classrooms and disgusting school bathrooms. In the “hot seat,” OUSD’s Director of Facilities and Chief Community Accountability Officer responded to pointed questions from students, promised to visit the school sites that week, and committed to fixing these problems. Three OUSD school

board members, as well as the Alameda County Superintendent of Schools also spoke in support of the *Williams* standards and thanked the students for their efforts.

Thanks to the students' vigorous follow-up, many persistent problems were fixed throughout the district. Broken sinks were repaired. Graffiti was removed. Bathrooms were cleaned, stocked with supplies, and placed on a more regular maintenance schedule.

But while the district's response to the complaints was sometimes exemplary, other times it fell short. At certain schools the students received no response at all. By February 2007—nine months after the complaints were filed—students had still received no response to numerous complaints filed at Oakland High School and McClymonds High School.

AYPAL students organized a press conference to draw attention to the district's failure to address their complaints. Under the public eye, on the eve of the event, the district finally issued a letter responding to the complaints. Students went ahead with their plans anyway. Other youth organizations joined AYPAL, YT, and Californians for Justice (CFJ) as they gathered together to share their frustration with the district's non-responsiveness. Their efforts were covered in the *Oakland Tribune*. Public Advocates sent a pointed letter to OUSD officials highlighting the inadequacy of the district's response—which was six months late and failed to respond to specific complaints about insufficient textbooks and teacher misassignments.

SPRING 2007: A SUCCESSFUL APPEAL

That same February, student leaders from CFJ's Oakland chapter collected and filed more than 50 *Williams* complaint forms. They detailed nearly 80 separate complaints about textbooks, teacher quality, and, primarily, facilities at Oakland High School. Some were nearly identical to complaints filed by AYPAL and YT the prior school year. In particular, facilities issues focusing on dirty bathrooms and poor ventilation were repeated in both sets of complaints.

When CFJ students and organizer AyeNay Abye met with the Oakland High principal, he refused to do anything to resolve the complaints. However, the central district office provided a timely response to the complaints in May 2007—a major improvement from their delayed response to the AYPAL/YT students the previous year. Unfortunately, the response fell short by failing to provide specific details about how many complaints would be resolved. Public Advocates and CFJ filed a joint appeal with the California Department of Education (CDE) charging OUSD with failing to provide complete and adequate responses to many of the students' facilities complaints.

"We loved working with AyeNay and the CFJ students. We really appreciated the students' efforts to bring a greater awareness at the state level to the district's Williams application."

TIMOTHY WHITE

Assistant
Superintendent for
Facilities, Oakland USD

To press resolution of their textbook and teacher complaints (for which there was no avenue for appeal), and to keep the students engaged in the work, AyeNay, the CFJ students and a Public Advocates attorney met with the district official handling *Williams* compliance for OUSD and the district administrator overseeing its high schools. The students asked that their complaints be resolved. Public Advocates further educated the administrators about their responsibility to properly respond to *Williams* complaints as well as resources available to the district, like the Emergency Repair Program (ERP).

In August 2007, the group won a major victory. The CDE determined that OUSD had not responded adequately to at least 14 of the facilities complaints at Oakland High School, including complaints about the heating and ventilation system, bathrooms, water fountains, and vermin. This was important because it forced district officials to pay special attention and resolve the complaints properly. The CDE demanded the district remedy all outstanding complaints within 20 working days.

“Williams is about empowering students to speak up for their rights, but with any new civil right also comes responsibility. That includes keeping the school clean and maintaining the improvements you’ve won, such as clean bathrooms. In a Williams campaign, the win is getting the problem fixed. But we need to maintain these wins by working in partnership with school staff and engaging young people in owning their school site and taking pride in coming to a clean campus.”

RAQUEL JIMENEZ

Student Engagement Specialist,
Oakland Unified School District,
Former Youth Together Organizer

By the end of September, the district had made many improvements to the Oakland High School facility, including:

- repairing broken toilets and stall doors in bathrooms
- instituting a custodial schedule that includes cleaning and stocking bathrooms three times a day
- purchasing new classroom desks
- hiring an exterminator to address pest and vermin infestation
- repairing broken heating in one classroom
- replacing air filters in the ventilation system

SPRING 2008: IMPROVING VENTILATION AND AIR QUALITY AT OAKLAND HIGH

Over a two year period, AYPAL, YT and CFJ students had filed complaints about their classrooms being too hot, too stuffy or way too cold, and of poor air circulation because many of the rooms had no windows. The district provided a stock response to these complaints: the school’s HVAC system was scheduled for revamping during a round of modernization in 2009. But, in the face of the bombardment of complaints, negative media coverage, follow-up advocacy by students, and education by Public Advocates about the ERP funds available to the district under *Williams*, OUSD’s Assistant Superintendent for Facilities finally embraced the *Williams* complaint process as a tool to bring sorely needed resources to the district. Under his leadership, the district got serious about addressing this burgeoning health issue. District staff prepared an ERP application in February 2008 and committed to carrying out the HVAC system renovation in the summer of 2008.

Building on their victory, and newly formed partnerships with district and site administrators, CFJ students and students from the district-wide All City Council launched a new campaign they called “So Fresh, So Clean.” The campaign had

two goals: build pride among students in taking care of their school, and increase the odds of the HVAC ERP application receiving funding. The students engaged the principal, teachers, custodians and district officials and collected nearly 1,000 student and teacher signatures in support of greater ERP funding. They also worked with the Oakland High School custodial staff to create a work order system so students could quickly alert the building staff to unsanitary or unsafe conditions.

As the “So Fresh, So Clean” campaign moved forward, a Healthy Buildings Team made up of representatives from the Ethnic Health Institute, California Department of Public Health, and Green Schools Initiative issued an independent report confirming with scientific evidence what the students had written in their complaints: the school’s HVAC system was not providing adequate ventilation to a number of classrooms or maintaining a reasonable indoor classroom temperature. AyeNay, the students, and a Public Advocates attorney met with district officials and members of the Healthy Buildings Team to address this issue. At that meeting, OUSD committed to fixing the HVAC system over the summer recess. In the words of Timothy White, Assistant Superintendent for Facilities, “We funded this project—even without knowing whether we would receive *Williams* funding—because it was the right thing to do.”

Then in April AyeNay, CFJ student member Juan Muñoz—a recent Oakland High graduate—and a Public Advocates attorney met with elected officials in Sacramento to advocate for full funding of the Emergency Repair Program by telling Oakland High School’s story. In part because of this advocacy, the Legislature preserved ERP funding in the 2008-09 state budget at just over \$100 million.

As they promised, OUSD carried out a complete renovation of the HVAC system at Oakland High School over the 2008 summer recess, at a cost



CFJ member Juan Muñoz & Public Advocates attorney Angelica Jongco at the State Capitol

to the district of \$16 million. As of this printing, OUSD’s ERP application to be reimbursed for funds spent on the project is still pending, and the district hopes to receive full reimbursement for its costs.

But in the meantime, students now attend class in rooms that are well-ventilated and maintained at comfortable temperatures—an environment that allows them to concentrate on the material they are learning. In addition, when the district replaced the HVAC system, they also installed new lighting and ceilings. As a result of their *Williams* campaign, youth leaders in OUSD have come to realize that their district cares about providing them with a decent learning environment and has invested in providing them with a better school facility. The students, in turn, are taking greater responsibility themselves for maintaining their school.

"Our campaign was successful. We got a lot of money put into our school. Now the ventilation works better and we can focus more. Students don't have to worry about coughing and dust. The air can circulate, and the air conditioning wasn't on this winter!"

NATALIA TOSCANO

CFJ Member & Junior at
Oakland High School

FOSTERING SYSTEMIC CHANGE IN OUSD

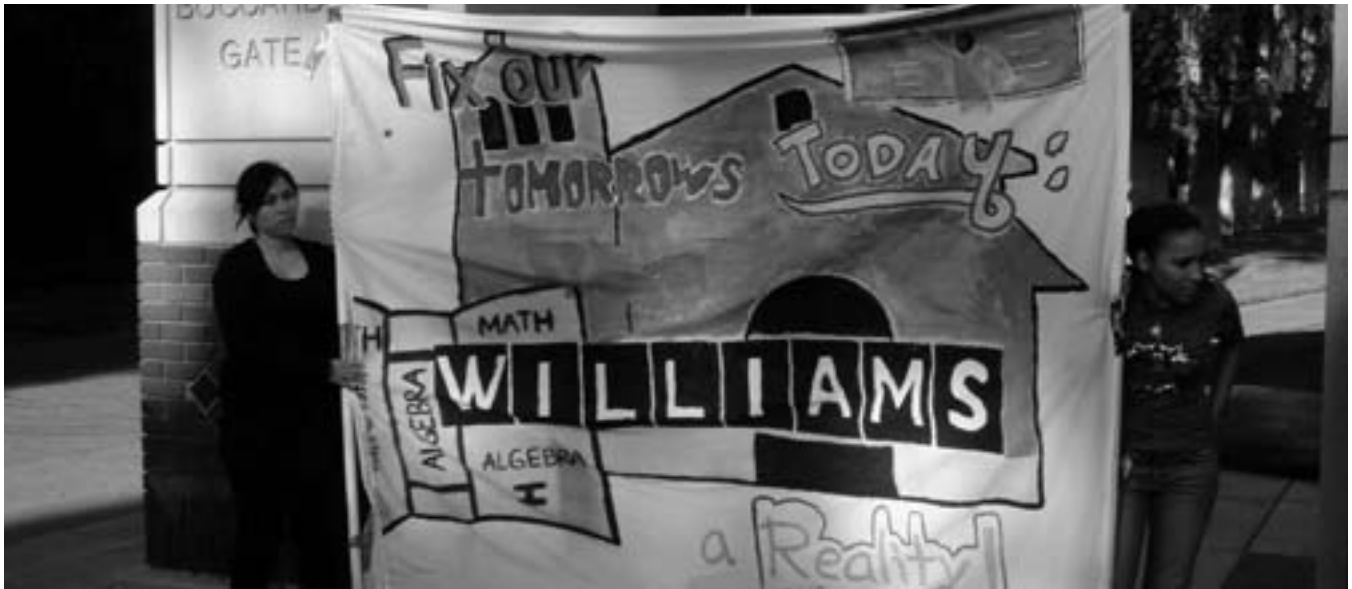
The student-led *Williams* campaigns in Oakland won far more than tangible improvements at school sites. Yes, bathrooms are cleaner, all students have textbooks, and students and staff at Oakland High School can breathe more easily. But more important to creating lasting change, students learned how to hold district administrators accountable for providing them with the tools they need to be successful. District officials learned that students are a critical and powerful constituency that cannot be ignored. And organizers learned too that consistent interaction can lead to improved responsiveness from district officials.

The *Williams* campaign provided students, organizers and administrators with the chance to get to know one another and develop a working relationship, opening lines of communication between student-led youth organizations and district officials that allows them to discuss issues outside of *Williams*. Each face-to-face meeting provided another opportunity to educate district officials about the process and best practices from other districts. The students and their organizers were frequently accompanied by attorneys from Public Advocates and at times other *Williams* counsel, including attorneys from the Education

Equity Project of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights (LCCR) and the ACLU of Southern California.

During the 2007-08 school year, CFJ, Public Advocates, and the Education Equity Project of LCCR joined in partnership to work with the district on improving its internal processes for complying with *Williams* obligations. Public Advocates and LCCR provided valuable feedback to the district, including a "best practices" guide on preparing responses to *Williams* complaints that the district used in training its principals before the start of the 2008-09 school year. OUSD's Student Engagement Specialist and the district-wide All City Council also committed to sharing information about the district's processes for handling *Williams* complaints at all schools.

As a result of adopting best practices from other districts, OUSD substantially improved its textbook accounting, ordering, and distribution systems. Beginning in spring 2007, the district implemented an annual spring instructional materials survey at each school site, so that it has accurate numbers of the textbooks and other instructional materials it must order over the summer. OUSD also made its annual textbook resolution process more transparent so that parents, students and the public can



Californians for Justice members spread their message for change.

better understand the full extent of textbook insufficiencies and hold the district accountable for remedying them.

The results of these reforms are impressive. Over the past four years, OUSD has reduced the number of decile 1-3 schools identified as having textbook shortages by the county office of education on its annual visits from 44 out of 55 schools (2005-06), to 15 out of 51 (2006-07), to two out of 61 (2007-08) to finally, just one out of 61 (2008-09).

YOUTH SHARE WHAT THEY'VE LEARNED

One of the most exciting outcomes of the Oakland *Williams* campaign led by AYPAL, YT, and CFJ has been their willingness to share their experiences and lessons learned with youth leaders from other organizations around the state. They have spread the message that *Williams* can be a powerful tool for both improving their schools and building a

strong base of activist students. In August 2006, AYPAL, YT, and CFJ leaders came together in a youth convening organized by Public Advocates to reflect on their campaigns and share many of the lessons they had learned with 30 youth and youth organizers from as far away as San Bernardino. Using posters, presentations, skits and games, they shared their knowledge of the *Williams* lawsuit and settlement and their personal experiences using the complaint process in their campaigns. Their success is inspiring other youth to follow in their footsteps.

“Now the district knows we’re not just Mexican moms. We’re Mexican moms who know our rights. Once you know your rights, they look at you in a different light.”

MARIBEL HEREDIA

Familias en Acción

CHAPTER 3

THE *WILLIAMS* COMPLAINT PROCESS: NUTS & BOLTS

As the case studies in Chapter 2 illustrate, parents and students play a critical role in holding schools accountable for meeting the *Williams* instructional materials, teacher, and facilities standards. The *Williams* complaint process has proven to be an effective tool for doing so.

Since this process was first implemented in 2005, parents, students, and other community members have been actively using it to enforce *Williams* standards in schools across the state. Unfortunately, the state does not systematically collect data on the number of complaints filed statewide, so there is no way to know for sure how many complaints have been filed.

But data collected by the ACLU of Southern California indicates that in just the first two years of *Williams* implementation, 2,789 complaints were filed in the 100 California school districts with the largest student enrollments. Los

Angeles Unified provided the largest number of complaints, with more than 1,100 complaints filed from January 2005 to July 2007, followed by Oakland Unified (620), East Side Union High (217), San Francisco Unified (209), and Lynwood Unified (98). In these districts, grassroots organizations of parents and students often led the complaint effort as a means of increasing educational opportunities for students.


But in 42 of the largest 100 school districts in California, no complaints at all were filed. Sadly, this is not because these districts are providing every student with sufficient textbooks, decent school facilities, and qualified teachers. The reality is that many parents, students, teachers, and other community members remain unaware of their rights under *Williams* and the complaint process that exists for asserting these rights.

When the *Williams* settlement was being negotiated, the *Williams* plaintiffs and their lawyers intended the complaint process to be user-friendly and to lead to tangible improvements for students. It is written into law and is part of the California Education Code (§ 35186) and California Code of Regulations (title 5, §§ 4680-4687). This means that anyone filing a *Williams* complaint has the power of the law behind them.

HOW THE WILLIAMS UNIFORM COMPLAINT PROCESS WORKS

Following is a step-by-step guide to filing and following up on a complaint. There are five steps to this process.

1. **Get a Complaint Form**
2. **Fill Out the Complaint Form**
3. **Submit the Complaint Form**
4. **Wait for a Response**
5. **Appeal if You are Unsatisfied with the Response**

 See pages 29 and 30 for a brochure you can share with others or go to www.publicadvocates.org/williams/

STEP 1: GET A COMPLAINT FORM

Schools are required to post a notice in each classroom describing students' rights under *Williams* and stating where to obtain a complaint form. Cal. Educ. Code § 35186(f). But, the law explicitly states that a person does not need to use the district's form to file a *Williams* complaint. Cal. Code Reg., tit. 5, § 4680(c). You may file one simply by writing a letter on plain paper and identifying it as a *Williams* complaint.



However, we recommend you use the complaint form on page 31 or on the *Williams* Resources Page at www.publicadvocates.org/williams/ as it will help you identify all the key issues.

Any person or organization may file a *Williams* complaint, including students, parents, teachers, and community organizations. A *Williams* complaint may also be filed anonymously. Cal. Educ. Code § 35186(a). However, if you do this you will not receive a written response stating how the problem was resolved. Individuals who are worried about identifying themselves by name can ask an organization or a friend to submit the complaint for them. For example, teachers concerned about retaliation could ask their union to submit the complaint for them.

STEP 2: FILL OUT THE COMPLAINT FORM

You must fill out the complaint form **completely** and provide the school with enough information about the problem for them to actually investigate and fix it. Put yourself in the principal's shoes and imagine the level of detail you would need to be able to understand and solve the problem.

For Facility Complaints, you should identify:

- School name
- Location of the problem (e.g., Room 323, third floor boys bathroom)
- Specific problem (e.g., heat does not work properly, toilet stall door is missing)
- Why the problem threatens students' and staff's health or safety (e.g., lack of heat causes students to get sick)

For Textbook and Teacher Complaints, you should identify:

- School name
- Course or grade level where problem exists
- Name of teacher
- Specific problem (e.g., no book for the class, have to share books, not allowed to take book home, no permanent teacher, don't think teacher has proper credential to teach the class)

If you want a written response, you must also include your complete contact information and check the box on the form requesting a response.



Consider talking with your school principal or district about the problem before you file a *Williams* complaint. They may be unaware of the problem and cooperate with you to address it quickly and efficiently, so that you do not need to file a complaint. Be sure to mention that you are concerned about “a *Williams* issue”—the word *Williams* often gets their attention—and that you are preparing to file a *Williams* complaint. However, because the *Williams* complaint timeline is lengthy, ongoing discussions with your principal shouldn't necessarily mean that you should postpone filing the complaint. Timelines can start running while discussions are taking place in order to discourage delays.

You may submit a *Williams* complaint in any language. If 15% or more of the students at your school speak a language other than English, the written response from the school must be in the language in which the complaint was filed as well as English. Cal. Educ. Code § 35186(a)(1).

Following is a list of some common problems that *Williams* complaints have identified:

Common Facilities Complaints

- Bathrooms that are consistently locked, dirty, or undersupplied (no soap, toilet paper, etc.)
- Broken or missing bathroom fixtures
- Broken heating, ventilation, fire sprinkler, or air-conditioning systems
- Major pest or vermin infestation
- Broken windows/doors/gates posing a security risk
- Hazardous materials posing an immediate health risk (e.g, exposed asbestos, lead paint, mold)
- Leaking roof
- Structural damage (e.g, sagging floors, beams or ceilings; dry rot)
- Gang graffiti
- Gas leak
- Other school facility conditions that pose a threat to the health or safety of students or staff.

Common Textbook Complaints

- No or not enough standards-aligned textbooks to use in class (each student must have one - photocopies don't count)
- No or not enough standards-aligned textbooks for use at home
- Book in poor or unusable condition
- No or improper lab equipment

Common Teacher Complaints

- No permanent teacher within the first four weeks of the class
- Class taught by substitute teachers only
- Teacher lacks proper credential to teach the class
- English Learners taught by a teacher who lacks proper authorization to teach English Learners

LEARN SIMPLE STEPS TO ENFORCE YOUR RIGHTS

Under the historic *Williams v. California* settlement, every student in California is guaranteed the right to:

- A qualified, permanent teacher for every class
- Textbooks & instructional materials to use in class and at home
- Clean and safe schools & classrooms

COMPLAINT PROCESS STEPS

1. GET THE COMPLAINT FORM

Ask your school. By law, a notice must be posted in each classroom describing your rights and where to find complaint forms.

Or **Download** a complaint form. Go to http://www.publicadvocates.org/williams/#complaint_filing

2. FILL OUT COMPLAINT FORM

Any person or organization may file a complaint, including students, teachers, parents, and community organizations. The complaint can be filed anonymously. But, if you want the principal or district to tell you how the problem was fixed, include your name and contact information and check the box to show you want a response. Add additional pages if necessary and **be as specific as possible** (e.g., describe the classroom and course where the problem is).

3. TURN IN COMPLAINT FORM

Send the complaint form either to your principal or district office. **Make 3 extra copies:** keep one for you, send one to your District Superintendent, and send one to your County Superintendent. To find the contact information for your County Superintendent, go to www.ccsesa.org. You may submit the complaint in a language other than English and if requested, you may be entitled to a response in that language.

4. THE INVESTIGATION

The **principal must investigate** and provide a solution to a valid complaint **within 30 working days** (excluding weekends and holidays). If your principal forwards your complaint to the district, it must take action within 40 working days.

5. GET RESPONSE WITHIN 45 WORKING DAYS

If you put your name on the complaint, the principal/district **must respond to you** in writing **within 45 working days** to inform you how your complaint was resolved.

6. UNSATISFIED WITH RESPONSE?

You have the right to **speak at a school board meeting** to explain why the response was unsatisfactory and request that the board take action.

For facilities complaints, you may also **file an appeal** with the Superintendent of Public Instruction **within 15 days** of receiving the response. For textbook and teacher issues, notify your County Superintendent.

YOU CAN FILE A COMPLAINT UNDER THE UNIFORM COMPLAINT PROCEDURE (Cal. Educ. Code § 35186), TO PROTECT YOUR RIGHTS IF YOU LACK:

CLEAN & SAFE SCHOOL FACILITIES

- There are non-functioning or closed bathrooms or other unsanitary restroom conditions.
- The heating, ventilation, fire sprinkler, or air-conditioning systems in a school are broken.
- A school is infested with pests, insects, vermin, or rodents.
- A school has broken windows that pose a security risk.
- The exterior doors or gates of a school will not lock.
- There is a hazardous or uninhabitable condition at a school such as structural damage, asbestos, lead paint, etc.
- There is a gas leak at a school.
- There is an electrical power failure at a school.
- There is any school facility condition that poses a threat to the health or safety of students or staff.

On the complaint, describe the problem or condition, where it is located, and how it poses a threat to health or safety.

SUFFICIENT TEXTBOOKS/ INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

- A student doesn't have a book to use in class or must share a book.
- A student doesn't have a book to use at home.
- A student's book is missing pages.
- A student's book is severely damaged.
- A student's book is in poor or unusable physical condition.
- A student's book is out-of-date.

- A student doesn't have the proper lab equipment.
- A student is given only photocopies of a portion of the textbook because of a textbook shortage.

On the complaint, identify the problem, the course/grade level, name of textbook or instructional material, teacher's full name, and any other important details.

QUALIFIED, PERMANENT TEACHERS

- A class is not assigned a permanent teacher within the first 4 weeks of the class.
- A class is taught only by substitute teachers.
- A class is taught by a teacher who lacks the proper credentials to teach the subject matter.
- A class in which more than 20% of the students are English learners has a teacher who lacks the proper authorization to teach English learners. On the complaint, identify the problem, course/grade level, and teacher's full name.

Questions? Need help with filing a complaint or an appeal? Contact us!

**PUBLIC
ADVOCATES**
MAKING RIGHTS REAL

Public Advocates Inc.
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(415) 431-7430 (tel.)
(415) 431-1048 (fax)
williamsinfo@publicadvocates.org
www.publicadvocates.org

WILLIAMS COMPLAINT FORM

(Uniform Complaint Procedures for California Education Code Section 35186 Complaints)

Anyone may use this form to file a complaint regarding one or more of the following problems: (1) insufficient instructional materials; (2) an unsafe or unhealthy school facility condition; (3) a teacher vacancy or misassignment, and/or (4) a restroom that is closed, not fully operational, or not cleaned, maintained, or stocked regularly. After completing this form, file it with the School Principal. If the Principal does not have sufficient authority to fix the problem, he or she will forward this form to the appropriate school district official for resolution.

► **Do you want to receive a written response describing how the problem was fixed?**

Yes, I request a written response.

Name: _____ Address: _____

City, State, and Zip Code: _____ Phone Number (optional): _____

No, I do not request a written response. I am filing this complaint anonymously.

► **I request immediate action to correct the following problem(s):** *Please check all that apply and provide supporting details (attach additional pages if needed).*

I. Textbooks and Instructional Materials:

- A student does not have required textbooks or instructional materials to use in class.
- A student does not have textbooks or instructional materials to use at home or after school.
- Textbooks or instructional materials are in poor or unusable condition, are missing pages, or are unreadable due to damage.
- Because of a shortage of textbooks or materials, a student was given photocopied sheets from only a portion of a textbook or instructional materials.

Description of the problem: *include (1) the names of the textbook(s)/materials that are missing or damaged, (2) the course/grade level and (3) the teacher's name.* _____

II. Teacher Vacancy or Misassignment:

- A class has not been assigned a permanent teacher within the first 20 working days of the semester.
- A teacher is assigned to teach a class for which the teacher lacks the appropriate subject matter credential or authorization.
- A teacher is assigned to teach a class in which more than 20% of the students are English learners and the teacher lacks the proper credentials or training to teach English learners.

Description of the problem: *include (1) the course or grade level and (2) the teacher's full name.* _____

III. School Building and Facility Conditions:

- A school building, building system, or part of the school grounds is in a condition that poses a threat to the health and safety of students, teachers, or school employees (for example, the heating, ventilation, fire sprinkler, or AC system doesn't work; the school is infested with rats or other pests; windows are broken or exterior gates will not lock and pose a security risk; or a damaged building or structure creates a potential health or safety hazard).

Description of the problem: *include (1) the condition, (2) where it is located, and (3) how it poses a threat to health or safety.* _____

IV. Restrooms:

- A restroom is not fully operational, maintained and cleaned regularly, and stocked at all times with toilet paper, soap, and paper towels or functional hand dryers.
- The school is not keeping all restrooms open during school hours when pupils are not in classes.
- The school is not keeping a sufficient number of restrooms open during school hours when pupils are in classes.

Description of the problem: *include location of the restroom.* _____

► **IMPORTANT:** I am mailing / hand-delivering (circle one) this form on _____ (date) to

Principal _____ (name) at _____ (school name & address).

Please make and keep a copy of this completed form for your records.

For more information, visit www.decentschools.org or call toll-free 1-877-532-2533. Form updated Feb. 25, 2008.

FORMULARIO DE WILLIAMS PARA HACER QUEJAS
(Procedimiento Uniforme para Hacer Quejas del Código de Educación de California Sección 35186 Quejas)

Cualquier persona puede usar este formulario para presentar una queja relacionada a uno o más de/de los siguiente/s problema/s: (1) insuficientes materiales de instrucción; (2) instalaciones que presentan una amenaza a la salud y seguridad; (3) puesto vacante de maestro/a o maestro/a malasignado/a; y/o (4) un baño que está cerrado, no completamente en funcionamiento, o no está limpio, mantenido, o almacenado regularmente. Después de completar este formulario, preséntelo con el/la director/a de la escuela. Si el problema es más allá de la autoridad de el/la director/a, el o ella debe mandar este formulario al oficial del distrito apropiado para solucionarlo.

► **¿Quiere usted recibir una respuesta por escrito describiéndole cómo fue arreglado el problema?**

Sí, yo solicito una respuesta por escrito.

Nombre: _____ Domicilio: _____

Ciudad, Estado, y Código Postal: _____ Número de Teléfono (opcional): _____

No, yo no solicito una respuesta escrita. Yo estoy presentando esta queja anónimamente.

► **Yo solicito acción inmediata para corregir el/los siguiente/s problema/s:** *Por favor indique todo lo que aplique y proporcione detalles que lo/a apoyan (adjunte páginas adicionales si es necesario).*

I. Libros de Texto y Materiales de Instrucción:

- Un estudiante no tiene los libros de texto requeridos o materiales de instrucción para usar en clase.
- Un estudiante no tiene libros de texto o materiales de instrucción para llevar a casa o después de escuela.
- Libros de texto o materiales de instrucción están en condición pobre o inservibles, les faltan páginas, o no pueden leerse porque están dañados.
- Por falta de libros o materiales, a un estudiante le dieron copias de páginas de sólo una porción de un libro de texto o de materiales de instrucción.

Describe el problema: *incluya (1) el nombre del libro de texto /material que falta o está dañado, (2) la materia/nivel de grado y (3) el nombre del/de la maestro/a* _____

II. Puestos Vacantes de Maestros o Malasignados:

- Un semestre empieza, y no hay maestros asignados a enseñar el semestre completo o año (por ejemplo, la clase está enseñada por una serie de maestros sustitutos o por un sustituto de largo plazo).
- Un maestro/a es asignado/a a enseñar una clase en cual el/la maestro/a le falta la credencial apropiada o autorización.
- Un maestro/a es asignada a enseñar una clase en cual más del 20% de estudiantes son estudiantes de aprendizaje inglés y el/la maestro/a le falta credenciales o entrenamiento para enseñarle a los que están aprendiendo inglés.

Describe el problema: *incluya (1) la materia o nivel de grado y (2) el nombre completo del/de la maestro/a* _____

III. Condiciones de Edificios e Instalaciones de Escuela:

- Una instalación, sistema de edificio, o parte de la escuela esta en una condición que presenta una amenaza a la salud y seguridad de estudiantes, maestros, o empleados de la escuela (por ejemplo, el calentador, ventilación, sistema de aspersión automático, o el sistema del aire acondicionado no trabaja; la escuela está infestada con ratas u otros bichos; ventanas de escuelas que están rotas o puertas exteriores no cierran y presentan un riesgo de seguridad; o un edificio dañado crea un posible riesgo a la salud o seguridad).

Describe el problema: *incluya (1) la condición, (2) donde está localizado, y (3) cómo afecta una amenaza a la salud o seguridad* _____

IV. Baños:

- Un baño no está funcionando completamente, mantenido y limpiado regularmente, y almacenado a todo tiempo con papel de baño o seca-manos eléctrico.
- La escuela no está manteniendo todos los baños abiertos durante las horas de escuela cuando los estudiantes no están en clases.
- La escuela no está manteniendo un número suficiente de baños abierto durante las horas que los estudiantes están en clases.

Describe el problema: *incluya la localización del baño.* _____

► **IMPORTANTE:** Yo estoy enviando / entregando en persona (*circule uno*) esta queja el _____ (*fecha*) a el/la

Director/a _____ (*nombre*) en _____ (*nombre de escuela y domicilio*).

Por favor haga y mantenga una copia de este formulario completo para sus archivos.

Por favor visite www.decentsschools.org o llame a la línea gratuita 1-877-532-2533 para más información. Formulario actualizado 25 de febrero, 2008.



Californians for Justice members rally for better schools.

“Looking back, we were missing the step of educating the administration first. We could have explained to principals a little better what we were doing and given them a heads up about our Williams campaign. At one high school, the principal was against the campaign. He wasn’t plugged in, so he thought we were making the school look bad. He didn’t realize that Williams complaints could help to bring the school more money to fix the facilities.”

ARMAEL MALINIS

AYPAL Campaigns and
Communication Coordinator

STEP 3: SUBMIT THE COMPLAINT FORM

Submit the *Williams* complaint directly to your school principal. If you use a school district form, you should also submit the complaint to the address listed on that form. Keep a copy of the complaint for your own records, and send an additional copy to the superintendent of your school district. Be sure to put a date on your complaint form and keep track of the date you submit it, as this date starts the timeline under which you can expect to receive a response.

STEP 4: WAIT. PRINCIPAL HAS 30 WORKING DAYS TO INVESTIGATE AND FIX THE PROBLEM AND 45 WORKING DAYS TO PROVIDE A WRITTEN RESPONSE

Once a complaint is filed, the principal or district official must investigate the problem and provide a solution—and not merely a response—within a reasonable time, not to exceed 30 working days (excludes weekends, holidays, and school vacations—but not summer break). A principal may forward your complaint to the school district. If this happens, the district must investigate and provide a solution within 40 working days from the day the complaint was first received by the principal.

If you put your name and address on the complaint, the principal or district official must respond to you in writing within 45 working days from the day you first filed your complaint to inform you how your complaint was resolved. Cal. Educ. Code § 35186(b).

"If we're really given an opportunity to speak for ourselves about what we think is good for us, people will be surprised how youth can make changes in our community"

ROSE ANN LEYBAG

Oakland Tech High School
Graduate & AYPAL Member

Rose Ann Leybag speaks to district officials
at the AYPAL/YT "accountability session,"
May 2006



STEP 5: APPEAL IF YOU ARE UNSATISFIED WITH THE RESPONSE

FOR ALL WILLIAMS COMPLAINTS: APPEAL TO THE SCHOOL BOARD

Take advantage of your rights. If you are unsatisfied with the principal's or district's response, you have the right to speak at a public school board meeting to describe the problem, explain why the response was unsatisfactory, and request that the school board take action. Cal. Educ. Code § 35186(c). This right to "appeal" to the school board provides you with an opportunity to shine a spotlight on the problem described in your complaint. It also gives you a chance to use public pressure to spur your school district into action. If you are part of a group of parents, students, teachers, or community members, consider organizing a rally or other action at the school board meeting to draw attention to the problem and build public support for a solution.

Get on the agenda. Call the School Board Secretary and ask to be placed on the agenda for the next scheduled school board meeting. When you do, be sure to request that the school administrator in charge of facilities, instructional materials, or human resources (depending on the

nature of your complaint) be present so that school board members may ask them questions and hold them accountable. Alternatively, if you have not been able to get on the agenda in advance, you can speak during the public comment period at the meeting. Be sure to fill out a card at the beginning of the board meeting so your name is placed on the speaker list for public comment.

Plan and practice your testimony. Make sure you clearly describe the problem and explain how it is affecting students' ability to learn. Explain why the response was unsatisfactory, and describe the action you would like the school board to take. Pictures speak louder than words, so make use of visual aids if you have them. For example, if your complaint is about unsanitary bathrooms, bring in photos of the bathrooms and share them with the board members. For a complaint about contaminated drinking water coming out of the water fountains, bring in a plastic bottle filled with the water. Make sure you know how long you will be given to speak. Public comment is usually limited to 2-3 minutes. Agenda items should allow for longer testimony.

Organize others to come and support you. Bring allies or friends who can also speak about this problem or who will stand by you in support. There is power in numbers! You can organize a

rally before the school board meeting or line up a series of speakers to testify during the public comment period.

Contact the media. Local education reporters often cover school board meetings. They and other print and television reporters like to cover controversy. Contact reporters in advance of the meeting. Tell them about the problem, the complaint you filed, and the district's failure to fix the problem. Inform the reporter about your plan to testify at the school board meeting and any rally or action you have planned. The best strategy is to call the reporter. They may ask you to email them the details. You can also send out a formal press release.



A sample press release can be found at www.publicadvocates.org/williams/

Follow up. In the days following the school board meeting, talk with individual school board members, as well as the relevant district administrators responsible for facilities, instructional materials, and human resources. Press them on what action they plan to take to address the problem presented in your complaint.

FOR FACILITIES COMPLAINTS ONLY: APPEAL TO THE CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

If your complaint is about a facilities issue, you may appeal directly to the California Department of Education (CDE) in a formal written appeal letter, requesting that they require the district to remedy the unsafe or unhealthy facilities condition raised in your complaint. Cal. Educ. Code § 35186(c). **You must file this formal appeal within 15 days of the day you receive the written response to your complaint from the school district.**

Your appeal letter should describe:

- **What** the facilities condition is that caused your complaint.
- **How** this facilities condition poses a threat to the health and/or safety of students and/or staff.
- **Why** the district's response is inadequate.

Along with your appeal letter, you must also include (1) a copy of the complaint you filed, and (2) a copy of the district's written response to your complaint.



A sample appeal letter to the CDE can be found at www.publicadvocates.org/williams/. The CDE's website also includes information on how to file a *Williams* facilities appeal at www.cde.ca.gov/ls/fa/sf/williamsappeal.asp

If your appeal is successful, the CDE will send a letter to your district requiring it to address the problem within 20 days of receiving the letter. The Superintendent of Public Instruction also must provide a written report to the State Board of Education describing your complaint, the district's remedy or proposed remedy, and whether the Superintendent agrees with this remedy.

CHAPTER 4

LESSONS LEARNED ON THE GROUND: A GRASSROOTS ORGANIZER'S GUIDE TO LEADING A *WILLIAMS* CAMPAIGN

The *Williams* campaigns featured in Chapter 2 all achieved impressive results, both in tangible improvements to schools and a more empowered parent or student base. These wins did not come easily. Looking back and knowing what they know now, each organization might have chosen to run their *Williams* campaign a little differently. Over the course of four years working with community partners on their *Williams* campaigns, Public Advocates has had the privilege of being part of this learning process.

Following is a collection of these “lessons learned.” They will help guide you as you develop your own campaign strategy.

Some of the lessons may be applicable to other campaigns. As you discover best practices and encounter new challenges, we encourage you to share them with us by sending them to williamsinfo@publicadvocates.org. We will share

them with others (giving you credit) and continue expanding this resource.

The lessons in this chapter are organized according to the five stages of a *Williams* campaign:

OUTREACH & TRAINING

Lesson 1 Use a *Williams* campaign to generate interest in your community organization and build new membership.

Lesson 2 Train your members well about the *Williams* complaint process.

ACTION RESEARCH: IDENTIFYING *WILLIAMS* ISSUES AT YOUR SCHOOL

Lesson 3 The process of identifying *Williams* issues is as important as the actual *Williams* complaints it generates.

Lesson 4 Involve parents and students in a comprehensive assessment of the school facility.

Lesson 5 Determining whether or not the teachers



Armael Malinis

“Williams was one of the best campaigns we’ve worked on because it excited and mobilized our base of young people. They spend eight hours a day at school—that’s where their networks are. This was a concrete way for them to plug in and transform their schools in a way that directly impacted their lived experience.”

ARMAEL MALINIS

AYPAL Campaigns and
Communication Coordinator

at your school have the proper credentials takes time, but is worth the investment.

Lesson 6 Use the School Accountability Report Card as a tool for understanding your school’s performance and the educational resources it provides to students.

COMPLAINT FILING

Lesson 7 When filing complaints, focus on quality not quantity.

Lesson 8 When filing multiple complaints, have a system in place for keeping track of them.

Lesson 9 A picture is worth a thousand words: use photographs to document facility problems.

GATHERING PUBLIC SUPPORT/GENERATING PUBLIC PRESSURE

Lesson 10 Organize a media event to publicize your *Williams* campaign and put pressure on school district officials to fix the problems.

FOLLOW UP

Lesson 11 Highlight your victories, being sure to give school district officials credit for fixing the problems.

Lesson 12 Be persistent, and ask for help if you need it.

OUTREACH & TRAINING

LESSON 1: USE A WILLIAMS CAMPAIGN TO GENERATE INTEREST IN YOUR COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION AND BUILD NEW MEMBERSHIP.

Interest in improving schools is shared among people from all different walks of life. *Williams* offers a concrete pathway for improving schools in three basic areas: access to clean, safe school facilities, qualified teachers, and sufficient textbooks. As the case studies in Chapter 2 illustrate, a *Williams* campaign has proven to be a powerful method for building a deep and committed grassroots base. Using the *Williams* campaign as a springboard, the parents in Huron and Hayward fomented new groups of organized parent advocates who continue to work toward reform. In Oakland, already established youth-led organizations used *Williams* campaigns as a means to engage their membership base and achieve tangible results in their schools.



Public Advocates has developed a web page containing resources for use in generating initial interest in a *Williams* campaign: www.publicadvocates.org/williams/

Tailor these documents to your own community’s needs. Included are:

- Sample flyer for spreading the word about your meeting
- Sample short presentation to provide an introduction to *Williams* and to spark interest in getting involved in the campaign
- Brochure about the *Williams* complaint process.

"I dared to do things I never thought I could do: inspect my son's school, and even challenge myself to speak with the school board."

MICAELA GABRIEL
PUME Leader



Micaela Gabriel protesting at PUME's rally and press conference, March 2007

LESSON 2: TRAIN YOUR MEMBERS WELL ABOUT THE WILLIAMS COMPLAINT PROCESS.

After four years supporting community organizations in their *Williams* campaigns, we've learned the importance of training grassroots members about what is and is not covered by the *Williams* settlement and the components of an effective *Williams* complaint. An incomplete complaint cannot be adequately addressed by the school or district. It is a time-consuming process to review each complaint before it is submitted only to find there are incomplete or ineffective complaints you must address before filing. With proper training, your members will have fewer incomplete or invalid complaints.

Of course, any in-depth training must be tailored to the needs of your membership and take into account their prior campaign experiences and varying levels of expertise. We will not try to provide a one-size-fits-all training curriculum here. However, any training on the *Williams* complaint process should include the steps outlined in Chapter 3, particularly Step 2, which outlines key points needed for a complete complaint. To minimize incomplete or ineffective complaints, you may want to have members fill out complaints right at the training and review some complaints with the group as examples.

ACTION RESEARCH: IDENTIFYING WILLIAMS ISSUES AT YOUR SCHOOL

LESSON 3: THE PROCESS OF IDENTIFYING WILLIAMS ISSUES IS AS IMPORTANT AS THE ACTUAL WILLIAMS COMPLAINTS IT GENERATES.

In Huron, when parents became involved in assessing their local school's compliance with *Williams*, many had their first conversations with their children about the quality of their day-to-day educational experience: Did they have textbooks? Did they have access to the bathrooms? What were their teacher's names, and did they think their teachers were doing a good job? This heightened level of parent involvement was in itself a positive outcome. In all of the campaigns, this investigation phase was an important step for getting participants to take action.

In each of the campaigns described in Chapter 2, the process of identifying *Williams* issues at their schools provided parents and students with a deeper understanding—backed up by data they themselves collected—of the educational opportunities available at their schools as well as a common vocabulary for describing deficiencies to school administrators.

LESSON 4: INVOLVE PARENTS AND STUDENTS IN A COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT OF THE SCHOOL FACILITY.

Under the *Williams* settlement, county superintendents visit all of California's lowest-performing schools every year to assess the condition of the school facility and identify any urgent threats to the health or safety of students and/or staff. Districts also are required to perform annual self-evaluations to ensure that they maintain their facilities in "good repair." When evaluating the physical condition of their school, parents and students should use the same criteria used by the county superintendent and by districts. These criteria are listed on the Facility Inspection Tool (FIT), the form used by county offices of education for their site inspections and by districts for their self-evaluations. The FIT can serve as a helpful reference as it provides a detailed list of the types of facility problems to be on the lookout for at schools (e.g., exposed hazardous chemicals, nonfunctioning fire alarms, dangerous playground conditions).



For a copy of the FIT, see www.publicadvocates.org/williams/



TIPS FOR PHOTO-DOCUMENTATION, Shared by Californians for Justice

- **If possible, use a good quality camera that allows you to zoom in and out.**
- **Get close-ups of the condition you are trying to document, and avoid having distracting backgrounds or people in the shot.**
- **Shots from below make your subject bigger; shots from above make it smaller.**
- **If it helps to demonstrate your subject, take shots from different angles. Remember, the closer or larger your subject is, the better the photo will be.**

The *Williams* Resources web site also has a simplified Site Inspection Worksheet that parents and students can fill out as they conduct an inspection of their individual classrooms as well as the entire school facility. The information collected on the Site Inspection Worksheets can then be used to complete *Williams* complaint forms.

LESSON 5: DETERMINING WHETHER OR NOT THE TEACHERS AT YOUR SCHOOL HAVE THE PROPER CREDENTIALS TAKES TIME, BUT IS WORTH THE INVESTMENT.

The *Williams* complaint process can be used for complaints about teacher vacancies (i.e., where a classroom has no single, permanent full-time teacher) and teacher misassignments (i.e., where a teacher lacks subject matter, English Learner, or other required training or credential). Although parents and students are generally aware when a class is being taught on a long-term basis by one or more substitute teachers, they do not necessarily know whether a teacher has the proper credentials to be teaching the class. For example, it was not until the parents in Huron and Hayward analyzed the credentials of teachers at their children's schools that they realized many teachers of English Learner (EL) students were not trained or authorized to be teaching ELs.

The first step in researching whether the teachers at your school have the proper credentials is to obtain a copy of the master schedule, sometimes called a teaching roster. This document should provide you with the names of the teachers (ideally, first and last names) and the class(es) they are assigned to teach. You



A school drinking fountain, Huron, California

“Looking up teacher information on the CTC website gave us the information we needed to hold the district accountable. Parents trust to district to give us accurate information. Before we wouldn’t have had the confidence to push back when they said every teacher was properly credentialed. But now we could say, ‘Wait a minute, we looked it up’ and hand them a copy of the printout from the CTC website. That’s when the district finally admitted that they had misassignments and gave us a real explanation of how they would get the teachers the training they needed.”

MARIBEL HEREDIA

Familias en Acción



Maribel Heredia & daughter Celeste

may be able to get a copy of the master schedule from the school secretary (or a friendly teacher). Otherwise, you can send a letter to the school district requesting it. Identify your letter as a California Public Records Act request. The master schedule is public information and must be made available to anyone who requests it.



For a sample Public Records Request letter, see www.publicadvocates.org/williams/

Once you obtain the names of the teachers at your school and the classes to which they are assigned, you can enter their names into the Commission on Teacher Credentialing’s web site (<https://teachercred.ctc.ca.gov/teachers/index.jsp>) and look up the type of credential they have. This database will tell you what type of credential a teacher has (i.e., multiple subjects (elementary credential), single subject (secondary credential), education specialist (special education)) and whether or not the teacher is authorized to teach English Learners. If the teacher has a single subject credential, the web site will also tell you the subject(s) that the teacher is authorized to teach.



For more information on how to determine whether a particular teacher is misassigned, see *A Teacher is Key: Using the Williams Settlement to Monitor Teacher Quality* at www.publicadvocates.org/williams/

LESSON 6: USE THE SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT CARD AS A TOOL FOR UNDERSTANDING YOUR SCHOOL’S PERFORMANCE AND THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES IT PROVIDES TO STUDENTS.

By February 1st every year, each California public school is required to publish a School Accountability Report Card (SARC) and make it available to parents both on its web site and to any parent who requests a paper copy. While the SARC is a lengthy document, it contains a great deal of specific information about each individual school that can help parents gain familiarity with their child’s school, including information on test scores, graduation rates, access to Advanced Placement classes, access to qualified teachers, sufficiency of instructional materials, and the condition of the school facility. Public Advocates is pursuing advocacy at the state level to make the SARC more readable for parents and easier for schools to complete.



Look for your school’s SARC on your school/district web site or at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/sa/ap/sarlink1.asp>

COMPLAINT FILING

LESSON 7: WHEN FILING COMPLAINTS, FOCUS ON QUALITY NOT QUANTITY.

The youth-led *Williams* campaign in Oakland was impressive for the broad support it won from students across the district and the huge quantity of complaints they filed (nearly 600). However, the sheer quantity of filed complaints presented challenges both for the community organizations filing them and for the district. It was difficult for the community organizations to keep track of the complaints to which the district had responded. It was difficult for the district to adequately investigate complaints that did not include all of the necessary information. It was also time consuming to draft hundreds of individual responses, especially where many of the complaints raised identical issues.

The students learned that filing detailed, complete complaints is key to a successful *Williams* campaign. Indeed, 25 detailed, complete *Williams* complaints will likely lead to far more responsiveness from a district than 200 that are incomplete.

“Williams has opened our eyes. Before we used to complain and nothing would get done. Now, our kids are getting books, water fountains are working, bathrooms are being cleaned regularly. When we file a Williams complaint, the district responds quickly and seriously.”

ARACELI OROZCO
Familias en Acción

A blank *Williams* complaint form is included on page 31 of this manual. You can make copies of this form and use it to file your *Williams* complaints. See Chapter 3 of this guide for a description of what kind of detailed information to include in your complaints.

LESSON 8: WHEN FILING MULTIPLE COMPLAINTS, HAVE A SYSTEM IN PLACE FOR KEEPING TRACK OF THEM.

Because the Oakland students filed hundreds of complaints and did not initially create a system for tracking the district’s responses, they found it difficult to hold the district accountable when it provided inadequate responses or failed to respond to each individual complaint. In contrast, members of PUME in Huron and Familias en Acción in Hayward both used a spreadsheet to keep track of the complaints they filed and the adequacy of the district’s response. They found it most helpful to group complaints by category (e.g. Facilities) and number each complaint so that it was easy to track (e.g. Complaint #5 not remedied). This tracking system allowed them to track the date the response was due, thank the district for fixing some of the problems identified in the complaints, identify “wins” from their campaign, and—for those complaints where the district’s response was inadequate—plan targeted follow-up actions. In the spirit of partnership with your district, you might consider sharing your spreadsheet with them so that they can input their responses to you directly on it. This will save the district work, perhaps strengthen your relationship with them, and help to ensure that no complaints fall through the cracks.



For an example of a complaint tracker created using Microsoft Excel, see www.publicadvocates.org/williams/



Araceli Orozco

“When I was fired up and yelling about what wasn’t happening, Angelica [the Public Advocates attorney] helped me to think about the next step to take and to focus on where we could win. And in the end, we won a lot in Oakland!”

AYENAY ABYE
CFJ Lead Organizer



CFJ member Juan Muñoz and AyeNay Abye at the State Capitol

LESSON 9: A PICTURE IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS: USE PHOTOGRAPHS TO DOCUMENT FACILITY PROBLEMS.

Attaching photographs to a *Williams* facility complaint can help you document the severity of the problem. Even more importantly, photographs are powerful visual aids that can be used to illustrate for members of the public the inadequate school conditions students face. The most successful campaigns blew up photographs and put them on signs to use at rallies, projected photos on a slide at a public meeting before school board members and district officials, and shared photos with the media for use in their media coverage.

GATHERING PUBLIC SUPPORT/ GENERATING PUBLIC PRESSURE

LESSON 10: ORGANIZE A MEDIA EVENT TO PUBLICIZE YOUR WILLIAMS CAMPAIGN AND PUT PRESSURE ON SCHOOL DISTRICT OFFICIALS TO FIX THE PROBLEMS.

Successful *Williams* campaigns have used the delivery of complaints as an opportunity to draw attention to the lack of educational resources many students face and to publicize the leadership that students and parents are taking to improve their schools. For example, PUME members in Huron

organized a press conference at the local elementary school on the day they filed the complaints with the school principal. Individual parents described the conditions their young children faced at school, explained why they were filing the complaints, and pointed to powerful visual aids—plastic bottles containing brown, contaminated water.



For media coverage of grassroots *Williams* campaigns, including the campaigns described in this guide, see www.publicadvocates.org/williams/

Members of AYPAL and Youth Together in Oakland organized a *Williams* rally in front of the central school district building on the day they filed their complaints. Their presentation included a description of the *Williams* settlement, a summary of all the complaints they were filing, student-led chants, a skit showing the effects of inadequate school resources on students’ ability to pass the California High School Exit Exam, and a ceremonial delivery of a giant box of *Williams* complaints to the central district office. After 30 working days had passed (the deadline by when the district was supposed to have investigated and fixed all of the problems described in the complaints), the students also organized an “accountability session” event at which they delivered a presentation containing photos of some of the problems they had complained about, described the effect that

having inadequate school resources was having on their education, and pointedly asked school district officials what actions they were going to take to address their complaints. This action received front page coverage in the *Oakland Tribune*.



These types of media events require detailed planning. For a sample timeline and “to do” list for planning this type of event, modeled on a media outreach plan developed by Californians for Justice, see www.publicadvocates.org/williams/

LESSON 11: HIGHLIGHT YOUR VICTORIES, BEING SURE TO GIVE SCHOOL DISTRICT OFFICIALS CREDIT FOR FIXING THE PROBLEMS.

When your campaign achieves its intended results and the school district or principal fixes the problems that you identified, publicize these successes to the media. Your organization and members will gain credit for taking action to improve local schools, and school district officials will gain credit for solving the problems identified in the complaint. This creates a win-win situation, one that may help you build long-lasting, positive relationships with school district leaders. And, by highlighting a public education story with a positive and hopeful message, you will contribute to the larger effort to restore faith in the public education system.

FOLLOW UP

LESSON 12: BE PERSISTENT, AND ASK FOR HELP IF YOU NEED IT.

Because the *Williams* settlement and complaint process is still relatively new, school districts are still learning about their obligations under it. Indeed, some districts have not yet had any *Williams* complaints filed there. You may be the first!

If a district’s response is inadequate, don’t give up! Take your complaint to the next level by appealing

to the local school board or, for facilities appeals, to the California Department of Education. See Chapter 3 (p. 34-35) for more information on how to appeal. In each of the three campaigns described in Chapter 2, the districts addressed some—but not all—of the complaints filed within 45 working days. For the outstanding, un-remedied complaints, it took follow-up advocacy, meetings with district officials, testimony before the school board, and appeals to the California Department of Education before the districts finally fixed the problems. Eventually, though, they did. And, by engaging in this follow-up advocacy, grassroots members built their advocacy skills and strengthened their working relationships with district officials.



For a sample agenda from a meeting with district officials, see www.publicadvocates.org/williams/

If you want to strategize on the best way to follow up on outstanding complaints or you feel that your district is not complying with the *Williams* settlement, please contact Public Advocates at (415) 431-7430 / williamsinfo@publicadvocates.org

“Giving credit to school district officials for fixing the problems is so important for gaining their trust and building a strong partnership, which can then be leveraged to work on other important issues like quality teaching. In Oakland, the relationships we were able to build during the Williams campaign are helping us to advance other goals the students have, such as instituting a student-teacher evaluation process.”

RAQUEL JIMENEZ

Student Engagement Specialist,
Oakland Unified School District,
Former Youth Together Organizer

The *Williams* Resources Page on our web site (www.publicadvocates.org/williams/) offers samples of many of the documents listed throughout this manual. Please contact Public Advocates if you would like assistance at any stage of a *Williams* campaign, including campaign development, designing a training for your members, or following up on unresolved complaints, or if you have questions about anything in this manual.

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RESOURCES

Additional Resources On The *Williams* Settlement & Complaint Process:

Decent Schools for California

www.decentschools.org

Additional information about the *Williams v. California* case and settlement.

Education Equity Project of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights of the San Francisco Bay Area

(415) 543-9444

www.lccr.com/eep.shtml

An organization that assists individuals in the Bay Area with filing *Williams* complaints. Their website includes a helpful manual on the *Williams* Complaint Process entitled *Better Schools, Brighter Futures*.

Williams Toll-Free Hotline: 1-877-532-2533

Call with any questions you have about the *Williams* settlement or the *Williams* complaint process.

California Department of Education

www.cde.ca.gov/eo/ce/wc/

Link to the California Department of Education web page devoted to implementation of the *Williams* settlement.

Grassroots Youth Organizations Featured In This Guide:

Californians for Justice

www.caljustice.org

Offices in Oakland, Fresno, San Jose, & Long Beach.

Asian/Pacific Islander Youth Promoting Advocacy and Leadership (AYPAL)

www.aypal.org

Based in Oakland, California.

Youth Together

www.youthtogether.net

Organizing in Oakland, Berkeley, and Richmond, California.

Note, PUME and Familias en Acción do not currently maintain websites. To contact PUME or Familias en Acción leaders, please contact Public Advocates.

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Your Schools, Your Rights, Your Power
A Grassroots Guide to Effective *Williams* Campaigns
April 2009

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