



NO LONGER IN THE DARK

HOW A PARTNERSHIP
BETWEEN STATE AND
NATIONAL ADVOCATES
HELPED L.A. PARENTS
GET THE ANSWERS
THEY DESERVE

PIEn
network

CASE STUDY

**SAYING THAT
GROWTH DATA
MATTERS
DOESN'T MEAN
ANYTHING,
BUT SAYING
THAT PARENTS
DESERVE
INFORMATION
MEANS
EVERYTHING.**



INTRODUCTION

Like many leaders across the PIE Network, California advocates are no strangers to debates over accountability. But in Los Angeles, one key question seemed to be settled: in 2018, the Los Angeles Unified School Board (LAUSD) agreed to share student growth scores as part of the new School Performance Framework (SPF). Parents and advocates celebrated the fact that this data would give families information about how well each L.A. school helps students learn. This school-level growth data offers families a more complete picture of school quality and improvement, shining a light on schools that accelerate student learning.

Flash forward to August 2019, and the city school board had changed its mind. For PIE Network member Parent Revolution, this meant that the families they work with would be left in the dark, without access to key information about their students' education. Families in the Parent Power Network had fought hard for access to this data. In 2018, they organized for the passage of the SPF, and were deeply engaged in the development process through the district's working group and internal meetings. When the SPF, and the growth scores in particular, came under attack, L.A. parents decided to fight back.

Grounded in more than a decade of work with California families, Parent Revolution was ready to support LAUSD parents in their push to hold the district accountable for

releasing growth data. Building off the connections made through the PIE Network and years of collaboration and partnership, the Parent Revolution team knew they could count on additional support from their trusted Network colleagues and national data experts, the Data Quality Campaign (DQC).

Unfortunately, SPF opponents' early and effective work in the press meant parents and advocates were facing an uphill battle. Parents moved quickly to plan and execute actions to demand that the district release the data, from a targeted Wizard of Oz-inspired social media campaign (highlighting that California and Kansas are the only two states that don't publish academic growth data) to a candlelight vigil outside district headquarters. Parent Revolution was also working with partners to coordinate messages across tweets targeted at Board members, earned media, and sign-on letters.



On November 5, 2019, after years of building the right conditions and weeks of intense communication and organizing actions, the board reversed course again and voted to release student growth data to the public, which is now available via the new School Information+ website.



On the following pages, leaders from the Parent Revolution and DQC teams share insights into this successful campaign, the foundation for which parents and advocates had been building since 2013—a testament to the power of long-term partnerships between state advocates and national thought leaders, and proof that campaigns grounded in real stakes for families can take on even the wonkiest of policies.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Explore an interactive timeline with key dates in the process and view a list of related resources.

Q&A INTERVIEW

PIE Network Team: First of all, congratulations to Parent Revolution and LAUSD parents on this important win. We know that the release of LAUSD student growth data will unveil key information for Los Angeles students and their families. Why should this story matter to education stakeholders outside of Los Angeles?

Seth Litt, Executive Director of Parent Revolution:

This is proof that you can actually organize and win on some of the issues that get dismissed as technocratic. You need folks like DQC doing the thought leadership work and research in service of advocates on the ground, and you need local people asking actual families, 'What else do you need to know about this issue? Let's stay organized on this to find the local and political opportunities to act.'

It's important to realize that the work isn't either mass mobilization or something entirely uninspiring. It also shows that advocates need support to build capacity over time, so that we have the ability to act quickly.

Paige Kowalski, Executive Vice President of the Data Quality Campaign:

I think this work is an example of threading the needle between high-level, wonky best practices and authentic local engagement. These types of partnerships have significant potential to create real and sustainable change. Recently, [PIE Network member] GO Public Schools used The Education Trust-West's Black Minds Matter report to showcase inequities in CA and pulled in a DQC infographic to galvanize parents around a vision. This work resulted in parents showing up at school board meetings armed with a rubric from the Strategic Data Project to evaluate how their school board was using data to drive towards more equitable outcomes.



KEY TERMS TO KNOW

DQC:
Data Quality
Campaign

ESSA:
Every Student
Succeeds Act

LAUSD:
Los Angeles
Unified School
District

SPF:
School Perfor-
mance Frame-
work

For more than a decade, PIE Network members have connected across community, state, and ideological lines to strengthen their efforts to transform education for all students. Paige and Seth, this campaign wasn't the first time you had collaborated. Can you talk about how you built a partnership between Parent Revolution and DQC over time?

Paige: Seth, you've mentioned before that, because of the relationship we'd developed through places like PIE Network, you felt comfortable reaching out to DQC with a rapid-response type of request. At its core, DQC is a partnership organization; one of our stated values is that we do nothing alone because we go further together. Our goal is impact—not getting credit. We push ourselves to stay in our lane (e.g., research, best practices) and strive to add value to organizations whose lane is local. As a result, we build trust with partners, we listen to them, and they know they can reach out.

Seth: You and I have connected several times when there wasn't

an immediate action at hand. Parent Revolution was just interested in topics where I thought you might be knowledgeable, and you were always open to sharing your thoughts and brainstorming opportunities, even if there wasn't a direct outcome in that moment. I think that helped build a strong relationship.

From the outside looking in, this was a quick two-month campaign. But in many ways, both of your teams were building off years of preparation—from building partnerships to engaging with families. What lessons could leaders take away from your success in capacity building?

Ashley Lautzenhiser, Director of Communications & Strategy, Parent Revolution: It's not like we started engaging families on data transparency in August, when we first saw signs that the SPF might be rolled back. Families were engaged during the original passage of the School Performance Framework a year and a half ago in 2018, on the California School Dashboard, and also participated in district working groups for a year. I think it's important to understand what it takes to achieve that level of standing readiness.

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You really need to make the investment in working on issues over time, so that when things start to move quickly, people are ready. Parent Revolution was a member of the LAUSD working group that designed and planned for the implementation of the SPF, but more importantly, parents were members of the working group. Parent leaders were at every meeting for a year, and in parallel were meeting with a larger committee of families who were monitoring the issue.

Paige: At the end of the day, it comes back to sustainability. This is a long game. Building relationships and capacity over years is crucial so that when opportunities come up to protect the win or achieve something new, you have all the pieces in place to make that happen.

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And for national thought leaders, if you want your work to really have impact, you need to pick up the phone when somebody on the ground calls—not just the congressman or the governor’s aide. National partners need to consistently answer calls and form relationships with organizations that are trying to make real, on-the-ground change.

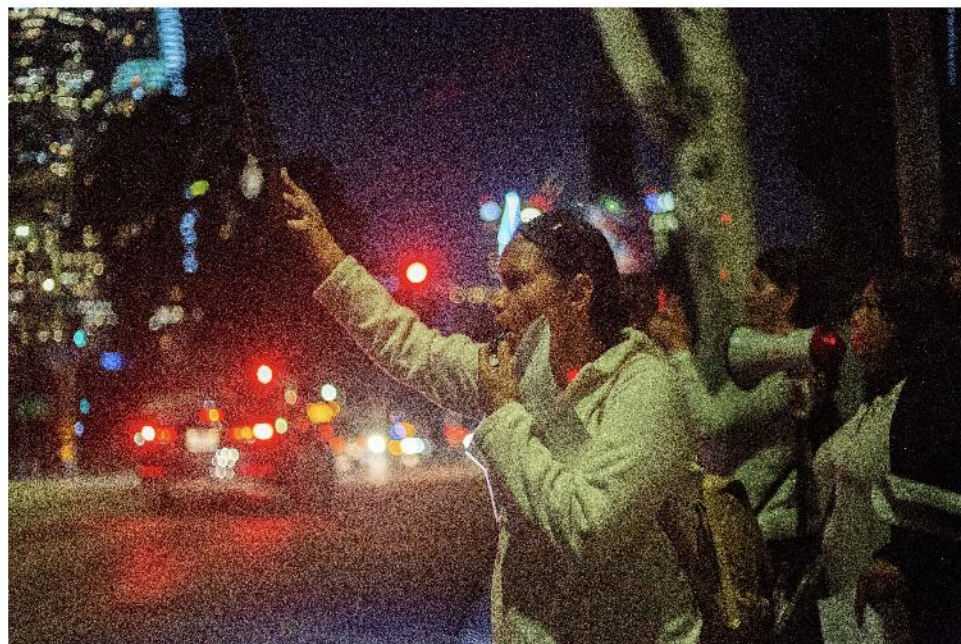
Seth: I recommend working from an orientation where you don’t have to be the expert on everything. We can all unintentionally become competitive with one another for credit, but that mindset doesn’t help make things better for children. We always have to think about who can be on our team, and what assets already exist that don’t have to be built from scratch. DQC’s strengths in this effort were unique and complementary to the outcome parents wanted. The same is true for the 12 or so local organizations that got involved. It’s about organizing assets.

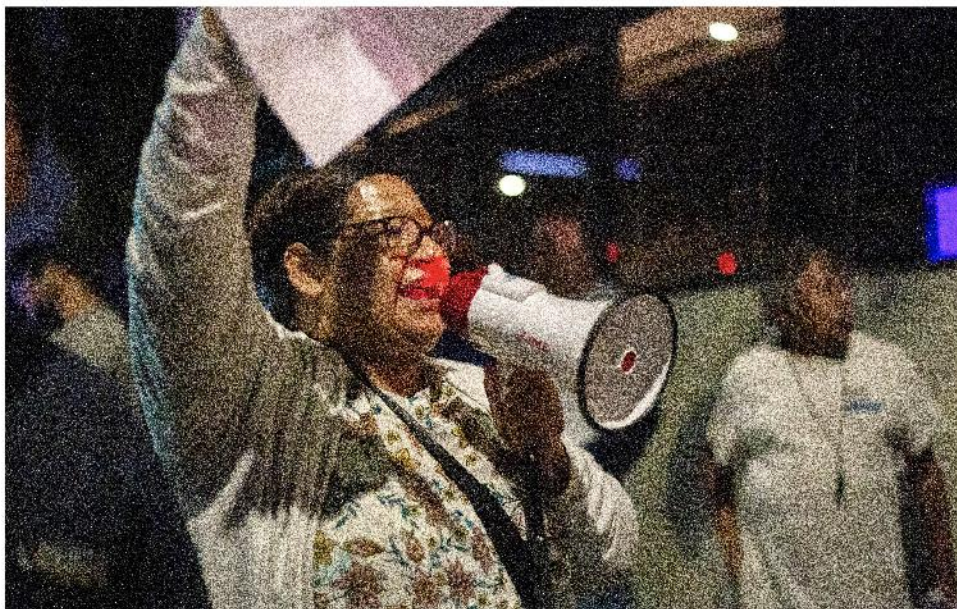
Paige: I love that term: organize your assets. Let’s say you have your priorities for the year. Who are the five people who can help you learn more? Sit down, be strategic, and even create a spreadsheet about the reports you need to read and

the people you should talk to. And then, follow up when they direct you to new ideas and resources.

It sounds like laying the groundwork for parents to engage with data transparency issues was an important condition for success here. Let’s be honest—data transparency isn’t usually an issue that gets folks excited! Let’s talk about threading the needle between authentic engagement and “wonky” issues.

Seth: I think this shows that you need to build capacity broadly enough so that stakeholders have options, but also not so broad that you’re underestimating their ability to learn about the policies. Our families care about clear school quality information because they care about finding the right school for their child and getting school board members to act with a greater sense of urgency, among other concerns.





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Families and students often have a hard time getting people to acknowledge their own experiences, and an even harder time getting people with formal authority to act. This is especially true for the members of our network who live in low-income neighborhoods, are Black and Latino, or are not fluent in English. Student growth is an important part of the larger issue, but if there had been a moment for, say, school climate ratings, our members likely would have seen the value in that.

Paige: For somebody who's been trying to get people excited about data for 15 years and data privacy for five years, you have to meet people where they are. It's sitting down and saying, "What are you worried about? What keeps you awake at night?" This is true whether you're talking about state legislators, school board members, or parents. If you can connect to the problem they're trying to solve, now they're in.

Seth: And a big part of our work is listening to people's experiences and making connections that someone on a national level can't. There's no way that Paige can know the specific experiences of a group of 30 moms sitting in an office in Huntington Park in southeast Los Angeles. DQC and National PTA did a great job making their student growth resource digestible for families, but we still have to

do the work to draw the lines between families' actual experiences, the resource, and what they might want to do about it.



Paige: I'll emphasize that research needs to be digestible. Don't release a 30-page research paper if you're not also offering a short resource that people on the ground can grab onto quickly. DQC did

this when we partnered with the National PTA to release a parent-friendly version of our earlier research paper on growth data. Make your work easily accessible for the people who are doing the real heavy lift of making change.

Over the course of the campaign, families and partners were able to engage across a variety of different platforms: coalition letters, social media, board meeting testimony, and earned media. Can you tell us more about the communications strategy of this campaign?

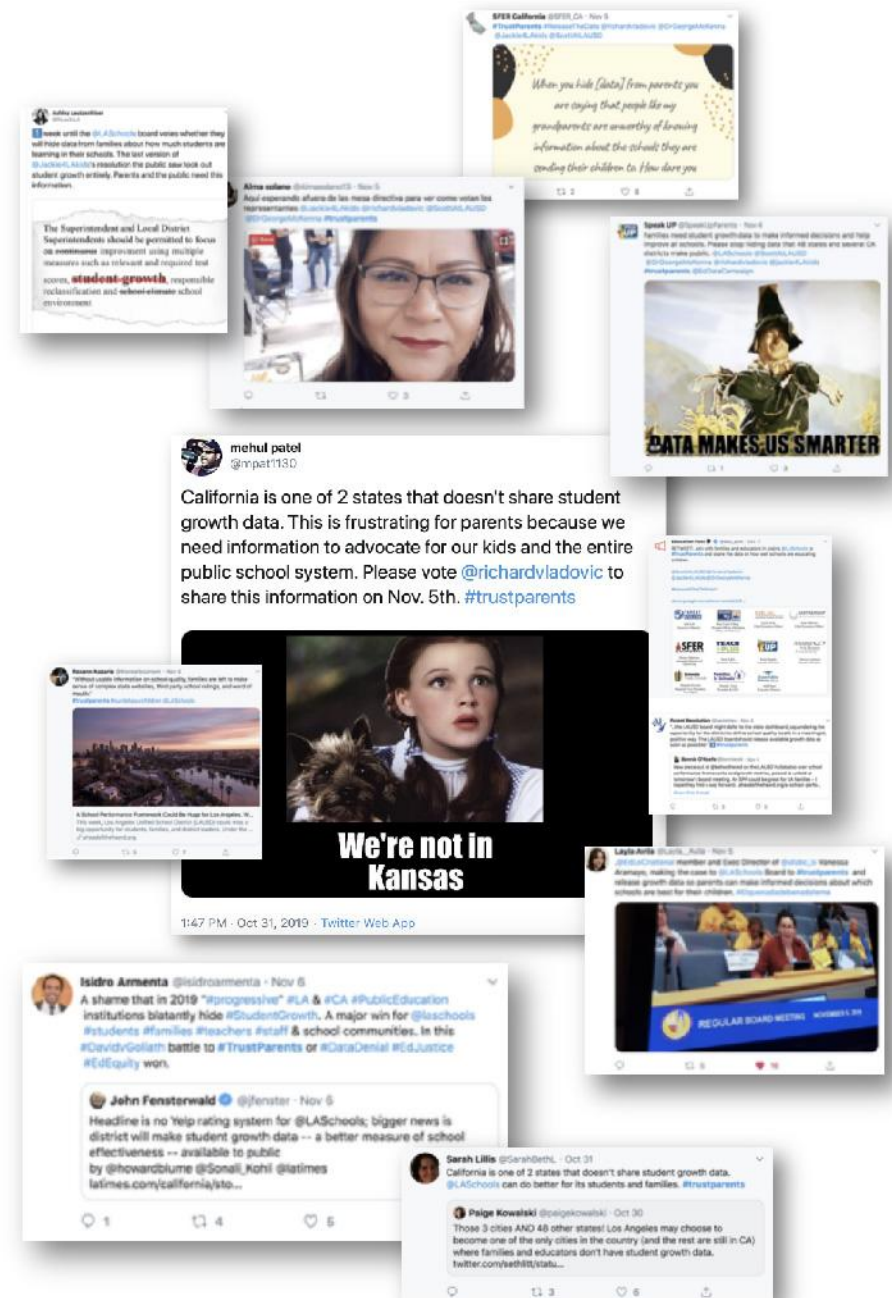
Ashley: We had clear messages that were easy for people to use. We sent out daily updates to families, which helped lay a foundation and build comfort with the content. And, once stakeholders felt comfortable with the content, it was cool to see them put their own spin on it.

Especially on social media, it was really important to be specific about our targets. We shared information about a specific board member resolution and about board members who were trying to hide student growth information. Even though it's a huge district and these are elected board members, I don't think they're used to engagement via social media.

Seth: I'll add that throughout the course of this campaign, we used a variety of communications tools for their strengths. Twitter is good for separating the direct, digestible appeal from the wonkiness. But parents and advocates were also making comments at board meetings, working with editorial boards and reporters, employing grassroots advocacy, and pursuing earned media.

"Trust Parents." "LAUSD Keeps Families in the Dark." "We're not in Kansas." Why do you think the campaign's key messages gained traction with so many stakeholders?

Seth: We learned from DQC's Growth Data report that just two states—Kansas and California—weren't committed to reporting out student growth data. We spend so much time thinking about



our local context that it was very helpful to zoom out to the national landscape. The Kansas/California comparison became a beautiful through-line for this campaign. It was just so compelling that it rose to the top and just clicked with people.

Paige: That was definitely intentional. The largest state in the union isn't using the biggest equity measure we have! Mentioning the Wizard of Oz was attention-grabbing and played upon the competitive spirit of states. The broader focus was a core value that everyone can relate to: don't leave parents in the dark. Parents want to know about their kids and their schools. People could latch onto that, even if they're not familiar with growth data or the School Performance Framework.

Blair Mann, Communications

Director, DQC: The strength was the emotional message—one that you really can't deny. Saying that growth data matters doesn't mean anything, but saying that parents deserve information means everything.



Seth: Being “kept in the dark” is an all too common feeling that families had about their children's education. There was a specific planning meeting when a parent leader proposed that this should be the slogan for their work, and it resulted in a 15-foot banner zip-tied to a fence for every LAUSD employee to see. For us, this was a campaign highlight. It's fine for us to come up with a communications strategy, but it speaks to much deeper parent power for parents to be doing this themselves, in ways that resonate deeply with their experiences.

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The effectiveness of these messages, and the overall campaign, is also a testament to how well you leveraged the strengths of local families, grassroots partners in California, and national organizations. How did you strike a balance here?

Seth: Any of us on the ground have credibility, we have local members, we understand the political context, we have local partners. But at the state level, what we don't always have is the knowledge of the national policy landscape or the staff capacity to develop our own materials. So if we're working with a national organization like DQC, it's a symbiotic relationship: what can we do that they can't, and vice versa? And then it's thinking about other local partners through the same lens.



Paige: It goes back to “meet people where they are.” Of course the data people are going to say that data is good, but what’s really powerful is when the National PTA, or AACTE, or the National Conference of State Legislatures, or The Education Trust talks about data. We want to show that we all believe in this. We work really hard to keep our partnerships alive.

Blair: Organizations like Parent Revolution can tell us where we, as people who sit in D.C. and talk about data all day, need to reframe. Having those touchpoints is important to making sure our messages are clear.

Student growth data is now available to LAUSD families, but the work isn’t done. What’s next?

Seth: Sometimes organizing is about building assets for later victories. In 2017, we didn’t have enough power to reverse efforts to eviscerate accountability, but we spent two years showing that the California School Dashboard doesn’t work for families, and we’re reaping some of the benefits now.

In LAUSD, parent leaders of the Parent Power Network are launching a campaign to engage their community, education leaders, school board candidates and civic leaders with student growth data and the need to focus on school quality and student results. They’re also working on several issues related to adequate funding and equitable use of funding.

We’re also excited to explore ongoing collaboration with DQC. There is a big opportunity to make issues actionable for families, and—in cases where national research aligns with parents’ priorities—to combine the strengths of DQC’s work with the power of organized families to change and sustain good policy. ●



CAMPAIGN PARTNERS

The following partner organizations participated in the coalition effort to support parents and hold LAUSD accountable to releasing student growth data.

*denotes PIE Network member

Alliance for a Better Community
 Center for Powerful Public Schools
 Education Leaders of Color
 Educators for Excellence Los Angeles*
 EdVoice*
 Families in Schools
 Great Public Schools Now
 Innovate Public Schools*
 Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund
 Partnership for Los Angeles Schools
 Promesa Boyle Heights
 SFER California
 Speak UP
 Teach Plus California*
 United Way of Greater Los Angeles

RELATED RESOURCES

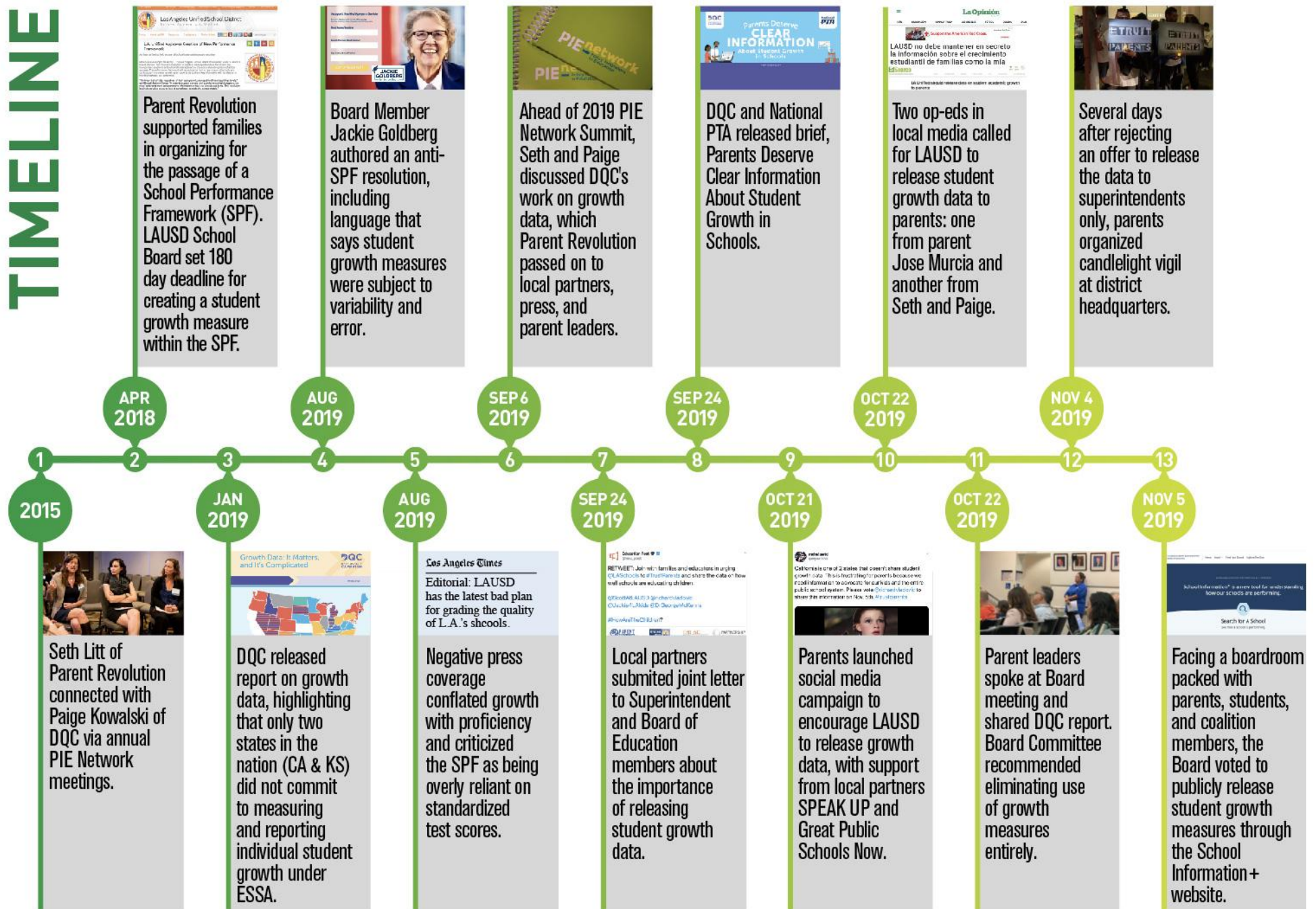
Growth Data

- Data Quality Campaign: Growth Data: It Matters, and It's Complicated
- Morgan Polikoff: On Growth Models, Time for California to Show Some Improvement
- Data Quality Campaign and National PTA: Parents Deserve Clear Information about Student Growth in Schools
- LAUSD: School Information+ tool

Op-Eds and Coalition Letters

- Paige Kowalski and Seth Litt: LA Unified should release data on student academic growth to parents
- Jose Murcia, LAUSD parent: LAUSD no debe mantener en secreto la información sobre el crecimiento estudiantil de familias como la mía
- Jeimee Estrada, Educators for Excellence-Los Angeles: LAUSD has a chance to help city's students and teachers by releasing growth data
- Christopher Steinhauser, Long Beach superintendent: Long Beach schools chief: Want to get to know our schools better? Academic growth data is a very good place to start
- Coalition Letter to LAUSD Board of Education and Superintendent Austin Beutner

TIMELINE



A hand holding a lit candle in a crowd at night. The background is blurred, showing other people and lights, suggesting a large gathering or event.

Contact the PIE Network team for connections to leaders featured or to share ideas for future resources.

MISSION: The PIE Network connects, strengthens, and catalyzes the work of education advocates across communities, states, and ideological lines. Our members are powerful and diverse champions for students whose organizations lead efforts to transform education so that every learner can succeed.

VISION: Every student, in every community, has the educational opportunities and experiences necessary to achieve a future without limits.

PIEⁿ
network