

The Work Agreement

One unchanging principle of the Parent Leadership Curriculum, dating back to its inception in Bushwick, is that parents have a right to be financially compensated for their time devoted to the Curriculum. The reasons for this are both practical and symbolic.

The nature of the child welfare system in New York City (and beyond) is that the majority of the families affected by the system are poor. The communities in which ACS's presence is most pervasive are, overwhelmingly, low income communities populated by people of color and recent immigrants: Upper Manhattan, the South Bronx, and Central Brooklyn. Many parents in these communities are motivated to learn more about this public service system, both to protect their families, and to be of assistance to their friends and neighbors. Most, however, cannot be reasonably expected to commit ten hours per week to activities that generate expenses (such as travel, child care, or time off from work), but do not produce income.

On a symbolic level, putting a monetary value on parents' time – once again, going back to our beginnings in Bushwick – was both an equalizer and a value statement. It was a way of “leveling the playing field” between parents and professionals. The professionals were being compensated for their time and effort in developing the Curriculum as an accepted part of their job responsibilities. We also wanted to acknowledge the unique and irreplaceable value of what the parents brought to the table: knowledge and insight grounded in a range of life experiences that most of the professionals had not had.

Since some of the parents most qualified to become Parent Leadership Trainees receive various forms of public assistance, or are – in some cases - undocumented immigrants, we developed a mechanism for financial compensation that would be framed not as a salary or a stipend, but as reimbursement for the parents' expenses related to their participation in the Curriculum. The Parent Leaders submit bi-weekly expense vouchers, based on the presumption that one hour of Curriculum participation generates \$10 in personal expenses. They may bill for up to a maximum of ten hours / \$100 per week. The minimal requirement for graduation is to complete all eight classroom sessions.