

Overview

Padres & Jóvenes Unidos is a multi-issue organization led by people of color who work for educational equity, racial justice, immigrant rights and quality healthcare for all.

Mission

“Build power to challenge the root cause of discrimination, racism and inequity by exposing the economic, social and institutional basis for injustice as well as developing effective strategies to realize meaningful change.” – PJU website



Constituency

- Latino/Chicanos
- Ages 13-64
- LGBTQ
- Immigrants
- Undocumented Populations

Local Conditions & Critical Issues Impacting 0-5 Childhood Health in Southwest Denver

Affordable early childhood education

Including a lack of funding for and access to early education. Pre-K enrollment rates are between 16% and 39% within Southwest Denver neighborhoods, compared to 100% in more affluent neighborhoods.¹

School discipline

Ineffective and punitive forms of discipline in early childhood education (41% of parents from Southwest neighborhoods reported that their pre-K students were suspended, expelled, or sent home for disciplinary reasons.¹

Limited access to high quality, affordable, healthy foods

Unaffordable housing

Due to low wages and rising rents.

“...in our communities only 23% on average had their 3 or 4 year olds enrolled in a preschool program versus other communities where I think it’s 98%...We saw that a lot of it has to do with lack of childcare centers in our community... it really sets our kids back academically. When they’re 3 or 4, right away we’re starting to widen the achievement gap between students of color and white students.”

– Elsa Oliva Rocha, Co-Executive Director

Key Indicators of Childhood Health in Bernalillo County & New Mexico



17% of Latino children ages 2 to 20 were overweight, while 21% were obese (3 times higher than their white peers.³ Further, 25% of Denver Public Schools pre-K children (ages 2-5) are deemed to be overweight.²

37%

of Latino children live in poverty.²



An average meal costs \$3.11 (higher than the national average meal of \$2.89), with Latino children being at the highest risk for food insecurity.²

Allies/Partnerships Working on Children’s Health

- University of Denver – Denver, CO
<http://www.du.edu/>
- Colorado Trust – Denver, CO
<http://www.coloradotrust.org/>
- Colorado Health Foundation – Denver, CO
<http://www.coloradohealth.org/>
- Westwood Unidos – Denver, CO
<http://www.westwoodunidos.com/>
- Colorado Children’s Campaign – Denver, CO
<http://www.coloradokids.org/>

Current Wellness & Safety Efforts

- **Improving Access to Quality Education**—using a holistic approach to education reform by addressing multiple barriers to student success such as: access to healthier meals; positive discipline/restorative practices (including banning suspensions/expulsions for children ages 3 to 8); access to clean water (versus sugary drinks); access to suspension/expulsion data (disaggregated by school district, race, and grade level); school policing

“...black and brown youth are suspended at higher rates in kindergarten and pre-K, at higher rates than their high school peers. So, what we’re pushing for is banning expulsions because we know that [results in] trauma... [we want to] push schools to come up with implementing restorative justice practices that are more appropriate for that age range.”

- **After School Youth Program for Latino and Asian American youth:**

“A lot of our [working] parents rely on [the Boys and Girls Club for afterschool care]...So, we’re offering [tutoring] and healthy, nutritious foods for kids...so that they can really concentrate when they’re doing their tutoring piece for 2 hours.”

PJU Accomplishments in Wellness & Safety

- **Universal School Breakfast**—in partnership with a coalition, ensured access to universal breakfast for all school children in Colorado regardless of income
- **Access to School Meals**—direct action to prevent the state of Colorado from cutting meals for 1,600 children
- **Education Research**—conducted survey on daycare/preschool accessibility and enrollment
- **School Discipline Data**—helping to end the school-to-prison pipeline by having full implementation of the Smart School Discipline Law (data collection and reporting of discipline practices disaggregated by race and grade)



Community Defined “Best Practices” to Improve Childhood Health

- **Racial and Class Equity Analysis + Leadership Development**—one of the few organizations in Denver that emphasizes race, class, and power to challenge oppressive health policies and support health justice for low income communities of color by developing strong parent and youth leaders
- **Participatory Action Research (PAR)**—collecting information and data in collaboration with parents and youth has resulted in numerous campaign and/or policy wins, as well as strengthened their organizing:

“[PAR] has made our campaigns very successful because it’s rooted in real conditions, and our parents go through that entire process, and can really demand for what’s right for our kids... the best practice is just making sure that our parents and youth are involved in every single piece.”

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Twitter: @PJUnidos

YouTube: [PadresJovenesUnidosDenver](https://www.youtube.com/PadresJovenesUnidosDenver)



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1. Padres & Jóvenes Unidos. (2016). The Great Unequalizer: How Denver’s Pre-K System Fails the Children of Southwest Denver and Other Low-Income Communities of Color. Retrieved from http://padresunidos.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/ece_reportENG.pdf
2. Office of Children’s Affairs. (2014). The Status of Denver Children. Retrieved from https://www.denvergov.org/content/dam/denvergov/Portals/713/documents/2014_Data--Lisa/Status%20of%20Denver's%20Children2014.pdf
3. Be Healthy Denver. (2014). 2014 Health of Denver Report, Community Health Assessment. Retrieved from https://www.denvergov.org/content/dam/denvergov/Portals/746/documents/2014_CHA/Full%20Report-%20FINAL.pdf