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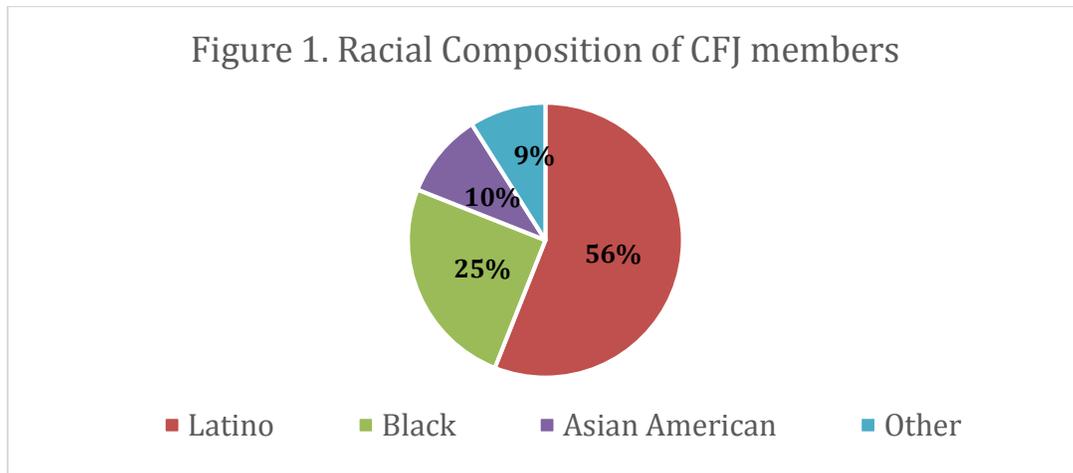
**MARCH 2016**

Founded in 1996, Californians for Justice (CFJ) seeks to advance educational and racial justice through grassroots organizing. With chapters in Oakland, San Jose, Fresno, and Long Beach, CFJ aims to promote the leadership of youth and other community members impacted by social injustices. CFJ is one of many youth leadership programs funded by the California Endowment that participates in Building Healthy Communities (BHC), an initiative which seeks to improve the well-being in select high poverty neighborhoods.

Drawing on survey and semi-structured interview data collected as part of a broader evaluation of the BHC youth leadership programs, the purpose of this report is to provide a brief overview of CFJ's youth membership and outline some of the ways young people have been involved in and benefited from this group. We begin with a demographic description of youth survey participants and lay out both how youth were recruited and why they remained in the organization. To provide information on CFJ's programming, we show how youth members participated in different types of activities. We then share how members benefited from their involvement. This report also relies on semi-structured interview data to help illustrate members' experience in CFJ and to list some of the group's recent campaigns. We hope that this report informs CFJ's efforts to continue its high quality youth programming, as well as provides insights for other programs and initiatives seeking to build the leadership capacity of low-income and diverse youth.

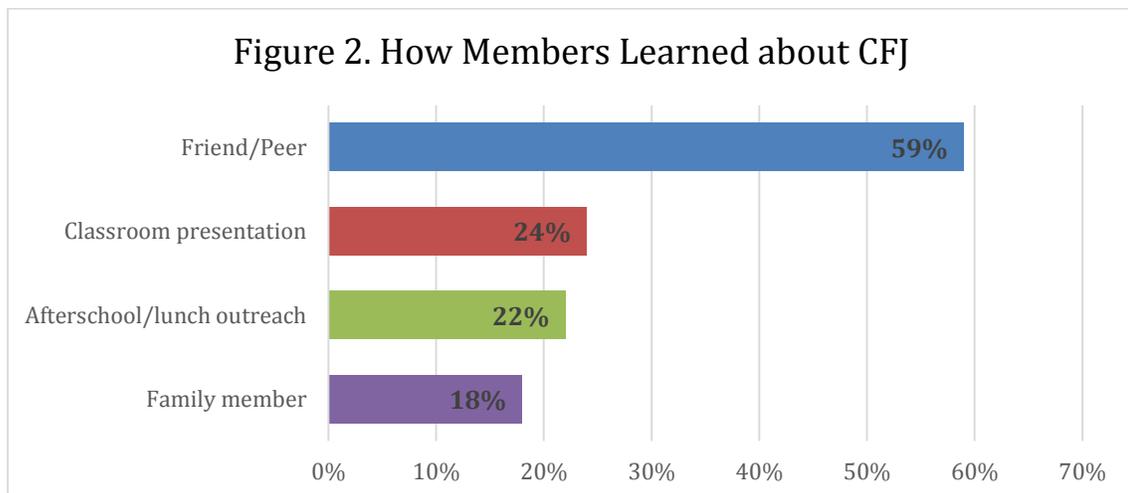
### CFJ's Youth Membership

Survey data was collected in 2014 from 68 CFJ members who averaged 16 years of age. The majority of participants (69%) are female. Most come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, as 83% were eligible for free or reduced lunch at school and only 9% were raised by a parent with a bachelor's degree. As demonstrated in Figure 1, members are diverse: 56% identified as Latino, 25% as Black, 10% as Asian American, and 9% as Other. Sixty-three percent were raised by at least one immigrant parent. The demographic background of members reflects CFJ's goals of engaging diverse low-income youth.

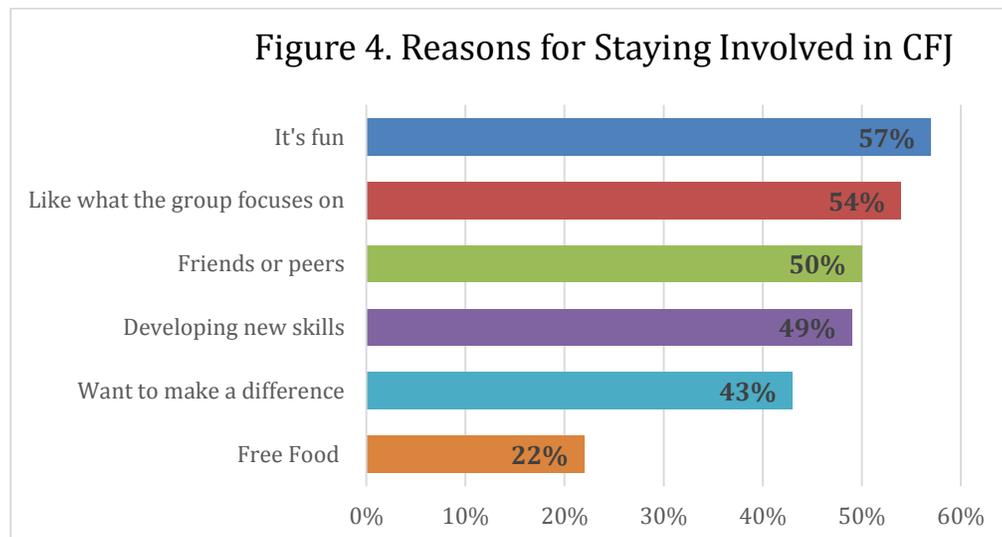
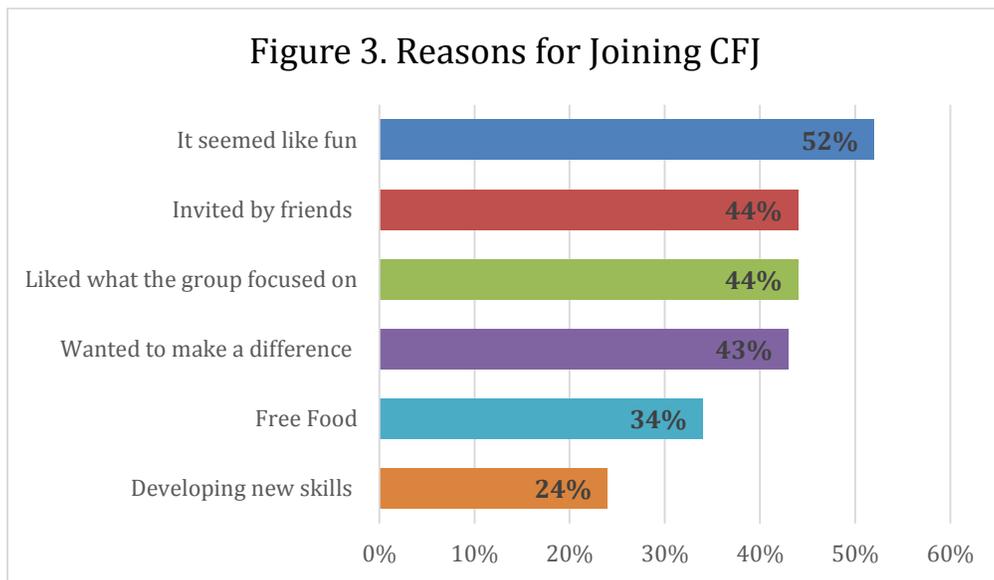


### Member Recruitment and Retention

Peers and school-based outreach play an important role in recruiting youth to the organization. Specifically, when asked to share one or more ways in which they first heard about their group, a majority of respondents (59%) reported learning about it from friends or peers (see Figure 2). Indeed, several CFJ youth leaders described how they had recruited many of their peers to join CFJ, demonstrating youth leadership in building and sustaining the organization. Many youth also reported learning about CFJ from classroom presentations (24%) and after-school/lunch outreach (22%), showing that CFJ is able to recruit students through school-based outreach.



Members gave various reasons for joining, as shown in Figure 3, and for remaining in the organization, as shown in Figure 4. When asked to report one or more reasons for staying in the organization, a majority indicated that it was fun (52%), suggesting that CFJ involves youth in interactive, engaging activities while addressing issues of social inequality. Notably, the percentage reporting that they stayed involved because they liked what the group focused on (54%) was higher than the percentage reporting that they first became involved because of the group’s focus (44%), suggesting that some young people become more interested in issues that CFJ focuses as they remained in the group. For example, one 16 year old woman stated that she had stayed in the group because CFJ filled a unique need, teaching her and her peers about “things that are real and that affect our communities, but that nobody else is talking about.”



## **CFJ's Programming**

Californians for Justice's efforts to promote education and racial justice entail building its young base through outreach, direct organizing, and leadership development; spearheading regional and statewide campaigns; and developing alliances at regional, statewide, and national levels. Its regional and statewide structure allows for multiple progressive leadership opportunities for members. Specifically, within each region, students lead regular school-based chapters where they engage peers at the school site. Meanwhile, representatives of school chapters come together in weekly student core leader meetings that focus on political education, policy analysis, and leadership development. Student leaders also represent their regions on the statewide strategy team, helping to coordinate campaigns and overall strategies between districts.

### *Base Building and Leadership Development*

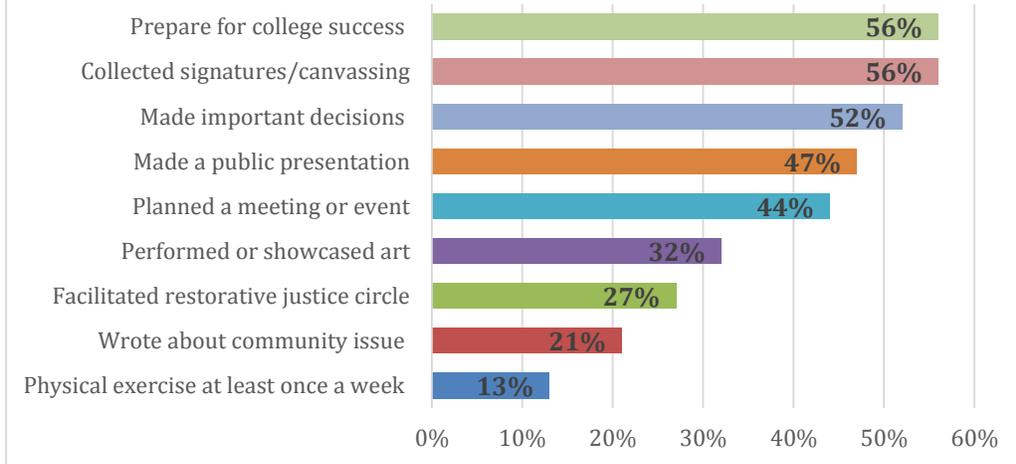
Through ongoing leadership development, CFJ works to build the knowledge and skills of youth members. Under the guidance of adult staff and the group's alumni, members participate in political education workshops that expose them to historical and current social movements (such as living wage efforts, immigrant rights, and Black Lives Matter). CFJ's involvement in LCFF efforts contributed to its capacity to develop youth's skills in engaging in school and district-level decision-making about budgets. They also receive training in skills needed for grassroots organizing, such as base-building, conducting one-to-ones, delegation meetings, planning events and actions, and public speaking. CFJ incorporates popular education techniques, and creative, youth-friendly approaches in efforts to build the leadership capacity of their members. Some of the training that young people receive occurs through an intensive summer program and a Leadership Bootcamp that takes place during the school year.

### *Members' Involvement*

CFJ clearly provides its members with opportunities to participate in a range of activities. As part of the broader BHC evaluation, we asked respondents if they had participated in any of a list of activities through CFJ. The list was based on activities commonly reported among BHC groups across the state of California. Survey results shown in Figure 5 indicate that a majority have collected signatures and canvassed (56%), as well as prepared for college (56%). This can be attributed to CFJ youth's frequent participation in various electoral campaigns as well as canvassing of support for their own campaigns. Organizers orient their members' towards college by informing them about financial aid, guiding them through college application processes, and reviewing admissions essays.

Figure 5 also demonstrates that a majority (52%) stated that they had made important decisions; forty-seven percent made a public presentation, and 44% planned a meeting or event. These responses reflect CFJ's lifting up of youth leadership in planning events, executing campaigns, and engaging in local decision-making processes. For example, one 16 year-old young man who took the lead in Oakland's advisory council recalled sharing decision-making space with adults, "who would come into the room thinking they know what's best for the students and they'd give out all these ideas, and we'd be like, 'that's not how it really happens in schools.'" This young man felt that he and his peers successfully challenged assumptions by adults and had a voice in shaping school policies.

Figure 5. How Youth Participated in CFJ



### The Impact of CFJ on Members' Leadership and Healthy Development

CFJ has contributed to members' leadership capacity and healthy development. We asked members to rate how their organizational involvement impacted different aspects of their personal development—did it have *no impact*, *very little impact*, *some impact*, or *a lot of impact*? Figure 7 shows the percent that reported that their organizational involvement had “a lot” of impact on each of the areas of personal development included in the survey. Results suggest that participants overwhelmingly learned “a lot” that enabled them to stand up for their beliefs—66% indicated that this was the case. Indeed, this belief was echoed among many CFJ participants, who noted that their participation enabled them to voice their ideas, interests, and concerns. As one 17-year old young woman from San Jose stated:

I've become a better leader. I used to be the girl who was really shy and would never speak. Even if I thought I knew the right answer, I wouldn't say anything. Now I'm leading; I'm not afraid to speak my mind, even if I'm wrong. I'm not afraid to learn when I'm wrong. I'm not afraid to take charge, no matter the situation. I'm not afraid to talk to people much older than me. I'm not afraid to have an opinion on certain issues.

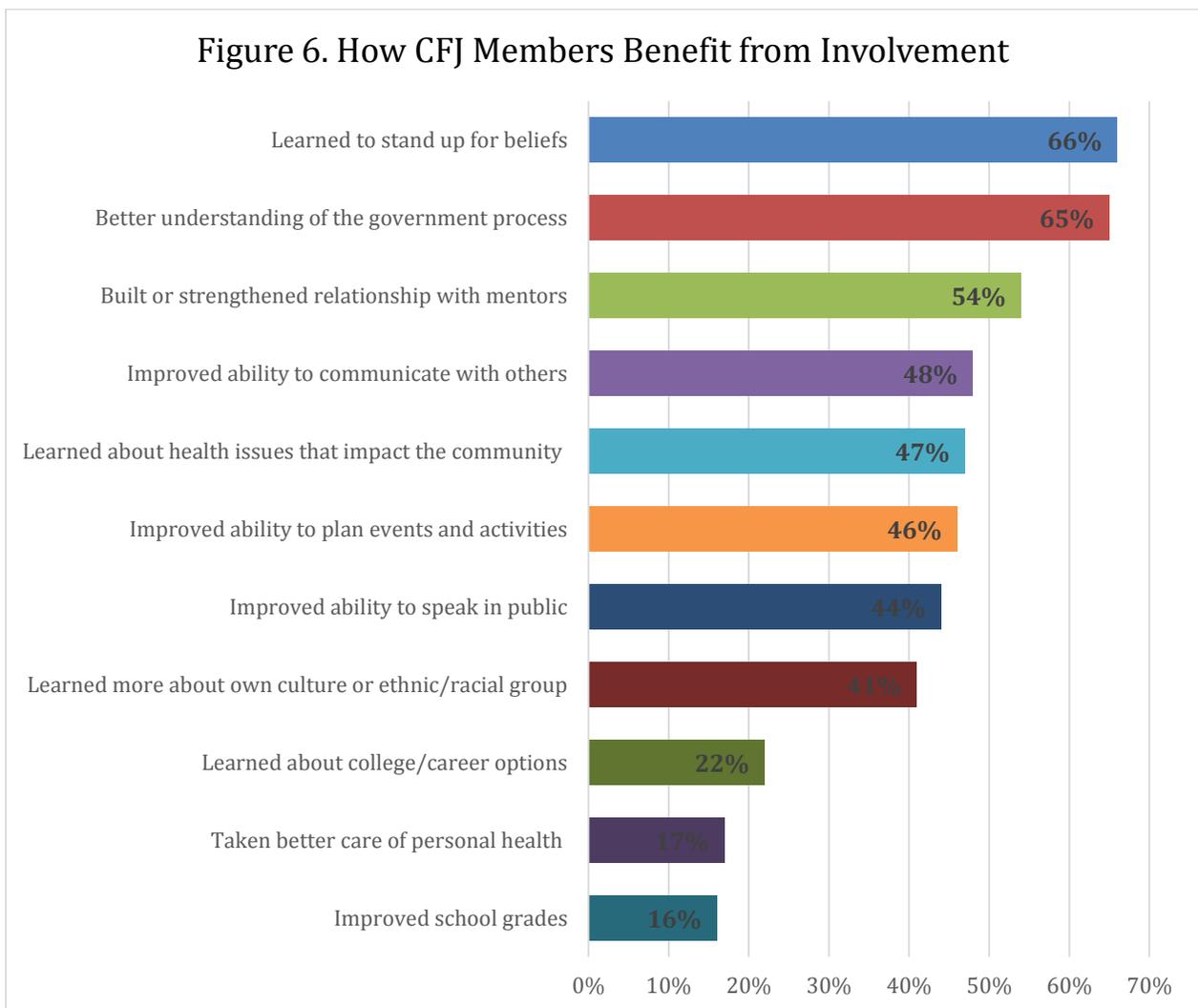
Sixty-five percent of members also stated that they developed a better understanding of how government works. Political education workshops, campaign involvement, and participation in decision-making processes likely contributed to this finding. CFJ participants described how advocacy visits to Sacramento and engaging with local government enabled them to learn about decision-making processes in policies that affected their lives.

A majority of CFJ students surveyed also indicated that they built or strengthened relationships with mentors (54%). Many described how organizers dedicate considerable time to mentorship and a holistic support system for youth. As one 17-year old young man from Oakland indicated: “If we really need help, they will listen to our problems. . . [T]hey help us out with any emotional distress we have.”

CFJ also develops members’ communication skills, as suggested by nearly half of youth surveyed. In follow-up interviews, CFJ participants discussed how they were able to engage in one-on-ones with peers and adults more easily because of their enhanced communicative skills. As one 17 year-old young woman from Oakland stated, “I’m a lot better talking to new people to grab their attention, based on certain common interests—[I’ll tell them] you care about your community, come to this event, we’re going to be talking about it, we want to hear your experience and your voice.”

CFJ members’ leadership development was reflected in their increased capacity to problem-solve, especially with issue related to education. They recalled that teachers’ positive regard for CFJ made them more willing to support students who were involved, and their access to high-level decision-makers further helped them develop the confidence to advocate for local reforms.

**Figure 6. How CFJ Members Benefit from Involvement**



## **Recent Youth-Led Campaign Victories**

While CFJ members have personally benefited from their involvement, they have also developed their capacity to lead grassroots campaigns to improve community well-being and expand educational opportunities in their communities across the state. Much of this work is done in alliances with other youth or adult community-based organizations also committed to working for educational and racial justice. In its regional coalition work, CFJ lends organizing and campaign expertise to help lead strategic planning. As part of its broader efforts, CFJ members also participate in door-to-door canvassing and mobilizations around propositions and bills related to educational and racial justice.

Statewide Campaign: Student Voice. CFJ was a leader in forming the Campaign for Quality Education, which won a major victory in equitable funding for schools with the 2013 passage of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). Following up on the LCFF victory, CFJ's Student Voice campaign sought to ensure that students will be engaged in district-level decision-making around how LCFF funds will be spent. In coalition with groups across the state, over 250 students have been trained to lead student and community engagement processes. They have met with state and local officials, testified at State Board of Education meetings, and mobilized their peers to send in testimony and attending meetings around the state.

Additionally, each CFJ region launched a campaign to institute student voice in the local allocation of funds. To date, students have successfully advocated for resources to be dedicated towards cultural competency trainings for teachers; restorative justice; home school liaison positions; psychological, counseling and mentoring services, and career-technical programs and supports. CFJ chapters in Oakland and Long Beach have won student advisory councils. In San Jose, the chapter has provided leadership in piloting participatory budgeting processes. Students are continuing to participate in district budget decision-making in advisory committees.

In order to sustain youth voice in LCFF processes, CFJ has also launched a social media campaign entitled “#FliptheFrame.” The campaign builds youth leadership to confront stereotypes and shift perceptions so that school and community leaders can view students as valued contributors and leaders.

Healthy Schools. CFJ's campaigns have often focused on school-related issues that impair students' well-being. For example, in Oakland, students organized to replace outdated school equipment and repair the school's heating/ air conditioning system. In Long Beach, students won a bathroom improvement campaign, as well as the passage of a city resolution promoting community gardens and a “Healthy School Zones” city resolution that encourages businesses near schools to provide healthy food options.

High School Graduation & College Access. CFJ has fought for educational reforms that facilitate high school graduation and postsecondary educational enrollment for low-income students of color. For example, in Long Beach they successfully advocated for an Academic and Career Success Initiative to increase college-going rates and the percentage of students who graduate with A-G college admissions requirements. In Fresno, CFJ's local campaign raised visibility of A-G requirements by requiring college access posters in every classroom. These

efforts build on CFJ’s early efforts to make A-G requirements the default curriculum in San Jose Unified School District in 2010.

Restorative Justice. Each of CFJ’s regions has been organizing to change punitive school discipline policies that have disproportionately targeted and pushed out students of color. In Long Beach, CFJ and allies won a student bill of rights and elimination of willful defiance as a reason for suspending students in LAUSD. In Fresno, CFJ worked in a coalition to encourage the district to adopt a restorative justice framework, winning 3 million dollars for the implementation and expansion of restorative justice programs as well as funding.

In summary, this research report briefly evidences CFJ’s recent efforts to promote the healthy development of low-income students while engaging them in grassroots efforts to promote educational and racial justice, and community well-being. With a 20 year track record and its efforts in four regions and statewide policy, CFJ serves an example of an effective youth development and organizing program that may be emulated in other communities.

USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity (PERE) conducts research and facilitates discussions on the issues of environmental justice, regional inclusion, and social movement building. PERE conducts high-quality research that is relevant to public policy concerns and that reaches those directly affected communities that most need to be engaged in the discussion. A faculty affiliate of USC PERE, **Veronica Terriquez** is an Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of California Santa Cruz and is leading the BHC Youth Program Evaluation. **May Lin** is a graduate student in the Sociology Department at the University of Southern California.

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For a statewide and other reports on BHC youth programs, please see:  
<http://dornsife.usc.edu/per/bhc-youth-leadership/>

