

A Resilient Community



COPAA

Annual Report 2022-2023



COPAA members help each other persevere

Michael is a 19-year-old young adult trying to figure out what he wants to do with his life.

He attended the COPAA Conference's Student Rights Initiative Symposium while his mother attended the COPAA Conference. There, he received training for students to learn effective strategies to enforce their own civil rights.

Michael's journey advocating for his civil rights started in 1st grade with his first IEP — and every year after until 8th grade. It took a while to figure out why Michael was so brilliant at math but getting bad grades. His handwriting got in his way so he started using scribes or programs to type instead. With the right tools, he successfully graduated from high school in 2021.

At this year's conference, Michael attended the newly formed COPAA Disabled Members Committee. He described this experience as "life changing," says his mom Lisa. "Those are words I have never heard him say before. There, he met an attorney with autism, one with dyslexia and several other attorneys and advocates with disabilities."

"Growing up, Michael wanted to be a civil rights attorney, but the reality of college life with disabilities was hard. His struggles with autism and ADHD resulted in him leaving college in his second year.

At the COPAA conference, something shifted for Michael. "This program showed him he CAN do it. That there is a path forward," Lisa says.

Michael is working on a plan to go back to college. He's already requested to speak with his Independent Facilitator (in CA), and is working on changing his spending plan to include an executive functioning coach and tutor. He advocated for tools he needs to be successful like a separate computer for school so he doesn't see distracting notifications while studying. Michael's now on track to finish his second year of college at his local community college this fall.

Highlights 2022

TRAINING & MENTORING:

10

students trained on leading their own IEP/504 via the The Student Rights Initiative

1,000

people trained through our Special Education Advocate Training courses, webinars and the annual conference

BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER & RAISING VOICES:

10

roundtable discussions for practicing attorney members

24

states represented by 45 members during COPAA Hill Days

30

late night discussion sessions with the Advocates Committee

36

members joined the newly formed #NothingAboutUsWithoutUs Disabled Members Committee

500

members play an active role in committees and workgroups

7,000

members receive information and support through the COPAA newsletter

70,799

families across the country receive services, support and representation from COPAA members

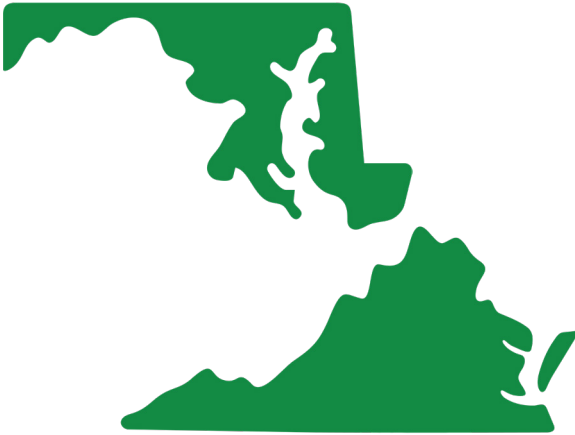
14,000

followers stay in touch with COPAA through social media



GOING TO THE SUPREME COURT: PRESERVING STUDENT AND FAMILY RIGHTS

On behalf of 12 national organizations in support of the plaintiffs in the case of LUNA PEREZ v. STURGIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS ET AL, COPAA submitted an amicus brief in 2022. The decision of that case in March of 2023 has far-reaching implications because it preserves student and family rights under all laws. The decision allows Miguel to pursue damages claims under the ADA even though he settled his IDEA claims. COPAA member Ellen Saideman represents the family.



A VICTORY IN MARYLAND AND VIRGINIA: NO MORE SECLUSION

This year, the state of Maryland and Fairfax, Virginia joined Georgia, Hawaii, Nevada, Pennsylvania, and Texas in eliminating seclusion in public schools. This is a huge win as we've been advocating for eliminating seclusion in public schools since 2009. High five to COPAA the Government Relations Committee, Litigation Workgroup, Maryland and Virginia members and our colleagues for making this happen.



CLASS ACTION LAWSUIT IN OREGON: NO MORE SHORTENED SCHOOL DAYS

As a plaintiff along with individual student plaintiffs (and part of the co-counsel for plaintiffs), COPAA was part of a team that recommended an expert to investigate and submit a "neutral expert" report on behalf of children with disabilities in Oregon. The lawsuit requests measurable and consistent statewide systemic reform to stop the practice of excluding children with disabilities from attending a full school day and encourage school districts to develop services to remedy this. A trial date is scheduled for 2024.



Raising Voices for Civil Rights

In partnership with civil rights and disability advocates, COPAA released the [K-12 Threat Assessment Processes: Civil Rights Impacts](#), a comprehensive report outlining key concerns with threat assessment systems. The rush by many school districts to use threat assessment systems as “solutions” to prevent horrible events like mass shootings has led to “an end run” around key student civil rights protections including those provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

PROFILING BLACK AND BROWN STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:

An important element of this report focuses on the increased use of abusive profiling of students of color by local law enforcement. The case examples in the report highlight the intrusive nature of threat assessment into the private lives of Black and Brown families and the families of students with disabilities.



Sacred Seeds: Growing Resilient Advocacy in Native Communities

At COPAA, we believe that parents play an important role in their child's education. This year, in collaboration with the University of Iowa, National American Indian and Alaska Native MHTTC, we tailored a COPAA SEAT Training to empower Native American and Alaskan families.

The Sacred Seeds: Growing Resilient Advocacy training

provided 11 weeks of training to **45** students from Alaskan and Native American communities across the nation. We will replicate this program and have plans to create additional trainings for Native families.



SACRED SEEDS



“The training has helped me be a better advocate for my son’s education. Before attending I felt intimidated and lost while in SAT and IEP meetings and after receiving the training I felt prepared and confident to speak up for my son’s educational rights. My son is now receiving the appropriate services he needs and is thriving in school.”
- Sacred Seeds, participant

WHY IS THIS TRAINING PROGRAM CRITICAL?

- American Indian and Native Alaskan children have the highest disability rates in the United States (5.9% compared to 1%) yet they aren't receiving the services in their IEP
- They are **1.5 times more likely** to receive services for a specific learning disability compared to white students
- They are overrepresented in the intellectual disability category, and **2x as likely to receive special education services** for developmental delays

SACRED SEEDS IS TRAUMA-INFORMED. LED BY NATIVE PEOPLE, FOR NATIVE PEOPLE.

- The Sacred Seeds team incorporated elements of the Circle of Courage into the training.

The Circle of Courage is widely used in Native American culture and has four quadrants: *The Spirit of Belonging*, *The Spirit of Mastery*, *The Spirit of Independence*, and *The Spirit of Generosity*. This program helps parents to come to an IEP team meeting and believe that "I have the power to make decisions."

*"When we feel like we belong
When we have mastery and
independence*

*Then, we are ready to help
others"*

*- Ronalda Tome-Warito
(Diné, Navajo), Sacred Seeds
Instructor*



Protecting Rights. Creating Opportunities. Changing Lives.

Everyday, COPAA members protect the rights of students with disabilities and their families across the United States. There are active members in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and several US territories. Facts about our members:

25% identify as a person of color

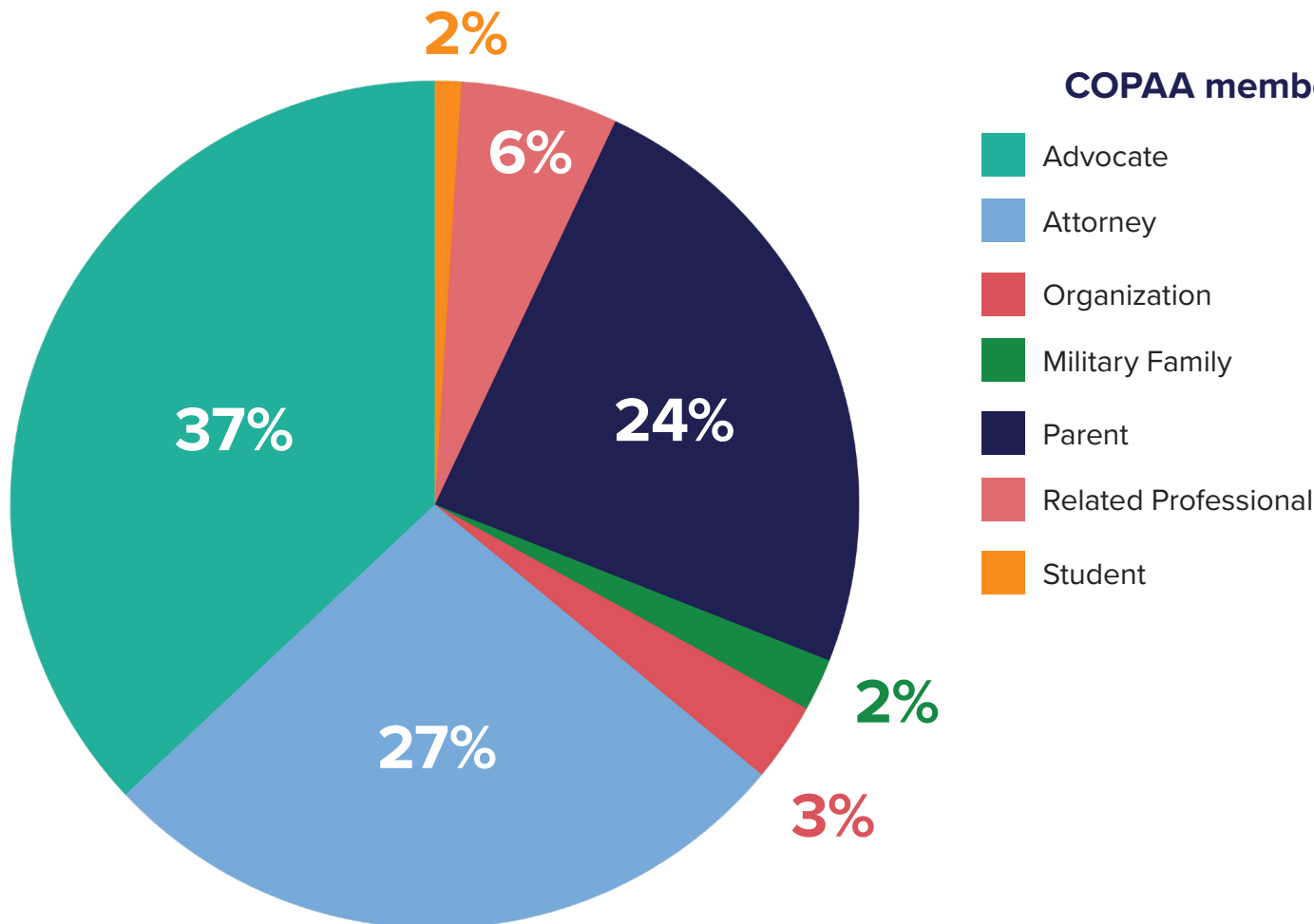
52% identify as a person with a disability

70% have a child, family member, or loved one with a disability

100% are committed to ensuring that every child has what they need to learn, thrive, and make meaningful progress in school

COPAA members have expertise with federal, state and local laws and regulations, including:

- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (504)
- the American with Disabilities Act (ADA)





A resilient community hard at work

For just one IEP, it takes a community of people to work together to ensure it's not only legally compliant but that it's beneficial for the child. Everyday, our community fearlessly stands up for children with disabilities across the United States.

WANT TO GET MORE INVOLVED? HERE'S HOW YOU CAN HELP:

- Join a committee or workgroup
- Respond to discussion group questions
- Post information on the COPAA Member Forum
- Lead or participate in a topical workgroup on issues of significance to COPAA Members
- Author a publication or fact sheet
- Be an ambassador for your friends and colleagues and encourage them to join COPAA, attend the conference, webinars, or other events

“Protecting rights is not a sunshine-filled sense of accomplishment; it is a painful process by which we deconstruct the barriers that prevent us from moving forward. Doing so day in and day out takes resiliency, connection, and strategy. That’s what COPAA provides.” - Denise Stile Marshall, CEO



Donors 2022

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Financials 2022-23

REVENUE

| | | |
|-----------------------------------------|-----------|--------|
| Donated services | \$922,516 | 44.93% |
| Conference, membership fees & trainings | \$981,237 | 47.79% |
| Grants & contracts | \$60,395 | 2.94% |
| Contributions | \$102,582 | 5.00% |
| Interest, gains/loss & other | -\$13,404 | -.65% |

Total Support and Revenue: \$2,053,326

EXPENSES

| | | |
|----------------------|-------------|--------|
| Program services | \$1,958,498 | 91.94% |
| Management & general | \$120,994 | 5.68% |
| Fundraising | \$50,634 | 2.38% |

Total Support and Revenue: \$2,130,126

\$2,053,326
Revenue

\$2,130,126
Expenses



“Attending this conference changed my life! From the kickoff dinner to the last session—the people and their journeys, the passion, the strong sense of community and vulnerability—all solidified my choice to transition to advocacy.”
 - Donna, Advocate



**PROTECTING THE LEGAL AND CIVIL RIGHTS OF STUDENTS WITH
 DISABILITIES AND THEIR FAMILIES**

www.copaa.org

ABOUT COPAA

Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates, Inc. is an independent, nonprofit, §501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization of attorneys, advocates, parents and related professionals. COPAA members work to protect the legal and civil rights of and secure excellence in education on behalf of tens of thousands of students with disabilities and their families each year. With over 3100 members nationwide, COPAA is at the forefront of special education advocacy.

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