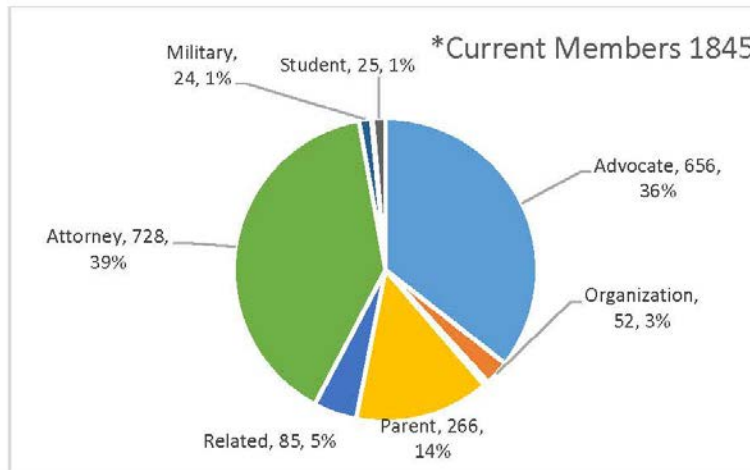




# COPAA Year in Review

2016-2017

Protecting Rights. Creating Opportunities. Changing Lives.



**52**

States and Territories Represented in COPAA



**70**

Advocate Late Night Sessions



**5,000+**

Peer-to-Peer Posts on Listservs



**252**

COPAA Members Volunteer on Committees

**80%**

Win for Parents and Students in cases in which COPAA submitted an Amicus Brief



**76**

Scholarships Awarded



**14,400**

average # visitors to COPAA Website a month



**897**

People participating in COPAA Training Events



**155,990**

Sponsor and Donor funds raised



## **Protecting Rights. Creating Opportunities. Changing Lives.**

The Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates, Inc. (COPAA) is a national, independent nonprofit organization that protects the legal and civil rights of students with disabilities and their families. COPAA is largely volunteer run. From the IEP table to the White House, our unrivaled peer-to-peer network of parents, family members, advocates, attorneys and related professionals is everywhere the voices of students and families need to be heard.

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## **MISSION**

COPAA's mission is to protect and enforce the legal and civil rights of students with disabilities and their families. Our primary goal is to secure high quality educational services and to promote excellence in advocacy.

COPAA works to:

- Enable parents to work more effectively with school personnel to plan and obtain effective educational programs for their children with disabilities;

- Encourage more attorneys and advocates to undertake representation of parents of children with disabilities in their efforts to plan and obtain effective educational programs;
- Provide advocate, attorney, parent/family members and other professional COPAA members with the practical resources and information they need to obtain effective educational programs for students with disabilities;
- Enable members to network and share information and legal resources;
- Provide training for special education advocates on all aspects of special education advocacy and informal conflict resolution;
- Provide training for attorneys on legal practice: including due process, litigation, and informal conflict resolution;
- Enable parents/family members to locate advocates, attorneys, and related professionals through COPAA's website directory;
- File amicus curiae briefs in cases of national significance.

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## STRATEGIC GOALS

In 2016 the COPAA Board approved a new strategic plan, with the following goals:

*Goal 1: COPAA will have an active community of 2,500 members.*

*Goal 2: COPAA will be a diverse civil rights organization whose membership and participation in all COPAA activities is reflective of the community of families and professionals we represent.*

*Goal 3: COPAA will expand power and reach through collaborative partnerships to assure each child eligible for services and supports has an equal opportunity to a quality education.*

*Goal 4: COPAA will clearly articulate a legal and advocacy strategy; and build the capacity to provide direct legal intervention and support on priority issues.*

*Goal 5: COPAA will remain the leading national authority and resource on educational rights of students with disabilities and their families.*

*Goal 6: COPAA will have an annual operating budget of >\$1,000,000.00.*

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## COPAA COMMITTEES



The **Advocates Committee** serves as a forum to discuss the needs of COPAA's special education/disability rights advocates. This committee provides input and direction to the other committees to assist in steering the activities of COPAA with the needs of advocates in mind. In 2016 the committee held 2x weekly Advocate late night with 70 topical sessions! The committee continues to research and discuss advocate certification and is working on building resources in the Advocate Committee - Tool Boxes, Fact Sheets and growing the network of advocates; with a specific focus on underserved geographic and diverse communities.

The Advocate Committee partnered with the Social and Racial Equity Committee on presentation of specified late night sessions. David Beinke, Naomi Grossman, Cynthia Daniels-Hall and Diane Willcutts are Co-Chairs of this committee.

**Amicus Committee.** Last year the Amicus Committee submitted 17 briefs, two of which were in the Supreme Court of the United States: *Fry v. Napoleon and Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District*. As Judith Gran reported in the annual case law review: in 2016 calendar year in the cases in which COPAA filed a brief, the win rate for parents and students was 80%!! The Amicus Committee considers requests to participate in or draft an amicus brief in those cases that present an issue or issues that are consistent with the COPAA mission statement and those specifically identified by the Amicus Committee. The issue presented to the court for a decision must have precedential value and the decision of the court should materially affect students with disabilities. Amicus information is made available, broadly, to all members. The Amicus committee keeps in mind that certain legal issues are more prevalent for certain sectors of our population and endeavors to weigh in (when it makes sense) to further the cause of diverse and underrepresented groups. The Amicus Committee continues to submit briefs, produce technical assistance documents and provide technical assistance to members in the forms of phone meetings and moot court. Committee members continue in collaborative relationships with other civil rights organizations and pro bono law firms. A sub-committee is developing a plan to develop the capacity to assess and participate in impact litigation. All Amicus briefs are located on the COPAA website at <http://www.copaa.org/page/Amicus>. Catherine Merino Reisman and Alexis Casillas Co-Chaired Amicus Committee Co-Chairs for 2016. Catherine Merino Reisman and Ellen Saideman are chairs for 2017.

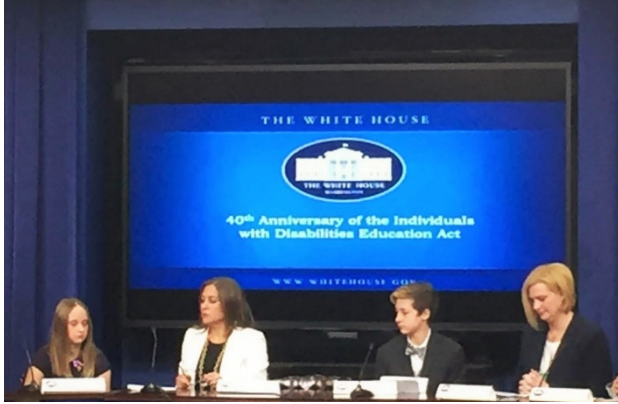
The **Attorney Committee** supports the peer-to-peer networking of our attorney members. The committee conducted a survey of members in working towards its Mentoring/Technical Support program. Information was received about what new attorneys need from a COPAA mentor. The identified needs include: state or circuit specific support; group mentoring; opportunities to shadow an attorney / observe a hearing, and in person mentoring to provide assistance on inquiries, learning opportunities research assistance and immediate feedback when the need arises. The Attorney Committee also partnered with the COPAA Legal Director on New Attorney Online initiative. The committee is currently focusing energy in moving forward a voluntary mentoring program for members that are new to the practice area and initiating a schedule of topical roundtable discussions. Jennifer Laviano and Craig Goodmark are Co-Chairs.



The **Awards Committee** is responsible for administering COPAA's scholarship programs, the Diane Lipton Award for Outstanding Educational Advocacy, and other COPAA Awards. Robert K. Crabtree was the 2017 recipient of the Diane Lipton Award in recognition of the multitude of ways in which his work has positively impacted the field. The Awards Committee is exploring the creation of an Impact Award to recognize the work of individuals who have made a significant impact in the lives of children with disabilities or the world of special education. Specific criteria to be determined, but could be in the areas of grassroots organization, innovative advocacy, direct impact, litigation, etc. Dana Jonson and Jon Zimring Co-Chair this committee.

The **Conference Committee** is responsible for the program design of the annual conference. The committee meets by conference call throughout the year on at least a monthly basis. Tasks of the committee include, among other things, design of the Pre-Conference Skills Trainings, recruitment and training of Pre-Conference Trainers, design of Request for Proposals, Selection of Proposals, location selection, keynote and general session speakers and the overall agenda. In 2016 the conference committee had our largest event yet in Philadelphia with 548 registrants, 29 Sponsors, 18 exhibitors and 9 SRI students, for a total of 604! 12 individuals received a reduced rate scholarship. Missy Alexander and Mandy Favaloro Chair the Conference Committee.

The **Development Committee** is responsible for steering COPAA's revenue and fund development. The committee provides support to all development activities, including recruiting sponsors; reviewing all potential revenue opportunities to assure alignment with the COPAA Mission; Giving Day and year round Giving Initiatives; and the Wednesday Night Fun(d) Raiser at the annual conference. Committee members provided input into submission of the National Council on Disability proposal (awarded to COPAA in July,



2016) and the submission of a Martin Luther King Day of Service application to the National Service Corporation in February, 2017. Notices are still outstanding for that opportunity. Maureen van Stone and Carolina Watts Co-Chair this Committee.

**The Government Relations Committee** participates in public policy matters at the national level, through participation on the Education Task Force of the Consortium for

Citizens with Disabilities, Alliance to Prevent Restraint Aversives and Seclusion (APRAIS) and the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, The Equity Coalition of the National Center for Special Education in Charter Schools, The Civil Rights Roundtable focused on disproportionality and school push-out, and, through additional independent legislative and other activities. In the last year COPAA released a position statement and fact sheet on Response to Intervention (RTI); COPAA was invited to testify before the U.S. House of Representatives (Selene Almazan) and the U.S. Senate (Denise Marshall) on the importance of the U.S. Department of Education issuing regulations on the Every Student Succeeds Act. COPAA continues to gain influence as experts and passionate advocates for the rights of students with disabilities. COPAA increased its access to senior Hill staff, education reporters and important civil rights allies. COPAA was very active throughout the ESSA passage; including supporting LCCHR and other civil rights negotiators throughout the U.S. Department of Education sponsored ESSA negotiated rulemaking process to strengthen provisions of the final bill and ensure regulations related to assessment, accommodations and the 1% cap. COPAA was in the forefront of pushing for ESSA accountability and limits to Pay for Success provisions. Finally, COPAA released the paper School Vouchers and Students with Disabilities: Examining Impact in the Name of Choice; holding a congressional briefing and several media hits directly from our paper as well as in depth reporting on the issue featuring COPAA members or their clients in subsequent articles. In the next year the GR Committee is focused on protecting rights and creating a network of state coordinators. Diane Willcutts and Andrew Feinstein Chair this committee. Laura Kaloi, formerly with Washington Partners and now with the McKeon Group, is COPAA's policy advisor.

**The Media Relations Committee** is a relatively newly formed committee charged with developing a strategy for media relations. In 2016 the committee developed a media kit for the COPAA website, advised on DeVos nomination press releases. Largely on issues on which COPAA is working through the Government Relations Committee we were quoted and/or interviewed on the DeVos nomination and other issues throughout the year by Education Week, The Washington Post, The New York Times, USA Today, Associated Press, Politico, and conducted outreach to media for the conference. In the upcoming year the committee will hold activities to educate and engage with the media and increase knowledge and skill of COPAA members to engage with the media on key issues of importance to COPAA. Julie Swanson Chairs this committee.

The **Membership Committee** is comprised of COPAA members from various geographic regions and member categories. The committee works on activities, initiatives and outreach geared towards membership growth, retention and expansion, identifying and addressing the needs of COPAA's members, and addressing issues related to membership policies and their



implementation. Subcommittees are established under the committee as needed to address specific needs, and currently include the Law Student Subcommittee; a Member Retention / Member Communications Subcommittee to work on decreasing attrition; and Member Engagement subcommittee that will work to support the diversity and equity related goals by working collaboratively with the Social and Racial Equity Committee. 50 individuals received the reduced rate membership scholarship this past year. Carolina Watts and Mallory Finn are Co-Chairs.

The **Parent Committee** was new in 2016. The committee was previously a subcommittee under Membership. The Parent Committee is working to formulate a plan to enhance resources and planned webinars/phone conferences directed at parents. The Parent Committee also plans to utilize the listserv to send updates, notices, and questionnaires directly to Parent Members. Dana Jonson Chaired in 2016. Elizabeth Ballart and Dana Jonson are Chairs for 2017.

The **Scholarship Committee** administers the restricted Beth Goodman Scholarship Fund on behalf of the Board. Since 2003, COPAA has awarded Beth Goodman memorial scholarships to defray conference expenses for COPAA members who meet the financial requirements and who have made significant contributions to special-education advocacy, or who have a demonstrated interest and commitment to make future contributions to special education advocacy but could not otherwise afford to attend the conference. Nine scholars were provided financial assistance (total awards: \$7000) to participate in the COPAA Annual Conference this past year. Michael Gilberg, Bob Berlow, and Amber Foote Co-Chair this committee.

The **Social and Racial Equity Committee** focuses on COPAA's commitment to consider fully the intersectionality of disability, race, national origin, ethnic, cultural and/or religious identity, sexual/gender identity/ sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, in our efforts to protect and enforce the legal and civil rights of students with disabilities and their families. This committee is working on collaborating on strategic goals for retention, outreach and collaboration with other committees; has added three pages of social and racial equity resources for the African American community, Latino/Hispanic Community, and Implicit Bias to the COPAA website resource section. Native American and LGBTQ resource pages are under development. Several documents (Advocates Voluntary Code of Ethics, RTI Position Statement, and Language Matters) are translated to Spanish and posted to the COPAA website. The SREC is developing an implicit Bias Tool Kit to be distributed to the

chair of each committee. David Jefferson and Cheryl Poe Co-Chaired this committee in 2016. David Jefferson is the Chair for 2017.

The **Training Committee** is responsible for consulting on and/or developing trainings outside of the annual conference for parents, advocates and attorneys. Recent activities include development of COPAA's Webinar Series and implementation of the Special Education Advocacy Training (SEAT) Online Training. Selene Almazan, COPAA Legal Director coordinates the New Attorney Online Training. Five individuals received reduced rate scholarships to participate in SEAT last year. In the upcoming year the committee is looking at creating an Introduction to Special Education Advocacy course. Eileen Crumm and Mark Kamleiter Co-Chair.

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## SPECIAL PROJECTS

### **ESSA Bootcamps and StudentsCantwait.com**

COPAA expanded and strengthened the partnership with the Education Trust, who leads a business/civil rights/disability coalition; receiving funding as a subcontractor to conduct ESSA boot camp training in 3 locations across the country and develop materials for grassroots advocates throughout the country. Funding is provided by the Walton Family Foundation and Gates Foundation. Over 20 COPAA members representing 8 states were included in ESSA boot camps in Chicago, Baltimore and Dallas where they were trained to influence ESSA Title I plans in their respective states. Materials have been developed to support the work that lives on both COPAA's and the Students Can't Wait websites. Members continue to partner locally [in some cases] and for COPAA, the coalition partnership with Education Trust, National Council of LaRaza, LCCHR, NCLD, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and Business Roundtable continues into 2017.

### **National Council on Disability IDEA Report Series**

COPAA, under agreement from The National Council on Disability, is conducting research for a five (5) report series. The findings in these reports will primarily serve to assist policymakers, including the White House and Congress, and state and local education agencies with insight needed to make policy decisions designed to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. Selene Almazan, Esq., COPAA's Legal Director is the Project Director and Principal Investigator. Laura Schifter, Ph.D., is the Co-investigator. Specific Topics to be addressed as part of the research include: Monitoring and Enforcement of IDEA Compliance; *report author: Candace Cortiella*; Broken Promises: The Underfunding of IDEA, *report authors: Laura Kaloi and Candace Cortiella*; English Language Learners with Disabilities and IDEA, *report author: Laura Schifter*; The Continued Segregation of Students with Disabilities, *report author: Carol Quirk*; IDEA and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), *report authors: Laura Schifter and Laura Kaloi*. The reports will be available in early fall 2017.



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Matthew Cohen, Esq, (IL)  
Eileen Crumm (CA)  
Mandy Favaloro, Esq. (CA)

**Newly Elected to the Board in February, 2017** – Craig Goodmark (GA), Kimberly Griffie Jackson (FL) and David Jefferson (AZ). **Officers for 2017-2018:** Alexis Casillas, Esq., Chair, Maureen van Stone, Esq., Vice-Chair, David Jefferson, Treasurer, Mandy Favaloro, Esq., Secretary.

Mark Kamleiter and Franklin Hickman completed terms and cycled off the Board in February, 2017 after serving on the Board for over 15 years each!

Susan Bruce, Gloria Perez-Stewart, and Cheryl Poe also served on the COPAA Board in 2016.

Sincere thanks to all of the volunteer Board for their service to the organization.

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## COPAA STAFF

Denise Marshall, Executive Director  
Selene Almazan, Legal Director  
Marcie Hipple, Meetings and Membership Coordinator  
Jamie Anderson, Membership Assistant  
Mary Fornoff, Accountant

# FINANCIAL

**THE COUNCIL OF PARENT ATTORNEYS AND ADVOCATES, INC.**  
STATEMENTS OF FINANCIAL POSITION

December 31, 2016 and 2015

	2016	2015
<b>ASSETS</b>		
Current Assets		
Cash	\$ 277,102	\$ 297,406
Accounts receivable, net	50,750	1,870
Prepaid expenses	31,559	20,453
<b>Total current assets</b>	<u>359,411</u>	<u>319,729</u>
Investments	<u>106,076</u>	96,530
Property and Equipment		
Computer equipment	3,516	3,516
Website	14,839	14,839
	<u>18,355</u>	18,355
Less accumulated depreciation and amortization	17,065	15,705
<b>Total net property and equipment</b>	<u>1,290</u>	2,650
<b>Total assets</b>	<u>\$ 466,777</u>	<u>\$ 418,909</u>
<b>LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS</b>		
Current Liabilities		
Accounts payable	\$ 17,108	\$ 13,108
Accrued expenses	21,067	12,439
Deferred revenue	225,650	244,753
<b>Total current liabilities</b>	<u>263,825</u>	<u>270,300</u>
Commitments		
Net Assets		
Unrestricted:		
Undesignated	92,738	37,900
Board designated	100,000	100,000
	<u>192,738</u>	137,900
Temporarily restricted	10,214	10,709
<b>Total net assets</b>	<u>202,952</u>	148,609
<b>Total liabilities and net assets</b>	<u>\$ 466,777</u>	<u>\$ 418,909</u>

COPAA ANNUAL REPORT ▪ 2016-2017

**THE COUNCIL OF PARENT ATTORNEYS AND ADVOCATES, INC.**  
STATEMENTS OF ACTIVITIES

Years Ended December 31, 2016 and 2015

	<b>2016</b>	<b>2015</b>
<b>UNRESTRICTED NET ASSETS</b>		
Support and Revenue		
Donated services	\$ 743,265	\$ 591,457
Conference fees, net of refunds of \$2,315 in 2016 and \$2,025 in 2015	330,665	297,121
Membership dues, net of refunds of \$50 in 2016 and \$0 in 2015	163,969	154,466
Webinar training, net of refunds of \$2,038 in 2016 and \$0 in 2015	132,926	112,428
Grants	81,731	-
Contributions	12,718	13,741
Interest and dividends	2,567	3,226
Unrealized gain (loss) on investments	7,351	(6,438)
Other	2,706	8,458
	<b>1,477,898</b>	1,174,459
Net Assets Released from Restriction		
Satisfaction of restriction	7,000	4,840
<b>Total unrestricted support and revenue</b>	<b>1,484,898</b>	1,179,299
Expenses		
Program services	1,349,324	1,107,891
Management and general	80,736	79,234
<b>Total expenses</b>	<b>1,430,060</b>	1,187,125
<b>Change in unrestricted net assets</b>	<b>54,838</b>	(7,826)
<b>TEMPORARILY RESTRICTED NET ASSETS</b>		
Contributions	6,505	7,305
Net Assets Released from Restriction		
Satisfaction of restriction	(7,000)	(4,840)
<b>Change in temporarily restricted net assets</b>	<b>(495)</b>	2,465
<b>Change in net assets</b>	<b>54,343</b>	(5,361)
Net Assets, Beginning of Year	<b>148,609</b>	153,970
Net Assets, End of Year	<b>\$ 202,952</b>	\$ 148,609