

2015-2016

COPAA Annual Report

Protecting Rights. Creating Opportunities. Changing Lives.

THE COUNCIL OF PARENT ATTORNEYS AND ADVOCATES, INC.

WWW.COPAA.ORG

The Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates, Inc. (COPAA) is an independent, nonprofit, national organization, mostly volunteer run, which protects the legal and civil rights of students with disabilities and their families. 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 parents need to be heard.

COPAA members believe in possibility for each student and support others to do the same. We are premised on the belief that every child has the right to high-quality education and an equal opportunity to achieve his or her full academic potential. States, school districts and schools have an obligation under federal and state law to ensure that each student receives an individualized education that prepares them for work, college, and participation in his or her chosen community.

COPAA is a community that works to increase the quality and quantity of advocate and attorney representation; and, through that vehicle, achieve better outcomes for the families we serve. We believe the key to accessing individualized, effective educational programs is assuring that students with disabilities and their parents are equal members of the educational team.

2015-2016 Board of Directors

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Staff

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Selene A. Almazan, Legal Director
Mary Fornoff, Accountant
Marcie Hipple, Meetings and Membership Coordinator
Jamie Anderson, Administration Assistant

Strategic Direction

GOAL 1: Increase Membership to 2000

GOAL 2: Increase Revenue to \$500,000 per year

GOAL 3: COPAA is the leading National Information Dissemination Network on Educational Rights of Students with Disabilities and Their Families.

GOAL 4: Protect Civil Rights and Promote Excellence in Education for Students with Disabilities

GOAL 5: Assure each child eligible for services and supports has equal access to a quality education.

Much of the day-to-day work of COPAA is achieved through involvement of our member community. COPAA's richest asset is our diverse and knowledgeable network. We depend on volunteer activities to accomplish our mission. Members are encouraged to contribute their unique skills and talents by serving on one of more of the standing committees. The work of the committees towards reaching the stated goals is described below.

COPAA is committed to the development of policies and activities to promote the participation of diverse stakeholders and constituents, and we encourage all of our members to demonstrate cultural competency and genuine sensitivity in representing and advocating for students and their families. We work



towards the full inclusion of persons of diverse backgrounds and identities in COPAA's leadership and membership as communicated in our [Diversity Statement](#). As part of this commitment, the Board and staff participated in a retreat in 2015 in Memphis, TN., led by a nationally recognized facilitator. Working together in whole and in small groups we considered how diversity and bias impact us in areas such as communication, policies, committees and outreach.

On day two, we took the lessons learned with us as we reviewed our strategic plan. It was inspiring to see the incredible progress we have made over the last 10 years and consider where we will go in the next 5 years. The retreat was a first step in the process as we continue to grow and strengthen COPAA. The COPAA Board is undertaking the process of revising the strategic plan in 2016.

Pictured (from Left to Right) *Back Row:* Melissa Alexander, Diane Willcutts, Catherine Merino Reisman, Mandy Favaloro, Michele Kule-Korgood, Maureen van Stone, Cheryl Poe, Matt Cohen, Mark Kamleiter, David Beinke *Middle Row:* Selene Almazan, Michael Gilbert, Dana Jonson, Jennifer Laviano, Frank Hickman, Susan Bruce, Gloria Perez-Stewart, Marcie Hipple *Front Row:* Denise Marshall, Carolina Watts, Mark Martin, Alexis Casillas, Jon Zimring. *Not pictured:* Eileen Crumm, Cynthia Daniels-Hall, Andrew Feinstein.

Amicus Committee (22 Members)

2015 Chair- Catherine Merino Resiman

2016 Chairs – Catherine Merino Reisman, Esq. and Alexis Casillas, Esq.

The Amicus Committee continues to be very active. The addition of Selene Almazan as $\frac{3}{4}$ time Legal Director provides a great benefit to the Committee and its work. Throughout last year Selene co-wrote some of the briefs that COPAA filed. We still seek to rely on outside *pro bono* counsel, but it is a tremendous asset to have Selene as the Legal Director when we have multiple briefs due at the same time.

Briefs Filed

January, 2015 – 9th Cir, *Timothy O. v. Paso Robles Unified Sch. Dist.* That case involves issues related to child find and the need for comprehensive assessment. Selene Almazan wrote the brief for COPAA.

February 2015: 6th Cir. *Domingo v. Kowalski*, a case regarding restraint and seclusion of students with disabilities. The brief was filed out of time, and ultimately not accepted, but raised issues related to constitutional protections. Selene Almazan, Catherine Merino Reisman, Leslie Margolis and Aimee Gilman wrote the brief for COPAA.

March 2015: 6th Cir. *Gibbons v. Forest Hills* COPAA signed onto a brief written by Neil Vakharia of Jones Day. NDRN, Autism Speaks, Michigan P&A were also on the brief. The issue was the denial of a transition plan for a student who was determined to be unable to benefit from a transition plan due to her disabilities. Selene Almazan and Catherine Merino Reisman reviewed drafts of the brief.

April, 2015 - 4th Circuit, *S.T. v. Howard County Public Schools*, presents an issue of profound importance to COPAA and its members because it invokes the parents' rights to notice and meaningful participation. Caroline Heller GREENBERG TRAUIG, LLP wrote the brief for COPAA.

May, 2015 - 1st Circuit *Doe v. Cape Elizabeth*. Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act a student qualifies for special education services under the Specific Learning Disability (SLD) category if she meets two basic criteria, both found in the IDEA's regulations. Ellen Saideman and Selene Almazan wrote the brief for COPAA.

May, 2015 5th Circuit in the case of *Seth B. v. Orleans Parish School Board*. The issue is one of primary importance to COPAA members: the right to an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE). Jon Zimring and Selene Almazan wrote the brief for COPAA.

May 2015, 5th Cir. *DG v. New Caney School Distr.* The issue was one of primary importance to COPAA: the ability to obtain attorney's fees and the appropriate interpretation of the statute of

limitations for filing. This case was particularly important for families who do not have the financial resources to hire an attorney and rely upon pro bono services of an attorney. Selene Almazan and Catherine Merino Reisman wrote and filed the brief on behalf of COPAA. Alice Nelson assisted in the drafting.

July, 2015 - *BD v. DC Public Schools*, COPAA signed onto brief written by Children's Law Center. The *amicus* brief offered guidance to the Court on the appropriate mechanism or procedure to enforce a favorable hearing officer decision (HOD) that parents received at the lower level. Attorneys from Baker and McKenzie assisted in the drafting and signed on behalf of COPAA. Selene also participated in the drafting.

July, 2015 - *Meridian Jt. Sch. Dist. v. M.A.*, on COPAA filed an *amicus* brief in support of re-hearing *en banc*. The Ninth Circuit panel issued its decision on July 6, denying reimbursement in an IEE case because, two years after the IEE dispute arose, the school district determined that the student was no longer a "child with a disability." COPAA argued that this construction of the statute frustrates the goals of the IDEA. Alexis Casillas and Selene Almazan wrote the brief for COPAA.

July, 2015 - COPAA filed an *amicus* brief in *Se.H. V. Bd. of Educ. of Anne Arundel County Pub. Sch.*, in the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit. The brief focused on the importance of procedural safeguards for Section 504 and ADA claims. Mark Martin and Catherine Merino Reisman wrote the brief.

August, 2015 - COPAA filed an *amicus* brief in the 2nd Cir. *L.O. v. New York City Dep't of Educ.* That brief focused on the importance of appropriate functional behavioral assessments. The Cuddy Law Firm represents the parents in that case. Selene Almazan wrote the brief with assistance from Andrew Feinstein.

August, 2015 - COPAA filed a brief in the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals in *SM v. Gwinnett County*. The *amicus* brief emphasizes the importance of LRE for students with disabilities. Selene Almazan, Alice Nelson, and Dawn Smith wrote the brief.

November, 2015 4th Cir., *SB v. Board of Education of Harford County*. Selene Almazan and Mark Martin wrote and filed a brief on behalf of COPAA regarding a student who was subjected to bullying and harassment in school and the application of Section 504 and the ADA to these claims. Catherine Merino Reisman assisted in the drafting and editing.

December, 2015 COPAA filed an *amicus* brief in the Supreme Court of Minnesota on December 23, 2015 in a case involving a "zero tolerance" discipline policy. COPAA's brief discussed and addressed how exclusionary disciplinary practices jeopardize educational opportunities and have a disproportionate burden on students of color and with disabilities. Selene Almazan wrote the brief for COPAA.

March 3, 2016, COPAA received news of a great victory in ***A.G. v. Paradise Valley Unified Sch. Dist. (9th Cir.)***. The case reversed a grant of summary judgment on ADA/Section 504 claims. This decision has language acknowledging the difference in FAPE standards under

504/ADA and the IDEA. Further, it finds that the failure to provide appropriate behavioral supports, resulting in exclusion from an educational program can support a claim for denial of meaningful access and reasonable accommodations.

The Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals issued a favorable decision in *D.G. v. New Caney Indep. Sch. Dist.*, holding that a complaint for attorney's fees was not time-barred. The time to file for fees did not begin to run until expiration of the District's period to appeal the adverse decision. Selene, Alice Nelson and Catherine drafted the *amicus* brief.

Oral Arguments

A.G. v. Paradise Valley, attorneys for COPAA at Baker & McKenzie participated in oral argument before the Ninth Circuit.

Alice Nelson argued on behalf as COPAA, as *amicus curiae*, in the Fourth Circuit in *Se.H. v. Bd. of Educ. of Anne Arundel County Pub. Sch.* COPAA's brief focused on the importance of procedural safeguards for Section 504 and ADA claims.

Andrew Feinstein argued on behalf of COPAA as *amicus* in ***L.O. v. New York City Dep't of Educ.*** COPAA's brief focused on the need for school districts to evaluate in all areas of suspected disability.

Litigation Workgroup

The workgroup developed two detailed responses to the 2013 American Association of School Administrators (AASA) attack on the right to an impartial due process hearing and called for its abolition. In 2014 the Government Accounting Office (GAO) issued a comprehensive report and found that there are fewer special education hearings between parents and schools. The number of hearings has fallen from 7,000 in 2004-05 to 2,262 in the 2011-12 academic year. The steep decline was due, in large part, to the reduction in hearings in Puerto Rico, Washington, D.C. and New York.

Tulman, Joseph, B., Feinstein, Andrew A., Kule-Korgood, Michele. (2015) *Are There Too Many Due Process Cases? An Examination of Jurisdictions With Relatively High Rates of Special Education Hearings*, University of the District of Columbia Law Review David A. Clark School of Law, Spring, Volume 18, Number 2.

Almazan, Selene,, Feinstein, Andrew A., Marshall, Denise Stile. (In Press) *Quality Education for America's Children with Disabilities: The Need to Protect Due Process Rights*. The Barry Child and Family Law Journal.

The workgroup also is about to release a publication on RTI, authored by Matt Cohen.

Technical Assistance

Members of the committee and Selene continue to provide technical assistance to members on a variety of issues, including getting an opinion published, potential retaliation claims,

exhaustion of administrative remedies in 504-only cases, least restrictive environment, and organized several moot courts.

Advocate Committee (62 members)

2015-16 and 2016-17 Co-Chairs: Naomi Grossman, Diane Willcutts, David Beinke, Cynthia Daniels-Hall

The Advocate Committee continues to be very busy and has held many regular events throughout the year. The committee initiated an Open Advocate Committee Meeting Call (Quarterly) in 2015. The 1st Meeting of 2016 was held on 02/10/16 at 10:00 PM and repeated on 02/12/16 at 12:00 Noon; on 02/10/16 - We had a very lively discussion about the support, information and training Advocates are requesting. The call reinforced the stated need for additional information about the Business of Advocacy.

Advocate Sunday Night Study Group (Sundays at 9:00 PM EST)

We continue a rotation of “Ask an Advocate”, “Ask a Psychologist”, “Ask a Related Service Professional”, “Ask an Educator”, “Ask an Attorney” for the Sunday Night Study Group. Thanks to Mark Martin, Missy, Marcie, Denise and everyone we have not listed here for joining the rotation.

Highlights:

- Diane Willcutts “Common Errors and Omissions and Anomalies in the Business of Advocacy”
- Diane Willcutts “Doing Intake with Artful Panache”

Advocate Late Night (Wednesdays at 10:00 PM EST)

Highlights

- The Power and Zen of OCR Complaints
- Ask a Psychologist with Leslie Doan
- Independent Education Evaluations
- Learning Disabilities, Other Health Impaired, Speech Language Eligibilities

Advocate Consumer Guide Sub-Committee

(Missy A, Carrie, Diane, Amber, Missy K, Cynthia and David)

Advocate Sub-Committee (joined by members Training, Membership and Development) has been developing a Consumer Guide for Advocate Training. A Statement on Advocate Training was developed in 2014. The Advocate Sub-Committee used this statement as the framework for the “Consumer Guide on Advocate Training”

This Guide is now in draft form with teams working on sections. We plan to have it ready for initial review to Selene and Denise. Our goal after review is to present to the Board for

discussion by June 2016.

Voluntary Code of Ethics – the code was reviewed and determined that did not need any changes at this time. The committee plans to have the code translated to Spanish.

Additional areas of focus

- State Level Advocate Training Resources -David and Cynthia
Continuing the conversation about training in a State or Regional location.
- Advocate Certification - The Advocate Committee continues to explore feasibility of Advocate Certification, which is a complex and monumental undertaking to consider. An Ad Hoc Group has been formed and the goal is to develop a business case.
- Advocate Retreat – A suggestion from the last conference was to have an advocate retreat during the summer. In informal conversation, it appears that idea has support. The committee will research and present possible structure to Board.

Attorney Committee (76 members)

2015-16 and 2016-17 Co-Chairs: Jen Laviano, Esq. and Craig Goodmark, Esq.

This committee is working to meet the needs of supporting “new” attorneys (those who are new to the practice of law and those who are new to special education law) as well as providing resources to our experienced attorney members.

The active Committee members are a mix of both groups. The committee plans to schedule webinars that are topic specific/interactive; using WebEx, Skype and other platforms to facilitate mentoring relationships; partnering with our Legal Director on the New Attorney Online initiatives; partner with SEAT to find people interested in helping with training and/or mentoring; and, instituting an Attorneys’ Roundtable call at least quarterly to discuss various topics.

Awards Committee (9 Members)



2015-16 Chair: Dana Jonson
2016-17 Co-Chairs: Dana Jonson and Jon Zimring

Debra Liva Named Recipient of the Diane Lipton Award for Outstanding Advocacy

At the Annual Awards Luncheon on Saturday, March 12, 2016 the COPAA Board of Directors awarded Debra Liva the Diane Lipton Award for Outstanding Advocacy. The award is given to an individual or group of individuals who have made a particularly exceptional and outstanding contribution to COPAA's primary mission: obtaining high-quality educational services for children with disabilities. [Read more information about Debra's Accomplishments and the Diane Lipton Award.](#)

Conference Committee (20 members)

2015-16 and 2016-17 Co-Chairs: Missy Alexander and Mandy Favaloro

18th Annual Conference - Philadelphia, PA



Annual Fun Run
Leader Craig
Goodmark

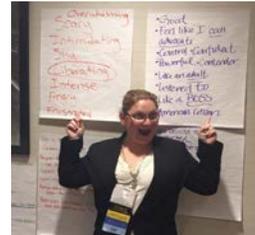


Opening Keynote:
"My name is Hasan Davis and like you, I am a hope dealer. For those of us who choose this important work, hope is mandatory; because we cannot give what we do not possess."



Assistant Secretary of
the Office of Civil Rights
Catherine Lhamon

"Our job is to make sure citizens live the promise of the law. First we seek relief for the student and then we require systemic change."



Inaugural Student
Rights Initiative
(SRI) a Success!



Recognizing
COPAA ED Denise
Marshall for 10
years of service



Wednesday Night
Fun(d)raiser a Success!!



Incoming Chair Michele Kule-Korgood thanks outgoing Chair Mark Martin for his year of service.



Thanks to COPAA Board Member Mandy Favaloro for this year's TShirt and Compendium Cover Design!



One of the many important topics covered this year in COPAA's 48 breakout sessions.

The COPAA Conference continues to grow, both in depth and breadth. The 2016 Annual Conference was the largest yet with a total of 606 attendees. We had 29 sponsors, 18 exhibitors, 9 SRI students, and 550 registered for conference. The conference included an extraordinary slate of workshops and speakers, including our keynote speakers, Hasan Davis (who so poignantly brought to life the struggles faced by so many of our nation's children with disabilities, and yet who also brought living proof and hope that these struggles are not insurmountable); and Catherine Lhamon (who illuminated the important work of the Office of Civil Rights in putting a halt to discrimination against children with disabilities). On Saturday our General Session Judges Panel provided an interesting and thought provoking perspective; and we shared a look forward to pressing issues in the Town Hall. And of course, our very own Judith Gran (who outdid herself yet again, providing a crystallized and clear analysis of the case law developed in the Circuits this past year), and our wonderful pre-conference and conference speakers. For the first time, the COPAA conference included a Student Rights Initiative, where we are working to empower students with disabilities to advocate for themselves, protecting and exercising their own rights.

Mark your calendars

2017 Conference – Dallas, TX ~ March 2-5th

2018 Conference - Monterey, California ~ March 8-11th

THANK YOU SPONSORS

Cuddy Law Firm, PC; Chamberlain International School; Law Offices of Regina Skyer; Newman Aaronson Vanaman; Feinstein Education Law Group; Baker & McKenzie; MetLife Center for Special Needs Planning; Law Offices of Adam Dayan; The Law Offices of Jennifer Laviano, LLC; Alpine Academy; Freeman Law Offices, LLC; Kule-Korgood and Associates, PC; Reisman Carolla Gran,LLP; Monarch Center for Autism; Law Offices of Mark P. Martin, P.A.; Batchis, Nestle & Reimann, LLC; Heartspring School; Law Offices of David J. Berney; The Glenholme School; Haynes Family of Programs; Bouer Law; Stratford Friends School; Professional Tutors of America, Inc.; Huntington Learning Center; Sandra M. Gumerove & Associates; HMS

School; Ilene Young Law Offices; Philadelphia Convention and Visitors Bureau; The Law Offices of Tania L. Whiteleather

Development Committee (11 Members)

2015-16 and 2016-17 Co-chairs: Maureen van Stone and Carrie Watts

The committee communicated throughout the quarter via email about ongoing projects. Some development committee members also met in person after the Saturday strategic planning meeting in Memphis.

1. Update on committee goals:

- a. Recruit new members to the committee: The committee has more than doubled in active participants.
 - i. In early October, Maureen participated in an Advocates Late Night call (thanks to David and Cynthia!) to promote interest in what our committee does, both in terms of recruiting new members and also for making COPAA members more aware of the type of activities we are engaged in.
- b. Explore other fundraising opportunities for COPAA. COPAA Participated in Giving Tuesday and End of Year Giving, and once again had 100% Board Participation in donations. We continue to explore funding from private grants and partnerships.
- c. Apply for a federal grant: MLK Day of Service Grant, next opportunity in 2017. Two pilot sites held days of service in Los Angeles and Dallas. Data from the pilot cities in our grant application for 2017. The grant requires us to then identify 10 locations/regions, where we will implement our day of service activities for MLK day.

THANK YOU DONORS

LEADERS

Andrew Feinstein
Michele Kule-Korgood
Margy Kohn
Cindy Lane
Jennifer Laviano
Mark Martin
Catherine Reisman
Anita Wong

SUSTAINERS

Fred Andresky
Raymond Ahearn
Melissa R Alexander
Selene Almazan
Susan Bardet
Lorraine Bees
David L Beinke
Robert Berlow
Jessica Brown-Clark
Susan Bruce

Judith Canty Graves
Alexis Casillas
Debra Casillas
Matthew D Cohen
Robert Crabtree
Eileen Crumm
Cynthia Daniels-Hall
Susan Farmer
Mandy Favalaro
Michael Gilberg
Rhonda Graff

Franklin Hickman
Marcie Hipple
Beth Hopwood
Dana Jonson
Mark Kamleiter
Margaret Kohn
Cindy Lane
Andree Larose
Honey Low
Bobbi Neiss
Denise Marshall

Mark Martin
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Marci Miller
Cheryl Poe
Patrick Radel
Diana Savit
Sandra Shove
Jodi Siegel
Richard and Kathleen Stile
Elizabeth Stoff

Kenneth Thomas
Torin Togut
Sharon Tropf
Joseph Tulman
Maureen van Stone
Carrie Watts
Diane Willcutts
Sylvia S. Winik
Anita Wong
Jonathan Zimring

Diversity Committee (44 members)

2015-16 and 2016-17 Co-Chairs: Cheryl Poe and Gloria Perez-Stewart

As an organization committed to civil rights, COPAA recognizes the relationship between discrimination and bias against people with disabilities and other forms or systems of oppression, domination, or discrimination based on race, national origin, ethnic and/or religious identity, sex/gender/gender identity/sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. COPAA is committed to the full inclusion of persons of diverse backgrounds and identities in COPAA's leadership and membership. In the past year the COPAA Board has addressed these issues through various means (first implicit bias/anti-racism training for board, and emphasis on these issues in strategic planning). The Diversity Committee is organized into three workgroups, including Internal Accountability, Resources, and Inclusion Planning.

The committee is working to define the scope of diversity being addressed and is targeting to work closely with other COPAA Committees in 2016-17. Part of the quest for strengthening diversity is tracking data as reported in voluntary membership diversity demographic information.

COPAA Board

Race/Ethnicity

Identifies as other than Caucasian (22%)
Caucasian (78%)

Religion

Jewish (22%)
Christian (22%)
Other (4%)
Not Identified (52%)

Person with a Disability (35%)

Parent or Family Member (70%)

Gender

Male = 7 (30%)
Female = 16 (70%)

General Membership

(56% response rate, percentages below are based on the sample responding)

Race

Caucasian	71%
Other/Multi (see list)	15%
Not Identified	14%

Parent or Family Member 75%

Person with a Disability 30%

Religion

Christian	39%
Jewish	10%
Other	5%
No Religion	10%
Not Specified	36%

Gender

83%
17%

Government Relations (22 Members)

2015-16 and 2016-17 Co-Chairs: Andrew Feinstein and Diane Willcutts

COPAA is the nation's leading authority on protecting and enforcing the legal and civil rights of children with disabilities, and believes that this work is essential to the success of *every student* with a disability. Between March 2015 and February 2016 COPAA achieved several key strategic public affairs and public policy goals which have both directly impacted the federal policy affecting children with disabilities and supported the Mission of the organization, including significantly raising the profile of COPAA. The goals which provide a framework to COPAA's policy work and targeted agenda are:

- Be the lead voice and key advisor to the White House, federal agencies, and to Congress and their staff on the legal and civil rights of children with disabilities as they relate to all federal legislative and regulatory matters;

- Create federal and targeted state policy momentum and support for key legislative and policy objectives as well as oppose and neutralize efforts that infringe upon the legal and civil rights of children with disabilities; and,
- Initiate meaningful and purposeful ways to inform and engage its membership and for COPAA to speak to the education policy press, bloggers and social media audiences to advance the organization's Mission.

The following summary intends to highlight the many ways that COPAA, in partnership with Washington Partners LLC, is leading and influencing federal legislative and regulatory activities resulting in demonstrable outcomes for the organization and the children it serves.

Executing a strategic education policy plan for the 114th Congress

- Conducted [at least] one annual strategic planning meeting to ensure COPAA sets goals and executes strategies to accomplish them including the following:
 - Initiated and invited to participate as key advisor to officials at the White House and the Administration. COPAA staff and advisors met with:
 - Roberto Rodriguez, Director of Education Policy, Amy McIntosh and other staff at the White House and U.S. Department of Education which resulted in the COPAA standing firm with the civil rights, business and disability communities to help influence the accountability and assessment provisions in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) reauthorization.
 - John King, Deputy Secretary, and now Acting Secretary, U.S. Dept. of Education – regarding ESEA and civil rights of students with disabilities.
 - Assistant Secretary, Office of Civil Rights, Catherine Lhamon—resulted in COPAA being asked to meet frequently on civil rights issues. The Asst. Sec. will also speak at COPAA's annual meeting-2016.
 - Assistant Secretary, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Michael Yudin – resulted in COPAA knowing about pending regulatory action, federal/state activities (e.g. regulations on: inclusive PreK; standards-based IEPs; Disproportionality).
 - Director, Special Education, Melody Musgrove – resulted in numerous invitations to speak, listen and participate in policy meetings (e.g. Dyslexia guidance).
 - Maria Towns, Disability Liaison to the President Obama which resulted in strategic discussions about the Administration's commitment to taking action on seclusion and restraint, bullying and other disciplinary issues impacting students with disabilities.
 - Led disability advocacy community activities in the 2015 reauthorization of the ESEA
 - Building on the work reported early last year, COPAA continued to play a key role with the business, civil rights and disability coalition which worked together and in tandem with the ESEA civil rights coalition forming a unified voice on accountability, assessment and transparency for all students in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Together, we:

- Conducted over 100 Hill visits between March and October to establish presence and influence, this included working directly with both Ranking Members and several Members/staff to provide data and information in support of major issues and priorities (e.g. Sen. Murphy (D-CT), Seclusion and Restraint; Sen. Franken (D-MN), Computer-Adaptive Testing; Sen. Warren (D-MA); Accountability, Sen. Baldwin (D-WI), N-size;
- Reviewed, vetted and helped Members and staff negotiate key provisions in the bicameral bill between the House and Senate including protecting key provisions from the Senate bill (e.g. 1% cap; accountability among others).

Note: COPAA was intensely involved in assuring final ESSA language on the alternate standards, alternate assessment, alternate diploma and accountability reflected the primary protections needed for students with disabilities. Also, the partnership with the civil rights and business community is an historic first in a major education reauthorization and COPAA is well-positioned to further strengthen these partnerships.

- COPAA's role was acknowledged by Ranking Member Patty Murray on the Senate Floor. She also sent a personal note thanking COPAA for the 'expertise, advocacy and hard work exhibited throughout the process.'
- COPAA testified as a critical witness during the first House Education and the Workforce Committee oversight hearing on ESSA implementation in February 2016.
- Strategized outreach to the press and create new partnerships to expand COPAA's impact
 - COPAA continues to be called to comment with regard to key education policy issues regarding ESSA, IDEA guidance and regulations (e.g. Inclusive Pre-K, dyslexia guidance, standards-based IEPs guidance, discipline, communication devices guidance and more). The publications and blogs include: *Politico*, *Education Daily*, *Special Education Weekly*, *Disability Scoop*, *Education Week* and various local/state venues.

Building Member support for COPAA's agenda and providing direct lobbying services

- Led the development of policy recommendations to Congress on the following federal laws:
 - **The Higher Education Act:** Hearings have been conducted in the Senate and discussions will continue although final action is not expected in an election year. COPAA worked directly with Senator Casey (D-PA) to develop a letter to the U.S. Department of Education asking them to more fully expand a required survey conducted in higher education to help provide more comprehensive information for young adults [and their parents] exploring college options so they understand which colleges provide the best access to accommodations and rates of successful completion. COPAA also supports efforts targeting transition from high school to post-secondary education programs designed specifically for students with intellectual disabilities.
 - **Annual Appropriations process:** COPAA works annually [with several coalitions] to conduct Hill visits on efforts to expand funding to IDEA and Title I.

- **Disciplinary Practices:** The COPAA policy and legal team work together and with the civil rights community to attend meetings, respond and collaborate with the U.S. Department of Education Office For Civil Rights and U.S. Department of Justice on discipline issues including: bullying, harassment, suspension, expulsion and seclusion and restraint. There is an effort in 2016 to strengthen current guidance on discipline with regard to students with disabilities and to have The White House bring more attention to the issue of abuses and their disproportionate impact on students with disabilities.
- Supported and coordinated introduction of key bills central to COPAA's agenda
 - **2015:** Rep. VanHollen (D-MD) introduction of the *IDEA Full Funding Act*, Rep. Beyer (R-VA) introduction of *The Keeping All Students Safe Act*, Senator Chris Murphy (D-CT) introduction of *The Every Child Counts Act* and Senator Casey (D-PA) *Empowering Parents and Students Through Information Act*. As a result, an amendment to include language in ESSA supporting the 1% cap and protecting access to a regular high school diploma as well as a requirement for state Title I plans to show how they will reduce the use of aversives (e.g. seclusion and restraint) were included in ESSA.
 - COPAA is a lead partner and actively engaged in APRAIS – the coalition formed to assure that federal law addresses the egregious practice of seclusion and restraint. Senator Chris Murphy is preparing to introduce a bill and work continues on the House Keeping All Students Safe Act (KASS). The goal is to create awareness that states must do more to protect children in K-12 settings and that the ESSA provision, while a foothold, is not sufficient without passage of additional federal oversight and protections.
- i. **Providing ongoing strategic consulting to extend the impact of COPAA**
 - Monitored, reviewed and advised on other bills and key regulatory activities including:
 - Opposed the reauthorization of the DC voucher law due to use of federal funds while severing IDEA rights for participating students.
 - Provided comments to U.S. Department of Education on:
 - Family Engagement regulations
 - Standards-Based IEPs
 - Dyslexia guidance
 - Workforce Investment Opportunity Act implementing regulations with regard to the transition of youth from school to competitive, integrated employment
 - Inclusive Pre-K guidance
 - Led and participated in coalitions to assure recommendations to Congress and the Administration are consistent with COPAA policies
 - Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD)
 - Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights (LCCHR)

- Dignity in Schools
- Alliance to Prevent Restraint, Aversive Intervention, and Seclusion (APRAIS)
- Coalition for Teacher Quality

ii. **Supporting advocacy training and updating web materials for COPAA membership**

In 2016-17 COPAA will continue to target its policy and advocacy resources toward two important policy areas that represent COPAA's priorities, pose as opportunities to build on its core strength, and address potential challenges to students with disabilities and their families.

The Priority Policy issues for 2016-2017 are:

- Assuring equity for students with disabilities, especially students of color
- Improving outcomes for students with disabilities
- Protecting student and parent rights
 - Protecting and strengthening due process rights
 - Restoring expert witness fees
 - Restoring attorney's fees for parents when the case settles
 - Rebalancing the burden of proof , and
- Preventing the use of seclusion and restraint in schools (HR 927 + ESSA's new foothold).

We will continue to work on key issues such as (but not limited to):

- Creating strategic partnerships in key states to help parents and advocates influence **ESSA** Title I planning (e.g. Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, National PTA, Urban League, Education Trust etc.)
- Monitoring and influencing state implementation of new ESSA
- **Pay For Success:** prevent state use of funds that have negative impact on states' responsibility for Child Find and FAPE.
- **IDEA:** Although amending IDEA is not expected in 2016, COPAA has identified critical provisions of IDEA that the organization would like to protect, strengthen, or change in order to plan well ahead of any IDEA reauthorization or other attempt to amend or alter the law in the coming year. Efforts are underway to address these issues in whole or in part.
- **HEA:** In 2014, COPAA contributed to the development of draft bills to reauthorize the Higher Education Act (HEA) which may be discussed this year. Issues of interest to COPAA include:
 - Accessibility of instructional materials, access to accommodations,
 - Transition to post-secondary education for students with disabilities, including students with intellectual disabilities,
 - Teacher quality provisions and grant programs, and,
 - High-quality teacher preparation in qualified post-secondary institutions to ensure effective instruction for all students, including those with disabilities.
- **Perkins:** The Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Perkins) may be considered by Congress this year. COPAA has submitted key priorities for this reauthorization including:

- Promoting inclusion in career and technical education training and align with *Olmstead v. L.C.* and the **Workforce Investment Opportunity Act (WIOA)** to promote elimination of subminimum wage jobs,
- Ensuring access to accommodations in career and technical education, and,
- Supporting transition planning and other key aspects of IDEA/WIOA.
- **Other Key Issues:**
 - Vouchers (COPAA Paper to be Disseminated in 2016, HR 10/S.171)
 - Charter Schools (continue work with The National Center for Special Education in Charter Schools Equity Coalition), and
 - Accessibility to published works (Seek ratification of the Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for People Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired or Otherwise Print Disabled).

Media Relations (6 members)

2015-16 Co-Chairs: Susan Bruce and Julie Swanson

2016-17 Co-Chairs: Vacant and Julie Swanson

In an effort to put a “face” on COPAA’s mission and cause, the Media Relations Committee has focused on publishing “Our Stories” to the COPAA website and articulating key messaging. COPAA members who have shared a story help us to further put a “face” on what COPAA does and who COPAA serves. The story can be one of successful advocacy, on the success for a student with a disability, or one that describes what a student/ parent has gone through to acquire a FAPE for a student.

Another strategy for MR Committee is to enhance information about the leadership of COPAA on the website. Board Member bios and pictures will be added soon. The committee has also created draft for guidelines for the story submissions and as well as a draft media relations kit. Below are key messages that COPAA Media Relations committee seeks to reinforce; and, which as a set, frame a strong positioning of the organization.

1. Civil Rights for Children

- a. COPAA advocates for the equal rights of all children.
- b. Protecting legal rights/enforcing civil rights.
- c. Changing the trajectory of children’s/students/families lives.

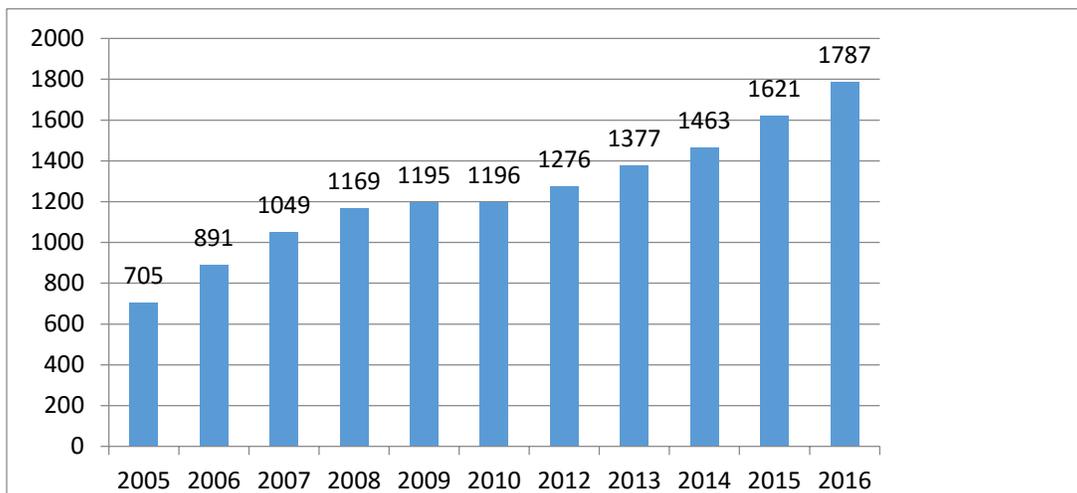
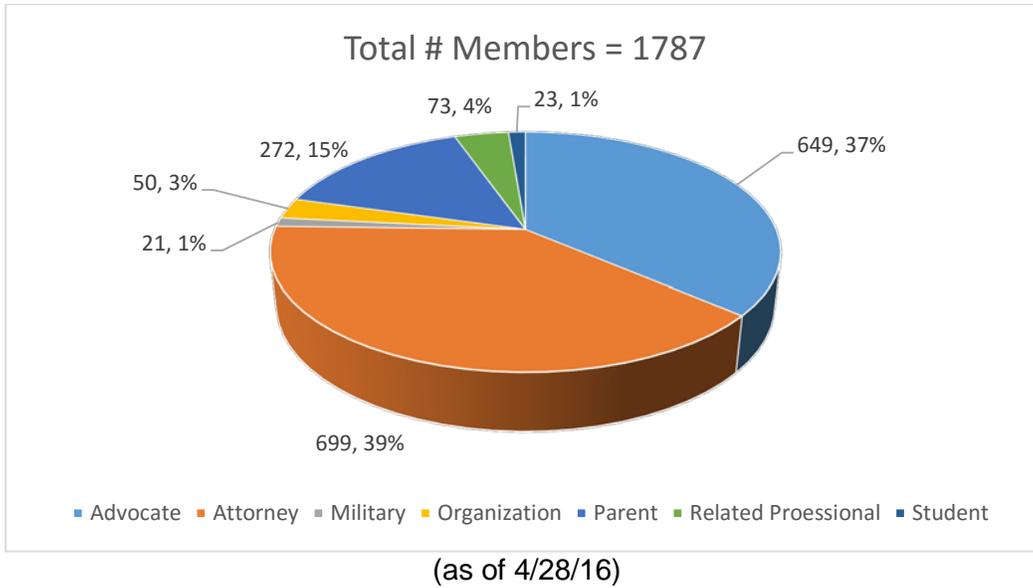
2. COPAA Success Stories

- a. Emphasize contributions of children w/disabilities.
- b. Focus on kids, parents, and families: “this is COPAA.”
- c. Shows impact of gaining access to quality education.
- d. Contribute/productive/success vs. needy, entitled, burdensome.

3. Unrivaled peer-to-peer network

Membership Committee (19 Members)

2015-16 Co-Chairs: Carolina Watts and Missy Alexander
2016-2017 Co-Chairs: Carolina Watts and Susan Bruce



Activities / updates:

Over the past year, one focus has been on gathering information regarding how to better address the needs of members in various categories. Multiple surveys have been disseminated and in the coming year, this information will help guide strategic goals.

Parent Subcommittee: The parent subcommittee, led by Dana Jonson is actively soliciting input from the parent members via a survey and the conference meet and greet. In March the Parent subcommittee was formally approved as a full standing committee by the Board. Chairs of the Parent Committee for 2016-17 are Dana Jonson and Kim Chen.

Organizational Membership: The committee discussed the possibility of restructuring organizational membership to allow for different price points based on size of the organization. Currently, any organization of any size can join for \$475 per year and have all of their staff included under that umbrella. The committee recommended, and the Board approved, a new rate structure by size that will be announced and put into effect in 2016.

Reducing member attrition: The strategic goal is to reduce to a norm of 25%. In 2013 the attrition rate was 33%, and in 2014 it was 26%. The committee is considering ways to gather additional data from members, specifically new members, on their reasons for joining COPAA as a way to identify potential reasons for attrition. The committee chairs review monthly membership data as reported, specifically the number of new members and the number of members who haven't renewed. Trends remain the same as to the ebb and flow across all membership categories. The committee will continue to outreach to all member categories and the Diversity, Advocate, and Attorney committees.

Publications (17 Members)

2015-16 Co-Chairs: Alexis Casillas & Catherine Merino Reisman
2016-2017 Chairs: Vacant

The publications committee is working on three main projects this year. One is a Judges Database to keep track of decisions and trends. The other two include:

- A. CHECKLISTS: The publications committee has published the following documents on the COPAA website
 - a. Attorney's Fees Checklist
 - b. IEE Checklist
 - c. Behavior Checklist
 - d. IEP Checklist
 - e. Due Process checklist

- B. Response Letter Book. This will include 40+ Letter of response for common scenarios, such as Independent Evaluations, Assessment timeframes / delays, Grades / Grading Standards, Need Services (OT, Orientation and Mobility, Behavior FBAs and BIPs, Need for Counseling or Therapy, Manifestation Determination, Suspension, Placements, and much more.

Scholarship Committee (4 members)

2015-16 Chair: Vacant

2016-2017 Chairs: Michael Gilberg, Bob Berlow, Amber Mintz

The scholarship committee awarded 9 scholarships to COPAA members under the Beth Goodman Scholarship for the 2016 COPAA Conference in Philadelphia. Awardees included members from parent, advocate, student and attorney member categories. 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. The scholarship honors the memory of Beth Goodman, a member of the COPAA Board until her death in 2002. Beth was an outstanding attorney who dedicated her life to fighting for the rights of students with disabilities in Washington D.C.

Training Committee (12 Members)

2015-16 Co-Chairs: Eileen Crumm and Mandy Favaloro

2016-17 Co-Chairs: Eileen Crumm and Mark Kamleiter

Webinars

Four series were put in place to take place over the summer and fall through mid-November.

Series 1: Parent Rights and Advocacy Strategies for IEP meetings. (7 sessions)

Series 2: Trauma (2 sessions)

Series 3: Addressing Behavioral and Emotional Needs of Students (7 sessions)

Series 4: Legal Issues that Impact Special Education (7 sessions)

There were approximately 10 individual registrations for series and 32 subscriptions.

Subscriptions are by far preferred. New webinars series will be developed for the Spring/Summer 2016.

Online Trainings

The New Attorney training finished on December 10th. The class had 24 students and was well received.

SEAT is currently running two online training cohorts simultaneously in order to accommodate 80 students. SEAT Cohort 5 will be offered in the Fall of 2016. Registration will be announced in June, 2016.

Thank you to Our Volunteers

Melissa Alexander, Sandra Alperstein, Pat Alvarez, Julia Amerongen, Diane Arbesman, Barbara Armstrong, Nigel Atwell, Greta Bailey, C. Lara Bakshi, Nikki Barner, Jana Barnett, Sabrina Bazemore, Michelle Becker, Lorraine Bees, David Beinke, Robert Berlow, Amy Betts, Sheri Bianchin, Melissa Bilash, Kanako Blondet, Ginny Bobby, Kelley Bond, Catherine Borzi, Allison Boscarine, Michael Breeskin, Mary Broadhurst, Susan Bruce, Christine Bruno, Jill Calian, Gregory Cangiano, Jennifer Carlin, Alexis Casillas, Jackie Chadwick, Robin Chalker, Kimberly Chen, Angela Cleveland, Jennifer Coco, Anton Cohen, Matthew Cohen, Kimberly Coleman, Jackie Coleman, Alicia Coleman-Clark, Julia Conlin, Natalie Cooper, Eileen Crumm, Marney Cullen, Lynn Dalton, Cynthia Daniels-Hall, Rebecca Dauterive, Sarah Davis, Deb Davis, Samantha Davis, Gina Decrescenzo, Sharman Dennis, Mimi Desjardins, Cheryl Dispoto, Brianne Dotts, Mary Eaddy, Barbara Ebenstein, Paul Eisenberg, Trevor Eisenman, Antony Eminowicz, Jamie Epstein, Matthew Famiglietti, Mandy Favaloro, Andrew Feinstein, Faith Filiault, Ann Marie Fitzpatrick, Mike Flom, Amber Foote, Robyn Forbes Drucker, Rita Ford, Kim Foster, Hadassah Foster, Suzanne Francisco, Jennifer Frankola, Michai Freeman, Dayna Sabrina Friduss, Betsy Gamse, David Garcia, Bonnie Garza, Amanda Gasparonis, Julie Gaughran, Louis Geigerman, Noelle Giesse, Michael Gilberg, Joseph Glazer, Heather Gogola, Tal Goldin, Craig Goodmark, Peggy Goulding, Judith Gran, Jessica Grauer, David M. Grey, Naomi Grossman, Michele Gruba, Allison Gurley, Tenesia Hall, Michelle Hall, Michelle Hall, Christopher Hamilton, Kirstin Hamman, Dan, Harris, Franklin Hickman, Peter Hoffman, Beth Hopwood, Gabriela Huber, Jehmal Hudson, Felicia Hurewitz, Vanessa Jachzel, Alyssia James, David Jefferson, Nicole Jimerson, Catherine Johnson, Anya Johnson, Christopher Jonas, Dana Jonson, Mark Kamleiter, Brad Kauffman, Sonja Kerr, Michael Kinser, Missy Koslosky, Michele Brady Kowalski, Melissa Krishock, Michele Kule-Korgood, Marissa LaVette, Jennifer Laviano, Matthew Lehman, Barry Levine, Marcie Lipsitt, Debra Liva, Honey Low, Susan Luger, Patricia Luker, Tom Lundy, Andrea Macintire, Leslie Seid Margolis, Raja Marhaba, Mark Martin, Laurie Martucci, Sara Mauk, Ellen Mavriplis, Marilyn McClure, Danielle McGee, Kerry McGrath, Gerry McMahan, S Medlock, Ann Mergler, Martha Millar, Nicole Miller, Cheryl Miller-Bannister, Nicholle Mineiro, Felicia Miyakawa, Cynthia Moore, Goviana Morales, Alice Nelson, Richard O'Meara, Daysi Ortiz, Gail Parker, Piper Paul, Maia Pawooskar, Mary Peitso, Gloria Perez-Stewart, Deborah Pergament, Nancy Perkins, Lauren Peterson, Dorene Philpot, Jill Pinto, Cheryl Poe, Linda Pratt, Claudia Pringles, Dinah Rainey, Sharon Ramage, Teresita Ramos, Barbara Ransom, Janne Reisch, Catherine Reisman, Erin Richardson, Surisa Rivers, Felicia Rosen, Kathleen Ross-Kidder, John Rue, Judith Ruffulo, Paula Rule, Mary Ruppert, Ellen Saideman, Nicole Saldana, Jennifer Sang, Jeffrey Sankey, Michele Scavongelli, Matt Schefflen, Brad Schlossberg, Sharon Scipio, Lynn Scull, Heather Selick, Kristie Sepulveda-Burchit, Sande Shamash, Mary Sheridan, Denise Smith, Wayne Steedman, Betsy Stevens, Chan Stroman, Margaret Suter, Julie Swanson, Diane Taranto, Shifra Tarica, Andrea Tate, Holly Terrell, Sonya Toma, Sonya Toma, Erin Toponce, Taylor Tremel, Maureen van Stone, Mary Waghorne, Victoria Wagnerman, Monica Watts, Carolina Watts, Stephanie Weigel, Andrew Weisfeld, Lynne Weissmann, Michelle Weltman, Tania Whiteleather, Diane Willcutts, Nikki Woods, Mark Woodsmal, Romina Yamini, Bryan Young, Anne Zachr, Renay Zamloot, Loretta Zayas-Revai, Susan Zeiter, Jonathan Zimring

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

December 31, 2015 and 2014

	2015	2014
ASSETS		
Current Assets		
Cash	\$ 297,406	\$ 352,975
Accounts receivable	1,870	1,849
Prepaid expenses	20,453	18,280
Total current assets	319,729	373,104
Investments	96,530	-
Property and Equipment		
Computer equipment	3,516	3,516
Website	14,839	11,844
	18,355	15,360
Less accumulated depreciation and amortization	15,705	13,828
Total net property and equipment	2,650	1,532
Other Asset		
Deposit	-	200
Total assets	\$ 418,909	\$ 374,836
LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS		
Current Liabilities		
Accounts payable	\$ 13,108	\$ 10,540
Accrued expenses	12,439	9,799
Deferred revenue	244,753	200,527
Total current liabilities	270,300	220,866
Commitments		
Net Assets		
Unrestricted	137,900	145,726
Temporarily restricted	10,709	8,244
Total net assets	148,609	153,970
Total liabilities and net assets	\$ 418,909	\$ 374,836

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

Years Ended December 31, 2015 and 2014

	2015	2014
UNRESTRICTED NET ASSETS		
Support and Revenue		
Donated services	\$ 591,457	\$ 414,288
Conference fees, net of refunds of \$2,025 in 2015 and \$700 in 2014	297,121	253,950
Membership dues, net of refunds of \$0 in 2015 and \$5 in 2014	154,466	142,396
Webinar training, net of refunds of \$0 in 2015 and \$955 in 2014	112,428	81,984
Contributions	13,741	9,968
Interest and dividends	3,226	619
Unrealized loss on investments	(6,438)	-
Other	8,458	6,230
	<u>1,174,459</u>	<u>909,435</u>
Net Assets Released from Restriction		
Satisfaction of restriction	4,840	7,425
Total unrestricted support and revenue	<u>1,179,299</u>	<u>916,860</u>
Expenses		
Program services	1,107,891	855,619
Management and general	79,234	59,752
Total expenses	<u>1,187,125</u>	<u>915,371</u>
Change in unrestricted net assets	<u>(7,826)</u>	<u>1,489</u>
TEMPORARILY RESTRICTED NET ASSETS		
Contributions	7,305	4,632
Net Assets Released from Restriction		
Satisfaction of restriction	(4,840)	(7,425)
Change in temporarily restricted net assets	<u>2,465</u>	<u>(2,793)</u>
Change in net assets	<u>(5,361)</u>	<u>(1,304)</u>
Net Assets, Beginning of Year	<u>153,970</u>	<u>155,274</u>
Net Assets, End of Year	<u>\$ 148,609</u>	<u>\$ 153,970</u>