



Community & Parents for Public Schools (CPPS)

Parent Involvement Assessment Project Final Report June 2007

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project Overview

Research overwhelmingly demonstrates that parent involvement plays a key role in student achievement and successful schools. Community & Parents for Public Schools (CPPS) sought to assess parent involvement in Portland Public Schools in order to determine how best to strengthen that involvement in order to help all children succeed in school.

The Parent Involvement Assessment Project was conducted during the winter and spring of 2006-07. The project had two main components: a district-wide survey taken by over 1,300 parents from 74 schools, and a deeper assessment of 11 elementary schools, selected to reflect current PPS demographics. Those deeper assessments included 11 principal and family coordinator interviews, 19 parent focus groups—including a number with English Language Learners (ELL), seven teacher surveys and two teacher focus groups.

Both the survey and the deeper assessments looked at five key areas needed to foster strong parent involvement: school climate, communication, learning collaboration, volunteering and parents as decision-makers. It is CPPS' hope that the findings presented below will inform a needed dialogue between all stakeholders—parents, teachers, school administrators, Blanchard Education Service Center central office staff (BESC), district-level leaders, and the community at large—and lead to tangible ways to strengthen parent involvement in every single school in the Portland Public School District.

Findings and Recommendations

While our findings revealed that some schools excel at particular aspects of parent involvement, the District as a whole **doesn't effectively support parent involvement to its full potential**. Areas of concern range from basic issues like building access and communication to more complex issues like developing effective school leadership and reaching traditionally disenfranchised communities. Examples of our recommendations include:

- Better signage at schools to improve access
- Multicultural events that reflect and celebrate diversity
- Improved parent-teacher and parent-school communication
- Increased use of electronic communication in addition to traditional means of communication with families
- Easily-understood materials to help parents understand their child's academic expectations, along with tangible ways that they can provide academic support at home
- Support for parents as decision-makers, including leadership training for parents and professional development for school staff

Two key findings should be emphasized:

- **Language and culture are strong barriers to involvement for many parents**—communicating with parents whose native language isn't English was often cited as a concern by parents, teachers and principals. Parent organizations, individual schools, and BESC are all faced with this challenge.
- **Most Site Councils are currently functioning at minimum capacity.** Because Site Councils create school improvement plans, and will be responsible for the newly-mandated parent involvement plans, the District and schools should redouble their efforts to make Site Councils more effective and representative by providing training and other support.

The parent involvement plan that each school must create starting in the 2007-08 school year will be an opportunity for school communities to discuss the school-based recommendations made in this report.

The District's leadership should

- **Set standards and guidelines** for almost every area of parent involvement discussed. Because individual school communities are so different, leave the "how" of reaching those standards up to each school through its parent involvement plan, but do set clear expectations.

The District's BESC should follow up with

- **Resources, training and tools** designed to help reach those standards and guidelines.
- **Materials** that explain curriculum at specific grade levels, including ways parents can extend the curriculum at home. Materials must explain benchmarks and standards in layperson's terms. Parents want more information about what their children are learning at school and how they can help at home, but found current materials confusing and jargon-ridden—elementary progress-based report cards were often cited as a prime example of unclear, inefficient communication.

II. INTRODUCTION

Community & Parents for Public Schools (CPPS)—the Portland chapter of Parents for Public Schools—is part of a nationwide network of grassroots organizations focused on increasing parent, family and community involvement in public education. Launched in January of 1999, CPPS advocates for parents and community members to take an active role in decision-making, school improvement, and accountability.

The Parent Involvement Assessment Project, conducted in the winter and spring of 2007, focused on measuring parent involvement¹ at the school level, with an emphasis on involvement that results in improved academic achievement. Parent involvement has long been recognized as a key factor in student achievement; its importance has been well-documented in education research². The project assessed five key components of an educational system needed to foster strong parent involvement:

1. **School Climate:** Is the school a welcoming place for parents and does it foster a sense of community? Is the school building accessible and easy to get around, are there events that bring families to the school and help build community, are staff welcoming and responsive, and are other parents welcoming?
2. **Communication:** Is communication between the school and home two-way, consistent and meaningful?
3. **Learning Collaboration:** Is there support to help parents engage with their child's learning at home? Do parents understand academic expectations, do they know how their child is doing in school, and do they know what homework is being assigned?
4. **Volunteering:** Do school staff encourage parents to volunteer in support of students and school programs? Has the school utilized creative approaches to encourage all parents—including parents who work full-time, and those who do not feel comfortable in a school setting?
5. **Parents as Decision-makers:** Are parents partners in decisions that affect children and families? Are parents involved in school decisions, governance and advocacy through parent organizations or other mechanisms?

Parent involvement is included as one of the five major areas of work in the Portland Public Schools Strategic Plan. However, there are no current standards to assess parent involvement: no shared definition, plan or even a baseline measurement of existing parent involvement. This CPPS report provides a first step—a baseline—to measure the current state of parent involvement at the school level, and to highlight both strengths and areas of concern. Next steps should include focused discussions about how to strengthen parent involvement and share existing best practices. These discussions should result in a clear, achievable plan of action.

¹ When using the word parent, we mean any key adult in a child's life. The words "parent involvement" and "family involvement" are used interchangeably throughout this report.

² See, for instance, Henderson and Mapp, [A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement](#)

CPPS believes that this report—specifically, the recommendations and next steps in the conclusion—provides a catalyst for such discussions among parents, parent organizations, teachers, school administrators, BESC, and the community at large.

Methodology

The project had two major components: a parent involvement survey made available to parents throughout the school district and a deeper assessment of 11 elementary schools selected to mirror the demographics found within the district at large. The survey was made available to parents (in both online and print form) from mid-February until the end of April. The print copies were available in five languages (English, Chinese, Russian, Spanish and Vietnamese) in individual school offices. Schools were encouraged to promote the survey through their newsletters and email lists. CPPS also promoted the survey in its electronic newsletter, on the Web site, and by directly reaching out to school networks.

1,338 parents took the survey, representing over 74 schools. More than 1,000 of those parents took the online version. Thirty schools had 10 or more parents take the survey—however, only seven of those 30 schools (23%) are Title I schools.³ This should be viewed with an awareness that over half of our schools in the District are Title I schools.

It is important to note that CPPS is not presenting these survey results as a statistically accurate portrait of the district at large, since the majority of our survey responses were received from parents from non-Title I schools who have ready access to a computer. However, the findings are still worthy of examination, especially when coupled with the deeper assessment

The 11 elementary schools selected for the deeper assessment represent the geographic, ethnic and economic diversity of schools and families attending PPS. Additionally, schools with varying programs and size were selected to further broaden the sample. Because of budget limitation, only elementary schools were selected. Finally, schools currently undergoing transitions—some of which were controversial—were not included in the sample.

We recognized that the broad survey would largely attract parents from non-Title I schools—thus deliberately chose to do our deeper assessment at a higher percentage of Title I schools—nine of the 11 schools chosen are Title I schools. (A complete list of the 11 schools and brief information on each can be found in Appendix A.) Principals and family involvement coordinators were interviewed at each of the 11 schools; 14 parent focus groups were held. Two of these focus groups were with Somali-speaking parents; three of the focus groups included Spanish-speaking parents participating with translators. Finally, the project also conducted written teacher surveys at seven of the schools and held teacher focus groups at two of the schools.

In order to encourage a diverse group of parents to attend and also to honor their participation in the focus groups, participants were given \$10 gift cards generously donated by Fred Meyer. Between five and twenty parents participated in each focus

³ Title I schools in PPS have 40% or more of their student population receive free or reduced-cost lunch.

group, and some of these “parents” were grandparents. At 8 of the 11 schools assessed, a variety of parents participated, ranging from the very involved to the minimally involved. At three of the schools, only very active parents—representing the “core group” of volunteers at that school—participated.

We made additional efforts to include typically underrepresented communities. Since we had no participation from Russian, Chinese or Vietnamese speakers at any of our school-specific focus groups, three additional focus groups were held for parents of each of these language groups (from various outer southeast schools) at the Kelly Family Resource Center. One focus group for parents of Talented and Gifted (TAG) students was held and one for parents of special needs children was also held. The parents in those focus groups were from throughout the school district; outreach was coordinated through the District’s TAG and Special Needs advisory committees. In the spring of 2006, two trial focus groups were held at Stephenson and Alameda Schools in order to test the focus group format.

Project Partners

The Portland Schools Foundation generously provided us with a \$15,000 grant that made this project possible. The project also had numerous partners at PPS—in particular, the PPS Title I office was extremely helpful. Title I funds are federal dollars that come to our school district for distribution to higher poverty schools and come with parent involvement requirements. As a result, the Title I Office is extremely interested in what Title I schools are doing to foster parent involvement and how BESC can be more supportive of their efforts. The Title I office provided childcare, snacks and translators for the focus groups that were held at Title I schools. The office also translated our survey into four languages and then translated the responses received in languages other than English so that they could be included in the survey results.

The Office of Student, Family and School Support has also been very involved in this project. This fairly new office is very interested in determining how it can better support parent involvement in schools. In the coming school year, this office will be working with the principals in each school to develop individual school parent involvement plans. They provided us with critical assistance by promoting and encouraging principal support and communication to their school communities in order to broaden our outreach efforts.

CPPS wants to warmly acknowledge and thank all the principals, teachers, family involvement coordinators, and parents who opened up their schools to us and generously shared their time and candid thoughts with us. Without them, this project would not have happened. They were the most important project partners of all.

III. MAIN FINDINGS & RESULTING RECOMMENDATIONS

The surveys, focus groups and interviews gathered information on five areas of parent involvement: **School Climate, Communication, Learning Collaboration, Volunteering, and Parents as Decision-makers**. This section of the report makes recommendations in each area and summarizes the major findings upon which the recommendations are based. The complete project findings are detailed in Appendix B. Appendix C provides a list of recommendations to facilitate their use.

Our research found that our school communities are often profoundly different from each other. One school may have English as the only dominant language, while another school may have four or five different languages significantly represented. One school might have as many as one third of its families come and go throughout the year, while another will see little change in attendance. Even within school communities that appear to be fairly homogenous, parents' experiences within the same school can be quite different. For example, a parent who walks their child to school and speaks to the teacher daily may have a much different experience than a parent who has their child in before and/or aftercare and rarely has face-to-face contact with their child's teacher. There is no standard profile of a parent or parent community. Yet while parents are often very different from one another, they also often have similar experiences, challenges and desires. This report will highlight both the similarities and the differences.

1. School Climate: Is the school welcoming to parents?

Buildings

Recommendations: If schools are going to be friendly and safe places for current and prospective parents and community members, schools should make it easier to get around by having multilingual signage that clearly indicates where main entrances and offices are. A component of each school's parent involvement plan should address this. Larger schools should have a map at the main entrance.

A lot of our school buildings are old. People often like the look of their old buildings and the sense of history they hold. "It's like a real school, from a movie!" "I went to this school when I was growing up!" However, our older buildings do bring challenges. As neighborhoods and traffic patterns have changed, the school's main entrance may have been moved. As a result, main entrances are often not in obvious spots. Offices are often far from the main entrance and difficult to find within the building. There are few signs, and most of those that exist are in English only. As a result, it is often confusing for newcomers to figure out where to enter the building and to find their way around once inside. High schools are especially daunting for parents to navigate.

Events

Recommendations at the school level: Schools and parent groups should organize more events that reflect and celebrate the diversity now found in their schools. They should reach out to ELL families to engage them in creating and

planning these activities. Community-building events should be included in school parent involvement plans.

Recommendations at the district level: BESC and Portland Council PTA should provide examples of best practices and information on how to organize such events. As many school-based events are hosted by PTAs/PTOs, their membership should also be provided with tools (such as best practices) and training on how to do this.

Almost all of our schools host a large number of well-attended family events; talent shows, winter concerts and ice cream socials play an important role in bringing families into the school for positive interactions, include parents who otherwise rarely visit the school, and build a sense of community among families. Sometimes they also have an educational component. Parents at schools with few events were asking for more.

Only a few schools host multicultural events that reflect and celebrate the diversity within their schools. Reasons for this are either a lack of awareness by currently involved parents of other families' cultures and traditions, an emphasis on traditional events that parents enjoy and want to continue that take up available energy and time, or a concern that culturally-specific events might be offensive to some or leave some out. However, English Language Learner (ELL) parents at schools who have had culturally diverse events (such as an Asian New Year celebration) really liked them. Many expressed a strong desire to help their school organize an event that reflected their culture. Such events can be a great way to involve traditionally less-involved parents and make them feel a valued part of the community. They can also help the school community embrace diversity as an asset, rather than a burden.

Recommendations at the school level: Schools and parent groups should hold events and activities at times that best engage their family population. This means scheduling events throughout the year at various times of the day and evening in order to accommodate parents' diverse schedules. Each school's parent involvement plan should include a strategy for doing this. Parents expressed frustration that many events and volunteer activities are not accessible to working parents. "Please remember the working parent" was a common refrain in the survey.

Principals and Office Staff

Recommendations: Principals and office staff should always be welcoming and accessible to families at every school. District leadership should set a high standard for principals in this area, and build this standard into their evaluations. In turn, school administrators should set high standards for their office staff on the quality of their interactions with parents, and similarly build these standards into evaluations.

Principals and office staff are key to parent involvement. The project found that many schools are doing well in this area—most parents find their principals accessible and respectful. Parents value principals with a visible presence—principals who know and value them in return. ("Our principal always makes himself very visible and walks up and greets people he may not know. That speaks volumes.") However, parents at one-third of the schools in the assessments (and 9% of survey respondents) did not feel this

way about their principals. Many parents in the survey expressed a desire for their principals to be more visible in the hallways, as well as before and after school.

Office staff also play a key role in how parents view their school. A majority of parents do find their office staff courteous and responsive and really appreciate it. (“Parents are always greeted with a warm hello by office staff. It feels like they truly care.”) However, when this is not the case (as at three of the 11 schools assessed and 7% of the survey respondents), parents take note. In those schools, parents described an office staff person that acted annoyed or superior to current or potential school parents and cold to students. (“One of our secretaries is rude and seemingly ‘put off’ by parents and children.”)

Parents

Recommendation: Parent groups should periodically critique themselves on how welcoming they are to their entire community, and continue to reach out to new parents. They should look around periodically and ask, “Who isn’t here and what can we do to encourage them to join us?”

Most parents find other parents in their school communities welcoming. However, schools with a strong core group of volunteers are sometimes perceived as “clique-ish,” making it harder for new parents to get involved.

2. Communication: Do the school and teachers communicate well with parents?

School-wide Communication

Recommendations at the district level: District leadership should set standards to ensure effective school communication, while leaving the specifics of how to accomplish that up to individual schools. BESC should provide schools with resources and directives to assist them, such as requiring a portion of teacher planning time be set aside for writing weekly class newsletters or fostering cross-school collaboration about best practices.

Recommendations at the school level: Individual school parent involvement plans should include specific strategies for how the school will communicate with all parents. These may look quite different from school to school and will most likely include multiple forms of communication in order to effectively reach all parents.

Many of our schools are working hard to communicate information to parents and many parents are satisfied with the current level of school-wide communication. Most schools have some form of school-wide newsletter, for example, while all schools have flyers for events and activities. Parents particularly like calendars or lists of dates and activities that they can “post on the refrigerator door”.

At the few schools that do not have a regular, predictable newsletter, parents find it hard to know what is going on at the school. Use of electronic communication school-wide varies greatly: in the survey, 82% of the respondents indicated they had electronic

newsletters; but in the assessment only two schools of 11 sent their newsletter out electronically.

Communication between Teachers and Parents

Recommendations at the district level: the district leadership should set goals and standards for teacher/parent communication and develop and share a list of resources and best practices. Each school is different. The District leadership, however, should clarify that this is an important area for student success and set clear expectations, while leaving the exact methods up to the individual school.

Recommendations at the school level and parent level: individual school parent involvement plans should include standards and practices for teachers at that school that define parent communication. These plans will differ from school to school depending upon the parent population at that school. At all schools, staff email addresses should be clearly posted and the use of email encouraged as an additional tool to exchange information.

The quality of communication between teachers and parents varies greatly from teacher to teacher, even within the same school. Parents uniformly want and expect reliable, consistent communication with their children's teachers, and many feel that they have that dialog established. *But a notable one third of survey respondents and half of the focus group participants were not happy with the communication they received from their child's teacher. This is a key CPPS concern.*

Parents prefer varying communication methods. Parents who spend a lot of time at the school often like face-to-face communication, as do many elementary school teachers. Working parents with computer access often prefer electronic communication—they like it because it doesn't get lost in the student's backpack, doesn't require their presence at school, and can be very immediate. ("I know what happened at school even before my son gets home!") However, the use of email by teachers varies greatly. In some schools, the teachers' email addresses are readily available (for example, they are listed in the student directory). In other schools, email addresses are not readily available and it is unclear to parents if email is an appropriate means of communication.

Good communication is a two-way street. Parents have the responsibility to proactively communicate with their child's teacher(s). They should reach out to teacher(s) and let them know their preferred method of contact.

Communicating in Languages Other Than English

Recommendations at the district level: BESC should provide more support to reduce language and cultural barriers. District leadership should have standards and centrally-available resources for translating newsletters, flyers and other materials sent home. Translating can be expensive and cumbersome—any time the BESC sends information to all schools to include in newsletters or flyers, it should already be translated so each school does not have to do so independently. The BESC and the regional PTA should provide creative solutions—for example, electronic versions of various translated flyers that schools could quickly adapt for use (e.g., a standard PTA

meeting flyer in multiple languages on which a group only needs to fill in the date and time). Additionally, now that every school has at least one computer for parent use, these should be used to provide videos and translated materials on particular topics on the spot to parents.

Recommendation at the school level: Individual school parent involvement plans should include strategies and methods for communicating with ELL families.

Bilingual staff, who are most often educational assistants, are ELL parents' bridge to the school. Many of us are unaware of the critical role they play. Schools and teachers use them for face-to-face translating, to make phone calls to parents, to link families with services, etc. Schools without bilingual staff, or who only have them for limited hours, struggle to communicate and engage their ELL families. As a result, schools with small populations of particular language groups are often the most challenged in connecting with parents. Schools often develop creative solutions for this problem—finding a cafeteria worker who speaks Russian or developing a video in Somali that explains the school. But principals expressed a desire for more centralized support around language and cultural issues. “Language shouldn’t be such a barrier. We need more resources, more systems.” “I had to make calls around town myself to find someone who knew something about what kind of emotional trauma a former refugee child might be experiencing. It seems like someone at the District level should have the information available for all the schools.”

Both parents and teachers use their children for translating. While at times this may be the only communication method readily available, some staff and parents raised concerns about placing the children in the parents' role in this manner (“parentifying” the child), and the long-term effects this can have on the parent/child relationship, as well as on how accurate the translating may be. A student may have obvious reasons to not clearly translate all information and, in some cases, the child's ability to accurately translate information may also be limited.

Communication in Older Grades

Recommendation at the school level: School communities—especially middle schools and high schools where it becomes increasingly necessary—should heavily utilize online communication methods and provide pointers to relevant software resources.

Middle school and high school parents have a harder time connecting to their schools for a variety of reasons. The schools are bigger, kids often don't want them there (“My kids would rather eat liver and onions than have me volunteer in the classroom!”), parents no longer walk their children to school, students have multiple teachers, and the curriculum gets more difficult.

Many parents of older children appreciate electronic communication. “At the elementary level, massive amounts of paper were sent home, but at the high school level, how I stay informed is the e-mail daily bulletins. This is the most effective way because I am the one that receives it, so it doesn't get lost from school to home.” Parents of older students answering the survey also really appreciated software programs that made it

possible for their students and them to check on assignments and keep abreast of how the students are doing. These software programs make it significantly easier for parents to help their students. Unfortunately, schools take a disparate approach - some school communities provide a variety of electronic communication and school tracking software, while others provide none.

Schools can help parents develop electronic skills by partnering with community resources that provide training for parents. It should be noted that electronic communication can augment, but not replace, the more traditional newsletter mailer,

Trust and the Impact on Communication

Recommendation: BESC should provide more visible resources, trainings and best practices for teachers and school administrators about ways to successfully reach out to parents who may be distrustful of the school. While it wasn't a major finding of the parent component of this study, many teachers, family coordinators and principals believe it's an issue worthy of action. Individual school parent involvement plans should outline strategies and methods the school will use to engage these parents in their children's education, including events, communication, staff development, etc.

Many of the principals, family involvement coordinators and teachers commented on the lack of trust that often exists between parents and the school. Some commented on it from the school personnel's perspective: "Some of our parents don't trust schools and don't know how to interface with them." "If a parent has had a negative experience themselves when young, they may assume any contact with the school will also be negative and avoid it." This is exacerbated by the fact that the first communication that comes from the school is usually about a problem. Other staff and parents commented on it from the parents' perspective: "Some teachers don't show respect, and parents and kids pick up on that."

As noted in an earlier section, most of our schools do a good job of hosting inviting events (such as student recognition or family fun nights) to draw families in and highlight positive experience with the school. This is a great first step. Some principals are aware of the need to have staff development on this issue, while at least two principals in the 11 schools assessed believe strongly in the need for staff to be culturally aware of poverty and to show respect to all families. These two principals had their staffs go through Ruby Payne's *Framework of Poverty* workshops.

3. Learning Collaboration: Do the school and teachers help parents help their students succeed?

Understanding Academic Expectations

Recommendations: BESC should develop materials for parents on benchmarks, standards and curriculum for each grade level, including ways that parents can extend the curriculum at home. These materials need to be easy to read and understand for the average parent. Individual schools and parent groups should host workshops and trainings for parents on the curriculum and how to help children at home. Parents should ask their children's teachers and principals

critical questions about what their children are learning, and request specific suggestions for ways they can more actively engage with their children.

Parents' understanding of academic expectations varies a great deal. Some parents feel they have a good understanding of what is expected of their children at a particular grade level, along with how to help their students succeed academically. But many do not (about half of the parents in the focus groups and 21% in the survey). In particular, ELL parents have little understanding of academic expectations and struggle to help their children at home. There is a wide variation of support available in schools, from parents stating there is "nothing at all", to curriculum nights, consistent teacher communication, electronic software, etc.

Parents have ideas about things that would help them better understand expectations and how they can help at home. They would like benchmark brochures written in layperson's terms, broken down in ways they can understand. Parents want more specific ways they can help their children at home. They universally feel they are told to read to their children, and not much else. Parents want to know what topics and subjects students cover in each grade level, with examples of questions they could ask their children to start a conversation about that topic.

Principals also told us they would like to see materials developed that can help parents understand the curriculum and how they can help at home. "BESC should provide more support materials for math and literacy nights, for things parents could do at home. We all struggle with explaining math to parents."

Homework

Recommendations: In their individual school parent involvement plans, schools should consider developing strategies to help parents assist their children with homework. Schools should review the support they give children whose parents cannot help them with homework. Are homework clubs effective? Are they reaching the kids that most need help? Schools without homework clubs should assess if this service is needed. BESC should also develop guides and resource lists for parents in multiple languages, along with ways to find additional homework assistance.

ELL parents indicate that homework is very difficult for them and wish they could help their children more. Some can help with math or give general encouragement, but can't do much more because of the language barrier. English-speaking parents with older children also struggle to help them with homework, as the material gets harder. Many English-speaking parents would also like assistance and training in how they can help their students with homework, especially with math.

A number of principals stated that homework is an equity issue since many children have parents who cannot help them with homework, putting them at an inherent disadvantage. On the other hand, many parents are concerned if their child's teacher(s) doesn't assign much homework, interpreting this as a lack of academic rigor.

Almost all of the schools that were part of the deeper assessment partially address this issue with after school homework clubs. Many schools offer this through their Schools

Uniting Neighborhoods (SUN) programs, or use Title I funds to pay for it. In one non-Title I school, the PTA pays for the homework club. However, students who ride the bus often aren't able to attend, as student transportation afterwards is limited.

Elementary School Parent-Teacher Conferences

Recommendations: Teachers and staff should provide parents with information on benchmarks and standards AND on the social development of their students—not one or the other—regardless of the parents' backgrounds. Conferences should also include information on how parents can help at home. Individual school involvement plans should include training for the teachers in this area if needed. There should be a second parent-teacher conference in the spring.

Parents and teachers generally like the parent-teacher conferences and find them very helpful. Schools work hard to get full participation from parents. Both parents and teachers universally want a second conference in the spring. At some schools, especially middle and upper income schools, teachers focus almost exclusively on explaining benchmarks and standards. "Just hearing about benchmarks is dry. I want to know how my child is 'doing!'" At other schools—often lower income schools—benchmarks and standards are barely mentioned. "They spent the entire time talking about behavioral issues." The project found, however, that when asked, all parents, including ELL parents and parents of various socio-economic backgrounds, said they want information both on how their child is doing on benchmarks and standards AND information on the social development of their child.

Recommendation: Schools should continue to work hard to get translators for ELL families. BESC should work with schools to understand why a few families are not receiving service and correct the situation.

Parent teacher conferences for ELL families usually have a translator present. Most schools work hard to reach out to these parents, encouraging them to attend and providing a translator. There were a few incidents mentioned over the course of the project where a translator was not present—it was unclear to those parents why this was so. Translators themselves told us that certain languages are harder to arrange translators for, as there are so few translators available in that language and so many conferences taking place simultaneously across the school district. The parent may also not know to request a translator or prefer not to. In those cases, the children themselves often help translate.

Elementary School Report Cards

Recommendations: Report cards are an extremely important form of communication between the school and the parent. BESC should develop report cards that are clear and understandable, and recognize that standards-based reporting is new for almost all parents. The report cards should make clear what standard is being used: end of the year, or at the time of the report card. Finally, individual schools and parent groups should consider offering educational workshops on report cards.

Parents of all income levels and ethnic backgrounds disliked the elementary school report cards. Parents are used to letter grades; the shift to standards-based report cards has been very confusing. Parents don't understand the benchmarks, and the symbols and the terms "often" and "sometimes" are unclear. Both parents and teachers are universally confused about whether students are being compared to an end of the year standard or a standard at the time the report card is issued. As a result, parents are confused about whether their children are doing well or not. "Is 'almost meeting benchmark' a good grade in January, or a bad one?" Parents are also overwhelmed with the specificity of the benchmark information and puzzled about how their child is doing overall. "I just want to know if my kid is okay—is he normal?" To that end, parents want more comments on the report card indicating if their child is on target or not.

Recommendations: BESC should work with individual schools to determine what the barriers are to all ELL parents receiving a report card in their native language and correct the situation. Individual schools should include a strategy in their parent involvement plan for providing ELL parents with a report card in their native language.

ELL parents often get report cards in English only. A few receive a completed report card in English along with a blank one in their native language, which they can use to translate. It was unclear during the course of this project why some ELL parents receive this while many do not.

4. Volunteering: Do the school and teachers encourage volunteering?

Recommendations: Teachers should be encouraged to welcome and recruit volunteers into the classroom. They should be given tools to help them do so and encouraged to think creatively about how to involve parents in the classroom. Parent groups at schools should discuss with teachers and administrators how they could facilitate classroom volunteering. Individual school parent involvement plans should include a volunteer component describing how the school will do this. BESC should provide resources and best practices to promote classroom volunteering.

Volunteerism varies from teacher to teacher and school to school. In many schools, there is a strong culture of volunteering, both inside and outside the classroom. Parents feel welcome, sometimes even encouraged, to volunteer—by both the school and most teachers. PTAs/PTOs that have a volunteer coordinator are able to pull in parents to help in school-wide activities. Some family involvement coordinators play this role. Schools without either often struggle to get their parents to help at school-wide activities.

In some schools, however, the culture is quite different. In almost half (five of 11) of the schools assessed, the parents aren't encouraged to volunteer in the classroom, except on field trips. The teachers feel that parents can be "distracting" and aren't always dependable. Teachers also report that they don't always have the time to manage volunteers, or are concerned about confidentiality issues. Some also express concern that the education level of some of the parents makes them less than appropriate classroom volunteers.

Many parents feel volunteering in the classroom is important and demonstrates to students that they are partners with the school. “When we are in the classroom, our kids know school is important to us.” Although only a few parents in the focus groups said teachers actually recruited them to volunteer (most parents felt they had initiated volunteering in the classroom, even in schools with high levels of classroom volunteering), parents really like it when a teacher actually asks them to volunteer, rather than waiting for the parent to initiate the contact. “The teacher invited me to stay and help. That made me feel good.” Parents want teachers to be specific about what they need and to have calendars or sign-in sheets so they know when they are needed and what jobs need to be done. Teachers also find this a good way to manage volunteers and focus them on activities where they would be the most helpful. A few schools have “room reps”—a parent or two in each classroom who help the teacher recruit and manage volunteers, as well as communicate with parents. Both parents and teachers find this very helpful.

ELL parents face language and cultural barriers in volunteering. Most have not been asked to volunteer and feel uncomfortable approaching the teacher. Many indicated they would like to be asked.

5. Parents as Decision-makers: Are parents involved in making decisions at the school level?

Parent Leadership Organizations

Recommendations: Parent groups—at the local, district and regional level—should do a better job of communicating what their roles and responsibilities are, and what happens at meetings. Parent groups should also reach out to ELL parents and make their meetings more open to traditionally under-represented groups. Local and regional PTAs should provide local groups with training and resources to encourage cultural competency and inclusiveness (including sharing of best practices); individual school groups should have goals and plans for incorporating these practices and resources.

Most of our schools have active Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) or Parent Teacher Student Associations (PTSAs) and a few have Parent Teacher Organizations (PTOs).⁴ They play a variety of roles: they raise money for field trips and classroom supplies, organize events, promote their schools in the community, and occasionally host educational speakers. In most schools, the principal attends their meetings. In schools where the principal doesn’t attend meetings, the PTA/PTO leaders feel out of touch with the school administration and the decisions it makes.

Survey comments indicated that parents would like more communication from their parent leadership groups about what the groups are doing, what their role is and what topics they are discussing at meetings. This was true for all parent organizations,

⁴ Individual school PTAs and PTSAs are membership based non-profit organizations legally separate from their school and a part of the local, state and national PTA organization. PTSAs, which include students, are more common in middle and high schools. PTOs are NOT usually tied to a district or national organization. Their focus is their particular school and they may or may not be legally separate from their school.

including booster clubs, schools foundations, etc. They would also like their parent organizations to be more of a resource for parents, hosting more educational programs to help them support their children's academic, social, and emotional development. In most schools, ELL parents are often unaware that these groups exist. If they are aware, a lack of translators and a general impression that the organizations are designed for English speakers keeps them away. English-speaking parents also express frustration that involved parents do not reflect the diversity found in their schools.

Site Councils

Recommendations at the district level: BESC should provide Site Council training for all Site Council members. The District leadership should mandate communication to the parents of the school about what its Site Council is doing and when it is meeting, as well as hold school-wide elections for parent representation. Finally, to make it easier for people to understand what Site Council does, its name should be changed.

Recommendations for individual schools: Each school Site Council should have a plan for how to make its work more transparent and engaging to its parent community and how to gather input for its work. In turn, parents should ask questions of their school administrators and Site Council members in order to better understand their Site Council and its work.

Site Councils are required by state law at each individual school, with the mandated goal of increasing student achievement. Their primary means of doing that is by developing and implementing an annual school improvement plan.⁵ A Site Council is composed of teachers, parents, and the principal and classified staff. It may also include community members and students. Neither teachers nor parents may comprise more than half of Site Council's membership. Representatives are to be elected from the group they are representing (i.e., teachers elect their representatives, parents theirs).

Starting next year, Site Councils will be required to develop a parent involvement plan, increasing their importance even more. They are not, however, doing well at engaging parents in their work. This project found that many schools have functioning Site Councils, but there are only a few with highly functioning Site Councils; while a significant number of schools have Site Councils which lack the mandated parent representation. Still others have little or no parent representation, or have no Site Council at all. In summary, most Site Councils do a poor job of engaging their parent communities in their work.

At schools with functioning Site Councils, most parents—even those very involved in their schools—do not know what a Site Council is unless they have served on it personally or know someone well who has. The name itself is confusing. Meeting times

⁵ Each school is required to have an annual school improvement plan. It establishes how the school will help students achieve standards set by PPS and the State of Oregon; student performance goals; professional development plans for the school's staff, and strategies for fostering family involvement at the school.

and agenda topics are rarely announced to the parent community. Many parents in the focus groups had the impression that Site Council meetings were not open to the public and that they weren't welcome to attend. Few parents had seen their school improvement plan or knew what it was. Few, if any, ELL parents were aware of Site Councils. Elections for parent representatives to Site Council are rarely held. Principals often struggle to make Site Councils work. Some don't see them as relevant. "Site Councils weren't designed with this school community in mind." Still other principals find a way to make Site Councils meaningful, but do so with little or no BESC support. "We struggled to make this work for our school. We figured it out, but I wish I'd had more training from the Central Office."

School-Wide Decisions

Recommendations for district level: District leadership should set clear guidelines for parent involvement in school-wide decisions. BESC should recruit, inspire and evaluate principals on their ability to develop parent leaders and involve parents as decision-makers. BESC should provide training and resources, both for the principals and for the parents themselves.

Recommendations for individual schools: School-based parent involvement plans should include a component on how the school (including the existing parent groups) will develop parent leadership, involve parents in decision-making and communicate decisions to parents. Examples of decisions in which parents can and should be involved include setting the vision and focus of the school, writing the school improvement plan, hiring and evaluating the principal, choosing areas for professional development, and planning for the transition to K-8.

Site Councils should be the hub of many of these decisions (see the section on Site Councils above), but other parent groups should play a supportive role in disseminating information and gathering input. Currently, parent involvement in school-wide decisions is very inconsistent from school to school. There is little clarity of what it means or what the spectrum of involvement could be. All the principals interviewed agreed with the importance of involving parents in their specific children's education. "Kids live in two worlds. The two worlds need a bridge, and that bridge is the involved parent." "Parent involvement shows the students that we are all on the same page. It creates a sense of common expectations for the kids from both the parents and school."

But for about a third of the principals in the deeper assessment, parent involvement stops there and it does not appear to mean having parents as partners in school-wide decisions. Still another group of principals seems to want parents as leaders and partners, but struggles with how to do so. "There aren't many decisions. The curriculum is mandated and resources for staff are slim."

Six of the 11 schools assessed are transitioning into K-8 schools. Parents (including ELL parents) at most of those schools would like more clear communication and input about what that transition will look like. Many parents are positive about the change, but they have questions about what the new model will look like and are frustrated by a lack of communication and involvement in these decisions.

IV. CONCLUSIONS & NEXT STEPS

This parent involvement assessment found that while many schools are doing good work in particular areas of parent involvement, we are not fully utilizing parents. This negatively impacts our children, and is everyone's responsibility to help address: parents, parent and educational organizations, teachers, principals, BESC staff, and district-level leadership. *Parents themselves have an important role to play, by either advocating for the recommendations outlined in this report or by stepping forward and volunteering to make them happen.* We all need to redouble our efforts so that our kids can be as successful in school as possible.

Individual school plans for parent involvement mandated to begin next year will give an opportunity for each school as a community to discuss and set goals to achieve many of the recommendations that were discussed in this report: encouraging better teacher-parent communication; moving toward more electronic communication without leaving families out; reaching out to ELL parents; strengthening Site Councils, and developing parent leaders, among others.

Because plans will be developed in Site Councils—an entity currently functioning at minimal capacity or hardly functioning at all—BESC and individual schools must redouble their efforts to make Site Councils the dynamic governing bodies they could be. Instead of an isolated group that few parents have heard of, they must become the hub of decision-making and parent involvement.

There is a critical role for District leadership and BESC to play here. District leadership can and should set standards and guidelines for almost every area of parent involvement discussed in this report—communication, Site Councils, parents as decision-makers, etc., and hold the schools accountable for reaching those goals. Because individual school communities are so different, they should leave the “how” of reaching those standards up to each school, but they should still set clear, achievable expectations. BESC then needs to support the schools in reaching those standards with resources, training and tools, such as the dissemination of best practices. Some of our schools are doing incredible things, but they aren't visible to the rest of the community. We could all learn from their examples.

BESC has some specific tasks to carry out as well. Parents want more information about what their children are learning in the classroom, and ways they can help at home. The recent standardizing of curricula gives BESC an opportunity to develop materials to address these concerns. BESC must also develop better, more understandable materials that explain benchmarks and standards. In addition, BESC needs to develop new report cards for elementary schools. Report cards are one key way in which schools communicate with parents and provide them with information about their children's progress. But parents throughout the city don't understand elementary school standards-based report cards.

Much work remains to be done as a community to address differences in language and culture. Our schools are changing, and we are all scrambling to catch up to this new reality. Language and culture are serious obstacles to communicating with many parents. Across the District, 11% of our students are English Language Learners, with a

high of over 40% at some schools and a low of less than 1% at others. And a much higher percentage of our parents speak a language other than English at home—while our students gain proficiency in English, their parents continue to speak their native language, adding to the communication complexity.

Most parents and almost all teachers acknowledge that parent involvement and leadership at their school does not reflect the diversity of the school, while the events and activities at our schools don't usually reflect or celebrate the diversity found within. We are all challenged by this issue—parent leadership organizations, individual schools and BESC. Parent groups need to find ways to reach out to traditionally under-represented groups, while BESC needs to find ways to support schools' efforts to overcome language and cultural barriers.

In the coming months, CPPS is committed to:

- Working with PPS' Office of Student, Family and School Support to make creating the parent involvement plans an engaging, valuable process.
- Holding a Parent Leadership Conference in the fall of 2007 that focuses on the issues raised in this report and provides parents with tools to help them develop and implement parent involvement plans at their schools.
- Leading an effort to bring Site Council training to every school in the District, something that has long been a CPPS priority.
- Influencing the selection of a new superintendent who is committed to parent involvement.

With so many truly wonderful things happening every day in schools throughout our school district, we are confident that if we all work together, we can increase parent involvement in order to achieve maximum student success for every child.

V. APPENDIXES

- A. List of schools assessed & brief information on each
- B. Complete findings
- C. List of all recommendations

Appendix A

Elementary Schools for CPPS Parent Involvement Assessment Project

		Cluster	Free/Red Lunch	Enroll- ment	Ethnic groups	ELL
1	Ainsworth	Lincoln	4%	492	81% W; 11% H	n/a
2	Glencoe	Franklin	26%	500	78% W; 11% Af; 6% H	5%
3	Humboldt*	Jefferson	96%	240	65% Af; 26% H; 8% W	15%
4	Lent*	Marshall	79%	400	43% W; 35% H; 15% As; 10% Af	30%
5	Lewis	Cleveland	42%	301	82% W; 7% H	7%
6	Markham	Wilson	45%	360	54% W; 16% H; 15% Af	25%
7	Rosa Parks*	Roosevelt	86%	435	48% Af; 29% H; 21% W	23%
8	Sabin*	Grant	50%	429	44% Af; 38% W; 11% H; 8% As	7%
9	Sitton	Roosevelt	83%	285	34% W; 30% H; 21% Af	26%
10	Vestal*	Madison	66%	343	46% W; 26% As; 13% Af; 13% H	23%
11	Woodlawn*	Jefferson	76%	449	55% Af; 21% H; 17% W	14%

* Transitioning to K-8

Af = African American
As = Asian American
W = White American
H = Hispanic American

Information from PPS 2006-2007 School Enrollment Profiles compiled in the fall of 2006.

Appendix B

CPPS Parent Involvement Assessment Project Complete Findings

Section 1 School Climate

1. Buildings:

- 1.1. Many of our school buildings are old. People often like the look of their old buildings and the sense of history (many generations having attended the same building). However, for good reasons, main entrances and offices have often been changed from their original location. As a result, they are often not in an obvious spot and/or are far apart from each other. There often are not clear signs indicating where the main entrance and/or office are located. As a result, it's confusing for a newcomer to both find where to enter the building and how to get around once inside. In the cases where the office was far from the main entrance, parents also often had safety concerns (parent focus groups, observations). This was less of a concern for parents in the survey (only 17% said their school wasn't easy to get around), maybe because in the focus groups parents were encouraged to think back to what it was like for them at first. Big high schools were especially daunting for parents to navigate (survey comments, focus groups).
- 1.2. The few signs that exist are only in English (Somali focus group, observations).
- 1.3. Four schools in the assessment have a parent resource room and involved parents really appreciated that. When there are computers in them, parents often hang out in the rooms using them (focus groups). Any other physical gathering places for parents are also appreciated, from benches in front of the school to small parent workrooms (surveys, focus groups).
- 1.4. Most schools in the assessment look cheerful, relatively well taken care of, and clean and parents were proud of those. A few schools lack curb-appeal and looked like no one cared about them (two or three in assessment), and parents noticed it (focus groups, confirmed by observations). In two cases, the school had put up large fences around the playground, most likely for security reasons, but the parents don't like how it made the school feel and that people weren't welcome at the playgrounds after hours (focus groups).
- 1.5. Most schools had a lot of artwork and projects on the walls; only two or three in the assessment did not (focus groups, observations).

2. Events:

- 2.1. Almost all schools have a lot of family events (10 of 11 in the assessment and 90% of the survey respondents). In high parent involvement schools, events are put on by parents through the PTA; in others they are put on by school staff, a SUN school, an after school program, or other groups. Usually these events have a good turnout, especially if they are in the evening and there is food, and people enjoy them (focus groups, survey). In the few schools where there aren't many family-oriented events, parents would like to see more (focus groups, survey).
- 2.2. Many events are strictly to get parents in the door, offer them a positive interaction with the school, and build a sense of community (carnivals, picnics, sock hops, movie nights, family fun nights, etc.). Some are to recognize students (student performances, recognition award events) and these are also a great

- positive way to get family members into the school building. Others events strive to involve family members more in their children's education (literacy, math, or science nights, back to school nights, etc.). Still others are focused on raising money (five of the schools in the assessment have an annual auction).
- 2.3. In middle and high school, many of the events revolve around the students, such as performances and sporting events. While many parents find this a good thing, some worry about parents who don't have children involved in these activities (survey).
 - 2.4. Few schools have multicultural events that celebrate the diversity within their schools (survey, assessments). Reasons appear to be lack of awareness; traditional events like sock hops, carnivals, etc. take the energy people have (and they may not want to give them up); and the concern that culturally specific events might be offensive to some or leave some out (focus groups). One school has such events for their ELL parents, but English-speaking parents don't know about them. ELL parents in the focus groups would like to see more events that celebrate their cultures and many had a desire to help organize such events. Parents at schools that have events that celebrate the cultures found in the school really like them. No events that celebrate the range of abilities/disabilities were mentioned in the assessments or survey, but were highly desired by a focus group of parents of special needs children (survey comments, focus groups).
 - 2.5. ELL parents said they often go to events if they know about them, but flyers aren't always translated. In some schools bilingual Education Assistants (EAs) call families to tell them about upcoming activities, which increases their attendance. Having translators at the events also increases ELL turnout (focus groups).
 - 2.6. The best way to get all types of parents to an event seems to be to get the kids excited, who in turn get the parents to come (focus groups)!
 - 2.7. At several schools, teachers usually come to the events too and parents appreciate the informal opportunity to interact with them (focus groups).
 - 2.8. Several schools have regular morning meetings of some kind for parents (four in the assessment—all Title I schools) organized by staff. Often called "Coffees", they have speakers on academic and family support issues (assessments). Three different schools in the assessments have periodic informal coffees or teas with the principal as a way for parents to interact with the principal. All these appeared to be held during school hours.
 - 2.9. There were numerous comments in the survey about events, volunteer opportunities, coffees, etc. not being available to parents who work during the day.
 - 2.10. Another group that sometimes feels left out is non-kindergarten newcomers to a school. Most welcome events are targeted to younger kids, rather than families joining the school in any grade (parent focus groups, survey).
 - 2.11. Middle school and high school parents have a harder time connecting to their schools. The schools are bigger, kids often don't want parents there, parents no longer walk their children into the school and students have multiple teachers (survey).
3. Principals:
 - 3.1. Most parents found their principals accessible, open and respectful. They really appreciate a principal who is visible before and after school, and who knows

them and their children. When this is not the case, parents requested that the principal be more accessible (focus groups, survey). Two or three parent communities in the assessment had concerns about the principals' relationship with parents. 81% of parents in the survey agreed or agreed strongly that their principal was accessible and respectful, 9% disagreed or disagreed strongly, 10% didn't know.

- 3.2. ELL parents have less contact with principals; their relationship is instead with bi-lingual staff (EAs and ESL teachers). Language is a barrier and also most of these parents are more culturally accustomed to approaching the classroom teacher (focus groups).
- 3.3. In the interviews with principals, they appeared to truly value parent involvement, at least at the engagement level.
- 3.4. Most parents in the assessed schools feel the principal is supportive of parent involvement. In three or four, they find the principal controlling—wanting to keep parent involvement at an engagement level rather than a leadership level.
- 3.5. Principal turnover in a school with low parent involvement can almost kill any parent involvement. The one school in the assessment with very few events was a school that had three principals in the past three years. (They now have a very dedicated principal who is making gains on this issue.) In schools with a strong culture of involvement, changes in the principal often have little effect as parent organizations are stable, and much of the parent activity institutionalized (assessments).
4. Office Staff:
 - 4.1. A majority of parents find the office staff welcoming. A notable minority in the schools assessed (one-third) does not, and in those it is common knowledge among parents. This was less of a concern in the survey, where only 7% of parents said they were NOT greeted courteously in the office. In those cases when they weren't, parents worry that office staff is off-putting, acts superior or annoyed by parents, and sometimes cold to kids. Survey comments were similar—parents loved their warm, welcoming office staff. When that was not the case, it had a strong negative impact.
5. Other staff engaging in parent involvement:
 - 5.1. Three Title I schools in the assessment have family involvement coordinators. At all three schools, parents speak highly of these staff members. In one other school, a counselor organizes family involvement activities.
6. Other Parents:
 - 6.1. Most parents find other parents welcoming.
 - 6.2. Schools with strong core groups of volunteers often are seen (and/or the core group worries that they are seen) as clique-ish (focus groups, surveys).
 - 6.3. ELL parents for the most part do feel welcome by other parents. In one school assessed, the Spanish speakers had been told not to speak Spanish as much and wondered if parents had complained. Even though ELL parents feel welcomed by other parents, they still often feel uncomfortable attending events if they are not sure translators or others from their language group will be there (focus groups).
7. Additional organizations at the school level:
 - 7.1. Parents at schools with SUN programs really appreciate them; having a SUN school was a major attraction for families. Some SUN schools have parenting classes.

- 7.2. Schools with Head Start and other preschool programs on-site make stronger ties with families before their kids start kindergarten.
- 7.3. One school had daycare for children ages zero to six on-site, hosted by a social service agency, to help prepare children for kindergarten. The county library provided preschool reading times at another school.

Section 2A Communication between the school and parent

1. General

- 1.1. In the interviews, several principals emphasized relationships and word of mouth as the most important means of communication. One principal said his job was to communicate excitement about things to the teachers, who in turn instilled it in the kids, who in turn talked to their parents (principal interviews). Many parents stated the reason they came to school events was that their children wanted them to (focus groups).
- 1.2. Many of our schools are working hard to communicate with parents. Many comments on the survey indicated people were very pleased with the level of school communication. "No comment, I like everything."

2. Newsletters:

- 2.1. Most schools (all but two in the assessment) have some kind of regular paper newsletter. Parents at schools that don't have newsletters feel out of touch with what is going on with their school. It is important for the newsletter to be consistent, so parents know when to look for it since children are prone to losing it or forgetting to give it to them.
- 2.2. Two schools in the assessment send it out electronically (in addition to a hard copy). The survey indicated many more schools do have regular electronic newsletters and communication and that parents really appreciate those. In the survey, those who did not have these forms of communication greatly desired it. (Note: Survey participants had a higher rate than normal of electronic communication. In the survey, only 20% of the parents said they did not have electronic newsletters and only 18% said their school did not have a school email list.)
- 2.3. In the assessment, only one school translates their entire newsletter, one other translates part of it. Note that seven of the schools in the survey have sizeable ELL populations: 15 to 30% of their students. Three others have pockets of ELL students: 5 to 7%. Principals said they did not have the resources and/or they have too many languages at their schools to translate.
- 2.4. There is a problem with sending material home with the students in that many parents never get it (survey, focus groups).

3. Flyers:

- 3.1. All the schools use flyers to advertise events. These were more likely to be translated than newsletters. Three schools almost always translated flyers; three often did. Four rarely did. (One did not and has no notable ELL population.)

4. Phone calls:

- 4.1. Several schools use an automated phone system to call parents when their children aren't at school. In at least one school, this is done in languages other than English. Many parents appreciate this communication (principal interviews, focus groups), but some parents in the survey commented that they find it annoying to get calls when in fact their student is at school but not counted as present.

5. Web sites:
 - 5.1. Two of the 11 schools assessed have well formatted and up-to-date school-affiliated Web sites (one is a Title I school and one is not). Survey comments indicated parents would like more Web sites.
6. PTA Communication:
 - 6.1. PTAs also often use newsletters, flyers, etc. PTAs rarely translate their materials and stated a lack of resources as the reason (assessment).
7. Bulletin Boards:
 - 7.1. Parents who go into the school appreciate bulletin boards as a way to find out what is happening.

Section 2B Communication between the teacher and parent

8. Teacher communication:
 - 8.1. Quality varies from teacher to teacher. People want reliable communication: they want to know what's going on in the classroom, what the homework is and how their child is doing (focus groups, teacher surveys, survey). One-third (32%) of survey respondents said their student's teacher did NOT provide them with regular information about what was happening in the classroom or how their student was progressing academically. One school has a policy that all teachers write a newsletter and allows 15 minutes of the staff meeting for that purpose. In all other schools, it is up to the teacher (assessment). At almost all the focus groups a common refrain was that communication varied from teacher to teacher, from very good to almost none. Survey comments echoed this.
 - 8.2. Lack of communication becomes an issue of great concern for a parent when the parent feels a teacher is not being responsive to the needs of their child (e.g., the student isn't being challenged, the child needs a different style of teaching, a student has a learning disability, a child is behind grade level in an area) (focus groups).
 - 8.3. Communication with individual teachers gets harder as students move to middle school and high school—parents are not on-site often and students have multiple teachers (survey).
 - 8.4. Many teachers use newsletters and/or homework packets to communicate with parents. Teachers in some schools (with high ELL populations representing multiple languages) do not see classroom newsletters as effective (teacher surveys).
 - 8.5. Parents who are involved in the school and/or drop off and pick up their kids usually prefer face-to-face contact with the teachers (focus groups). Many teachers also prefer this mode of communication (teacher surveys).
 - 8.6. Parents who work full-time and are computer-oriented really like email and want more of it. It doesn't get lost in the backpack, doesn't involve coming to school and can be very immediate (parents often know of an issue even before they next see their child) (focus groups, parent survey). Some parents and teachers use email a lot, others do not (focus groups, teacher surveys). Some schools list the teachers' email addresses in a directory. In other schools, parents aren't aware of their teachers' email addresses, don't know where to find them, or if it's appropriate to communicate with teachers via email (focus groups).
 - 8.7. Teachers frequently use phone calls to reach parents—if they can't talk to a parent at school it is often the first step in trying to reach parents (principal interview, teacher surveys and teacher focus groups).

- 8.8. Teachers' biggest frustrations with contacting parents involve phone problems: disconnected numbers, no answering machines, parents who don't call back, parents who cannot take calls during normal work hours, and language barriers. Often the only time teachers can reach parents is in the evening, when they tired or have their own families to be with (teacher focus groups and teacher surveys).
- 8.9. Parents mentioned software programs that helped them access student grades, homework and attendance—especially helpful, as students get older and have multiple teachers. Programs like Power School, Snap Grades, and mygradebook.com were mentioned (parent survey).
- 8.10. Time was a big barrier for both parents and teachers. "Everyone is busier these days. Parents are busier, teachers are busier and the kids are busier" (focus groups).
- 8.11. If a parent had a negative experience with school when he or she was a child, this often becomes a major barrier to their current involvement their child's school (principal interviews, teacher focus groups and teacher surveys). This is often compounded by the fact that their first contact with a teacher is when there is a problem.
- 8.12. Home visits are rare—often only as a last resort if a teacher cannot reach a parent any other way (e.g., phone is disconnected, mail comes back). Some teachers are concerned about the time involved and the safety of doing this (teacher focus groups and teacher surveys).
- 8.13. Parents rarely receive positive communication from the teacher (calls, emails), but when they do they really like it (focus groups).
- 8.14. In the few schools where parents had organized room reps for each classroom, teachers appreciated their help in communicating to parents (teacher surveys).
9. Communicating in languages other than English and cultural issues:
 - 9.1. Bilingual Educational Aids (and sometimes bilingual ESL teachers) in schools that have them are essential. They are whom the ELL families interact with; they are their bridge to the school (parent focus groups, principal interviews). Schools with small populations of particular language groups often have an even harder time communicating with them since their small numbers don't warrant an EA who speaks that language on staff, at least not for many hours a week. Schools are often creative, finding a cafeteria worker who speaks Russian or developing a video for Somalis (principal interviews).
 - 9.2. It gets harder for ELL families in middle school and high school. Parents have even less connection with the school (they're not walking their kids to school anymore, they may not know other adults) and because of language barriers an even harder time understanding homework, classroom content, etc.
 - 9.3. Most teachers most often use the EAs for translating. But they are not always available, so they use the children themselves, siblings or other family members to translate, or use pantomime. Teachers can often make do in Spanish, but find languages like Chinese, Russian and Vietnamese especially difficult (teacher surveys).
 - 9.4. Both parents and teachers use the children for translating. While at times this may be the only communication method available, for some staff and parents it raises concerns about placing the children in a parent's role and also about how accurate the translating may be. A student may have an obvious reason to not clearly translate all information and in some cases, the children's ability to

translate information accurately may be limited (principal interviews, parent and teacher focus groups).

9.5. Principals often want more BESC support for language and cultural issues. Many feel each school struggles on their own with these issues (principal interviews).

9.6. Many principals and staff talked about the lack of trust between some parents and the school. In principal interviews, two principals talked strongly of the need for staff to be culturally aware of poverty and had their staffs go thru Ruby Payne's Framework of Poverty workshops together (principal interviews, teacher focus groups).

Section 3 Learning Collaboration

1. Understanding academic expectations:

1.1. In the focus groups, about half the parents feel they have a clear understanding of academic expectations and half do not. Those who do attribute it to parent-teacher conferences and good communication with teachers. The survey indicated many parents do feel they get help understanding what their child is supposed to be learning and how to help them succeed. However, a notable minority (21%) does not. Comments indicate there is wide variation in the support available, ranging from "none at all" to curriculum nights, electronic grading emails and software, consistent teacher communication, etc. In the focus groups, ELL parents had little understanding of academic expectations.

1.2. Many parents feel benchmark brochures need to be in layperson's terms, broken down in ways they can understand. "They do provide general, vague information, but they predominately refer to the 'benchmarks' and 'achievement goals' without explaining what these mean" (survey, focus groups). Math is especially hard for parents to understand as the teaching methods have changed so much since they were students. Parents want to know what topics/subjects students are covered in each grade level with examples of questions they could ask their children about that topic (focus groups). In interviews, principals often felt parents have trouble understanding academic expectations. But in teacher surveys almost all of them stated that parents understand academic expectations and how to help their children at home.

1.3. Two schools in the assessment put information in their school newsletters about what each class is doing. Parents like this and feel it helps them know what their child is studying and enables them talk to them about it. It also helps them look toward the future and anticipate what their children will study in the upper grades.

1.4. Some ELL parents and those who work with them indicate that meetings for them in their native language focused on these issues would be the best way to reach them. Larger meetings in English, even if there is a translator, are sometimes uncomfortable (focus groups).

2. Knowing what to do at home

2.1. In the survey, parents indicated they do get information from their school and teachers about how to help their children succeed academically—only 21% did not. However, in the focus groups, parents across income levels want more ways to help their kids at home. Most feel they are only told "to read to their kids"—nothing more specific (focus groups). Some principals would like help from the District on materials to do this.

- 2.2. Parents who receive “conversation starters” from their teachers about what their child is learning really like that—those that don’t would like them (focus groups, surveys).
 - 2.3. Some parents expressed frustration that they couldn’t see text books (their kids can’t bring them home) to see what kids are studying (focus groups). “Couldn’t there be copies made available to parents?”
 - 2.4. Principals would like to see materials developed that help parents understand the curriculum and how they can help at home — something they hope will happen if more universal curricula are adopted. One principal also suggested materials to explain the schools’ behavior and discipline program and how to use it at home (principal interviews).
3. Homework support
 - 3.1. Several principals stated that homework is an equity issue since many children have parents who cannot help them with homework (principal interviews).
 - 3.2. On the other hand, many parents are concerned if their child’s teacher(s) doesn’t assign much homework. It indicates to some parents that the teacher isn’t academically rigorous (focus groups, surveys).
 - 3.3. ELL parents indicated that the homework is very difficult for them and they wish they could help their children more. Some can help with math or give general encouragement to do the homework, but not much more because of the language barrier (focus groups).
 - 3.4. English speaking parents with older children also struggle to help them with homework, especially in math (focus groups).
 - 3.5. In the assessment, all but two or three schools try to partially address this with homework clubs. Many schools offer this through their SUN school or use Title I funds. In one non-Title I school, it is paid for by the PTA. Students who ride the bus often aren’t able to attend these as student transportation afterwards is limited (assessments).
 - 3.6. ELL parents also sometimes find homework help through other services, some of which come to their apartment complexes (focus groups).
 - 3.7. Many parents spoke of a desire for more training in how to help their children with homework, especially math.
 4. Elementary School Parent Teacher Conference:
 - 4.1. Parents and teachers generally like them and find them helpful (parent focus groups, teacher surveys). Schools work really hard to get parents there and most have almost complete participation (principal interviews, teacher focus groups).
 - 4.2. Almost all conferences with ELL parents have a translator present. Many schools do a good job of reaching out to parents to see if this is needed and arranging for translators. There were a few incidents mentioned where a translator was not present—it was unclear why this was so. Translators told us that certain languages are harder to arrange translators for, as there are so few translators available in those languages and so many conferences taking place across the school district at the same time. The parent may also not know to request a translator or prefer not to (focus groups).
 - 4.3. Parents’ complaints are that parent-teacher conferences are too rushed, too short (especially if the person ahead of them runs over), and that there are not enough slots in the evening (focus groups).
 - 4.4. Both teachers and parents almost universally wanted a second conference in the spring (both teacher and parent focus groups).

- 4.5. At some schools, teacher's focus exclusively on explaining the benchmarks and standards and parents miss talking about their child's social development. At others, benchmarks and standards are barely mentioned. It varies from teacher to teacher, but schools do seem to lean towards one or the other (a focus on benchmarks or not). The focus corresponds to the economic and educational levels of the majority of parents at that school. Parents universally want information on both benchmarks and standards and on social development (focus groups).
5. Elementary School Report Cards:
- 5.1. Almost all parents of all economic and ethnic backgrounds do not like them. They are accustomed to letter grades. They don't understand the benchmarks, the symbols, and the terms used ("what do sometimes, often, etc. really mean?"). A few ELL parents liked the symbols as they could figure them out over time (focus groups).
- 5.2. Parents, including ELL parents, and teachers don't understand if students are being held against current benchmark or end of year benchmark (both parent and teacher focus groups).
- 5.3. Benchmark information was often so specific that it left parents confused about how their children are doing. Parents want more comments that summarize if their child is on-target or not.
- 5.4. Most ELL parents in the focus groups were getting report cards only in English, a few were translated. A few received a blank report card in their native language which they could use to translate the English one they received, most did not.
- 5.5. Parents of non-traditional students struggle with benchmarks and report cards. TAG parents are frustrated that their children aren't challenged to do more — that there is no setting and reporting of higher standards. Parents of children with severe special needs find report cards and benchmarks meaningless as they are unobtainable for their children and don't indicate what progress their child is making (focus groups with TAG parents and parents of students with special needs).
6. Support for behavioral issues:
- 6.1. Without a counselor, support is limited. Parents often go to a teacher, principal or family involvement coordinator with their concerns, with mixed results. Parents also have mixed results with counselors (focus groups). 29% of parents in the survey said they did not get help from their teacher or school with their child's social development and behavior.

Section 4: Volunteers

1. Volunteering in School-wide activities:

- 1.1. 82% of the respondents of the survey think their school provides clear information about volunteer options available. However, the focus groups indicated that this support of volunteer efforts was usually left up to the parents themselves. Strong PTAs often have volunteer coordinators who recruit and organize volunteers for school-wide activities and are highly appreciated by staff and parents.
- 1.2. Some parent involvement coordinators are good at motivating parents to volunteer.

- 1.3. Active schools often have a “core group of volunteers” who seem to make most things happen. A core group of volunteers ranges from a half a dozen parents to 30 or 35.
2. Volunteering in the Classroom:
 - 2.1. This really varies from school to school and teacher to teacher. In some schools, there is a strong culture of volunteerism in the classroom and nearly all teachers welcome parents. In a majority of the schools assessed, parents in the focus groups have never had a teacher recruit them to volunteer, except for field trips. In one school, teacher surveys indicated that a third or more of the teachers did not feel it was appropriate or helpful for parents to volunteer in the classroom. The survey indicated roughly the same percentages: 18% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that their teacher welcomed them as volunteers, 18% didn’t know. 33% disagreed or strongly disagreed that their teacher actively recruits parents to volunteer in the classroom, and another 15% didn’t know.
 - 2.2. Parents want teachers to be specific about what they need done and like it when teachers have calendars or sign-in sheets so they know when they are needed. Teachers also find this a good way to “manage” volunteers, by focusing them on activities where the teacher feels they will be the most helpful (parent focus groups and surveys, teacher surveys and focus groups). A few schools have a parent or two in each classroom who act as “room reps” or “parent liaisons” for the classroom teacher and help recruit and manage volunteers. Both the teachers and the parents at those schools find this very helpful (focus groups, survey).
 - 2.3. Teachers’ concerns about parent volunteers in the classroom are that it is “distracting”, behavior of some students worsens, confidentiality issues, lack of dependability of parents who volunteer, not having the time to prepare things for volunteers to do or to manage them, some parents don’t have an “appropriate” level of education to help and they don’t want parents watching them or telling them what to do (teacher surveys & focus groups). Principals also think that some teachers probably have a hard time giving up control (interviews).
 - 2.4. Many teachers value volunteering and many parents do too. They know if their kids see them in the classroom, that they will understand that they value their education. Parents like being asked to volunteer: it makes them feel special and it also facilitates their volunteering, as they often don’t know how to help without being personally asked (focus groups, survey).
 - 2.5. As students grow older there is a marked drop in volunteering in the classroom. Even schools with strong cultures of volunteerism feel this. Parents say it ‘s because of the harder subject matter (“The math is so confusing!”), the kids often don’t want them around, their lives have changed (“I’m working more now that all my kids are in school, I don’t have little ones at home anymore.”), and teachers in the upper grades seem more independent too (focus group, survey).
 - 2.6. Language is a real barrier for ELL parents volunteering. Most have not been asked to volunteer and feel uncomfortable approaching the teacher himself or herself. (This was less true for the Spanish-speaking parents in the focus groups, who appear more comfortable initiating volunteering in the classroom.) Many indicated they would like to be asked (focus groups).
3. Fundraising:
 - 3.1. In the assessment, most principals and parents did not feel like the fundraising was overwhelming. Almost all schools did some, although in two or three it was

hardly noticeable. In contrast, in the survey many parents commented that all the fundraising alienated them from their schools and made them feel that if they weren't bringing a lot of money into the school, they weren't welcome.

- 3.2. In two schools in the assessment, the principals seem to control the fundraising themselves rather than let a PTA/PTO handle it (as then they wouldn't be able to control how the money is spent).
- 3.3. Some parents feel bad that they cannot afford to participate in any level of fundraising (focus groups).

Section 5 Decision-makers

1. PTA/PTO/PTSAs

- 1.1. In the 11 schools assessed, seven have strong or fairly strong PTAs (self-sufficient, at least a strong core group of parents involved). Three have very weak PTAs or PTOs. (Only a few people come, irregular meetings, no activities resulting.) One is just starting a PTA. 84% of survey respondents said their schools have very active or active PTA/PTOs, 10% said they do not, and 5% do not know.
- 1.2. In the assessment, one school has a PTO rather than a PTA.
- 1.3. Focus of PTAs seems to be fundraising (many give money to classroom teachers, pay for field trips, etc, all of which is greatly appreciated by the teachers) and putting on events. A few do community outreaches about their schools to attract families (at least two in the assessment), a few sponsor educational speakers in support of parents (assessments, surveys). In the teacher survey comments, fundraising was cited as the most appreciated activity of parent organizations. Survey respondents also stated they would like to have organizations focus on political advocacy at the district and state level. They would also like more parent educational programs to help them support their children's academic, social and emotional development.
- 1.4. PTA membership dues were an issue that came up as a turn-off for parent involvement in them at a few schools (focus groups).
- 1.5. In the assessment, only two PTAs had a list-serve or emailed announcements on a regular basis.
- 1.6. Survey comments indicate parents would like much more communication from their parent organizations (including PTAs, booster clubs, etc.) about what they are doing, what the role of the organization is in the school and what agenda topics are for meetings.
- 1.7. Only one school has a translator (provided by the school) at PTA meetings (focus groups).
- 1.8. Many ELL parents have not heard of PTA/PTO. If they are aware of it, ELL parents say that a lack of translators at meetings and an overall impression that PTA/PTOs are designed for English-speakers keeps them from participating (focus groups). A large number of survey respondents commented on the need for parent organizations to be more culturally competent and inclusive (of both ELL parents and working parents).
- 1.9. In the schools assessed, most principals attend their PTA/PTO meetings (but a few do not). Where they do, it is an opportunity for an exchange of information between parents and the principal.

2. Site Council:

- 2.1. In the assessment, six of 11 have active Site Councils with parent involvement (two or more parents). One has new Site Council that is just forming. Two have functioning Site Councils, but limited parent participation (only one parent representative). One has Site Council, but no parent rep. One did not have Site Council at all at the time of the assessment.
- 2.2. Responses to the survey are as follows: 66% have a very active or active Site Council, 8% somewhat active, 2% not active and 23% do not know. In contrast, in the focus groups, unless parents had served on a Site Council (or had a very close friend or family member who did), they were highly unlikely to know about it. Those who had heard of it often did not know what the council did.
- 2.3. A few schools (maybe two) in the assessment had elections for Site Council parent representatives; most parents volunteered on their own or were recruited by the principal.
- 2.4. Even schools with functioning Site Councils rarely announce the meeting times or agenda items in their newsletters to encourage parents to come. Many parents have the impression that the meetings are closed and they shouldn't attend (focus groups, survey).
- 2.5. Some principals struggle to find ways to involve parents in their Site Councils. Other schools find ways to make Site Council meaningful, but wish they had more BESC support and training (principal interviews).
- 2.6. Few if any ELL parents in focus groups were aware of Site Councils.
3. School Foundation:
 - 3.1. In the assessment, two schools have school foundations. In the survey, 53% of respondents stated they have a very active or active school foundation.
4. Curriculum enrichment activities:
 - 4.1. At one school in the assessment, parents run an art infusion program where parents are trained and teach art in the classroom, directly enriching the curriculum offered at the school.
5. Other parent groups:
 - 5.1. One school in the assessment previously worked with the School Alliance (they do not currently).
 - 5.2. The three SUN schools in the assessment did not appear to have strong parent advisory groups. The SUN schools gather parent input from time to time, but don't have on-going parent leadership groups.
 - 5.3. No parent groups for TAG, special need parents, parents who speak a different language, etc. were mentioned in the assessment. In the focus group for TAG parents, there was a strong desire for school-specific groups for TAG parents. In the focus group for special needs parents, they said it's a running debate within their community whether to integrate into existing parent groups or have their own. Some survey respondents expressed the desire to have groups for TAG and Special Ed parents, and/or organizations with a special focus on minorities and low-income families.
6. LSACS
 - 6.1. In the assessment, no one mentioned them or seemed to know what they were. In the survey, 21% said they had a very active or active LSAC.
7. Principal Hiring:
 - 7.1. All schools with principals hired in the past three or four years had some parent involvement in the hiring process. In one school where the principal was hired in

- the summer, parent involvement in the process was limited (principal interviews, focus groups).
- 7.2. When a principal ended up being transferred internally, parents were often initially frustrated by their experience and felt their input wasn't respected (focus groups).
 - 7.3. Experiences varied—at one school, parents remembered school-wide meetings with translators where parents were asked for input on criteria for hiring. Others had little recollection of parents being asked for input (focus groups).
8. School-wide decisions:
- 8.1. In focus groups parents often expressed concern and frustration that involved parents did not better represent the diversity in their school. In the survey this was less pronounced, but still evident. 42% strongly agreed or agreed that involved parents at their school represented their school's diversity, 37% disagreed or strongly disagreed. A large number—21%—did not know. Another 44% didn't know if their school made an effort to reach out to under-represented parents. Teachers strongly felt that involved parents do not reflect the diversity found in their schools (teacher surveys).
 - 8.2. Survey comments indicated that there is a perception that involved parents represent those economically able to stay at home and, while their involvement is appreciated, it doesn't necessarily represent the views of all families.
 - 8.3. Unless parents had served on a Site Council, they did not know what school improvement plans were (focus groups).
 - 8.4. All the principals of Title I schools indicated they did have a parent involvement plan, but all but one indicated it was a formality only, something they put into the school improvement plan because it was required, but that is was not a meaningful document. 40% of respondents to the survey did not know if their school had a parent improvement plan.
 - 8.5. Principals often send out surveys about parent priorities regarding resources or staffing (focus groups, principal interviews).
 - 8.6. A few principals seem most comfortable having parents at an engagement level, but not at a decision-making level.
 - 8.7. Other principals genuinely struggle with how to involve parents in decisions when they themselves feel there are limited options.
 - 8.8. The survey showed a wide variety of experiences—from the school does “nothing to encourage our voice”, to “our involvement is strongly encouraged.” Survey comments revealed there is no clarity around what is meant by parent involvement in decision-making—what the spectrum of involvement is or could be.
 - 8.9. In the assessment, six schools were moving towards K-8. Parents were generally supportive of the idea; many even excited about it, but had questions about teacher selection, program offerings, the mingling of students of various ages, etc. In four of the six, during the focus group parents stated strongly they would like better communication about how the schools are making these changes and input into the decisions being made. In focus groups with ELL parents, they also stated they would like more information about K-8 (focus groups).

Appendix C

List of all Recommendations

1. School Climate

Buildings

If schools are going to be friendly and safe places for current and prospective parents and community members, schools should make it easier to get around by having multilingual signage that clearly indicates where main entrances and offices are. A component of each school's parent involvement plan should address this. Larger schools should have a map at the main entrance.

Events

At the school level: Schools and parent groups should organize more events that reflect and celebrate the diversity now found in their schools. They should reach out to ELL families to engage them in creating and planning these activities. Community-building events should be included in school parent involvement plans.

At the district level: BESC and Portland Council PTA should provide examples of best practices and information on how to organize such events. As many school-based events are hosted by PTAs/PTOs, their membership should also be provided with tools (such as best practices) and training on how to do this.

At the school level: Schools and parent groups should hold events and activities at times that best engage their family population. This means scheduling events throughout the year at various times of the day and evening in order to accommodate parents' diverse schedules. Each school's parent involvement plan should include a strategy for doing this. Parents expressed frustration that many events and volunteer activities are not accessible to working parents. "Please remember the working parent" was a common refrain in the survey.

Principals and Office Staff

Principals and office staff should always be welcoming and accessible to families at every school. District leadership should set a high standard for principals in this area, and build this standard into their evaluations. In turn, school administrators should set high standards for their office staff on the quality of their interactions with parents, and similarly build these standards into evaluations.

Parents

Parent groups should periodically critique themselves on how welcoming they are to their entire community, and continue to reach out to new parents. They should look around periodically and ask, "Who isn't here and what can we do to encourage them to join us?"

2. Communication:

School-wide Communication

At the district level: District leadership should set standards to ensure effective school communication, while leaving the specifics of how to accomplish that up to individual schools. BESC should provide schools with resources and directives to assist them.

At the school level: Individual school parent involvement plans should include specific strategies for how the school will communicate with all parents.

Communication between Teachers and Parents

At the district level: the district leadership should set goals and standards for teacher/parent communication and develop and share a list of resources and best practices. Each school is different. The District leadership, however, should clarify that this is an important area for student success and set clear expectations, while leaving the exact methods up to the individual school.

At the school level and parent level: individual school parent involvement plans should include standards and practices for teachers at that school that define parent communication. These plans will differ from school to school depending upon the parent population at that school. At all schools, staff email addresses should be clearly posted and the use of email encouraged as an additional tool to exchange information.

Communicating in Languages Other Than English

At the district level: BESC should provide more support to reduce language and cultural barriers. District leadership should have standards and centrally-available resources for translating newsletters, flyers and other materials sent home. Any time the BESC sends information to all schools to include in newsletters or flyers, it should already be translated so each school does not have to do so independently. The BESC and the regional PTA should provide creative solutions—for example, electronic versions of various translated flyers that schools could quickly adapt for use (e.g., a standard PTA meeting flyer in multiple languages on which a group only needs to fill in the date and time). Additionally, now that every school has at least one computer for parent use, these should be used to provide videos and translated materials on particular topics on the spot to parents.

At the school level: Individual school parent involvement plans should include strategies and methods for communicating with ELL families.

Communication in Older Grades

At the school level: School communities—especially middle schools and high schools where it becomes increasingly necessary—should heavily utilize online communication methods and provide pointers to relevant software resources. Schools can help parents develop electronic skills by partnering with community resources that provide training for parents.

Trust and the Impact on Communication

BESC should provide more visible resources, trainings and best practices for teachers and school administrators about ways to successfully reach out to parents who may be distrustful of the school. Individual school parent involvement plans should outline strategies and methods the school will use to engage these parents in their children's education, including events, communication, staff development, etc.

3. Learning Collaboration

Understanding Academic Expectations

BESC should develop materials for parents on benchmarks, standards and curriculum for each grade level, including ways that parents can extend the curriculum at home. These materials need to be easy to read and understand for the average parent. Individual schools and parent groups should host workshops and trainings for parents on the curriculum and how to help children at home. Parents should ask their children's teachers and principals critical questions about what their children are learning, and request specific suggestions for ways they can more actively engage with their children.

Homework

In their individual school parent involvement plans, schools should consider developing strategies to help parents assist their children with homework. Schools should review the support they give children whose parents cannot help them with homework. Are homework clubs effective? Are they reaching the kids that most need help? Schools without homework clubs should assess if this service is needed. BESC should also develop guides and resource lists for parents in multiple languages, along with ways to find additional homework assistance.

Elementary School Parent-Teacher Conferences

Teachers and staff should provide parents with information on benchmarks and standards AND on the social development of their students—not one or the other—regardless of the parents' backgrounds. Conferences should also include information on how parents can help at home. Individual school involvement plans should include training for the teachers in this area if needed. There should be a second parent-teacher conference in the spring.

Schools should continue to work hard to get translators for ELL families. BESC should work with schools to understand why a few families are not receiving service and correct the situation.

Elementary School Report Cards

Report cards are an extremely important form of communication between the school and the parent. BESC should develop report cards that are clear and understandable, and recognize that standards-based reporting is new for almost all parents. The report

cards should make clear what standard is being used: end of the year, or at the time of the report card. Finally, individual schools and parent groups should consider offering educational workshops on report cards.

BESC should work with individual schools to determine what the barriers are to all ELL parents receiving a report card in their native language and correct the situation. Individual schools should include a strategy in their parent involvement plan for providing ELL parents with a report card in their native language.

4. Volunteering

Teachers should be encouraged to welcome and recruit volunteers into the classroom. They should be given tools to help them do so and encouraged to think creatively about how to involve parents in the classroom. Parent groups at schools should discuss with teachers and administrators how they could facilitate classroom volunteering. Individual school parent involvement plans should include a volunteer component describing how the school will do this. BESC should provide resources and best practices to promote classroom volunteering.

5. Parents as Decision-makers

Parent Leadership Organizations

Parent groups—at the local, district and regional level—should do a better job of communicating what their roles and responsibilities are, and what happens at meetings. Parent groups should also reach out to ELL parents and make their meetings more open to traditionally under-represented groups. Local and regional PTAs should provide local groups with training and resources to encourage cultural competency and inclusiveness (including sharing of best practices); individual school groups should have goals and plans for incorporating these practices and resources.

Site Councils

At the district level: BESC should provide Site Council training for all Site Council members. The District leadership should mandate communication to the parents of the school about what its Site Council is doing and when it is meeting, as well as hold school-wide elections for parent representation. Finally, to make it easier for people to understand what Site Council does, its name should be changed.

At the school level: Each school Site Council should have a plan for how to make its work more transparent and engaging to its parent community and how to gather input for its work. In turn, parents should ask questions of their school administrators and Site Council members in order to better understand their Site Council and its work.

School-Wide Decisions

At the district level: District leadership should set clear guidelines for parent involvement in school-wide decisions. BESC should recruit, inspire and evaluate principals on their

ability to develop parent leaders and involve parents as decision-makers. BESC should provide training and resources, both for the principals and for the parents themselves.

At the school level: School-based parent involvement plans should include a component on how the school (including the existing parent groups) will develop parent leadership, involve parents in decision-making and communicate decisions to parents. Examples of decisions in which parents can and should be involved include setting the vision and focus of the school, writing the school improvement plan, hiring and evaluating the principal, choosing areas for professional development, and planning for the transition to K-8.