

ENGAGEMENT PROTOCOL
SEATTLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Input Summary Report

November 17, 2008

INTRODUCTION

Seattle Public Schools (SPS) recently engaged in a district-wide strategic planning process to advance academic achievement for every student. This process culminated in the June 2008 board of directors' unanimous approval of "Excellence for All," our five year strategic plan. The plan establishes a vision for academic excellence, sets goals to measure achievement, and identifies the priorities for action in both academics and operations in order to achieve our educational outcomes across the District.

This plan was shaped by the input of more than 3,000 stakeholders. In virtually all of our engagement activities, we sought specific feedback on the way that the District communicates with, listens to, and involves its many stakeholders.

In June, we committed to:

- carefully review the ideas and concerns about engagement expressed in the strategic plan outreach activities prior to adoption in June,
- develop a draft engagement protocol that is as responsive as possible to stakeholder input about engagement while setting expectations that the District can realistically fulfill in the near term,
- circulate the draft in the community, post it to the Web, and update the board at a regular televised meeting;
- bring changes to the draft back to the key family and civic groups who helped shape the protocol in earlier rounds of engagement for their final feedback.

Improving stakeholder engagement is one of the major themes in Excellence for All. In addition to developing an engagement protocol to create clear expectations for engagement on district-wide projects, the District has undertaken the following work to better inform and engage our community:

- **Predictable community meetings:** Following adoption of the strategic plan, we committed to a regular schedule of community meetings throughout the year. Recognizing the volume and complexity of the work currently underway as we implement Excellence for All, we wanted to create a predictable cycle of meetings where stakeholders can track and be engaged in the major work of the District. We've committed to these meetings with the hope that by establishing a concrete schedule of engagement opportunities, we will fuel expanded

participation by students, families, staff and community members. The community meetings on Capacity Management and Student Assignment this fall served as the first quarterly meetings of this annual cycle. Additional meetings will follow in January, March and May.

- **Embed engagement in project management:** The project management model that has recently been adopted by SPS includes expectations for engagement with internal and external stakeholders. Communications plans are developed as a part of each major project, and engagement strategies that are appropriate to each project are determined by each project team. A guarantee of engagement at the “inform” level for all major projects is covered in the newly created engagement protocol. Engagement further along the continuum at the consult, involve, collaborate, and empower level will occur as the project manager and District leadership determine on a project by project basis. As individual project’s goals, timelines, deliverables, and outreach plans are developed, they will be shared with stakeholders. The Capacity Management and Student Assignment projects are examples of the first elements of the strategic plan the District has undertaken.
- **Improve Web Site:** Excellence for All calls for SPS to strengthen stakeholder engagement by making improvements to our Web site, one of our most powerful communications tools. Guided by a newly formed Web Advisory Committee, a project to redesign the District’s Web site is in initial planning stages. Stakeholder engagement will be a critical first step as a needs assessment is undertaken to help shape how the Web site can change to meet stakeholders’ needs. While this redesign work is underway, we have made a number of changes to the Web site that were suggested during the strategic plan engagement process, including improved navigation, more prominent featuring of Excellence for All, School Beat (the District’s bi-weekly “good news” e-newsletter to all staff and subscribing community members, and links from the home page to information about major District priorities).
- **Increase communication with all families:** Increasing timely communication with all families is key to both advancing academic achievement and improving stakeholder relations. We have recently implemented an automated telephone notification service (SchoolMessenger), and families have begun receiving messages both from the Superintendent about district-wide matters as well as from their students’ schools to remind them of important upcoming events. A system-wide effort to more fully implement a national model of family engagement is underway as one of the priority projects of Excellence for All.
- **Improve Customer Service:** Our strategic plan also underscores our need to improve customer service throughout the District, at the central office as well as in every school. A project is now underway to develop a statement of excellence in customer service and to research and pilot a training module for central staff. We expect to expand this work into the schools to ensure that every student, family member, and community member feels welcome and respected in every school.

- **Work with Community Partners to Strengthen Engagement:** The District is working in partnership with the Alliance for Education, which has formed a special task force committed to community-wide engagement. As themes of engagement and specific plans are developed, District staff will continue to coordinate with the task force and listen closely to the information shared through this engagement process. In addition to this collaboration with the Alliance for Education, SPS is working more closely with parent and family groups to get information to families more quickly through their newsletters and email lists, to provide timely information for their meetings, to participate in discussions with members in the early stages of projects and initiatives, and to always be open to opportunities to improve how we work together on behalf of all our students.

CREATING A DRAFT ENGAGEMENT PROTOCOL

A draft protocol was created to reflect the extensive feedback received during engagement with stakeholders about the strategic plan in the 2007-2008 school year. Our intent is to communicate clear expectations about how the District engages families and the community in the 26 major projects identified in the strategic plan. For example, Web site postings, use of outbound communication channels, translation of documents and quarterly updates to the school board would be required for each major project. The protocol can be found at the following link: http://www.seattleschools.org/area/strategicplan/engagement_protocol_intro.html

In addition to a clear set of informational activities for each project, the protocol features a spectrum of engagement activities that may be offered as appropriate for each major project. This spectrum ranges from “inform” (i.e., sharing information) all the way to “empower” (i.e., delegating decision-making, such as a ballot measure). The level of engagement to be offered for a particular project would be determined by the project manager responsible for that given initiative, but the District would commit to always informing the community of our progress on major projects.

OUTREACH TO REFINE THE PROTOCOL

Pyramid Communications was contracted by Seattle Public Schools (SPS) to collect and summarize feedback on the draft engagement protocol during September and October 2008. Outreach was conducted to continue engagement with key civic and family advocacy organizations that were involved in providing initial feedback during the strategic planning process. Feedback was received from the following groups:

- School-Family Partnership Plan Advisory Committee (SFPAC)
- Alliance for Education Community Engagement Task Force
- Communities and Parents for Public Schools (CPPS)
- Seattle Council Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA)
- Special Education PTSA
- Refugee Impact Grant leadership
- Friends of the Secondary Bilingual Orientation Center (SBOC)
- School's Out Washington
- Seattle Tutoring Coalition
- Learning Partners Group

- Horn of Africa Services
- City of Seattle, Department of Neighborhoods and Education Office
- Seattle Education Association
- Operating Engineers Local 609
- Principal Association of Seattle Schools (PASS)
- All stakeholders through goodnews@seattleschools.org

Other forms of outreach

The draft engagement protocol and opportunity for input was featured on the Web site and in several District outbound communications. An update was also presented at a televised school board meeting. Specific examples of additional outreach include:

- An article was included in the September issue of *School Beat*, which is received by all staff as well as more than 1,000 community members.
- Principals received specific communication through *Principal Communicator* where they were asked to encourage students to send feedback to goodnews@seattleschools.org.
- The draft protocol was circulated to and discussed by senior and school leaders at their regular meetings.
- Civic, family and parent groups were asked to circulate the draft protocol to their members and discuss it at meetings with their members and leadership.
- Information was posted on the Web site, including translation of the protocol in eight languages.
- Superintendent Goodloe-Johnson presented the draft engagement protocol and preliminary findings to the board of directors October 1, 2008.

WHAT WE HEARD

In addition to outreach to the community at large, targeted outreach efforts sought feedback on key questions regarding the draft of this protocol: 1) Is this a reasonable guarantee for engagement? 2) Does it properly set expectations? and 3) What other issues rise to the level of the strategic plan projects such that they would require a clear engagement protocol?

The following key findings reflect answers to these questions as well as general feedback received.

Properly setting expectations for the level of feedback offered is crucial to building trust with stakeholders.

- Stakeholders appreciate the effort to create clear expectations for engagement, but felt that, as drafted, it could be perceived as a commitment for extensive engagement for every project. It is a significant step in the right direction for the District to commit to a protocol of informing stakeholders on all major initiatives, so the protocol should clearly state that “informing” is an across the board commitment, and other more intensive engagement will vary by project and available resources.
- Improved outbound communication in and of itself was viewed as valuable, particularly for district-wide projects. School-level decisions, however, require more substantial engagement and a positive next step would be to create a similar protocol to be used by school leaders.
- Stakeholders would like engagement beyond information sharing to be standard for all projects but recognize that this would require a significant investment of new resources in order to be implemented.

Use of the Web is a necessary – but not sufficient – mechanism for information sharing.

- Stakeholders believe the District must employ communication tactics such as “kid mail” that are believed to be more effective in reaching stakeholders and are not exclusionary to those without Internet access.
- Key partners that are being relied upon to disseminate information should be identified and the District should support their outreach efforts with effective communication tools (e.g., short descriptions that can be quickly modified to fit various communication methods, like a newsletter or group email). This will help partners better leverage their networks to spread information.

- Extra time and more in-person contact is critical to involve many of the communities who would like to be more engaged but won't be reached by written or Web-based materials, even if they are offered in translation.
- Use of SchoolMessenger, the new automated telephone notification system, is a welcome improvement as a means of reaching nearly all families with timely information. While families may experience a variety of barriers in getting information via the Internet, nearly all families and guardians can be reached via telephone.
- SPS should continue to strengthen efforts to engage students. Staff should be supported to build expertise in emerging technologies so that we can effectively inform and listen to students as we work to deliver an excellent education for each of them.

SPS should commit to notifying stakeholders when additional engagement opportunities will be available for a given project.

- To ensure that people are aware of their opportunity to give input, SPS should specify at the outset of each project which stakeholders are likely to be most affected by a given project and then support targeted outreach to include them early.
- The District's recent announcement of standing quarterly community meetings will go a long way to support better planning and can make for better attended and higher quality engagement opportunities.
- Specific advisory or other groups that will have influence on the outcomes of decisions should be identified by SPS project managers as early in the process as possible. Community leaders can then support stakeholders offering input through appropriate channels throughout the decision-making process. Community leaders expressed their desire to help SPS shape the process by which community task forces are formed to advise the District on a variety of topics. This is particularly true for families and community members who want to be engaged as the District reviews recent audits and proposes changes for Bilingual, Special Education, and Advanced Learning services for our students.

The engagement spectrum is a helpful framework but stakeholders would like more concrete examples of how activities would look and feel.

- Stakeholders need a better picture of the steps that will be taken to create genuine opportunities for input.
- More clarity is needed on the mechanism for acknowledging feedback and how it will be used.

The District needs to allow sufficient time for stakeholders to take advantage of engagement opportunities.

- Partner organizations need more time than is typically offered to properly spread information through their networks.
- To be effective for all communities, engagement opportunities need more unstructured time. This would encourage more authentic two-way communication.
- The timeline stipulated under “inform” should include when decisions will be made and at what points stakeholders will have opportunities for input.

The recently announced building closure process should follow this protocol, and other areas of SPS work would benefit from an approach that embraces engagement

- Many other areas of work beyond strategic plan priorities would benefit from use of the techniques and attitudes expressed in the engagement protocol. For example, implementation of program audits (i.e., special education, bilingual), changes to academic programs, curriculum or testing, professional development opportunities, construction and maintenance projects, and working with the community based organizations who are actively engaged with SPS to eliminate the education gap.
- The accelerated Capacity Management work that now includes consideration of building closure should follow this protocol.

CHANGES TO THE PROTOCOL

The feedback we heard on the draft protocol will guide us moving forward. The updated protocol can be found in the appendix and is posted on our Web site at <http://www.seattleschools.org/area/main/getinvolved.xml>. Specific changes are noted below:

We will make clear that informing stakeholders is the guaranteed level of engagement offered for all major projects.

- Any engagement beyond information sharing will be determined on a project-by-project basis. Community meetings will all be posted on the District's Web site at: http://www.seattleschools.org/area/m_calendar/calendar.dxml. This approach acknowledges that not all projects lend themselves to broad community engagement, and it will allow the District to focus resources on issues requiring more extensive engagement to produce successful outcomes. As implementation of Excellence for All continues, project information will be prepared and posted at: http://www.seattleschools.org/area/strategicplan/plan_implementation.html.
- We introduce this engagement protocol at the same time that circumstances require the District to accelerate our Capacity Management work to include consideration of building closure. We have committed to a fair and transparent process. Given the importance of the nature of the decisions the District must make, engagement methods will exceed sharing information. Consultative workshops are planned to solicit ideas from the community about how we can strengthen preliminary recommendations while meeting our obligation to improve access to quality programs and protect the District's financial health by concentrating resources on fewer facilities.

We will utilize multiple methods of communication for our quarterly public meetings and better leverage our partner channels for all major projects.

- Communication methods such as direct mail or "kid mail" will continue to be used for major projects and important district-wide messages.
- Investing in strong communication through the quarterly public meetings will help establish these events as regular occurrences for all stakeholders. Materials for these meetings will be posted online and feedback will be posted on relevant project Web pages (such as Capacity Management).
- We will strive to improve the communication tools we offer our partners as we rely on them to spread the information about engagement opportunities and major District decisions. In addition to the many news articles prepared for School Beat which we invite media and community organizations to pass along, we will work to create "ready to use" articles with links to more information that are appropriate for partner organizations to add to their newsletters and email distributions.

We will notify stakeholders of any engagement opportunities beyond the quarterly community meetings and standard information sharing.

- We will continue to rely on key community partners to help facilitate and disseminate information beyond the District's own communication tools
- To support more successful outreach, we will increase our efforts to partner with community leaders and groups who can effectively engage their communities throughout Seattle.
- Reviewing how we currently engage with advisory groups is another area for improvement. As part of our project management rubric now in place, project managers may consider using advisory groups and task forces to collaboratively shape policies and design aspects of plan implementation. The ongoing work of the School Family Partnership Advisory Committee (SFPAC) is vital to the District in many ways, especially in terms of advising the District on engagement techniques. We will continue to strengthen our working relationship with SFPAC as we learn from how well this protocol serves us all.

The updated engagement protocol includes detailed examples of the kinds of tools and techniques associated with each of level of engagement

- By listing examples of the kinds of tools and activities associated with different levels of engagement, we can create better understanding of the types of opportunities along the engagement spectrum that the District may opt to pursue for various projects.
- One commitment we are adding (under the "Inform" category) is for the Superintendent to provide a high-level summary of feedback on major projects in her quarterly strategic plan update to the school board. Materials presented to the board are televised and also posted on the Web site.

We are making timely communication a top priority.

- We have added "timely" to our commitment to keep stakeholders informed and will strive at every juncture to share information as early as possible.

The Capacity Management work underway to consider building closure requires stakeholder engagement, and we will use this protocol to guide our efforts.

- Most feedback received suggested that anything related to balancing capacity should follow this protocol, and we agree. We will share information as early as possible, beginning with internal stakeholders, as we develop guidelines for building closure and then apply them to prepare a preliminary recommendation. That initial recommendation will be broadly distributed. In addition to required public hearings to gather feedback on the recommendations, we have announced workshops to consult with the board (November 25 at 6pm) and directly with the community (December 4 and 6)

as we develop final recommendations for board approval. More complete information about opportunities to be engaged is available at <http://www.seattleschools.org/area/capacity/index.dxml>.

CONCLUSION

Good stakeholder engagement requires intentional action and strong collaboration. Improving stakeholder relations through strengthened engagement activities is an evolving process, and we expect to learn more with each major project we implement. We appreciate the feedback received as we strive to build on the momentum in our community to build understanding and support of Seattle Public Schools. We look forward to working with our many stakeholders throughout our community as we make the vision of “Excellence for All” a reality.

Seattle Public Schools Public Engagement Protocol

At Seattle Public Schools, we believe that every child deserves the opportunity to succeed. Furthermore, we believe that, given the right support, every child can achieve.

In our vision for our schools:

- All students meet or exceed grade-level expectations and graduate from high school prepared for college, career and life.
- Every school is a high quality school.
- District leaders and staff model excellence for our students.
- The entire community is engaged in supporting and strengthening our schools.

We recognize that our likelihood of success in achieving this vision is strengthened by the involvement of our many stakeholders. Seattle Public Schools is committed to improving and increasing the opportunities for students, families, staff, and community members to engage with District leaders, particularly on matters with district-wide impact. As we implement our strategic plan, Excellence for All, we wish to create clear expectations about how the District will inform the community about our progress and when we will involve stakeholders in decision-making.

“Excellence for All” sets clear five-year goals for improving student performance, and outlines five areas of focus that we believe will help us attain our goals.

1. Academics – ensuring excellence in every classroom
2. Human Resources – strengthening leaders system-wide
3. Infrastructure – building an IT, finance and physical infrastructure that works well
4. Performance Management – creating tools, systems and a culture that rewards high performance
5. Stakeholder Engagement – communicating with and engaging key partners at all levels

Project teams working to implement “Excellence for All” in each of these areas will design stakeholder engagement plans that are appropriate for each project. To guide this process, we have developed this public engagement protocol that is based in part on the spectrum of engagement as developed by the International Association for Public Participation.

International Association for Public Participation Engagement Spectrum

Levels of Engagement	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Engagement Goal	Provide timely balanced and objective information to assist stakeholders in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities, and/or solutions	Obtain feedback on analysis alternatives and/or decisions	Work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered	Partner with the public in each aspect of decision-making including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution	Place final decision-making in the hands of the public
Promise to stakeholders	We will keep people informed and follow through on any commitments made during the course of engagement to deliver additional information	We will keep people informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision	We will work to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in alternatives developed and provide feedback on how input influenced the decision	We will look to the public for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible	We will implement what the public decides
Potential Tools¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fact sheets - Web sites - Open houses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Public meetings - Surveys 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Workshops - Opinion polling - Focus groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Advisory committees - Shared Decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ballot measures

¹Detailed examples of tools and techniques associated with each of the levels of engagement can be found below.

Our Protocol for Engagement for All Strategic Plan Projects

For all major projects, Seattle Public Schools commits to informing stakeholders of our approach and progress (as articulated in the “Inform” area of the spectrum above).

Whenever resources allow, we will attempt to offer a higher level of engagement to stakeholders (Consult, Involve, Collaborate and Empower). For those most important projects affecting our stakeholders, we will go above and beyond our basic commitment to share information as time and resources allow.

The sections below provide more specific **examples of the types of activities** that might be offered as appropriate for each project at the various levels of engagement.

Inform: the activities listed below are examples of potential activities for this level of engagement:

Public Web site postings

- An overview of the project, including goals, milestones, and identification of informational outreach to stakeholders interested in the outcomes of this work
- A fact sheet with answers to frequently asked questions, both anticipated at the outset by staff and those that surface during the course of engagement
- A timeline that clearly shows steps in the decision-making process and opportunities for input relative to deadlines
- A staff contact for questions or comments
- Background information that is updated throughout the process
- Information about quarterly district-wide public meetings
- Information about additional engagement opportunities

Multiple additional methods of communication

- Televised board meetings and posting relevant materials to the web site
- “Kid mail” to promote awareness of quarterly public meetings
- USPS mail for important district-wide communication
- District automated call system to promote engagement
- E-newsletters sent to employees, families and members of the public, each of whom are invited to inform families and other community groups through their newsletters, meetings, and other regular means of written and spoken outreach
 - *School Beat* sent to all SPS staff, families and community members who sign up and archived on the public Web site
 - *Classroom Connection* sent to all teachers and other instructional staff
 - *Principal Communicator* sent to all principals
- News releases of major announcements and public meetings
- High level articles on the SPS News Web page with links to more information
- Use of emerging technologies (texting, wikis, etc.), especially as a means to engage students

Efforts to solicit input

- Dedicated email address (goodnews@seattleschools.org) for general questions or comments
- Project specific email addresses to gather input (such as capacity@seattleschools.org)
- Phone calls or letters to staff contacts identified for major projects

Acknowledgment of receipt and use of feedback

- Quarterly updates to the School Board, including highlights of recent feedback heard and how it was considered. Updates at Board meetings are announced through the Web site and televised on SPS TV. Materials presented are posted to the Web site.

Reducing barriers

- Seattle Public Schools is committed to reducing barriers for students and families with special needs. All public meeting locations will be accessible to persons with disabilities. The District will work with families and staff in advance to make arrangements for needed services known in advance.
- Seattle Public Schools is committed to reducing barriers to engagement for our linguistically diverse families and community members. For all major initiatives, Seattle Public Schools will translate FAQs and any correspondence to families in the top languages of our linguistically diverse communities. Interpretive services and translation of documents will be announced in advance of quarterly meetings.

Outreach

- Project Managers will coordinate with our Bilingual Family & Community Engagement staff as messengers to formal and informal community networks effective in reaching diverse populations represented in our larger school community. *We will strive to share information in a timely manner to support success in these outreach efforts.*

The following components are examples of the type of activities the District may offer as resources allow and projects rise to the level of importance that require us to go beyond information sharing.

Consult: all of the activities listed above are potential activities for this level of engagement, plus:

Public Web site postings

- Documented two-way contact with stakeholder groups and advisory committees

Multi-modal communication

- "kid mail" and direct mail of letters or postcards to promote public meetings and share critical information
- District automated call system to promote engagement

Efforts to solicit input

- Surveys on analysis, alternatives, and decisions with open-ended questions about concerns and aspirations
- Public meetings/presentations/panel discussions/events with a variety of viewpoints represented on an even footing
- Participate in radio and television shows to share information and listen to community members
- Web chats

Acknowledgment of receipt and use of feedback

- Written account of updates made by the Superintendent to the School Board

Involve: all of the activities listed above are potential activities for this level of engagement, plus:

Public Web site postings

- A record of the public input received and the responses as to how input was considered are posted *prior* to decisions being made
- The names, offices, and contact information for members of committees that are making recommendations and/or decisions

Efforts to solicit input

- Drop-in meetings/workshops before decisions are made with the bulk of the time devoted to authentic conversations with decision-makers
- Focus groups with stakeholders

Acknowledgment of receipt and use of feedback

- High-level summaries of feedback received and responses to that input

Collaborate: all of the activities listed above are potential activities for this level of engagement, plus:

Efforts to solicit input

- Including members of the public on committees that are making decisions and recommendations
- Shared responsibility for decisions and implementation between District staff and stakeholder groups
- Events and initiatives co-designed and/or co-sponsored with stakeholders

Acknowledgment of receipt and use of feedback

- Detailed summaries of feedback received and how it will be used in decision-making

Empower: all of the activities listed above are potential activities for this level of engagement, plus:

Public Web site postings

- Full and detailed descriptions of all plans and intentions
- A record of the public input received and the responses to that input *prior* to when decisions are due

Efforts to solicit input and shape proposals together

- Drop-in meetings/workshops *prior* to when decisions are due
- Collaborative efforts to design and co-sponsor outreach events
- Collaborative working groups to design and implement proposals

It is important to note that for certain activities at the “empower” level, such as ballot measures, the District’s activities would have to comply with state requirements for appropriate involvement by public agencies.

We welcome comments on this engagement protocol. Please contact us at goodnews@seattleschools.org or call Bridgett Chandler, Executive Director of Communications, at (206) 252-0198.