

EXCELLENCE FOR ALL
SEATTLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS STRATEGIC PLAN

Community Input Summary Report (Final)

June 4, 2008

INTRODUCTION

Seattle Public Schools (SPS) is engaged in a district-wide strategic planning process to advance academic achievement for every student. This process began by listening to hundreds of stakeholders, and focused input has shaped the plan throughout its development.

More than 3,000 people have been engaged in the strategic planning process. These individuals have had the opportunity to shape the plan via peer reviews and audits, interviews, surveys, small group discussions, internal staff presentations, and various other meetings with SPS staff and leadership. Furthermore, background information and updates, as well as the opportunity to email questions directly to SPS, have been made available on the website and through electronic communications throughout the process.

The following summary highlights the input from 775 participants following the release of the draft strategic plan and framework in May 2008. This feedback was received via community meetings, smaller meetings with students, key community leaders and organizations as well as meetings of other community groups focused on serving Seattle's students.

METHODOLOGY

Pyramid Communications was contracted by Seattle Public Schools (SPS) to collect and summarize feedback on the strategic plan received through a number of engagement opportunities during May and June 2008. Members of the Pyramid Communications team reviewed all input received during this time. This summary report focuses on the major themes and key unique ideas that emerged during the feedback process.

This summary is informed by community feedback collected during the following activities:

- School-Family Partnership Plan Advisory Committee (PAC) meeting on May 6, 2008
- Communities and Parents for Public Schools (CPPS) meeting on May 8, 2008
- SPS Community meeting held at Roosevelt High School (RHS) on May 14, 2008

- SPS Community meeting held at West Seattle High School (WSHS) on May 15, 2008
- SPS Seattle Council Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) meeting on May 19, 2008
- SPS bilingual community meeting held at Aki Kurose Middle School on May 20, 2008
- SPS Inaugural Partnership Summit on May 22, 2008
- Business leader small get-togethers held by the Alliance for Education on May 23 and May 29, 2008
- SPS student feedback session with Dr. Goodloe-Johnson on May 27, 2008
- Community Connectors convened by SPS on June 2, 2008
- Comment cards, input forms and email feedback received throughout the month of May in various settings

Community meetings

A range of stakeholders participated in the community meetings, including families, teachers and other SPS staff as well as other members of the community. At all community meetings, a presentation on the strategic plan was delivered before participants were given the opportunity to participate in a small group discussion.

At the Roosevelt High School (RHS) and West Seattle High School (WSHS) meetings, five discussion groups—one for each element of the strategic plan—were offered. Seventy people participated in these topical discussions at RHS, and 35 people participated at WSHS.

Participation levels in these small group discussions were as follows:

Element of the Strategic Plan	Number of Participants	
	RHS	WSHS
Ensure excellence in every classroom	25	20
Strengthen leaders throughout the system	6	4
Build an infrastructure that works well	15	1
Monitor progress at all levels	6	4
Improve stakeholder engagement	9	5

At the bilingual meeting at Aki Kurose Middle School, the main presentation was conducted with simultaneous translation in the eight most frequently spoken

languages in SPS (other than English). The small group discussions were conducted in these same language groups and the conversation covered all five elements of the plan. About 220 families and community members participated in these small group discussions conducted in the following languages: Amharic/Tigrigna, Chinese, English, Oromo, Somali, Spanish, Tagalog and Vietnamese.

Participation levels in these small group discussions were as follows:

Language Group	Number of Participants
Amharic/Tigrigna*	23
Chinese	9
English	40
Oromo	16
Somali	25
Spanish	50
Tagalog (Filipino)	22
Vietnamese	41

**Awaiting translated notes from Amharic group at bilingual community meeting. Comments will be added when available.*

School-Family PAC, CPPS and PTSA meetings

At each of these meetings, participants heard a presentation by SPS staff and/or the superintendent, followed by a question and answer discussion. The PTSA meeting, with approximately 100 people in attendance, also included a small roundtable discussion with 15 individuals. The School-Family PAC meeting included about 20 participants, while the CPPS meeting included approximately 30.

SPS Partnership Summit

About 115 representatives from community-based organizations serving Seattle's students participated in the SPS Partnership Summit. The group heard a presentation from the superintendent and participated in a question-and-answer session as the full group. Participants then discussed best practices and barriers to strong partnerships in 16 small groups.

Business leader small get-togethers and Community Connectors briefing

The Alliance for Education held two meetings of business leaders that included a total of 23 people. SPS offered a separate briefing for key "connectors" in the community, which included approximately 20 individuals.

Student feedback session

Superintendent Goodloe-Johnson met with a group of 21 high schools students to hear their input on the plan. These students represented the following schools: Rainier Beach, Garfield, Interagency, West Seattle, Franklin, Ingraham, Chief Sealth, Summit K-12, Center School, Ballard, Cleveland, SBOC, Nova and South Lake.

Comment cards

Comment cards and input forms were collected at each community meeting, and emails sent to strategicplan@seattlepublicschools.org were also used to compile this feedback. A total of 121 comment cards, input forms and emails were received.

FORMAT

The following report is divided by each of the five elements of the strategic plan:

- Ensure excellence in every classroom
- Strengthen leadership throughout the system
- Build an infrastructure that works well
- Monitor progress at all levels
- Improve stakeholder engagement

Each section is further divided to include key findings and then is divided by high-level themes with more specific information on the feedback received.

REPORT VERSIONS

The following information includes feedback received and processed by Pyramid Communications by Wednesday, June 4, 2008, and is being provided to the SPS board of directors prior to its vote on the strategic plan on the same day. This report is a final, updated version of an interim summary released on June 2, 2008. The interim report summarized all feedback received and processed by May 30, 2008.

All of the input will continue to guide staff as they work collaboratively to develop implementation plans in the months following adoption of the strategic plan framework.

KEY FINDINGS

Participants generally agreed with the high-level components and goals of the “ensure excellence” element of the strategic plan but had many questions about the specifics of implementation, resources and programs, specifically around aligning curriculum.

A frequent concern was the perception that if a subject or program was not reflected in the plan, it was at risk of not receiving proper resources or not continuing at all. The large focus on bilingual programs, arts education and special education was a manifestation of this concern, and participants asked that the district be more explicit about the role of these programs moving forward.

Many participants used this opportunity to express a broad range of feedback that did not bear directly on the higher level ideas of the draft strategic plan framework. Support for at-risk students and early learning was the focus of many questions and comments received.

Finally, participants shared some specific suggestions for how SPS can improve stakeholder engagement in the future (summarized below).

BILINGUAL PROGRAMS AND SUPPORT

A broad theme across the various language groups at the bilingual community meeting was the perceived lack of support for bilingual programs. This theme surfaced in the PTSA and RHS community meeting as well. Participants expressed concern about bilingual program management turnover and quality and support for programs like the secondary bilingual orientation centers and the Saturday school program and SPS policies that in practice seemed not to support immigrant students and other English language learners (ELL). Specific points around these issues include:

- Immigrant students, particularly teenagers, are not being well served by grade-level placement. Participants noted that teenage immigrants often come in with little to no educational background, leaving them unlikely to be successful in high school or in passing the WASL.
- The requirement for students who are new to the country to pass the Washington Assessment for Student Learning (WASL) was of particular concern to participants.
- Support was expressed for the Secondary Bilingual Orientation Center (SBOC), which participants believe specifically and uniquely address the needs of secondary (ELL) students. One individual warned against co-locating the future SBOC at a comprehensive high school, stating her belief

that high school ELL students are often dealing with major educational and emotional challenges and are unlikely to learn English faster by sharing a campus with native English-speaking students. This feedback was received at the RHS community meeting as well as in emails and comment cards.

- Saturday school programs were noted as particularly important for Latino, Chinese, Vietnamese and Somali students and families.
- Participants in the Chinese-language group noted their students' math skills are strong but they struggle with learning English. They inquired if it would be possible for students to advance in math while maintaining ELL status for language classes.

Participants across language groups at the bilingual community meeting expressed concern that the bilingual audit was being completed after the adoption of the larger strategic plan. Participants suggested strongly that the district be clear on next steps for the bilingual audit and include opportunities for community feedback. Specifically:

- Participants asked that bilingual programs be called out in the plan, but, at a minimum, resources should not be diminished from the program.
- They want clarity on both the timeline of the bilingual audit and the opportunities the community would have to review and provide input to the district on those policies the staff would recommend to the board for adoption.
- One participant suggested there be a presentation on the findings of the bilingual audit before any decisions are made on those programs.

Participants at the Community Connectors briefing had several questions about how the work of the Race and Equity Office will continue. Participants suggested that SPS do a better job of communicating the district's position that the department was not eliminated but rather realigned to integrate the work into other departments. Several participants raised this inquiry across various settings.

ARTS EDUCATION

Participants at all community meetings, the Partnership Summit and the CPPS meeting expressed a concern around the absence of arts education in the strategic plan. They were concerned that not naming arts specifically in the plan signaled a negative impact on current and future programs. They want more clarity around the role of the arts in SPS moving forward. Specific comments include:

- Art is a key part of Seattle's identity and what makes the city unique. The Seattle community has much to offer the schools in this area; community support for the arts in schools is perceived as an untapped resource.
- One participant suggested integrated arts programs specifically.
- One participant recommended that music be offered to all the schools, not just specific schools.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

The implementation of the recommendations from the special education peer review, as well as management of the special education program, was of great interest to participants at the RHS and bilingual community meeting, the Partnership Summit and the School-Family Partnership Advisory Committee. Specific concerns include:

- One participant sought to understand who would be responsible at SPS during the search for a new executive director and wanted to have more concrete information on what is happening over the next 12 months.
- An input form received inquired about the availability and use of assistive technology with the new aligned curriculum for students with disabilities.
- A member of the Spanish-language group at the bilingual meeting wanted more information about how SPS would remedy the overrepresentation of Latino students in special education. The Somali group indicated this was a concern for Somali and East African students as well, stating that the lack of formal education should not be considered in the evaluation.
- One member of the English-language group at the bilingual community meeting stated her disagreement with the recent decision to place 35 special education students in self-contained classrooms, which she believed contradicted the recent special education peer review.

ALIGNING CURRICULUM

Participants generally seemed to support the plan for aligning curriculum and, in some cases, noted how the lack of an aligned curriculum currently makes achieving strong academic outcomes more difficult. A couple of comments expressed stronger support for site-based management that tailors curriculum to the need of that school.

- Varying curriculum across schools makes it difficult for community-based organizations (CBOs) to support students in different schools.
- Lack of alignment appears to be part of the challenge in closing the achievement gap.
- Monitoring progress would be more meaningful and easier with aligned curriculum.
- A teacher spoke to how helpful curriculum tools were to her, specifically the pacing guide and scope/sequence charts. She expressed the desire for the curriculum to be determined at the administrative level so that teachers can spend their time preparing for classroom instruction.

Many participants, including those members of the School-Family Partnership Advisory Committee, sought clarity on the meaning of aligned curriculum. Specifically, what would change due to alignment and the steps involved in implementing it (e.g., new books, new methods, labor evaluations). One participant

in particular sought to understand the barriers to alignment and how those would be overcome now if they had not been in the past.

- One participant wanted more information about what the curriculum would be aligned to (e.g., state standards, expectations at each grade level, etc.).
- Another asked if the curriculum used by teachers would be monitored in any way.

A range of other inquiries and, in some cases, suggestions on how to best approach aligned curriculum surfaced as well. Participants expressed an interest in seeing successful programs in certain schools expanded throughout the district as well as to have SPS programs in line with the work being done by the State Board of Education (e.g., meaningful diplomas, core 24). In at least one case, a teacher had ideas for specific strategies to ensure math and science components were integrated into other areas of instructions (e.g., literacy).

MATH CURRICULUM

Participants across different settings expressed general agreement with taking up the math curriculum as a priority but had several questions around resources and specifics of the program. Inquiry and concern was expressed around whether implementation of the program would match SPS's intent.

- Participants felt implementation would face challenges particularly in elementary schools where teachers are not specialized by subject. A couple of participants suggested placing math specialists or mentors in elementary schools to help.
- Several participants expressed concern about the current math curriculum's continued use, stating that it is confusing for kids past first grade and the current integrated approach for math is "not appreciated."
- A participant expressed concern that the math goal in the strategic plan is for seventh grade, stating her belief that a third-grade goal is more appropriate.
- One participant suggested that Montessori programs could be the key to success for the math gap, but they must be full-time programs to work and include students who speak English as a second language.

INDIVIDUALIZING INSTRUCTION WITHIN ALIGNED CURRICULUM

The need for an increased focus on individualized instruction emerged as part of the discussion on aligned curriculum. Participants appeared to support the need for this broad strategy but were interested in how it would be applied to different students with different needs. This feedback emerged at the WSHS and bilingual community meetings, the student feedback session and PTSA meeting as well as via emails and comment cards.

- A teacher indicated—and many participants agreed—that differentiating instruction is challenging, even for good instructors. She indicated more than professional development will be needed to ensure this is implemented properly.
- One parent at the PTSA meeting mentioned that a little extra attention to the mid-range students (those who do not qualify for accelerated progress program [APP] or special education).
- A comment received by email applauded unique learning environments at Roosevelt and asked that teacher and principal innovation not be taken away in the name of aligning curriculum.

OTHER COMPONENTS OF “ENSURE EXCELLENCE”

Feedback on the school performance framework proposed in the strategic plan was limited but generally positive. Participants did, however, seek clarity on how specifically low- and high-performing schools would be recognized and how SPS would ensure all schools were improving. A focus on high-performing schools and students was of particular interest to participants of the CPPS meeting.

- At the RHS community meeting, participants wanted more detail on how the district will address different schools with different problems (e.g., enrollment, populations with concerns beyond schools, etc.).
- One individual asked for greater detail on how SPS would define what low-performing schools need (in terms of support) to succeed.

Participants expressed agreement with the strategic plan’s emphasis on increasing the graduation rate, though at least one individual implied the goal should be 100 percent rather than 75 percent.

- Participants inquired about the difference between current and new strategic plan goals to “ensure excellence.”
- At the PTSA meeting, a parent requested more information about how specifically the district will increase the graduation rate.

Participants had specific questions about the new classroom-based assessments, asking which ones would be used to measure a student’s performance level and to what those would be aligned.

- They also expressed a desire for the results of the new tests to be shared with students and teachers to help the learning process.

Many participants, including members of the School-Family Partnership Advisory Committee and participants at the CPPS meeting, Community Connectors briefing and student feedback session, had many questions associated with understanding how SPS would accomplish its goal to “ensure excellence in every classroom.” Most questions focused on resources, goals and understanding how these programs

would be implemented and the role of different groups in doing so. Specific questions on resources focused on additional instructional assistants and tutors (particularly those who are bilingual), counselors, smaller classroom size and general support for south-end schools.

- At the RHS meeting, much of this concern focused on capacity constraints in the northeast cluster of SPS. Participants inquired about whether or not a new school would be opened next year in the northeast cluster.
- Participants wanted to understand how invested teachers are in successfully implementing the plan, including specific inquiries around teacher involvement in the development of the plan and if teachers would receive incentives of any kind.
- Community-based organizations and specific programs like the interagency academies sought clarification on their role in supporting these aims.
- Students shared their observation that resources do not appear to be evenly distributed now (e.g., between international baccalaureate and general education classes) and inquired about the approach moving forward.

SUPPORT FOR AT-RISK STUDENTS

Several individuals in various settings, including students who provided feedback, had specific inquiries around supports for at-risk students. Generally, participants were asking that resources continue to be dedicated to these programs that address truancy, drug and alcohol abuse, mental health and gang violence. Alternative schools were called out specifically as good programs to support at-risk students.

- One individual asked if additional resources will be allocated to the truancy department to help reach the goal of improving the graduation rate to 75 percent.
- One participant suggested that nonprofit partners might be able to meet the need for drug and alcohol counseling with little to no cost to SPS.
- Two families sent comments by email urging ongoing support for alternative schools like Middle College High School, which they understand may not “survive.” They indicated that these types of schools are positive environments for students who may otherwise take the GED or not be in the school system at all.
- A teacher suggested more access to social work, counseling and psychologists to help families in crisis and for children with learning challenges associated with these problems.
- A participant in the Somali-language group at the bilingual community meeting wants more information about how to communicate with parents of English language learner (ELL) students to address discipline issues.

EARLY LEARNING SUPPORT

Several participants wanted clarity on the district's plans to support early learning, given the goal of kindergarten readiness outlined in the strategic plan presentation. Participants generally expressed that investing in early learning and kindergarten would be positive for students.

- Participants noted that helping families prepare their children for school is the way to close the achievement gap.
- Concern was expressed around funding, with a participant asking if funding for preschool programs would come from the current K–12 budget.
- At the PTSA meeting, one parent expressed concern about full-day kindergarten and her perceived lack of support for this in the strategic plan.
- Business leaders indicated this was a key area where the business community could rally to support the schools.

OTHER FEEDBACK

A set of miscellaneous suggestions, comments, questions and concerns emerged during the feedback process but were unrelated to the themes already mentioned. Very little of these comments and feedback were associated with the specific proposals of the strategic plan; rather they were based in participants existing concerns and experience in the schools.

- There is already limited classroom time to teach and an overwhelming number of programs for teachers to implement.
- More information is needed about methods to increase Latino representation in advanced learning programs.
- Clarity is needed on whether or not SPS is developing specific strategies to attract parents back from private schools to the public schools system.
- The state should provide schools and families more useful information from the WASL.
- The district should talk more about technical training and dual education.
- Increase/improve access to advanced learning opportunities (e.g., spectrum program).
- Elementary school education should include teaching students how to study, which will help ensure they can complete homework at earlier ages. Actual homework for elementary students should be limited, given that completion is highly dependent on those children having “functioning” parents.

STRENGTHEN LEADERS THROUGHOUT THE SYSTEM

KEY FINDINGS

Participants at all community meetings agreed that the areas of focus and priorities of the plan seemed logical and obvious.

Many individuals requested more information about professional development, especially concerning timing and training prior to issues arising in the classroom. There was consistent concern expressed around the current hiring process with agreement on the need for a universal hiring process district-wide.

The system of evaluation at all levels throughout the district was a popular topic of discussion. Many individuals expressed confusion about the process and how feedback is gathered.

Most participants agreed that all staff need more support, and accountability must be monitored to ensure that all staff meet the performance standards.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

At RHS participants were concerned as to whether professional development will be enough to give teachers necessary training. Some participants commented that professional development is happening after the need is expressed.

There is a general interest in providing more timely professional development for teachers. Most participants felt more training is needed prior to starting the job with participants at RHS, citing the need for development options for teachers before problematic students become an issue in class.

- A parent at both PTSA and RHS noted that smaller classes would help teachers in addressing the magnitude of student learning sets, allowing more time to tailor teaching to specific student needs, including those with advanced skills.
- WSHS participants agreed that professional development should be more streamlined, and parents need to be better informed of the schedule and purpose. Two group members indicate that the lack of clarity and coordination now leaves parents believing this is “vacation” time for teachers that is not serving students and inconveniencing parents.
- One parent at WSHS suggested offering creative ways to keep students engaged in school while teachers undergo professional development. This parent used the example of Pathfinder school. Another suggested doing it around classroom hours rather than during it, while yet another parent suggested changing vacation schedules which interfere with “the rhythm of learning.”

Participants at all community meetings requested more clarification around the intent of professional development. Some participants at WSHS did not understand that professional development is an ongoing part of a teacher's education process in the district, while those at RHS requested more information about when targets for professional development will be established.

- A teacher submitted feedback suggesting that professional development be aimed at curriculum alignment and should be compensated by the district.
- At RHS, there was a suggestion that in order to sustain excellence there is a need to support transitioning and systemizing quality programs that are currently contingent upon individuals rather than programs.

EVALUATION

At both RHS and WSHS, participants requested more information about the evaluation process throughout the district. At WSHS, there was confusion around how feedback is gathered and incorporated back into the teacher evaluation process as well as who contributes to the process. Several parents in the group also indicated a lack of awareness about accountability standards for teachers.

Many participants at RHS expressed concern about the ability to collect and provide authentic feedback in the evaluation process throughout the district.

- One participant questioned whether district staff felt they had the freedom to criticize leaders.
- A few individuals noted that teachers should be allowed to evaluate their principals and leaders based on a set of criteria and performance standards.
- Participants in the business leader small get-togethers noted that principals ought to have the authority to remove under-performing staff. One individual suggested looking to New York's model for supporting and removing teachers.
- Students expressed a desire to be able to evaluate their own teachers.

SUPPORT

There was general agreement at all community meetings of the need for support of all staff. Participants felt very strongly that there is a need to support systemic collaboration so that teachers are really made to feel they can assist each other and that the system and the central office support them.

- Parents at WSHS noted that counselors are overworked and suggested greater support would help overall climate of every school.
- At WSHS, there was a need for more information about how the mentoring programs work, specifically if mentors are given only to new teachers.

- One teacher commented that support for special education seems to be a low priority due to the positions of consulting educators being cut over the past year.
- A teacher stated concern that the district has placed too much responsibility on specific leaders and often those supervisors are unavailable to assist staff.
- At RHS, one participant suggested that central office leaders take the time to meet with building leaders throughout the district in order to get a better understanding of needs. Many participants agreed on the need for collaboration throughout the district.

There was overwhelming response from many language groups at the bilingual community meeting for more support for students of the bilingual community. An individual at the bilingual community meeting commented that improvement in education cannot occur until all teachers and principals address “racist attitudes.”

HIRING

Participants at both RHS and WSHS expressed confusion about SPS’ current hiring process. At RHS and WSHS, participants requested information specific to the barriers within the current hiring process as well as an explanation as to why this system was arranged this way to begin with. At WSHS, participants asked for more specific information around the lack of a centralized hiring pool.

- One teacher at WSHS mentioned that she was hired from funding given to the school she is currently working at through grants, but due to logistical issues she did not begin working until four months after she was hired. All other participants noted that this was a serious problem.
- Participants at RHS suggested creating standards for the process that included listing all open positions in one central location, such as the website. There was also a suggestion for a district-wide standard hiring process to reduce variation in experience contingent upon individual schools. There was widespread agreement for the need for more recruiting efforts for teachers to want to work for SPS.

Many participants at the bilingual community meeting in the Filipino- and Spanish-language groups highlighted the need to hire more teachers of diverse backgrounds, so students can learn from teachers who they can relate to.

Members of the Community Connectors briefing noted the importance of hiring highly qualified teachers. The business community noted the importance of hiring more teachers with national certification. A participant in one of the community meetings approached the issue of highly qualified teachers differently, inquiring if having a greater percentage of teachers holding at least a B.A. is a goal for SPS.

ACCOUNTABILITY

There is widespread support for receiving more information about accountability across the district. Many participants noted that general information about the levels of accountability at each school would be helpful for families to have in order to provide feedback.

- One participant at RHS suggested that the development of an organizational chart to be available externally would be very beneficial to parents and the public, so they can see the system of support and accountability and therefore know who to contact when issues are raised.
- Participants at WSHS suggested that the district work with the teachers' union in order to remove poorly performing teachers. One member commented that the district must do more than just move bad teachers to a different school.
- School-Family Partnership Advisory Committee expressed concern about the challenge of ensuring high quality teaching in every classroom.

BUILD AN INFRASTRUCTURE THAT WORKS WELL

KEY FINDINGS

Generally, participants noted their reassurance in knowing that the district is addressing staff's systemic, knowledge-based skills at the district level. The majority of participants at RHS, however, were eager to discuss building-capacity and enrollment issues, and there was less desire to talk about technology infrastructure.

Some individuals were concerned with issues of building infrastructure and barriers impeding the upgrade of the technological system.

CAPACITY ISSUES

Participants at RHS expressed general frustration around the challenges they face due to capacity constraints and the fact that the district has not found a solution. Specifically, individuals questioned why certain programs and issues cannot be addressed throughout the discussion at RHS.

Many parents expressed various concerns about student assignment at the RHS and bilingual community meetings as well as via email feedback. Specifically, participants at RHS had questions about how the district would handle the overcrowding of schools in the northeast cluster and the number of students per class, particularly before the start of the next school year.

- Some noted that SPS needs to model "Excellence for All" by addressing capacity issues.
- One member of the Spanish-language bilingual group wondered how the district would ensure that every school across the district maintains a balance of diversity once the new student assignment plan is put in place.

Many parents at RHS expressed a desire to hear specific, data-driven assignment issues addressed as well as the district's other infrastructure priorities that are not listed on the overview sheet.

- Parents at RHS requested information as to how the district will address classroom space for the fall and how it will avoid getting stuck in similar capacity-shortage situations in the future.
- There was also a request for more information about vacant school buildings and policies about private schools using them (e.g., Muslim Youth Academy). Some participants felt very strongly that the district should not

allow private schools to use vacant buildings as the school-closures is a sore spot for the neighborhoods.

Parents at RHS also suggested that the district develop long-term plans to address building capacity beyond the 2009–2010 school year.

- Several participants at various community meetings suggested adding a new elementary school to the northeast cluster.

USE OF TECHNOLOGY

At RHS, some parents conveyed their concern that the new technology plan seems to be aimed solely at benefitting the central office. They did not see how the new system would benefit individual schools.

- There was also agreement that too much emphasis is being placed on human resources. They doubt that an improved technological system can overcome human limitations such as one counselor being assigned to 400 students.
- One individual expressed concern that not all computers are being utilized and felt it was a waste of resources to invest in technology that students are not using.

Several parents had suggestions to better utilize technology to improve communication. These included opening access to blocked email services, allowing access to wireless Internet at meeting spaces and using Open Source.

- One individual suggested via email that every school incorporate a technology person to ensure that staff technology functions properly as well as supplying every school with an up-to-date computer lab.

One individual suggested that more professional development around new technology would assist teachers in feeling confident to utilize the new tools.

Participants at RHS mentioned the need for more opportunities to have two-way communication between parents and administrators, including online discussion groups, databases for parents to identify their expertise and skills to assist the district, and establishing Google Groups for each classroom to streamline announcements.

- One parent suggested via email that it would be very helpful to educate families on how to get free web email accounts and free computer time at libraries so that families without web access at home can get improved email communication. This will save a lot of time stuffing take-home packets and save paper.

- Parents expressed eagerness to assist the district with technological support in order to keep technology up to date.
- One parent commented via email after the meeting that the district should work toward Open Source software.

TRANSPORTATION

Individuals at the PTSA meeting requested more information about transportation issues, wondering if SPS is talking with Metro to improve transportation options for students.

- Another participant commented that many south-end students have to travel for much longer periods to reach north-end high schools ever since the district switched to Metro.

MONITOR PROGRESS AT ALL LEVELS

KEY FINDINGS

Participants at all community meetings requested more information about the goals stated in the strategic plan presentation and expressed concern that monitoring progress implied that more emphasis will be given to the WASL. Individuals also stressed the importance of district-wide alignments for monitoring systems.

Participants expressed agreement in the importance of performance data being tracked in new IT systems as well as being made available to parents. They were aware that there has been a historical lack in electronically tracking performance data.

Participants also underscored that current outreach was insufficient and that many parents feel out of touch with what is happening at the district level. They were glad to hear that increased direct outreach to parents and regular progress reports are integral parts of strategic plan.

WASL

General concern was expressed at all community meetings that monitoring progress will lead to more standardized testing and less time for instruction in the classroom.

- High school students expressed that there is already too much emphasis placed on the WASL in 10th grade and feared that the plan will require even more class time to be dedicated to the testing process. They do not feel the test is well aligned to what they are learning in the classroom.

There was general agreement for K–12 interventions with some individuals highlighting the need to know what interventions were in place for WASL high school students.

- Nearly all language groups at the bilingual community meeting expressed great concern and disagreement about the use of the WASL to monitor progress, expressing the unfairness to expect English language learners to perform at the same level as native speakers.
- Members of the Filipino-, Vietnamese-, Somali- and Chinese-language groups all articulated the need for better support for their students in all areas—from homework help to passing the WASL.
- Members of the Vietnamese-language group suggested implementing a variety of measurements to track the ELL students' progress throughout the year.

SCHOOL EVALUATIONS

An area of great concern at RHS was regarding the current evaluation process with general agreement on the need for consistency across the district.

- One participant suggested having one trained professional conduct all individual school assessments instead of soliciting untrained parents to conduct assessments as had been done in past Direct Reading Assessments.
- One individual suggested establishing a universal management system like the one that many large corporations are currently using.
- Many participants expressed the desire to have evaluation and progress reports be school-specific.
- One individual suggested the need for consistent evaluation of all building leaders district wide.

There was consensus among RHS participants for the need to implement a standard process district wide.

- Participants suggested individual school performance goals, tactics and strategies to achieve those goals, and end-of-the-year reports should be articulated and disseminated via community meetings and parent groups.
- Participants at WSHS suggested posting a yearlong, district-wide master class schedule that was accessible and regularly updated.

Many participants at RHS expressed an interest in classroom-based assessments and noted the need for assessments to be regularly presented to parents in a manner that is accessible.

- A few participants noted the need to implement district-wide grading consistency in order to ensure that children are evaluated in a similar manner wherever they are.

Other participants expressed an interest in learning more about how permanent evaluation measures would be designed and implemented at the different school levels.

At RHS, all participants noted a concern about the size of the district, the gap between district policies and what happens in the classroom, and the district's historical resistance to change.

TRANSPARENCY

There was consensus among RHS individuals on the need for greater (and complete) fiscal transparency by the district. Business leaders had a discussion about the need for the district to control costs.

- One person suggested that the district develop a website where it posted district-specific statistics on the measures it is taking to cut costs (e.g., by recycling) and how much money such initiatives were saving.

One individual at the bilingual community meeting requested more information about the previous five-year plan, stating concern that the new plan implies that parents will have to wait another five years to see results.

Participants at the Partnership Summit were pleased to hear that data collection will be improved, and they would like a dependable way for this data to be shared with community-based organizations that are supporting academic achievement in the schools.

GOALS OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

Participants of the CPPS meeting expressed appreciation for clear goals and a focus on accountability in the strategic plan. There was a clear consensus from many participants at RHS, WSHS and PTSA that the district needs to provide better access to more plan details, including reviewing the specific tactics and strategies of the plan's goals, as many felt the goals were too broad or targets were aimed too low. The School-Family Partnership Advisory Committee also expressed an interest in learning more about district-level student goals.

- One individual at RHS said the details seemed to be limited to problem areas while another noted the need for more detail on achievement metrics and how the district planned to achieve them.
- A WSHS participant questioned if district-wide goals are meant to drive greater uniformity between schools, while another community member wondered if the student-level goals will be the same across the district. This individual also wondered if resources would be allocated away from those programs whose students are already meeting or exceeding the WASL standard.

Many at RHS expressed an interest in knowing what the district was doing to support low-achieving students and whether student-level goals will be the same across the board.

DISTRICT-WIDE ALIGNMENT

There is a need for greater clarity and district-wide alignment on discipline measures (i.e., what constitutes grounds for expulsion and suspension) as well as statistics on suspension demographics and how it affects academics.

- One individual requested more information about performance framework including if performance targets for sub-groups of students would be the same across the district as well as all students. This person also requested

more information about whether the superintendent's dashboard will be disaggregated by race, FRE and instructional programs.

A few individuals expressed an interest in knowing what four-year entrance requirements the district was going to model in their standards, while another participant inquired where technical, trade schools and less academically inclined students fit into the performance models.

There was a need expressed via email feedback and the WSHS participants for more information about expectations and performance management tools. Some individuals requested more information about how the district will measure school-readiness and how it will be supported in every classroom.

- At the bilingual community meeting, there was a request for more information around enforcing the use of new curriculum across the district.

A participant at the Community Connectors briefing was concerned about how central office leaders and the superintendent will guide the process of cultural changes in the district to align with the plan strategies and goals.

IMPROVE STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

KEY FINDINGS

Participants expressed strong agreement with an increased focus on improving relationships with various stakeholders. Families across various settings expressed the need for improved school-family relationships. A particular theme emerged around customer service at school offices as well as additional support for teachers to have more frequent, quality contact with families.

This was particularly applicable to “hard-to-reach” families. Participants expressed a need to do better outreach to immigrants and other families whose first language is not English and shared some specific suggestions.

Participants, particularly those who were involved in the SPS Partnership Summit, expressed a great interest in understanding how the district will partner with outside organizations moving forward. While most of these comments focused on the community-based organizations (CBOs) active in the schools, there was interest expressed in partnering with a broader set of organizations.

Finally, participants shared their thoughts—both positive and negative—about engagement around the strategic plan as well as ongoing efforts to improve relationships with stakeholders.

FOCUS ON AND CHALLENGES OF IMPROVING STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Participants were happy to hear that there is a plan to engage them and the community and look forward to the proposed improvements. Business leaders acknowledged the importance of exciting families and motivating parents to stay in Seattle and choose to enroll their students in public schools rather than private schools. At the same time, participants sought clarification on the specific strategies moving forward.

- At RHS, the ideas of strengthening public confidence and setting a protocol for engagement were well-received, and participants were pleased to have an opportunity for input.
- Participants expressed strong agreement around “widening the pipeline” for families to find resources and support. They also articulated a need to get new families engaged and bring back and support involvement of those families that may have walked away from PTA and other programs.
- One individual wanted clarity on whether or not engagement was one of the five key elements of the strategic plan, which he felt was crucial to ensuring

the district approaches all future projects with adequate community engagement.

- Participants would like clarity on the role of the School-Family Partnership Plan, which one individual believed had been rejected by SPS. Others felt that the Family-Engagement Plan could be used as a referral tool for parents.

Participants at both the RHA and WSHS community meetings expressed doubts and concerns that engagement with the schools will increase, given demands on families, barriers (e.g., economic factors) and a sense of intimidation felt by some families.

- One individual indicated the hurdle is existing distrust of the district on the topic of engagement given that many families feel their time and energy has been misused in the past. She suggested the district stop asking the public for their feedback unless this input would be used to create change.
- Both the RHS and WSHS groups also discussed their concerns associated with fluctuations or instability at the district as a factor interrupting efforts for increased engagement. Parents expressed they feel the need to continually brace themselves for change, such as schools closing.

Community-based organizations (CBOs) at the Partnership Summit expressed concern around current challenges associated with working in Seattle Public Schools.

- CBOs report that the success of their work is currently highly dependent on the leadership (i.e., principals) of individual schools because there is not a systemic approach. While this was positive where the principal is supportive, it creates a significant barrier where the school leadership is not supportive.
- CBOs have encountered difficulty with the change in leadership at the district. They expressed frustration over having to rebuild relationships with these changes and sometimes not knowing who is the right point of contact at the district.

SCHOOL-FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS AND CUSTOMER SERVICE

RHS and WSHS participants expressed a need for better customer service for parents when they arrive at schools, which can often feel unwelcoming. Participants at these meetings, as well as the PTSA meeting, wanted more information to help identify site-based contacts and sources of assistance at the schools to address this issue.

- At the RHS group, someone mentioned they feel like they are being asked, "Why are you here?" when they go into a school. It is off-putting and intimidating for some families, particularly those parents who don't speak English, who often feel like a "problem" when they arrive in the front office.

- At RHS, participants stated there is no clear go-to person at each school. They would like to know more about how communication will be fostered in the plan and what is in place now.
- At WSHS, participants ask that SPS develop some mechanism for parents to hold the district accountable for the customer service commitment.

Beyond customer service in the front office, participants expressed a desire for more resources around school-family relationships, particularly support for teachers and other staff to conduct outreach and availability of resources for families at the school.

- An RHS participant expressed that relationships between teachers and family are currently strained because of increased demands on teachers (e.g., time spent on WASL), limiting outreach. CBOs at the Partnership Summit emphasized that teachers need clear expectations to communicate with families and that home visits were an important aspect of this.
- Families would like to have a list of information about who to contact within each school about issues like safety, discipline and struggling kids.
- Another participant suggested that community learning centers and after-school programs foster more communication between families and staff at the schools.
- A teacher stated her opinion that every school needs a full-time family support worker who can coordinate with classroom teachers to support the social, medical and physical needs of the students and families.
- Participants at the WSHS meeting asked that schools have case management staff to investigate the cause of truancy and dropout with families and students.

ENGAGING TYPICALLY UNDERREPRESENTED FAMILIES

Many participants expressed the need for SPS to do more to reach families and community members who are immigrants and/or who do not speak English. They stated that typical online communications are not enough and schools with a high percentage of these families often do not have traditional engagement structures (e.g., PTSAs) in place. Various suggestions were made about how SPS can improve outreach to these individuals, starting with staff who can speak the language of these families when they come to the schools and general improvement on cultural competence throughout the system. The distinction between diversity and cultural competence was discussed at the Community Connectors briefing.

- Members of the Vietnamese and Somali communities suggest a need for instructional assistants who speak their language and translators and providing a workshop for new arrival refugees.
- The Oromo-language group at the bilingual community meeting asked for more translated materials, so they can act as ambassadors to their communities. They also suggested ongoing workshops at community centers to collect feedback from this community.

- The Oromo-language group and Somali group also expressed that they would like SPS to continue outreach like the bilingual community meeting that seeks to educate the whole community and parents.
- There was widespread agreement at the PTSA meeting around using radio stations to reach out to the various bilingual communities and more low-income families that do not have access to computers.
- One parent at the PTSA meeting suggested reaching out to faith groups, which can assist in reaching these families.
- Latino SPS staff who participated in the Partnership Summit feel they could be better utilized to serve Latino students, particularly those whose first language is Spanish.

PARTNERSHIPS WITH OUTSIDE ORGANIZATIONS

Many participants, particularly those at the PTSA meeting, expressed the need for more clarity around how the district is developing partnerships and the manner in which it is conducting outreach. Specifically, they wanted to hear more about partnering with early learning providers, higher-education institutions, neighborhoods and community groups, cultural organizations, broad voting populations, and philanthropic and business organizations.

- A participant at the RHS meeting expressed a need for a go-to person in each school that deals specifically with community partnership, which he believed would require allotted time (five to 10 hours) for each school.
- One individual suggested that employers are important stakeholders and that SPS should consider ways to involve businesses in the education of older students.
- Partner with our world-class mathematicians and scientists in Seattle to improve math and science in our schools.

Community-based organizations indicated a strong interest in aligning to the district's strategic goals. Participants at the Partnership Summit, the community meetings and the business leader small get-togethers had some specific suggestions of how CBOs can contribute to improving academic outcomes for students and how SPS can do a better job of coordinating those efforts. Participants at all three community meetings pointed to before- and after-school care providers in particular and expressed a need for SPS to have a better relationship with these groups.

- Participants who were before-/after-school care providers mentioned that they and their colleagues view themselves as a critical link between families and schools because these program staff often interact with families more than teachers do. They currently feel overlooked as a potential link of communication between parents and schools.
- Many small groups at the Partnership Summit indicated an interest in a more systemic-approach of coordinating CBO work at SPS that still allows a

direct working relationship with principals where the leadership at the school level is supportive of the CBO work.

- CBOs would like a better way to coordinate with one another to streamline efforts to support students. Examples of this include providing a menu of support options and using a common enrollment form for multiple programs.
- Participants at the Partnership Summit view themselves as key partners in supporting academic success of students and would like to build stronger partnerships with the district and align to the district's strategic goals. Several groups suggested giving CBOs equal access to student-level data so they can measure progress. Free rent for CBOs on school campuses was a suggested incentive for CBOs to align with district goals.
- Partnership Summit participants inquired about the district's strategy to engage site (school) leadership in being a partner with site-based (nonprofit) providers.
- Business leaders indicated they would like to see the Alliance for Education lead a public campaign to focus on district priorities, such as math and science. They suggested the Alliance pay the costs associated with teacher certification as well as compensate employees for volunteering/tutoring.

The impact of the reorganization on engagement work specifically needs to be clarified due to the elimination of two positions specific to community engagement in the Office of Community Learning. Participants at all three community meetings asked about what will become of this work.

- Participants in the Partnership Summit wanted to understand when the community collaboration will begin under the new reorganization.
- Two individuals were curious about how much money would be allocated to the SPS community partnership work, one stating the importance of such funds for programs like the Filstar project that helps students in jeopardy of failing the WASL.

ONGOING ENGAGEMENT AROUND THE STRATEGIC PLAN

Participants at the WSHS and bilingual community meetings, as well as the PTSA meeting, expressed the need for more information about how the plan is moving forward to allow the community to stay involved and to track progress. Both WSHS and the PTSA groups indicated they would like to see this information posted online. Many participants indicated an interest in better understanding who had been involved in the plan development.

- The group at WSHS also wanted to see how their own input and that collected at other groups, community meetings, etc. would be reflected.
- The PTSA group indicated that some level of detail, such as a month-by-month list, would be appreciated. This could be used as a tool to report back to the community about what is happening in the district.

- Participants suggested that the strategic plan be presented at every school via the principals or PTSA leaders. If principals, hold them accountable for presenting to their school.
- PTSA meeting participants expressed extreme disappointment around the timing of the community meeting for bilingual parents being held the day before a draft plan is being presented to the School Board.
- Several participants, including those at the Community Connectors briefing, asked that the strategic plan include details on how the district is going to engage teachers (and the teachers' union specifically) and all staff to get their input on the plan. One participant focused on the importance of the superintendent being in the schools to reach all staff, suggesting weekly after-school coffee hours.
- One participant suggested sending a mailer with an update on the plan, on a quarterly basis. Another participant asked that SPS clarify with the community about priority of programs over the next five years.
- Students specifically requested that they receive more information on what decisions are taking place at the district level, so they are aware of the decisions that make impact them.

WEBSITE AND PUBLIC TRANSPARENCY

The WSHS group talked a bit about limits on the district's communication methods and outcomes. Participants across a range of settings suggested improving the website to have it updated and simpler to use. They would also like to see particular information, such as budget information, shared more readily on the website.

- Put the strategic plan on the front page of the district's website and offer clarity in all things related to the plan.
- The website needs more relevant information, and there needed to be more publicity around these community meetings and other public forums; specifically, the links to the community meetings were difficult to find.
- At RHS, there is an expressed need for a glossary of terms on the website. Certain terms can have many meanings and would be beneficial to define.
- Transparency around the budget process was mentioned at the RHS community meeting. Currently parents are poorly informed about funding for basic education, capital campaigns, etc.

STUDENT ASSIGNMENT

There was little feedback about engagement specific to the student assignment plan. This theme emerged at the School-Family Partnership Advisory Committee meeting and the PTSA meeting, where many parents believe the district should “start the conversation” about how to manage this issue prior to the technology being in place. One parent suggested having these community meetings sooner rather than later. A similar sentiment was expressed about future school closures, with business leaders expressing the need for a clear strategy and better communication before approaching closures again.