

The State of Family, School and Community Partnerships in Washington State Schools

Research shows that family and community involvement is a key factor in a student's improved academic performance. When families are involved, students obtain higher grade-point averages, enroll in more challenging classes and have better social skills and attendance.¹ Because of this, the Center for the Improvement of Student Learning (CISL) wanted to know the state of family and community partnerships in Washington State.

This report summarizes the results of school and district surveys conducted by CISL in the spring of 2007. The survey paints a comprehensive statewide picture on family, school and community partnerships around Washington. The survey was designed to gather information from districts and schools regarding:

- Administration of family and community partnerships and activities.
- Title I family involvement.
- District and school needs to support their family and community efforts.
- Student involvement activities and school needs to support these activities.
- Opportunities for districts and schools to share successful family and community partnership stories.

Insights gained from the survey will be used to create resources such as tool kits and to develop effective professional development offerings.

CENTER FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING

CISL's legislative mandate calls for it to be a clearinghouse for educational research, promising practices and success stories from around the state. The Center, reactivated by the Legislature in 2006 after a six-year absence, is working to transform the way schools work with families and communities, especially those in underserved populations. You can read more about CISL at www.yourlearningcenter.org.

¹ "A New Wave of Evidence," Henderson and Mapp, 2003

SUMMARY

This report identifies the state of family, school and community partnerships in Washington and the needs of school districts and schools regarding family and community engagement programs.

KEY FINDINGS

Key findings in the school and district surveys are as follows:

- Many districts and schools are operating from the traditional model of family and community engagement: "Come when we invite."
- Most districts and schools are not aware or not using research and best practice models available for engaging families and communities.
- Most districts and schools have staff and/or volunteers to assist in coordinating family and community involvement.
- Districts and schools agree on the top three areas where they need assistance in implementing successful partnership programs. The needs are: training, networking with families and community groups, and access to a database of successful practices.

CISL TOP PRIORITIES

From this survey, CISL will help districts and schools implement successful partnership programs. CISL will:

1. Provide guidance and resources (via toolkits, conferences, workshops and Website).
2. Provide training (via conferences and workshops) and access to promising practices (via Website).

DATA COLLECTION AND METHODOLOGY

In May 2007, CISL, located in the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction in Olympia, sent online surveys to Washington state public school district superintendents and school site principals. The surveys closed in July 2007. Districts and schools were informed that CISL would use the surveys to compile success stories and to determine materials and services that districts and schools needed to support their family, school and community partnership efforts. Materials related to family and community involvement were offered as an incentive to complete the survey by May 30.

Participants were informed their individual responses would be kept confidential and the overall survey results would be shared. District and school site surveys were similar, except for the additional section for school sites regarding student involvement. The majority of the survey questions were multiple choice.

The response rate for the surveys provided good samples of Washington's district and school demographics. Overall, of the 294 **district** surveys sent to superintendents, 133 (45 percent) responded; and of 2,212 surveys sent to **school** site principals, 278 (13 percent) responded.

For **schools**, the response rate is reflective of the state's demographics of schools, with the exception of high schools. Survey respondents by grade level were: **High school**, 24 percent (vs. 14 percent in the state); **middle schools**, 18 percent (vs. 15 percent in the state); **elementary**, 55 percent (vs. 52 percent in the state); other respondents, 9 percent (vs. 19 percent in the state). A few respondents, where one person serves as both the district superintendent and principal, completed both or only one of the surveys.

Although the survey was addressed to "District Administrator" or "School Site Administrator," some districts and schools had individuals responsible for family and community partnerships complete the survey and/or gather information from individuals responsible for various areas in the survey. At the **district** level, 65 percent indicated "central office certified administrator" submitted the survey, and at the **school** level, 85 percent indicated "building administrator" submitted the survey.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Specific findings and recommendations in this report will be broken down into the following categories: administration of family, school and community partnerships; family and community activities; budget and staffing; and top three needs identified by districts and schools.

ADMINISTRATION OF FAMILY, SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMS

Findings: Survey results found that most districts and nearly half of schools have adopted a family, school and community partnership policy. However, most do not use a specific model or research base to implement a program. Specific survey results follow:

- 63 percent of **district** respondents have a formal school-adopted policy or plan for family and community partnerships. However, 69 percent did not use a specific model or research base to build a district-wide program.
- 46 percent of **school** respondents have a formal school policy or plan for family and community partnerships. However, 72 percent did not use a specific model or research base to build a program.
- 63 percent of **district** respondents and 64 percent of **school** respondents evaluate the progress and quality of their family and community efforts.

- No specific research base or model was used by more than 10 percent of **districts** or **schools**, meaning there was no consensus among respondents for research or model.

Recommendations: Districts and schools need guidance and access to research and best practice models for implementing solid family and community partnership programs.

BUDGETS AND STAFFING FOR FAMILY INVOLVEMENT PROGRAMS

Findings: The majority of **district** (77 percent) and **school** (71 percent) respondents have paid staff and/or volunteers coordinating family and community involvement. Forty-one percent of **districts** and 25 percent of **schools** have .25 full-time equivalent (FTE) employees or more charged with family and community program coordination.

Results of district and school staffing in regards to family and community involvement programs are as follows:

- 25 percent of **district** respondents have paid staff coordinating family and community involvement; 18 percent have volunteers; 34 percent have a combination of paid staff and volunteers; and 23 percent have no staff or volunteers coordinating family and community involvement.
- 18 percent of **school** respondents have paid staff coordinating family and community involvement; 23 percent have volunteers; 30 percent have a combination of paid staff and volunteers; and 29 percent have no staff or volunteers coordinating family and community involvement.
- 39 percent of **district** respondents have no FTE staff coordinating family and community activities; 21 percent have .24 FTEs or less; 9 percent have .25 to .50 FTEs; 10 percent .51 and .100 FTEs; and 22 percent have 1.01 or more FTEs coordinating family and community activities.
- 52 percent of **school** respondents have no FTE staff coordinating family and community activities; 22 percent have .24 FTEs or less; 8 percent have .25 to .50 FTEs; 10 percent .51 and .100 FTEs; and 7 percent have 1.01 or more FTEs coordinating family and community activities.

Recommendations: More resources and strategies are needed to understand how to utilize existing funding sources (Title I, LAP, Migrant and Bilingual) to better support family, school and community relations and partnership activities. All districts and schools should provide monies for family and community involvement.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

Findings: The good news is three-quarters of district and school respondents reach out to *all* families. An overwhelming majority of schools say they have a high concern for students, are welcoming to parents, have open communication and are connected with families. A small majority of districts and schools indicate they communicate clearly with families whose primary language is not English, they prepare teachers to help families better assist their children with homework and ensure school-decision committees represent the diversity of the student population.

However, the above data also means a quarter of districts and schools are not reaching out to *all* families, and nearly half are not currently communicating with all families, are not preparing teachers to better assist their children with homework and are not ensuring school-decision committees represent the diversity of student populations. Although schools indicate their efforts are high in being welcoming, open and connected, it appears that doesn't necessarily transfer to the implementation of basic family and community activities.

When asked how their district or school meets the challenge of reaching out to all families, respondents were given four choices: Not possible now, could do it, planning to do it and currently doing it. Districts were asked how they assisted schools, and schools were asked how they reached out to all families. Results found:

- 74 percent of **district** and 74 percent of **school** respondents are currently inviting *all* families to learn about academic issues. Less than 10 percent are “planning to do it”; less than 20 percent indicate they “could do it”; and less than 5 percent say “not possible now.”
- 64 percent of **district** and 58 percent of **school** respondents indicate they are currently communicating clearly with families when their primary language is not English; 17 percent of districts and 22 percent of schools “could do it”; 9 percent of districts and schools are “planning to do it”; and 10 percent of districts and schools say “not possible now.”
- 58 percent of **district** and 55 percent of **school** respondents indicate they are currently preparing teachers to guide families on how to monitor and interact with their children about homework; 17 percent of districts and 13 percent of schools are “planning to do it”; 22 percent of districts and 28 percent of schools “could do it”; and 3 percent of districts and schools say “not possible now.”
- 62 percent of **district** and 49 percent of **school** respondents indicate they are currently ensuring that school decision-making committees include family members that are representative of the diversity of the student population; 12 percent of districts and 18 percent of schools are “planning to do it”; 21 percent of districts and 25 percent of schools “could do it”; and 5 percent of districts and 7 percent of schools say “not possible now.”
- 40 percent of **district** and 35 percent of **school** respondents train staff to identify and implement solutions for family participation when language and/or cultural differences/expectations are barriers to participation; 20 percent of districts and 17 percent of schools are “planning to do it”; 29 percent of districts and 33 percent of schools “could do it”; and 11 percent of districts and 14 percent of schools say “not possible now.”
- 38 percent of **districts** and 24 percent of **schools** provide families with academic education, such as school sponsored ESL or GED classes; 4 percent of districts and 6 percent of schools are “planning to do it”; 29 percent of districts and 24 percent of schools “could do it”; and 29 percent of districts and 46 percent of schools say “not possible now.”

In a question only to **schools**, they were asked to rate their efforts in the following categories: concern for students, welcoming of parents, open communication and connections with families. The results follow:

- Concern for students: 79 percent say excellent, 19 percent good and 2 percent fair.
- Welcoming to parents: 47 percent say excellent, 46 percent good, 6 percent fair and 1 percent poor.
- Open communication: 42 percent say excellent, 51 percent good, 6 percent fair and 1 percent poor.
- Connected with families: 31 percent say excellent, 47 percent good, 20 percent fair and 1 percent poor.

Recommendations: A troublesome number of families are not being reached when a quarter of **districts** and **schools** indicate they are not reaching out to *all* families. Districts and schools need training and additional resources in communicating with families, especially those from diverse and underserved populations.

One puzzling finding from the first question was the “could do it” column. In four of the six categories, the “could do it” percentages were second only to “currently doing it.” Additional information is needed to determine if districts and schools could do something, why aren’t they and what do they need to implement it? Districts and schools should clearly prioritize different family and community activities and attempt to try at least one on their “could do” list.

Finally, more than 90 percent of schools rate themselves as excellent or good in having a concern for students, as welcoming to parents and having open communication. Schools need to continue those efforts, but more closely monitor and analyze the effectiveness of their family and community programs to determine their impact on student learning.

DISTRICT AND SCHOOL NEEDS

Findings: Districts and schools, not including time and money, agreed on their top three needs regarding family and community involvement programs. Those needs are: training, networking with family and community groups, and access to a database of successful practices.

Recommendation: The needs addressed will help shape the work of the Center for the Improvement of Student Learning. Districts and schools should seek more training, ways to network with family and community groups and databases for successful practices. CISL will help districts and schools develop family and community partnership programs by providing guidance and resources via a toolkit, its Website, www.yourlearningcenter.org and through workshops and conferences. CISL will also provide training at conferences and workshops and continue to populate its Website to increase its database of promising practices. Districts and schools should use CISL as well as models and research for training and access to successful practices.

1. Provide guidance and resources (via toolkits, conferences, workshops and Website).
2. Provide training (via conferences and workshops) and access to promising practices (via Website).

STUDENT INVOLVEMENT

Findings: In questions only to **schools**, a large majority of respondents used student government and/or student-led clubs to increase meaningful student involvement and engagement. School respondents also indicate their biggest needs to support student involvement are professional development for staff and a list of resources on student engagement strategies.

Schools were asked what specific programs they offer to increase meaningful student involvement. The top answers (that received 25 percent or more response) are as follows:

- 66 percent: Student government and/or student-led clubs.
- 44 percent: Student-led or created projects and/or performances in the Arts (dance, music, theater, visual).
- 40 percent: Student-led mentoring, tutoring, or student-taught lessons.
- 31 percent: Students in leadership positions.
- 28 percent: Navigation 101.
- 28 percent: Student-led service learning projects.
- 25 percent: Student-created communications products for public audiences.

In a second question, schools were asked what support they needed to increase meaningful student involvement and engagement. The top answers (that received 30 percent or more response) are as follows:

- 60 percent: Professional development for staff.
- 54 percent: A list of resources to support student engagement.
- 47 percent: Checklist to measure 'how engaged are our students?'
- 36 percent: Website of resources and links.

EVALUATING SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMS

Findings: Most school and district respondents asked parents and school staff for their input on educational issues in the last year. Just a small number of districts and schools conducted no surveys in the last year. In addition, a large majority of districts (55 percent) and schools (68 percent) indicate they do not have a successful or promising family, school and community partnership story/example they feel would benefit others.

Districts and schools were asked if they had conducted surveys in the past year to obtain input from families, staff, students and community members. The results are as follows:

- Families: **Districts** 74 percent, **schools** 70 percent
- Staff: **Districts** 74 percents, **schools** 80 percent
- Students: **Districts** 65 percent, **schools** 60 percent
- Community members: **Districts** 40 percent, **schools** 23 percent
- No surveys: **Districts** 16 percent, **schools** 11 percent

Recommendation: Districts and schools should continue to survey families, staff and students to gain valuable insight. However, districts and schools should reach out to the community more, not only to obtain input from outside sources, but to show the community they provide a welcoming environment and value involvement.

MORE INFORMATION

To contact the Center for the Improvement of Student Learning about this report, please see our contact information below:

Postal Mail: P.O. Box 47200, Olympia, WA 98504-7200

E-mail: cisl@k12.wa.us

Phone: 360-725-6165

Website: www.YourLearningCenter.org

