Parent & Family Engagement Manifesto



PORTLAND-EMPOWERED—
Championing Voice in Education

Parent & Family Engagement

Manifesto

- **As the parents, students, and community members who make up Portland Empowered, we invite Portland Public Schools to engage parents and communities**

in a way that . . .

values face-to-face relationships.

This means frequent opportunities for in-person communication (not just email and robocall outreach) between parents, teachers, board members, and administrators. Strategies should involve the many parents who can serve as ambassadors with other parents in their communities.

According to Epstein (2002), two-way communication systems and reciprocal exchange of information are essential for home-school partnerships and engaging families. Schools begin to trust parents' strengths and become more attuned to their concerns, while families can engage more deeply with schools and their children's educational progress (Muscott, 2008). In addition to building the family-school relationship, in-person opportunities for communication also help to engage parents who are the most difficult to reach. Parents may act as ambassadors in door-to-door outreach and recruitment efforts (Lawson & Alameda-Lawson, 2012) or as cultural brokers for parents who face linguistic, cultural, or relocation challenges (Georgis, et al., 2014).

- **creates safe spaces where everyone is welcome and valued as an expert.**

Parents and families need to bring their experience and expertise as equal partners in students' education. We must seek active participation by all parents, especially those who face extra barriers. Real two-way communication requires extra effort to make sure people feel safe speaking up.

At an interpersonal level between stakeholders – including parents – Bryk et al. (2010) present compelling evidence that strong relational trust facilitates school improvement efforts. School professionals launch parent outreach initiatives more easily when they feel supported by parents and by each other. Conversely, creating safe and welcoming environments for parents are necessary first steps for schools to get parents engaged. Beyond outreach, schools must act as collaborators with parents and maintain linguistic and cultural respect, systemic contact, and two-

way dialogue with parents (Warren et al., 2009). Moreover, effective collaboration

requires that parents and their strengths are valued as equal partners, rather than as problems to be solved by school "experts" (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011).

◆ requires parents, schools, and communities to work together to improve results.

We need a shared understanding of "student success" that reflects the visions of parents and youth as well as educators. This means creating opportunities to explore together what is working or not working, and why.

Hornby and Lafaele (2011) propose an adaptation of Epstein's (2001) framework of overlapping spheres of influence on parental engagement and discuss individual parent and family factors, child factors, parent-teacher factors, and societal factors. They argue that the goals and agendas of parents and teachers differ and are sometimes opposed, thus creating conflict and limiting opportunities for parental involvement. Consequently, effective parent engagement and school-family partnerships must start with a sense of shared goals and principals. School personnel and families must engage in collaborative and reciprocal processes to improve student outcomes (Bryan & Henry, 2012). For example, Academic Parent-Teacher Teams (National Education Association, 2011) and Family Engagement Partnerships (Sheldon & Jung, 2015) create opportunities for parents and teachers to work together in classroom meetings or home visits to support children's learning in the home, with the understanding that "the foundational element of teacher-parent collaboration is trust" (Sheldon & Jung, 2015, p. 9).

◆ works hard to include the whole range of voices in decision-making processes.

Parents should be aware of possible changes before final decisions are made at the school or district level. Opportunities for input should be widely shared. Schools should track how many parents are involved in decision-making, and consider who is not represented in those discussions.



The roles that parents play in their children's education are mediated in part by socially constructed ideas around how different actors should engage with the institution of the school. These socially constructed roles and norms influence how a school operates and interacts with stakeholders, and parents in turn learn about and assume their expected roles

(Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001). When schools institutionalize the parent role as that of a decision-maker and collaborator, parents are more likely to engage with such roles as well. In addition, Bryan and Henry (2012) propose that school partners in school-family-community democratic collaboration "intentionally involve culturally diverse and low-income parents and community members in the partnership process; . . . involve family and community members in mutual and equitable decisions about partnership goals, activities, and outcomes; . . . and encourage families and communities to define issues that affect their children" (p. 410).

◆ is accessible to parent and community leaders from diverse backgrounds.

We need to engage all types of families. Meetings and gatherings should be held in spaces, times, and formats that are accessible and friendly to parents. Parents and school personnel should have easy access to quality interpretation whenever needed.

One predictor of parental involvement is parents' perceived life contexts, including their time and energy to engage with their children's schooling (Green, et al., 2007; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005). Green, et al.'s (2007) study of a large and diverse group of parents whose children were enrolled in a metropolitan school system produced empirical findings that support this; parent questionnaires showed that parents' home involvement was significantly predicted by their self-perceived time and energy for involvement. Additional influences on parent involvement are parents' language proficiency, knowledge of schooling practices, and parental values (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008).

Parent engagement efforts must therefore respect parents' circumstances as well as their linguistic or cultural differences (Olivos et al., 2011).



◆ has sufficient resources devoted to it.

Lack of funds is no excuse for leaving families out. We must work together to identify what it takes to do parent engagement right and to find the necessary resources.

Moreover, Yosso (2005) suggests expanding ideas about what constitutes resources and capital in addition to funding, particularly for families and communities of color. Communities of color have multiple strengths and forms of cultural wealth that institutions, like schools, must acknowledge and be inclusive of in order to work toward educational change. In one school-linked, collective parent engagement program, engagement initiatives were improved by providing resources tailored to parents' personal histories, knowledge, and experiences (Lawson and Alameda- Lawson, 2012). The program provided the following resources to low- income Latin@ parents: information on community- and program-based services and activities; a parent stipend for undocumented parents who could not legally work; and educational and child-centered resources to care for and develop young children while parents were engaged in parent- focused activities. The data from this study suggest that this combination of informational, economic, educational, and child-centered resources helped create the necessary conditions for parents to become involved in school- based activities.

Please see https://goo.gl/eWkVdi for the references.

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For more on Portland Empowered, please visit https://www.facebook.com/portlandempowered.





Portland Empowered champions student and parent voice with a specific focus on engaging those who have been historically under represented. We reduce barriers and create opportunities for emerging youth and adult leaders so that youth in Portland public high schools are successful in high school and beyond.

