

**Desert Heights Elementary School Staff and Parent Surveys**  
**Washoe County School District Parent Involvement Council**  
**Evaluation Brief July 2008**



## Background

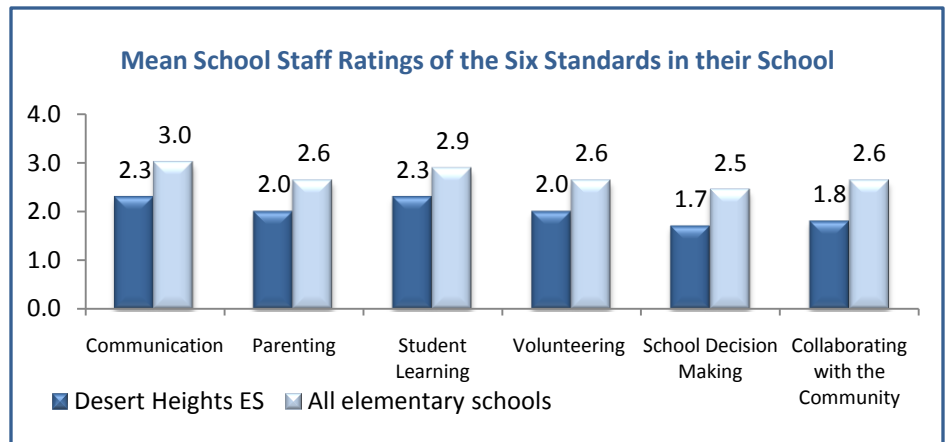
To learn more about how to strengthen partnerships between the district, individual schools, and parents, the Washoe County School District’s (WCSD) Parent Involvement Council (PIC) conducted a district-wide needs assessment. The PIC is comprised of parents, school district administrative, certified and classified employees, and business representatives. The needs assessment included three components: an online administrator survey, an online teacher and staff survey, and a parent survey administered through the mail. This evaluation brief will highlight the results from Desert Heights Elementary School’s staff and parent surveys. Throughout the brief, percentages reported are based on the number of respondents who answered the item, which may be less than the total number of survey respondents.

## Staff Survey

- 9 respondents; 67% certified and 33% classified; 14% response rate.
- 50% felt their school was “good” or “excellent” at making parents feel welcome.
- 88% thought they would benefit from professional development specific to PI “some.”
- 100% reported that in professional learning community meetings PI was talked about as a strategy for improving student academic achievement “infrequently.”
- 38% believed others at their school thought PI was “extremely important.”
- 50% would place a “high priority” on increasing PI in their school.
- 88% thought PI made a “major contribution” to a child’s academic success.

### Standards of Parent Involvement

School staff were asked to rate how well the school is doing with respect to the six well-established standards of parent involvement (PI). The items were combined to create a mean rating for each of the six standards. The response scale on these items were 1=poor, 2=fair, 3=good, and 4=excellent.



The bar graph to the right compares Desert Heights’s staff ratings to those of all WCSD elementary staff who completed the survey. Desert Heights’s mean ratings ranged from 1.7 to 2.3. The highest mean ratings were in the areas of student learning and communication, while the lowest was related to school decision making.

### 6 Standards of Parent Involvement

<b>Communication</b>	Communication between home and school is regular, two-way and meaningful.
<b>Parenting</b>	Parenting skills are promoted and supported.
<b>Student Learning at Home</b>	Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.
<b>Volunteering</b>	Parents are welcome in the schools and their support and assistance are sought.
<b>School Decision Making</b>	Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families.
<b>Collaborating with the Community</b>	Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families and student learning.

### School's Barriers and Strengths Related to PI

- **Greatest Barrier to PI:** Parents' work schedules and other events prevent them from participating (38%)
- **Greatest Strength for PI:** Positive staff attitude (25%)

### School's Actions to Encourage PI

- Provide translation and/or interpretation services (22%)
- Hold meetings and events at different times of day (33%)
- Hold meetings at different locations (11%)

## Parent Survey

Every parent in the school district was mailed a parent involvement survey written by members of the PIC. As part of the survey development process, parents outside of the PIC were also consulted for feedback and suggestions. The survey was mailed to 513 Desert Heights Elementary School parents, and 122 were returned, yielding a response rate of 24%. The top three ways that parents got most of their information about school were from their child's folder (30%), phone calls from the school (19%), and when their child told them (17%).

### Parent Respondent Demographics

- 80% were mothers.
- 38% of the surveys were completed in Spanish.
- 38% were Hispanic/Latino; 48% white; 14% other.
- 86% had lived in Washoe County 6 years or more.
- 68% had Internet access at home.

### Desert Heights ES Student Demographics

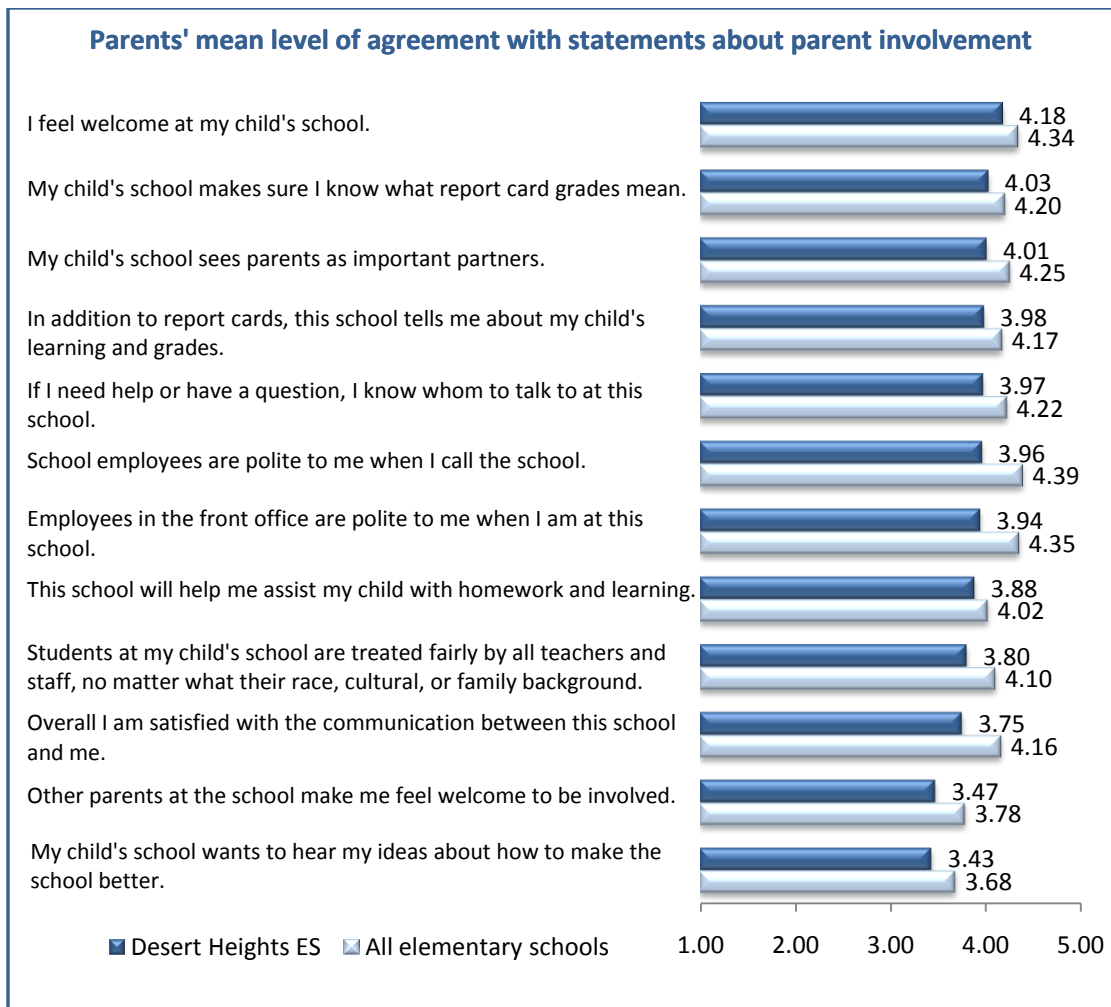
- 42% Hispanic/Latino
- 47% white
- 11% other ethnicity
- Transiency Rate: 36%
- Free/Reduced Lunch: 63%
- Limited English Proficiency: 30%

### Parent Contact and Involvement with School

	Desert Heights ES	All WCSD ES
Attended 3-5 school events a year	41%	47%
Contacted the school between 3-5 times in the past year	31%	40%
Had been asked to volunteer	59%	69%
Had volunteered for their child's school	54%	62%
Had not volunteered but would like to	59%	60%

### Opinions about Parent Involvement

Parent respondents indicated their level of agreement with 12 statements about parent involvement at their child's school (see bar graph on the page to the right). Responses could range from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree. The level of agreement was fairly high ranging between a mean of 3.4 to 4.2. The lowest level of agreement was on the item "my child's school wants to hear my ideas about how to make the school better." The highest level of agreement was for the item "I feel welcome at my child's school."



### Comparisons of English-speaking and Spanish-speaking parents' responses

- English-speaking had contacted the school more often during the past school year than Spanish-speaking parents.
- English-speaking parents were more likely to volunteer at their child's school (62%) than Spanish-speaking parents (42%).
- English-speaking parents were more likely to have Internet access at home (78%) than Spanish-speaking parents (52%).
- English-speaking parents were more likely than Spanish-speaking parents to agree that "I feel welcome at my child's school."

### Comparisons of white and non-white parents' responses

- White parents were more likely to have Internet access at home (86%) than non-white parents (53%).
- White parents were more likely to attend more school events during the year than non-white parents.
- White parents contacted the school more often during the school year than non-white parents.
- White parents were more likely to volunteer at their child's school (67%) than non-white parents (43%).
- White parents had lived in Washoe County longer than non-white parents.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Learning at home seems to be the strongest area of parent involvement at Desert Heights Elementary School. School staff respondents rated learning at home as a top area of parent involvement at their school. Parent results were similar with high levels of agreement on several learning at home-related items. Results from both the school staff and parent surveys suggest school decision making is an area in which Desert Heights Elementary School could strengthen parent involvement

As parent involvement is a viable and necessary strategy for student achievement, a general recommendation is to reallocate school site funding to support systemic implementation of parent involvement. Another recommendation is to provide all school staff with appropriate professional development on how to effectively engage parents in their children's education. Schools also should help parents understand academic standards, state and district assessments, how to monitor a child's progress and work with educators to improve the achievement of their children. A variety of strategies to improve parent involvement are highlighted below.

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## Strategies to Improve Parent Involvement

### General

- Reallocate school site funding to support systemic implementation of parent involvement. Example: Pay teachers overtime for working with parents at school wide meetings from the school general fund budget.
- Provide appropriate professional development to all school staff on how to effectively engage parents in their children's education. Example, customer service training for education support professionals; training for teachers in how to reach out to, communicate with, and work with parents as equal partners.

### School Decision Making

- Create networks to link all families with parent representatives.
- Promote active PTA/PTO or other parent organization, advisory councils, or committees (i.e., curriculum, safety, personnel) for parent leadership and participation.

