

Palmer Elementary School Staff and Parent Surveys
Washoe County School District Parent Involvement Council
Evaluation Brief July 2008



Background

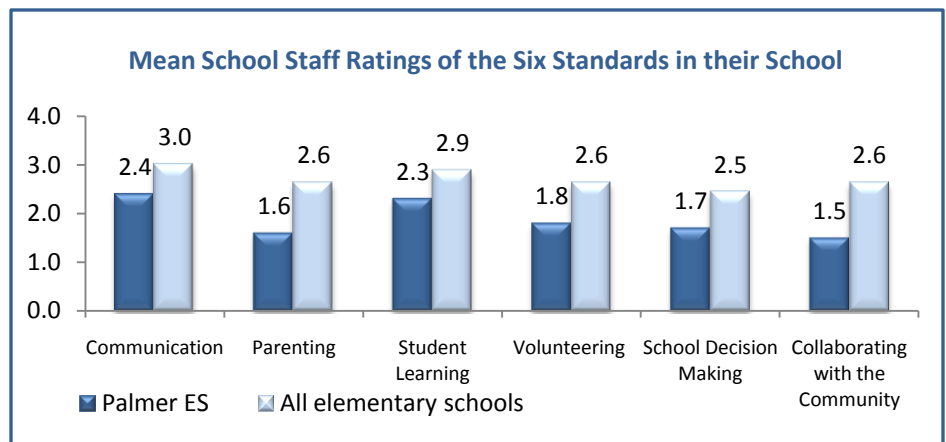
To learn more about how to strengthen partnerships between the district, individual schools, and parents, the Washoe County School District’s (WCSD) Parent Involvement Council (PIC) conducted a district-wide needs assessment. The PIC is comprised of parents, school district administrative, certified 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 Palmer 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

- 7 respondents; 86% certified and 14% classified; 15% response rate.
- 67% felt their school was “good” at making parents feel welcome.
- 50% thought they would benefit from professional development specific to PI “a great deal.”
- 83% reported that in professional learning community meetings PI was talked about as a strategy for improving student academic achievement “infrequently” or “never.”
- 100% believed others at their school think PI was “important” or “extremely important.”
- 67% would place a “high priority” on increasing PI in their school.
- 100% thought PI makes 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 Palmer’s staff ratings to those of all WCSD elementary staff who completed the survey. Palmer’s mean ratings ranged from 1.5 to 2.4. The highest mean rating was in the area of communication, while the lowest was related to collaborating with the community.

6 Standards of Parent Involvement

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

School's Barriers and Strengths Related to PI

- **Greatest Barrier to PI:** Each of the respondents chose a different barrier
- **Greatest Strength for PI:** Parents are interested (50%)

School's Actions to Encourage PI

- Provide translation and/or interpretation services (43%)
- Hold meetings and events at different times of day (14%)

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 602 Palmer Elementary School parents, and 120 were returned, yielding a response rate of 20%. The top three ways that parents got most of their information about school were from their child's folder (61%), flyers from school (15%), and phone calls from the school (6%).

Parent Respondent Demographics

- 84% were mothers.
- 38% of the surveys were completed in Spanish.
- 34% were Hispanic/Latino; 55% white; 11% other.
- 81% had lived in Washoe County 6 years or more.
- 69% had one child in school.
- 78% had Internet access at home.

Palmer ES Student Demographics

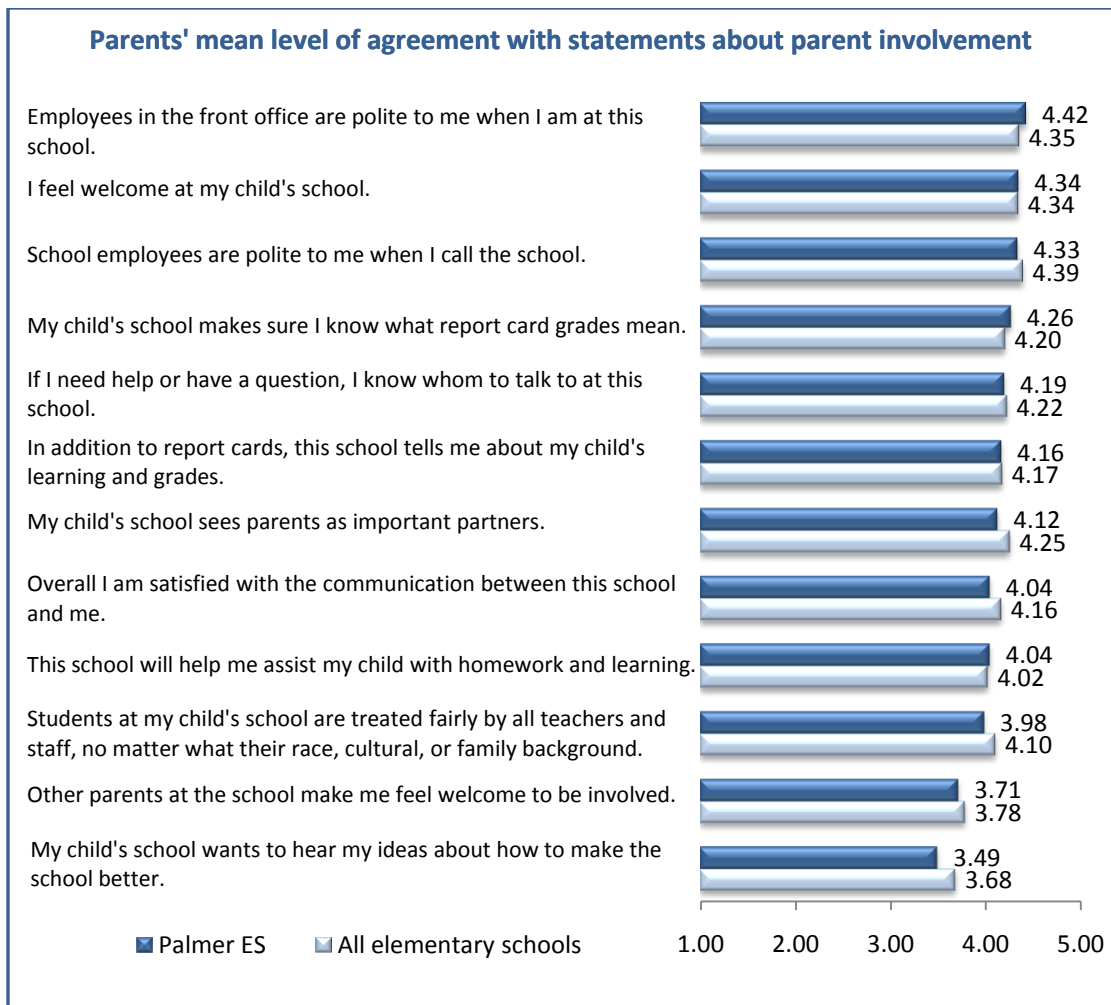
- 49% Hispanic/Latino
- 41% white; 10% other
- Transiency Rate: 23%
- Free/Reduced Lunch: 50%
- Limited English Proficiency: 35%

Parent Contact and Involvement with School

	Palmer ES	All WCS ES
Attended 3-5 school events a year	49%	47%
Contacted the school between 3-5 times in the past year	43%	40%
Had been asked to volunteer	66%	69%
Had volunteered for their child's school	58%	62%
Had not volunteered but would like to	54%	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 3.5 to 4.4. 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 "employees in the front office are polite to me when I am at this school."



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

- English-speaking parents were more likely to have volunteered at their child's school (67%) than Spanish-speaking parents (42%).
- English-speaking parents were more likely to have Internet access at home (85%) than Spanish-speaking parents (67%).
- Spanish-speaking parents were more likely than English-speaking parents to agree that "my child's school wants to hear my ideas about how to make the school better;" "my child's school makes sure I know what report card grades mean;" "this school will help me assist my child with homework and learning; and, "students at my child's school are treated fairly by all teachers and staff no matter what their race, cultural or family background."

Comparisons of white and non-white parents' responses

- White parents were more likely to have Internet access at home (89%) than non-white parents (63%).
- White parents were more likely to have volunteered at their child's school (67%) than non-white parents (46%).
- Non-white parents who had never volunteered at their child's school were more likely to want to do so (68%) than white parents (33%).

Conclusions and Recommendations

Communication seems to be the strongest area of parent involvement at Palmer Elementary School. School staff respondents rated communication as a top area of parent involvement in their school. Parent results were similar with high levels of agreement on several communication-related items. Results from both the school staff and parent surveys suggest that school decision making and volunteering are areas in which Palmer Elementary School could strengthen parent involvement. Additionally, school staff respondents rated parenting and collaborating with the community as areas of parent involvement which could be made stronger.

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.

Volunteering

- Create a parent room or family center for volunteer work, meetings, and resources for families.
- Send out an annual postcard survey to identify all available talents, times, and locations of volunteers.

Parenting

- Provide parent education and other courses or training for parents (i.e., GED, family literacy).
- Conduct home visits at transition points to preschool, elementary, middle, and high school.

Collaborating with the Community

- Provide information for students and families on community health, cultural, recreational, social support, and other programs or services.

