

Sparks Middle 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 Sparks Middle 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.

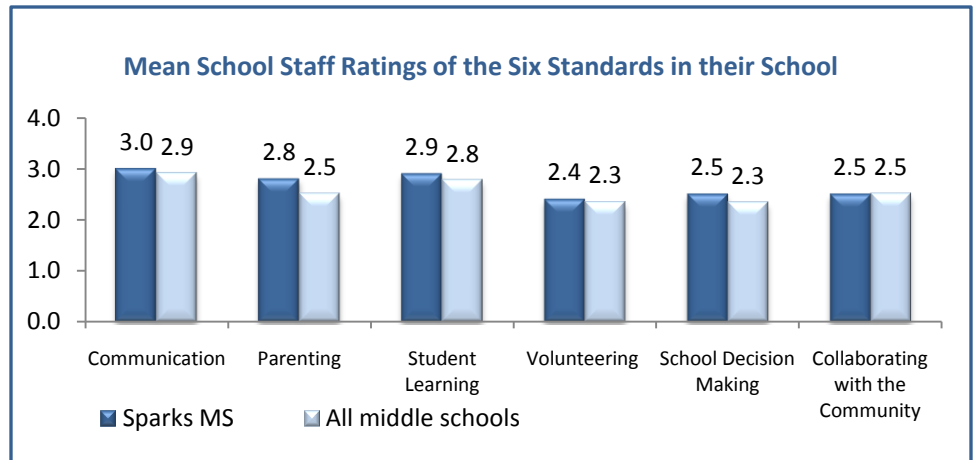
Staff Survey

- 17 respondents; 77% certified and 24% classified; 27% response rate.
- 88% felt their school was “good” or “excellent” at making parents feel welcome.
- 63% thought they would benefit from professional development specific to PI “some.”
- 63% reported that in professional learning community meetings PI was talked about as a strategy for improving student academic achievement “frequently” or “very frequently.”
- 88% believed others at their school thought PI was “important” or “extremely important.”
- 81% 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 Sparks’ staff ratings to those of all WCSD middle school staff who completed the survey. Sparks’ mean ratings ranged from 2.4 to 3.0. The highest mean rating was in the area of communication, while the lowest was related to volunteering.



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:** Parents' work schedules and other events prevent them from participating (44%)
- **Greatest Strength for PI:** Positive staff attitude (50%)

School's Actions to Encourage PI

- Provide translation and/or interpretation services (59%)
- Hold meetings and events at different times of day (35%)
- Provide child care (24%)

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 702 Sparks Middle School parents, and 199 were returned, yielding a response rate of 28%. The top three ways that parents got most of their information about school were from EdLine (23%), phone calls from school (23%), and when their child told them (18%). Twenty-seven percent reported that all of their child's teachers post information on EdLine.

Parent Respondent Demographics

- 83% were mothers.
- 44% of the surveys were completed in Spanish.
- 39% were Hispanic/Latino; 47% white; 14% other.
- 85% had lived in Washoe County 6 years or more.
- 71% had one child in school.
- 73% had Internet access at home.

Sparks MS Student Demographics

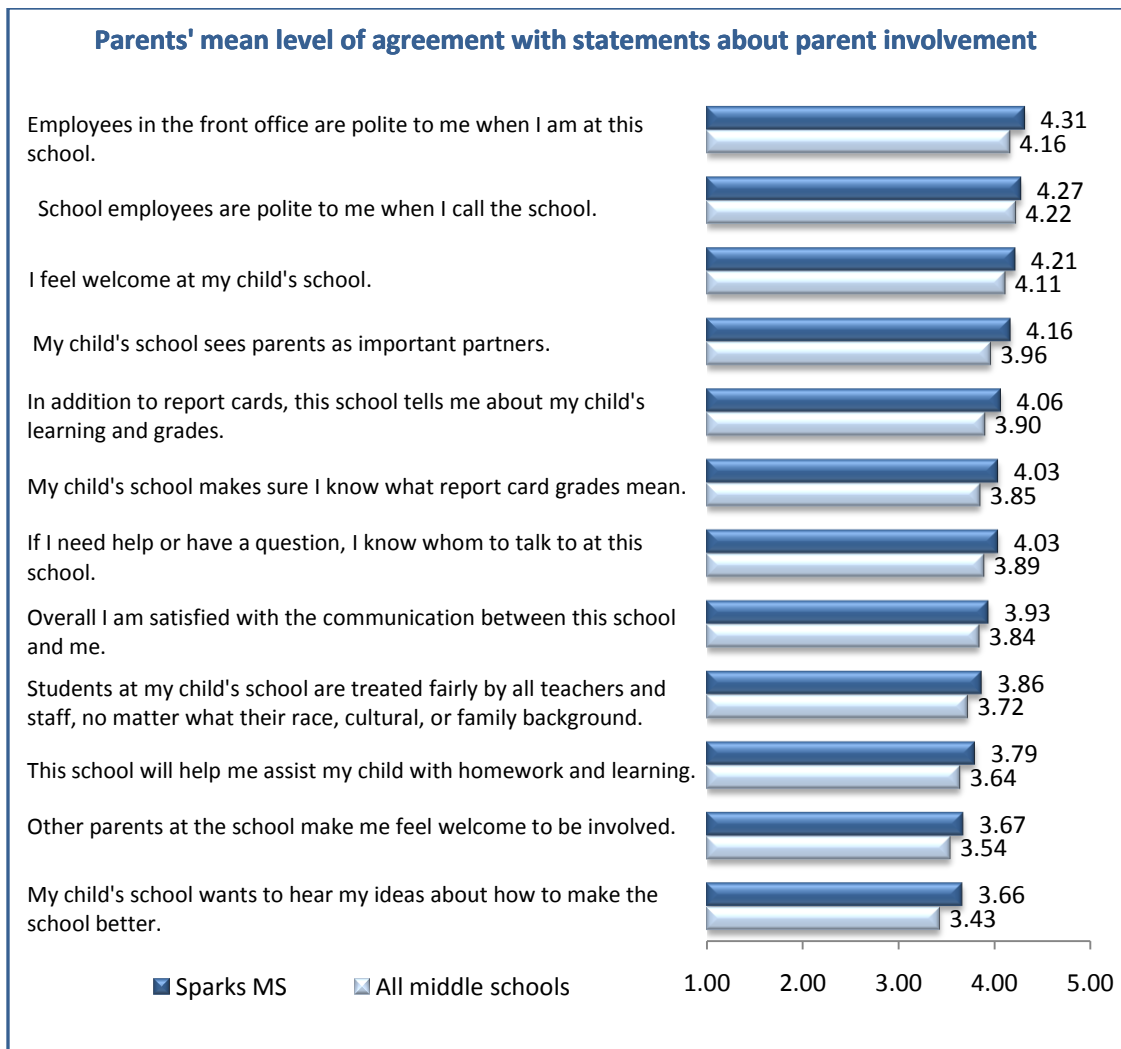
- 55% Hispanic/Latino
- 32% white; 13% other
- Transiency Rate: 25%
- Free/Reduced Lunch: 59%
- Limited English Proficiency: 14%

Parent Contact and Involvement with School

	Sparks MS	All WCSD MS
Attended 3-5 school events a year	33%	42%
Contacted the school between 3-5 times in the past year	46%	43%
Had been asked to volunteer	42%	51%
Had volunteered for their child's school	30%	44%
Had not volunteered but would like to	59%	56%
Used EdLine to track child's progress	42%	62%

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 3.7 to 4.3. 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

- Spanish-speaking parents (71%) who had never volunteered at their child's school were more likely to want to do so than English-speaking parents (51%).
- 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;" "in addition to report cards, this school tells me about my child's learning and grades;" "my child's school makes sure I know what report card grades mean;" 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 (83%) and to use EdLine to track their child's progress (53%) than non-white parents (64% Internet; 31% EdLine).
- White parents were more likely to be asked to volunteer at their child's school (51%) than non-white parents (36%).
- White parents were more likely to have volunteered at their child's school (45%) than non-white parents (16%).
- Non-white parents were more likely than white parents to agree that "students at my child's school are treated fairly by all teachers and staff no matter what their race, cultural or family background."

Conclusions and Recommendations

Communication seems to be the strongest area of parent involvement at Sparks Middle 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. School staff respondents also rated student learning at home as a top area of parent involvement in their school. However, parent responses suggest that the school could better help parents assist students with homework and learning. Results from both the school staff and parent surveys suggest that volunteering is an area in which Sparks Middle 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.

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.

Student Learning at Home

- Provide information and ideas to the family to increase family participation in setting student goals each year and in planning for college or work.

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.

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