

# Charting a Course to Equitable Collaboration:

Learning from Parent Engagement Initiatives in the Road Map Project



★ **White Center  
Promise Initiative  
Highline**

★ **Kent School District  
Parent Academy for  
Student Achievement**

★ **Federal Way  
Public Schools**



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Learning from Parent Engagement Initiatives in the Road Map Project**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Introduction & Background

We stand at a critical moment for understanding the potential of family engagement for addressing persistent educational inequities in our schools and communities. Decades of research suggest parent-family-school relations are pivotal to student success. Especially for non-dominant communities, however, traditional parent involvement approaches—such as parent-teacher associations, open houses, and parent-teacher conferences—rarely realize this promise. New “collective impact” efforts have arisen to eliminate educational disparities from “cradle to career” through multi-sector collaboration. These initiatives bring together schools, community-based organizations, advocates, businesses, governmental agencies, and the public at large to improve the educational outcomes of students throughout a community. Within this context, family engagement represents a potentially powerful lever for change.

In late 2012, the UW Equitable Parent-School Collaboration Research Project undertook a partnership with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Community Center for Education Results (CCER), and the districts, organizations, and partners of the Road Map Project, a regional collective-impact initiative in South King County, Washington. We sought to understand and support efforts to promote and enhance equitable collaboration between parents/families, community-based organizations, and school districts to improve student outcomes and success within the context of the Road Map Project. The research in this report represents extensive data collection and analyses examining three parent engagement initiatives—two school districts and one neighborhood-based organization—within the context of the Road Map collective impact initiative.

## Research Design and Sites

The case study research reported here sought to understand *how district-based and community-based parent engagement initiatives within a collective-impact effort seek to build the participation of parents/families*, particularly those from low-income, marginalized communities, in education. Over nearly a year, our team of researchers conducted approximately 120 hours of observations, 67 interviews with district and school leaders, teachers and other school staff, CBO leaders, program providers, and parents, and examined initiative documents and communications. The three case study sites were all recognized for their leadership in family engagement within the region, but they represented a range of approaches and contexts:

- The Federal Way Public Schools (FWPS) parent engagement initiative—coordinated by the Family and Community Partnership Office (F&CPO)—works through school-based family liaisons to help parents support their children’s success; improve communication and collaboration between parents and educators; and provide a range of opportunities for parents to become “informed, prepared, and involved” at home, school, and in the community.
- The Kent School District (KSD) uses language-specific facilitators to teach a nine-week evening Parent Academy for Student Achievement (PASA). PASA seeks to create a learning community among parents to enable them to advocate for their children and create partnerships that can support and strengthen the learning environment students need to become college- and career-ready.



- White Center Promise (WCP) is a long-term, place-based initiative aimed at eradicating poverty in White Center using a two-generation family approach to ensure student success and community wellness. As part of WCP, Family Connectors (formerly Family Navigators) seek to align the needs assessment, services, and family support efforts of family liaison-like staff from key CBOs and schools in the area.

## Findings

Our findings illuminated the goals, strategies, roles, and contexts of the initiatives, both their common dimensions and distinct, promising practices across the cases. The *goals* of the initiatives were focused primarily on improving how individual parents support the academic success of their own children. The sites employed *strategies* that ranged from foundational involvement to culturally responsive engagement to systematic collaboration. We also noted the convergence of cross-case strategies with the three Road Map family engagement indicators (Ishimaru, Lott, Fajardo, & Salvador, 2014).

We found parents and families in a wide range of roles, but also ambivalence regarding the extent to which parents who do not work for schools or CBOs should be directly involved in high-level discussions or decision-making. Finally, we found that the context of “collaberation” in the Road Map Project served as both an affordance for and a constraint on moving towards equitable collaboration. A dynamic of “collaberation” involves the cultivation of collaboration around a common vision in concert with structures and mechanisms experienced by many as constant competition for financial and human resources, media attention, and priorities.

## Recommendations

1. Create a reciprocal, collective, and equitable vision of family engagement tied to improving educational systems.
2. Recognize and address inequities in power between districts and community-based organizations.
3. Recognize and address inequities in power between policymakers, professional educators, and parents/families.
4. Create and sustain a culture of professional learning in family engagement practice.
5. Provide multiple opportunities for engagement that foster parent-to-parent networks and leadership.
6. Prioritize family engagement work as a strategic, shared responsibility.
7. Invest in building educator capacity.
8. Cultivate a welcoming learning environment for families and community.
9. Identify and leverage cultural brokers to foster culturally responsive relationships between parents/families, teachers, and other educators.
10. Establish a regional policy for equitable parent/family engagement.
11. Foster cross-organizational learning and capacity-building around equitable practice in family engagement.
12. Create systems, policies, and practices of equitable collaboration between organizations within the collective impact initiative.

# INTRODUCTION

## Purpose

This multiple case study report represents the culmination of over a year of research by the University of Washington's (UW) Equitable Parent-School Collaboration Research Project. The project sought to understand, document, and support promising district and neighborhood-based parent engagement efforts and indicators aimed at improving student outcomes and success within the context of a regional collaborative initiative called the Road Map Project.

Founded in 2010, the Road Map Project is a regional cross-sector effort aimed at dramatically improving student achievement from "cradle to college and career" in the seven districts of South Seattle/South King County ([www.roadmapproject.org](http://www.roadmapproject.org)).<sup>1</sup> The population demographics of this region represent a growing trend across suburban America: the migration of poor residents from central cities to the suburbs. In fact, the unemployment rate in this region went from less than 4% in 2007 to 10% in 2010 (The Metropolitan Policy Program at Brookings, n.d., para. 6). There are about 119,000 students in the Road Map region, 167 primary languages spoken, 66% of the students in the region are students of color, and 58% of students come from low-income families (The Road Map Project, 2013). While the overall graduation rate for the Class of 2012 was 74%, for students of color the graduate rate was 64% (The Road Map Project, 2013). From the outset, parent and community engagement was identified as a key strategy for reaching the Road Map Project goal of doubling the number of students on track to graduation or a career credential and closing opportunity gaps by 2020.

The Road Map Project represents a new model of cross-sector collaboration that is rapidly emerging in a growing number of communities across the country. Inspired by the Strive Network ([www.strivetogether.org](http://www.strivetogether.org)) and coined "collective impact" initiatives by FSG's John Kania and Mark Kramer (2011), such large-scale collaborative efforts seek to align the concerted resources of educational, community, health, business, governmental, and other programs, organizations, and institutions around a common agenda, structure, and set of indicators to impact social change. This research is among the first to examine the engagement of parents and families in schooling processes within a collective impact context.

## Charting a Course: The Case Studies Report

This report is a comparative case study of two districts and one neighborhood-based initiative, all of which are seeking to build more meaningful, impactful, and reciprocal engagement with parents and families in their children's education: Federal Way Public Schools, Kent School District, and the White Center Promise Initiative. These sites are all part of the Road Map Project and were selected for their leadership in parent/community engagement in the region, particularly the priority placed on this work by top formal leaders in each organization. Each of the three was selected to receive targeted funding and support to improve parent engagement with schools as part of the collective impact initiative. Although we share case studies of three sites in this report, as a result of existing partnerships between those sites, we also collected data on a third district and a second place-based initiative. Thus, all told, five sites informed our analyses. Through these case studies,

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<sup>1</sup> Districts in the Road Map region include Auburn School District, Federal Way Public Schools, Highline Public Schools, Kent School District, Renton School District, Seattle Public Schools (South Seattle schools only), and Tukwila School District. See Appendix A for the Road Map Project's theory of action, a map of the seven districts, and an overview of the demographics of the three communities of the case study sites.



we are gaining a systematic understanding of what promotes or inhibits equitable parent and family engagement at a systems level within the context of the Road Map collective impact initiative.

We first provide context from the field of family and community engagement and from the Road Map Project, then briefly overview our conceptual framework and methods. We then share in-depth case studies of each of the three initiatives.<sup>2</sup> The cross-case findings detail the goals (espoused and enacted), strategies, key roles, and contextual factors that enable and constrain the journey towards more equitable collaboration. We conclude with a brief discussion and recommendations.

This report is a result of the UW Equitable Parent-School Collaboration Research Project's partnership with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Community Center for Education Results (CCER), and the districts, organizations, and partners of the Road Map Project. However, any mistakes or shortcomings are ours alone. We are particularly indebted to the districts and community-based organizations who allowed us to learn from their tireless efforts as they work to collectively chart a course to more equitable collaboration between parents, families, communities, and schools to ensure the success of every student in the region.

## **CONTEXT**

### **What do we know from the field of family and community engagement?**

We know from decades of research that strong parent-family-school relations are critical to student success (Epstein, 1995; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2005; 2007). When the adults around young people work together to support student learning, students earn higher grades, score higher on achievement tests, adapt better to school, attend more regularly, earn more credits, have better social skills, and are more likely to graduate and go on to higher education (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Another landmark study found that low-performing elementary schools with strong parent-community ties were "ten times more likely to improve in math and four times more likely to improve in reading than schools weak on this measure" (Bryk et al., 2010). Thus, collaborations between schools and communities hold much promise for improving the success of young people, especially in low-income communities of color (Warren, 2005).

Yet particularly in such non-dominant communities, traditional parent involvement approaches—like parent teacher associations, open houses, and parent-teacher conferences—rarely realize their promise (Schutz, 2006). Such efforts are typically implemented with little regard to power, culture, class, or language divides (Baquedano-Lopez, Alexander & Hernandez, 2013). When low-income parents, immigrant parents, or parents of color do not participate in traditional school-sanctioned ways, educators too often conclude that they "do not care" about education. Despite the best of intentions, then, traditional parent involvement efforts often limit the participation of non-dominant parents and families in struggling schools (Auerbach, 2012; Olivos, 2006). Research suggests that a deficit orientation towards students and parents is associated with a reduced sense of responsibility for student learning among teachers (Diamond, Randolph, & Spillane, 2004). These dynamics can exacerbate other inequities in students' access to high-quality opportunities to learn. Amidst the calls for collaboration, alignment, and data-driven decision-making in

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<sup>2</sup> These case studies are condensed versions of the full case studies compiled and shared with the sites and the funder (Ishimaru et al., 2014).

collective impact initiatives, we suggest that the results of parent and community engagement efforts are unlikely to result in real change for students if the traditional approaches and default suppositions about non-dominant families and communities persist.

The research literature clearly supports the notion that parents of all race and class backgrounds care deeply about their children's education (Valencia & Black, 2002; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003). Many low-income parents and those from immigrant communities do work long hours and experience language, cultural, and other barriers to participating in school-based engagement activities, but there is no research evidence to support the idea that *all* families who are low-income, immigrants, refugees, or from communities of color are unable or unwilling to support their children's education and are therefore "hard-to-reach" parents. Instead, the research suggests that our schools and school systems foster this myth. One study found that parents' most common answer regarding what was missing from their involvement in their child's school was "power in decision-making processes and a more equal partnership with the school, one that [does] not center around fault-finding conversations" (Williams & Stallworth, 1984 as cited in Perez Carréon, 2005, p. 467). As Warren (2010) concludes, "the main problem may not lie in the individual, passive parent, but rather in the lack of opportunity for participation" (p. 141). Rather than "hard-to-reach" families, then, it is our schools and parent engagement programs and policies that are "hard-to-access" for many non-dominant parents (Mapp & Hong, 2010).

### **What do we know about the Road Map context?**

The experiences of non-dominant parents described in both the literature and the field at-large appear to be echoed in the diverse Road Map region. A recent report on immigrant families in the Road Map region found that parents wanted to become more informed and engaged in their children's learning, but they rarely participated in traditional models, such as Parent-Teacher Association (PTAs), due to lack of cultural relevance (One America, 2012). Many parents reported feeling unwelcome and like "outsiders or second-class citizens" when they went to their children's schools (Office of the Education Ombudsman, 2012). Moreover, such families' knowledge and expertise on their own children and communities are rarely drawn upon. For instance, an immigrant parent from the Road Map region noted, "We know how to educate our children but we are never asked" (OneAmerica, 2012).

Thus, rather than continuing with our current "best practices," this study in support of the Road Map Project sought to identify and cultivate "next" practices in building more equitable collaboration between parents/families, communities, and schools to ensure student success (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). In addition to the case studies described in this report, the UW worked with Road Map districts and community-based organizations (CBOs) to collaboratively develop a set of common parent engagement indicators to encourage strategic action and drive improvement. These three indicators—parent knowledge and confidence, welcoming and culturally responsive learning environments, and parent leadership and decision-making—converged with the cross-case strategies identified in this report (Ishimaru, Lott, Fajardo, & Salvador, 2014). Both the case studies in this report and the common Road Map parent engagement indicators are informed by the framework of equitable collaboration described briefly in the next section.



## RESEARCH OVERVIEW

In this section we provide a brief overview of the conceptual framework and research questions that shaped our approach as well as the data we collected and analyzed (see Ishimaru et al., 2014 for further details about our data collection and analyses).

### Equitable Collaborations Framework

This study draws on a conceptual framework from previous empirical work (Ishimaru, 2014), using it as a lens through which to analyze the parent engagement efforts in our study. The framework focuses on four primary dimensions of work at the intersection of schools and families/communities to improve student success: *goals*, *strategies*, *roles*, and *context* of educational change (see Figure 1 below for a summary of how these dimensions contrast between traditional partnerships and equitable collaborations). This framework draws on concepts from civic capacity (Stone et al., 2001) and from community organizing for education reform (Mediratta, McAlister, & Shah, 2009; Warren, 2005). Civic capacity refers to “the mobilization of varied stakeholders in support of a

FIGURE 1.  
**Contrasting rules of engagement in district-community relationships**

TRADITIONAL PARTNERSHIPS	EQUITABLE COLLABORATIONS
<p><b>GOALS:</b> Material resources and discrete aims within a culture of denial or implicit blame</p>	<p><b>GOALS:</b> Systemic change within a culture of shared responsibility</p>
<p><b>STRATEGIES:</b> Reliance on technical change such as scaling existing practices or leveraging existing relationships</p>	<p><b>STRATEGIES:</b> Adaptive change to build capacity and relationships of a broad range of stakeholders</p>
<p><b>PARENT ROLE:</b> Non-dominant parents are seen as clients and beneficiaries, professionals set the agenda</p>	<p><b>PARENT ROLE:</b> Non-dominant parents are seen as educational leaders who contribute and help shape the agenda</p>
<p><b>PROCESS:</b> Apolitical approach focused on schools in isolation from broader issues in the community</p>	<p><b>PROCESS:</b> Reform as a political process that addresses broader issues in community</p>

communitywide cause” (Stone, 2001, p. 15). In this case, the Road Map Project seeks to build civic capacity for the cause of educational improvement. Two elements are key to this idea: understanding and participation.

Understanding highlights the need for collective vision and *goals*, as well as a sense of shared responsibility that moves beyond blame (Henig & Stone, 2008). *Strategies* that build capacity and relationships are key to this understanding and ability to act (Warren et al., 2011). To cultivate understanding, efforts must build individual capacity and understanding of the work as well as relationships between individuals, both those from similar backgrounds (for example, immigrant parents) and those from different backgrounds (for instance, parents

and educators). Finally, at the level of organizations, sustainable reform requires changing relationships and interactions to create the political *context* needed to institute and sustain new practices (Stone, 2001).

Participation—or contribution to the cause—focuses attention on the *role* of stakeholders in the common effort, the resources they bring, and the need for cooperation between them. In conventional approaches, non-dominant parents are often relegated to the role of client or beneficiary. Educators or professionals act as “experts” who know what is best for them, and interactions are typically infused with highly unequal power dynamics. But as experts on their own children’s native language, culture, community context, and learning needs, low-income parents of color can play key decision-making, design, and implementation roles in education reform efforts (Ishimaru, 2013; Warren et al., 2011).

Thus, the framework used in this study contrasts with traditional deficit-based partnership approaches. Equitable school-community collaborations entail: 1) systemic *goals* within a culture of shared responsibility, 2) *strategies* that build capacity and relationships, 3) the *role* of low-income parents of color as experts on their children and communities and fellow educational leaders, and 4) a *context* for education reform as political process.

Our goal was to understand and work with sites in their efforts to move along the continuum from traditional involvement approaches to equitable school-community collaborations. All of our partner sites were doing meaningful and valuable work; in the spirit of continuous improvement and making contributions to the field at large, this report seeks to hold a mirror up to share what we learned and highlight both “bright spots” and inevitable challenges as these initiatives progress towards fostering more equitable collaboration.

## Research Questions

Given the goals of the study, the following research questions guided our research design:

How do district-based and community-based parent engagement initiatives within a collective impact effort seek to build the participation of parents/families, particularly those from low-income, marginalized communities, in education?

1. What are the goals, strategies, structures, and practices of system-wide parent engagement?
2. What contextual factors appear to shape efforts to move towards more equitable parent-school collaboration?



## Data Collection

From November 2012-June 2013,<sup>3</sup> we studied three efforts to build more meaningful and reciprocal systems of parent/family engagement in education. Overall, we:

- Conducted 67 interviews (including 4 focus groups) that included district and school leaders, teachers and other school staff, CBO leaders, program providers, and parents;
- Observed approximately 115 hours of trainings, meetings, workshops, and gatherings;
- Collected an extensive array of documents, including regional and site-specific reports on families and parent engagement, district publications, parent and educator training materials, strategic plans and grant proposals, and flyers, brochures, and newsletters related to communication between schools, families, and community.
- Facilitated five professional learning meetings between the sites and other place-based sites selected by the Gates Foundation, and worked to support our sites' ongoing reflection on their practice and use of indicators to inform their efforts.

## Analyses

Our research team transcribed and coded our data using a common codebook, generated ongoing site updates, and wrote analytic memos prior to drafting detailed preliminary findings memos, which we shared with each of our sites for feedback. Based on that feedback, we then constructed the final full case study versions that we drew from to craft the case studies in this report. We also identified themes across cases, presented preliminary cross-case findings to a collective gathering of the sites, and then, in response to feedback, linked the strategies to the common Road Map parent engagement indicators and developed recommendations to provide guidance in moving towards more equitable school-community collaborations. We have also written academic papers, which have been presented at the national American Educational Research Association conference and are currently under preparation for journal submission.

We have received permission to identify the sites in the report, including the actual names of the superintendents and organizational parent engagement leads (e.g., district or organizational directors of family/community engagement initiatives). However, the names of all other individuals referenced in the report are pseudonyms to protect their identities.

We also note that the analyses in this report are based on a snapshot in time. Given that the pace of change is rapid and our sites' work continues to evolve, these findings may not reflect their most recent efforts, as all of our sites are using our initial findings and conversations to continue to chart the path towards more equitable family-school-community collaborations.

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<sup>3</sup> We also conducted follow-up data collection in January-February, 2014.



Photo courtesy of Federal Way Public Schools

# Federal Way Public Schools

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## CASE STUDY

On an early evening in January, the cafeteria of Olympic View Elementary is filled with the voices of parents, teachers, and small children as they arrive at the Partnership 101 workshop. The school's Family Liaison, principal, and a handful of teachers greet the crowd of about 40 parents, predominantly Latina mothers interspersed with a few fathers and white parents. Children sneak cookies from the brightly wrapped blue cafeteria tables, while families chat with each other over dinner provided by the school. The children are then ushered by AmeriCorps volunteers into a playroom.

Trise Moore, the Director of the District's Family and Community Partnerships Office, darts around the room greeting parents and troubleshooting the translation headsets for Spanish-speaking parents. Meanwhile, the parents seat themselves around cafeteria tables and listen as the principal opens by praising the parents for their work with their children both inside and outside the school. Moore then tells the parents that they will have the opportunity to work with other parents who have attended prior Partnership 101 workshops and will be able to share their thoughts on the topics in the workshop as well as what they would like to hear about in the future.

Moore walks parents through the workshop agenda and explains the handouts, starting with the "Tips for schools from parents" page, which has been translated into Spanish. Voices in English and Spanish echo across the cafeteria as parents read together the list of Federal Way parent-generated tips on why parents should get involved in school partnerships and discuss which tips resonate the most with their experience. Moore asks parents to share their discussions in their first language with the entire room, and after the first English-speaking table of mothers reports, there is hesitation within the room. After some gentle prodding from Moore, a Latino father stands up and shares his concerns in Spanish with the group. Moore, listening to the translator in her headset, nods as he speaks and shares his concerns to the group about wanting to learn ways to support his child academically instead of finding out too late how to improve his outcomes. Around the room, other parents share stories of miscommunication between parents, teachers, and students, but also about ways to bridge those divides. There is urgency in their voices when they speak of finding solutions for their children. In one of these stories, a parent praises Pacita, the school's Family Liaison, and notes that not only has she been a great support for parents, but that—as a parent—she serves as a role model for other parents within the school. The room bursts into applause before transitioning into the activity indicated on the next handout.

## The Federal Way Family and Community Partnership Office

Federal Way serves approximately 21,696 students and is one of the largest districts in South King County. The district's vision is to help families identify and use strategies, tools and practices that help them become more "informed, prepared and involved" as effective partners with teachers to help their students successfully learn and graduate prepared for college. Located in a rapidly evolving and diverse district, the Federal Way Public Schools serve students from Latino, Chinese, Vietnamese, Russian, Ukrainian, African-American, White and other families.<sup>4</sup> At the time of the study, Trise Moore had been the Director of the Family and Community Partnerships Office for eight years, during which she has worked to build and maintain a district-wide focus on parent engagement. Moore emphasizes that she tries to take input from parents—through her parent leadership team, from feedback through Family Liaisons, and during regular stakeholder sessions—to guide her approach to building parent engagement within schools and throughout the district.

The Family and Community Partnership Office (F&CPO) coordinates efforts to provide information and tools to support parents in promoting their child's educational success (see Figure 2 for FWPS parent engagement components). The primary components of the department's work include:

- Six full-time Family Liaisons, hired by the district and housed in six elementary schools, work directly with those schools, ECEAP, Head Start and Pre-school programs, and five middle schools to provide support for parents, teachers and staff in partnering to support student success.<sup>5</sup>
- Partnership 101 workshops held twice a year in six to eight schools and community locations designed to support parents' efforts to support their children's success and to give staff and parents an opportunity to share tips, research and tools for increasing parents' understanding and plans to support their children in school;
- A district-level Parent Leadership and Advisory team that meets quarterly to communicate information about new developments and help guide the engagement work;
- Stakeholder sessions, called Key Communicators, held quarterly for the past nine years to communicate with and hear ideas from parents, staff, board, and community members about activities, practices and policies linked to the work of the department.



Photo courtesy of  
Federal Way Public Schools

<sup>4</sup> Other than English, Federal Way has 3,235 students speaking 81 languages (2009-2010). These include, in proportional order: Spanish, Korean, Russian, Ukrainian, Vietnamese, Samoan, and Tagalog.

<sup>5</sup> The number of Family Liaisons has expanded since the time of our data collection.

FIGURE 2.  
**Federal Way Parent  
 Engagement Programming**



**INITIATIVE GOALS:**

**Broadening Conceptions of Parent Involvement in Federal Way Public Schools**

The F&CPO vision is to have parents identify questions they need to ask their children and themselves to support their own children’s success; for parents, students, and schools to improve communication and collaboration to enable students to reach their educational goals; and provide parents opportunities to become involved at school and at home. The framework for fostering parent involvement in Federal Way—“Inform, Prepare, and Involve”—enables Family Liaisons and school staff to align their parent engagement efforts throughout the district. In their interactions with parents, Family Liaisons focus on “informing” parents about their roles and responsibilities as partners in their own children’s academic success; “preparing” them with tools and relationships with educators to enact that partnership; and “involving” them in a variety of activities and opportunities.

A key component of the framework entails parent choice about how they would like to be involved in their children’s education. Moore has intentionally articulated a vision for family engagement that departs from narrow conceptions limited to participation in the PTA or chaperoning for field trips. Moore and her team of staff and parent leaders seek to validate the multiple ways that parents can and do support their children’s academic success at home, at school, at the district, or in the broader community. For example, parents can choose from a “menu” of opportunities to customize their own engagement experience as part of a Parent Leadership Institute. The options range from supporting a child’s learning at home using a Khan Academy tutorial or attending a parent-teacher conference to observing a school board meeting or participating in leadership training at the Educational Service District. (See Appendix B for an overview of the FWPS Family and Community Partnerships Office).

For Federal Way, successful family engagement results in individual student academic achievement. That is, district administrators, school leaders, staff, and parents in this study primarily focus on the importance of each *individual* parent’s learning how to communicate with and support *his or her own* child in achieving academic goals. The programs emphasize parents’ gaining knowledge and capacity to better support their own children’s education, while Family Liaisons enable parents to feel comfortable supporting their children at school. A few in the district also see parent engagement programming as a means for parents to develop leadership skills to better advocate for the district’s children more broadly, and for schools to improve school climate and increase opportunities for parental decision-making.

## KEY STRATEGIES

### Creating Informed, Prepared, and Involved Parents in Federal Way

Federal Way's goals for building parent engagement are enacted through several key strategies. These strategies include foundational parent engagement strategies (such as building parent knowledge and capacity), more welcoming contexts for parents within schools and the community to build relationships in support of student learning, and efforts to build systemic capacity for parent engagement work across the district.

#### 1. Building Parent Knowledge, Capacity and Support

**INFORMING PARENTS ABOUT THEIR ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES.** Federal Way family engagement programs build parent knowledge and self-efficacy about their shared role and responsibility in improving student outcomes. Partnership 101 workshops—held twice yearly within schools or local housing developments for elementary schools with family liaisons—develop foundational knowledge of school expectations for students, strategies for school-based interactions with one's own children, and options for becoming involved in supporting student academic success. In the workshops, parents talk together using material in a published guide—translated into Spanish, Vietnamese and Russian— about how to support their children's success. Parents are provided with information about who to talk with at the school and district to resolve issues, and they complete a worksheet to "create their own involvement plan." The plan helps parents outline their long-term education goals for their children and their children's academic strengths, challenges, talents, and interests; provides concrete examples of how they will talk to their children and teachers about supporting their children's education; and identify specific roles, contacts, and activities they plan to undertake to help their children.

Through this programming, Moore hopes that parents will see themselves as "priority contributors" or active partners in the well-being and academic success of their own children. As of the end of our data collection period, Moore's vision for these workshops to be co-led by parents with Family Liaisons or other school staff had yet to be realized, although parents do speak about their experiences and sometimes facilitate small discussions during the workshops. Overall, though, parents within Federal Way repeatedly reflected that they have learned how to ask their children better questions about their school day, and—according to one principal— see classroom observations as a learning opportunity to support their children at home and feel more empowered to voice what's working (or not).

**PROVIDING ONGOING GUIDANCE FOR PARENTS.** While the Partnership 101 workshops happen only once or twice a year in a subset of Federal Way schools, full-time Family Liaisons positioned within six (now eight) schools interact daily with parents to guide their efforts to support their children's academic success. As a result of the F&CPO programming, parents report being more aware of school policies and expectations for student work, and wanting to come into the school to observe classroom curriculum and expectations firsthand. Family Liaisons often play a key role in helping to make these desires a reality. One parent described feeling more empowered to work with her local Family Liaison to speak out and express her dissatisfaction with certain changes within the school. However, teachers' more traditional expectations for parental participation (such as volunteering for fundraisers and administrative classroom support) did not always align with the Family and Community Partnership Office's vision for parent engagement. A principal at a middle school whose feeder elementary school had a Family Liaison echoed a comment heard over and over: "Every school should have a Family Liaison! Everyone should have a school mom!"

## 2. Changing Relationships and School Culture

**CREATING A WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT FOR PARENTS.** Moore and her team work to create a supportive and welcoming school culture for parents. Family liaisons build relationships with both parents and staff as an important first step for improving teacher and parent coordination in support of student learning. One Latina parent commented about the changes to her school after hiring a Family Liaison:

Previously we felt a little like [we were] pushed aside [and] not very welcomed in school, but now with the change . . . we feel like we are in our house.

One Family Liaison, Elena, described how she works to “build a relationship with the school staff first, one by one” and then with families separately before finding ways to serve as a bridge in interactions between staff and parents. Another Family Liaison works to help staff see that parents bring in new ideas to contribute to the success of students. Through these relationships, Family Liaisons feel that they can help more parents feel comfortable enough to attend parent programs and participate in decision-making. At one school, a designated parent space provides an easily identifiable place within the school for parents to seek and share resources with each other, or just grab a cup of coffee with the Family Liaison. Although parents from African American, Korean, Russian, and Ukrainian communities were not yet represented in proportion to the student population in Federal Way parent engagement activities, through the F&CPO’s work, parents feel much more welcome in their schools and those from some previously marginalized communities (particularly the Latino community) appear to have substantially expanded their presence in school and district engagement activities.

**REMOVING BARRIERS TO PARENT-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION.** Effective communication serves as a cornerstone of relationships with parents. Outside the school walls, Family Liaisons, school and district staff engage with school, parent, and community stakeholders at quarterly district-wide meetings hosted by Moore. These meetings communicate the current state of parent engagement within the district and provide a forum for a broad range of stakeholders to provide input on future improvements. While Federal Way has increased avenues for communication between parents, schools, and the district, the primary means of building relationships continues to involve face-to-face communication between staff and parents. In addition to serving as a willing ear for parental concerns within the school, Family Liaisons, like Pacita, also actively recruit parents for school and F&CPO programming:

I’m outside in the morning through the halls, and as I see . . . any parents that come [to] school, I’m usually like hey, did you know this is coming up? And so, the flyers go home, but also I come up to parents and I’m giving them more flyers and like hey, will I see you tonight? So doing the person-to-person, calling, I have an email list, too, so I try to do all the different things . . .

Particularly for Spanish-speaking families within Federal Way, opportunities to converse and share concerns in their native language are vital to engagement. For example, one Family Liaison sees that native-language groups for parents help them overcome feelings of apprehension in large group settings, such as school-wide meetings:

[I]t’s so much easier for anybody to give their opinion at a group, particularly if I’m talking about Spanish-speaking, anybody would say an opinion while sitting there. But if I’m in a big group, even if I’m being interpreted by someone, I’m still going to feel wow, should I raise my hand. . . . It’s so intimidating for a lot of Moms who don’t have that personality of oh yeah, ‘I’m just going to raise my hand and say it in my broken English,’ or just wait for the translator.

### 3. Developing systemic capacity

**PRIORITIZING FAMILY ENGAGEMENT ACROSS THE DISTRICT.** Federal Way superintendent Rob Neu talks about parent engagement as a key strategic priority within the district and has publicly committed to working to provide a Family Liaison for every school in the district (Key Communicator meeting, 1/24/13). This priority also takes the form of a district family engagement policy and dedicated budget allocations to the Family and Community Partnership Office. Coupled with Moore's leadership (and external fundraising), these investments enable the department to hire full-time Family Liaisons within schools, develop tools (such as the Partnership 101 booklets and guidelines for principals), offer workshops, and hold ongoing district-level stakeholder meetings. Family engagement staff members share a highly consistent language when talking about their aims to "inform, prepare, and involve" parents as well as the "platforms" and "pathways" that enable them to do so. It is less clear, however, the extent to which this vision, language, and work are shared and actively supported by other leaders at the district level, particularly those focused on instruction and educator professional development. Yet, providing both a vision and an infrastructure constitutes a key foundation for the integration of family engagement work district-wide.

**DEVELOPING EDUCATOR CAPACITY TO ENGAGE EFFECTIVELY WITH FAMILIES.** Federal Way also builds the capacity of teachers and other staff through two emerging strategies: a series of National Equity Project trainings for staff (teachers, administrators, counselors, and Family Liaisons), and an innovative "dynamic home visiting" program. The National Equity Project professional development sessions sought to increase educators' capacity to address and engage educational equity issues in their family engagement work. The Dynamic Home Visit Program, piloted at Ilahee Middle School by school counselor Julia Zigarelli,<sup>6</sup> aims to build relationships with families. In contrast to traditional home visit programs focused on addressing a problem or giving information to families, the Federal Way pilot program emphasizes teacher listening and learning about their students and families.

#### **PARENT ROLES:**

##### **Resources, Leaders, Ambassadors**

**PARENTS AS RESOURCES FOR ONE ANOTHER.** Federal Way parents involved in F&CPO programming find ways to help other parents by sharing information and resources, recruiting other parents for programming, and voicing their opinions to help make meaningful programs for parents. To do this, Teresa Garza—a veteran parent leader—highlights the importance of getting all parents to have an equal voice and to recruit any and all parents in the school area. While her main focus is her own children's academic outcomes, she also shares with parents the knowledge and information she obtains through her participation with the district and school leadership.

**PARENTS AS LEADERS.** The Parent Leadership and Advisory Team—made up of approximately 15 parents—meets quarterly with Moore to help guide the family engagement work and to ensure that the "parent voice" is part of activities. The close-knit group of parent leaders on the team provides input on the agenda for the quarterly stakeholder meetings, the Partnership 101 workshop booklet, and the development and assessment of the FWPS parent survey. Other administrators and staff also seek them out for feedback. Two Parent Leadership Team members have even become school board members. These board members share their keen awareness that the same "two people show every time" at school board meetings, but that the "invisible folks" are the ones needed at the table. As School Board members, they help make parent engagement a key strategy for student improvement in the district. At the school level, though, parent participation in decision-making continues to be driven primarily by principals, some of whom express interest in greater parent "input," but few of whom are actively cultivating shared leadership practices with parents in their buildings. However, some principals see the district priority as an opportunity to begin to create opportunities for parents to join the predominately administrator and teacher-led school leadership teams.

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<sup>6</sup> The person's real name is used in this case, at her request.

**FAMILY LIAISONS AS CULTURAL AMBASSADORS.** Family Liaisons play a key role in enacting the district’s vision for partnerships and systemic change by building relationships and contacts with families, a process which Moore refers to as “a formalized grassroots approach.” As full-time staff located within the school building, Family Liaisons are the only staff whose primary focus is to work with parents that come into the school. They work directly with parents to build knowledge, form networks, and navigate school culture, bridging the cultural and sometimes relational divide between parent communities and schools. One Family Liaison likened her position as an “ambassador” between parents and educators:

I don’t believe in siding with one side and siding with the other side. We are not into that. We are into this, uniting and to connecting. And united for one purpose in common, it’s the kid, to make the kid successful. That’s our goal. So I’m passionate about making that clear. And I think in this year I think it’s happening.

Some Family Liaisons serve as “transmitters” of parent voices within the school for decision-making purposes, for instance by sitting on leadership bodies in lieu of parents themselves. Thus, schools may rely on Family Liaisons to serve as “go-betweens” in representing parent perspectives. As predominantly bilingual Spanish and English translators and cultural navigators, Family Liaisons are careful to communicate that they are there for all parents in the school, not only Spanish-speaking families, and their daily presence provides ongoing connections between parents, families and the life of the school.

### **Promising Practices for Family Engagement**

Federal Way is a leader in the region for the strides it has made in moving towards more systemic collaboration between families and schools. Through multiple strategies and ongoing feedback from the Parent Leadership and Advisory Team, the F&CPO has built the capacity of parents to become “priority contributors” in their children’s well-being and academic success. While challenges still exist to scaffolding meaningful participation and broader leadership for parents at multiple levels, the district is moving forward towards some promising ‘next’ practices with the potential to improve parent engagement throughout the district. In addition to working to expand and build direct parent participation in district and school-level leadership, Federal Way is continuing to pilot and expand the Dynamic Home Visiting program that seeks to develop parent-teacher relationships and leverage new understandings of student home contexts to improve classroom instruction. Finally, F&CPO director Moore indicates that they are working to align and connect their parent engagement programming district-wide and build teacher ownership of engagement work through the development of a new Teacher 101 booklet and Home Visiting Teacher training materials. By involving teachers and parents to work collaboratively to build an educator curriculum, Federal Way has moved beyond merely obtaining teacher buy-in and has provided educators with the opportunity to design tools for their colleagues and to build collective ownership in fostering productive parent partnerships.



Photo courtesy of CCER/Road Map Project



Photo courtesy of Kent School District

# Kent School District's PASA

(Parent Academy for Student Achievement)

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## CASE STUDY

On a cool fall evening at Millennium Elementary School in Kent School District, Dr. Vargas, the superintendent, stands at a microphone at the front of a large multi-purpose room and welcomes 70-80 parents to the inaugural Parent Academy for Student Achievement (PASA). Spanish, Russian, and Somali translators standing next to Dr. Vargas receive the microphone after he speaks, to translate his words one after the other. "KSD is here for families, to help parents and students be successful. When parents are involved in their students' education they tend to do better." He continues, his voice rising with intensity: "Public schools belong to parents, and we are here to partner with you to create a college-going culture . . . to ensure college is in their future, as jobs now require some postsecondary education training." Dr. Vargas then shares his own personal experience, telling the group that his own parents did not graduate from high school or college, but they believed college was for him. The parents applaud, and the principal of the school welcomes all families to Millennium Elementary and thanks them for participating in the nine-week PASA program for parents. Parents are then asked to move into rooms designated by English, Spanish, Somali, Russian/Ukraine, and English with translators for Arabic, Burmese, Kurdish, Punjabi, and Vietnamese-speaking parents.

In one classroom, Monica and Leticia, parent facilitators, welcome each parent by introducing themselves in Spanish. Monica tells the group of parents, "As a parent who had children in the school, you want the best for your child and if I can help just a little bit in this class, then that makes me happy." Leticia notes how privileged Millennium parents are to have this program at their school. The facilitators introduce a pair-share activity by encouraging parents to find someone they did not know and ask each other to find three things they have in common. Within seconds, laughter and chatter fill the room, with one of the parents joking with the facilitator. Once the activity is finished, parents begin to share with the entire class. The class listens as one parent states, "We both grew up in a small town, we have children, and we both love food," which is greeted with laughter as the other parents nod in agreement.

## Kent School District

The Kent School District (KSD) is comprised of four high schools, six middle schools, twenty-eight elementary schools and three academies serving 26,975 students from a remarkable variety of backgrounds (e.g., Latino, African-American, Asian, Russian, Ukrainian, Vietnamese, Punjabi, Somali, and White families with smaller proportions of other ethnic groups).<sup>7</sup> This district has seen a dramatic increase in urbanization, the immigrant student population, and linguistic diversity over the past ten years (2002-2012). In order to meet the diverse needs of KSD families, Superintendent Edward Vargas purchased the intellectual property of the California-based Parent Institution for Quality Education (PIQE) curriculum (which cannot be shared outside the district). Student Services director Melanie Strey adapted this research-based curriculum and instructional model to create the district-led pilot program for parent engagement, the Parent Academy for Student Achievement (PASA). (See Appendix C for more information about PASA programming.)

Envisioned as a “learning community,” PASA works to build parent knowledge for engagement and collaboration with teachers, counselors and principals for student success. During the 2012-2013 school year, PASA was piloted in two high-poverty, culturally diverse elementary schools, Pine Tree and Millennium, with plans to expand into four additional schools (six elementary schools and one middle school) in 2013-2014 (see Figure 3) PASA programming is comprised of the following components:

- Twenty-three recruiters were hired by the district to call each family on behalf of the school principal and invite parents to attend PASA. At the two elementary schools, a total of 3,012 phone calls were made in all home languages. Bus transportation was provided at two neighborhood locations for families.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, twelve school staff members were hired to provide childcare.
- Sixteen bilingual parent facilitators were recruited, hired, and trained by the district to teach a nine-week PASA course in their native languages.<sup>9</sup> The director of Student Services wanted facilitators to be recruited within the community or from among those who had experience with parent communities in the area. These parents engaged in PASA development trainings before the start of the program and during the nine weeks on how to facilitate and implement the curriculum, which enabled the curriculum to be taught in parents’ native languages without translation of the materials.
- Each week parents completed one PASA module (1.5 hours) delivered by parent facilitators, in one of four main languages (English, Spanish, Somali, and Russian, plus an English-with-translation session for Vietnamese, Burmese, Arabic, Punjabi, and/or Kurdish speakers).

### INITIATIVE GOALS:

#### Teaching Parents to Support their Children’s Achievement

The vision for PASA is to enable parents to take an active role in supporting their own children to improve academic performance and focus on post-secondary education and career choices. The impetus for this program stemmed from the district’s strategic plan—created by students, parents, teachers, administrators, staff members, and business and community leaders—to meet the needs of the Kent community. One of the seven goals identified by the community is the need to increase the involvement of parents and families in schools in order to positively impact student success along the P-16 educational pipeline. The goals of the program were primarily focused on improving student outcomes by building parent knowledge for learning-support activities and collaboration with educators.

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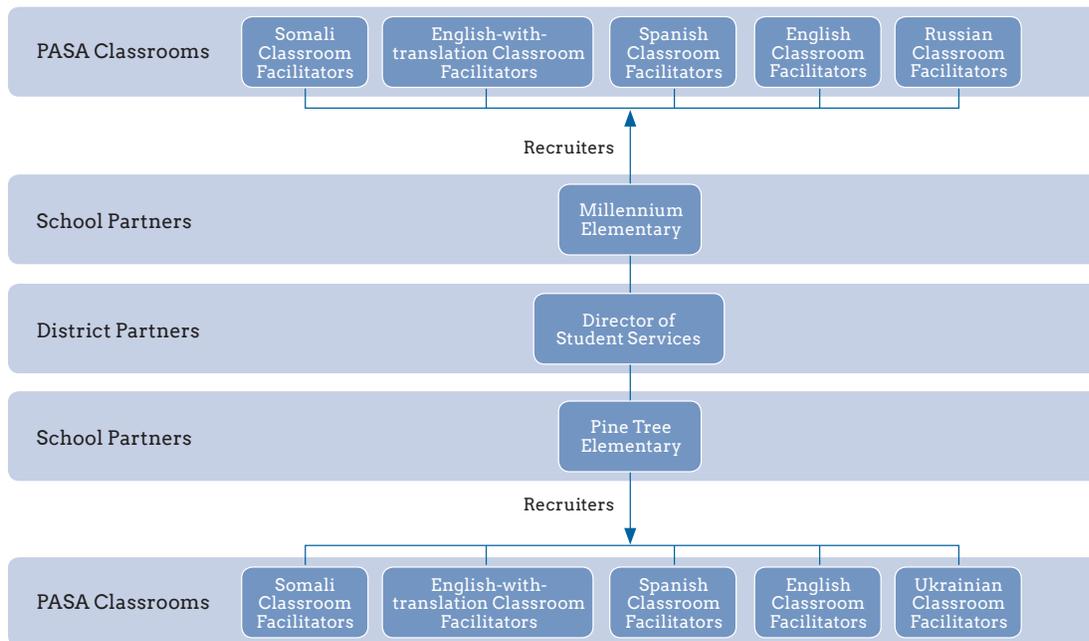
<sup>7</sup> Tagalog, Arabic, Cambodian families had fewer than 350 enrolled students.

<sup>8</sup> One of the locations is Birch Creek, a subsidized housing complex of the King County Housing Authority.

<sup>9</sup> Parents needed to attend seven classes to be considered graduates of PASA.

FIGURE 3.

**Kent School District Parent PASA Programming**



Successful completion of the PASA program involves parents acquiring a better understanding of the school system, academic standards, and college requirements; supporting their children’s academic achievement at home; and establishing regular collaboration with educators. District leaders and school staff in our study focused primarily on how individual parents could become more prepared to engage and collaborate with teachers and academically support their children at home. For example, PASA lessons focused on preparing parents for parent-teacher conferences, which teachers felt would give parents an opportunity to learn about their children’s academic life and create a dialogue at home where parents could begin to ask questions on homework and school. In addition, teachers felt that more academically focused communication between teachers and parents would help all children in the college preparation process.

One district leader sought the PASA programs as a means of increasing partnerships between educators and families throughout the district. The district plan is for PASA to be expanded into six elementary schools and one middle school in 2013-2014. The district hopes the program will be sustained in the future by inspiring the 115 PASA graduates to become recruiters and facilitators and for schools to see the value of the program and use their own funds (for e.g., Title I funds) to continue to run the program when Race to the Top resources sunset.

**KEY STRATEGIES:**

**Building Parent Capacity for Student Success**

KSD built parent engagement through the adaptation of an existing parent curriculum and the creation of infrastructure to support PASA programming at schools and within neighborhood housing authorities. These strategies focused primarily on building parent knowledge and capacity for collaborating with teachers and other educators to support their children’s learning at home and within the school and creating culturally and linguistically specific classrooms for parents during PASA programming.

## 1. Building Parent Knowledge, Capacity and Support

**BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS FOR SCHOOL-BASED PARENTAL PARTICIPATION.** KSD administration and pilot principals recruited a diverse group of parents from the community by calling all parents at participating schools in their native languages, and distributing a personalized letter from the principal encouraging parents to participate in PASA. Teachers also sent flyers home with students and encouraged students to share with parents. In addition, schools provided transportation at Birch Creek and Washington Park apartments and supervised childcare by educators to increase non-dominant parent participation. Having a wide range of recruiting strategies allowed families to hear and learn about the program. A principal reflecting on why she thought parents attended suggested: “They [parents] just loved having the opportunity to speak with someone they consider their equal who could communicate back to them about what the school was.”

**DEVELOPING EFFICACY FOR SUPPORTING LEARNING.** The PASA curriculum focused on providing knowledge for navigating the K-12 school system, encouraging a college-going culture, sharing strategies for supporting student academic achievement at home, and communicating school expectations for parents to participate within schools in primarily traditional ways, such as attending parent-teacher conferences. Prior to PASA, a few parents mentioned feeling intimidated by the idea of communicating with the school or scared to volunteer at school. Parents discussed gaining confidence because of PASA. Several shared the feeling that they could now advocate on behalf of their children and be involved in the school. Furthermore, parents acknowledged improved parent-child communication about the school. Parents pointed to receiving a certificate at graduation with a sense of accomplishment; one mentioned how the certificate displayed their commitment to their children’s success. One parent facilitator reflected on the impact PASA had on her own sense of efficacy:

I’m more confident to ask questions. [Now] I feel like I have an armor on me; before I felt like a soft shell. And a lot of it [before PASA] was more negative stuff of them [teachers] asking well, what is it [the problem] exactly? And just with me being in the program for nine weeks—and this is just a success story for me—my daughter’s grades have [gone] from Fs to like Bs and Cs, like literally within nine weeks.” (PASA Facilitator, 5.06.13)



Photo courtesy of Kent School District

## 2. Building New Relationships and Learning Environments for Parents

CREATING CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS FOR PARENTS. PASA provided a space in which parent facilitators could teach parents in their native languages how to navigate the educational system and support their children's academic success. Access to these spaces appeared to be dictated by a critical mass of parents within a particular language group. District administration decided on having PASA classes for the top four languages spoken at each school (English, Russian/Ukrainian, Somali, and Spanish) due to district capacity, but also to provide a language-specific space for parents. For families that fell outside of the top four languages, interpreters were provided at an English-speaking class. One district administrator commented on the decision to provide an English-with-translation classroom:

We don't have enough time to translate in multiple languages, so they'll be with a group of people and translating/interpreting at that table that time. It breaks up into groups a lot, so I thought well, when we break up into groups they can clarify, discuss, and they don't necessarily have to share back with the group. Their interpreter could share back with the group on behalf of their group.

Not all language groups had their own classrooms, and this created unintended dynamics between groups. For instance, when the principal forum took place with all the parents, only the four main languages were translated from the front, whereas speakers of other languages had translators sitting with them in the audience. Focusing solely on language-specific classes also had unintended consequences for the participation of English-speaking African American parents in PASA programming. For example, when asked about the limited participation of African American parents in PASA classes, Millennium's principal was puzzled by the possible barriers to their participation:

I don't know [why participation was so limited]. And yet they're our greatest under-achieving group of children in the school. And they're the kids we should be able to connect with. We're not talking about language barriers. Cultural barriers? I don't know.

Yet, the language-specific spaces created learning environments that were tailored to the cultural practices of each group, which had implications for recruitment, retention and graduation of this PASA cohort.

OPPORTUNITIES TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS AND NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES WITH OTHER PARENTS. Within these language-specific classrooms, parent facilitators worked directly with parents to build knowledge, form networks, and navigate school culture and were instrumental in bridging the cultural and sometimes relational divide between parent communities and schools. Having a facilitator with a similar background helped to create a space in which parents could share information, learn new ideas, and encourage one another in their own languages, thus forming a parent information network. Facilitators and parents drew from personal experiences, which created common ground between parents' surrounding barriers and enabling factors to parent engagement. One parent during a PASA lesson mentioned:

We as a community need to help each other learn about computers, the school system, and English. We need to create programs specifically for Latinos, for example, a program where kindergarten students meet Latino college students, or create a math group for Latinos, or learn English with your children and kindergarten is good place to start!

While there was little capacity-building for the emerging parent information network to take its knowledge and advocacy from parent information to parent agency, after graduation PASA parents left with an additional supportive network of parents and facilitators within their community.

### 3. Developing Systemic Capacity

PROVIDING INFRASTRUCTURE AND EVIDENCE-BASED PARENT ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMMING TO SCHOOLS. In order to lessen the burden on program development and implementation, the district single-handedly designed and implemented all the processes for the pilot program, from acquiring a research-based curriculum and instruction model from PIQE to hiring and training temporary staff to preparing materials to organize parent recruitment to providing parent transportation and childcare. One district administrator who was a former principal commented on this decision:

As a building principal, I would have loved for someone to say here is the curriculum, here's exactly how you do it, here's what it's going to cost, here's what it's going to take, and oh, by the way, we have a bank of people that you can hire to teach these classes. All you've got to do is say yes!

This approach minimized the work required for principals and teachers to pilot the program in their schools, increasing the likelihood that principals would take on the new initiative. However, the tight timeline for implementing the program limited the investment in time required of school staff in creating opportunities for collaboration between parents, community, teachers, and principals on key tenets of the program.

CAPITALIZING ON COMMUNITY ASSETS AND KNOWLEDGE. KSD created new structures within which to hire and pay parent and community leaders as facilitators, breaking out of entrenched policies regarding paying people without college or high school degrees and moving towards paying parents for their knowledge of the community and the school. Once hired, PASA facilitators were paired with mentors (e.g., former school counselors, substitute teachers, translators, etc.) who provided ongoing coaching and support to enable facilitators to connect their community expertise and knowledge to the PASA curriculum. This training, along with their visibility as PASA facilitators, allowed them to be seen as valuable assets within their school and community. A facilitator mentioned:

Through [PASA] . . . it was amazing because they [principals] would come into my class, see me teach, and every time they would come I always had questions. So I had them involved, so it was a good relationship and they got to know me. Now they're calling me for interpreting jobs.

### PARENT ROLES:

#### Cultural Brokers, Leaders

PARENTS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS AS CULTURAL BROKERS. Kent School District hired bilingual parents from the community to recruit Pine Tree and Millennium parents to participate in the new PASA programming. When phone calls were unsuccessful for some cultural groups, two Somali recruiters suggested and implemented an alternative strategy, as described by the principal of Millennium Elementary:

[H]e just started beating down the doors, and he's now up to about eight or 10 people in his Somali group, because that first night we opened, he sat there with no one. . . . And they're a close community, so once one of these ladies realizes this is what they need to do, they seem to be pretty good at drawing in each other and giving them a sense of ownership of that this is where you need to come.

Bilingual PASA facilitators were also uniquely positioned to build relationships with both educators and parents. Through weekly trainings with district staff, facilitators learned about the education system and built relationships with educators. The classroom environment also provided facilitators with opportunities to establish relationships with other parents in the class, which facilitated their efforts to decode and translate dominant cultural norms and expectations and share knowledge about resources and opportunities for their children.

**PARENTS AS LEADERS.** Outside of the PASA program, there were no defined roles for parent leadership for non-dominant parents. However, PASA-trained parents who are residents of Birch Creek or other King County Housing Authority properties took on leadership roles in their housing communities or in the Read to Succeed Initiative. This has already begun in small but promising ways. For example, KSD's support of one of the Somali PASA facilitators enabled him to create and lead a parent-child native-language class this summer at Birch Creek that strengthened first-language skills for children, leveraged the language expertise and cultural knowledge of parents, and created a culturally responsive learning environment for families within a community. Another parent facilitator reflected once PASA was over:

I was in a [school] board meeting. And to tell them what you feel, it's like, I can feel that now if I have any other issues or any other things I need to suggest, and then I can still come in and tell them. Before, I never even thought I can come over there and sit and suggest anything.

### **Promising Practices for Family Engagement**

Kent's PASA programming has re-envisioned the process by which parents and community members support and strengthen the learning environments students need to achieve high standards. Through their PASA programming, Kent has built parents' knowledge, capacity and confidence in partnering with educators and families to increase student success, built parent-parent relationships and culturally responsive learning environments for parents, and developed systemic capacity. While challenges still exist for expanding leadership opportunities for non-dominant parents throughout the district and building ownership for all educators, the district has moved towards a redesign of the PASA parent curriculum during the 2014-2015 school year because the original curriculum from PIQE cannot be shared outside the district for copyright reasons. This redesign has put parents, community members, and school staff around the table to create new lessons that can be shared with other Road Map districts to catalyze more authentic parent engagement throughout the region. By capitalizing on family and community assets and knowledge in their parent programming, Kent has created pathways for non-dominant parents to become leaders in contributing to culturally responsive parent engagement programming district-wide.



Photo courtesy of Kent School District



# White Center Promise Initiative

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## CASE STUDY

On a bright summer day, Greenbridge Plaza is adorned with dozens of multicolored balloons that read, “I Love White Center.” The brightly colored balloons match the blue, orange, yellow, and red apartments and townhomes of Greenbridge, a King County Housing Authority (KCHA) mixed-income rental housing property. Tables and chairs are set up with stations for food and games. Over the course of the day, 1,100 children and families from the White Center community gather at Greenbridge Plaza for the second annual Promise Summer Celebration.

As families arrive, employees and volunteers from White Center Promise partner organizations greet them. They introduce the families to all of the activities and stations at the event, including the use of the entire plaza as a human board game. The festivities begin with a family picture, which symbolizes the commitment of each family to help their children through the K-12 continuum of education—the images are as striking for their diversity as they are for their constancy. Family after family, large and small, grandmas and aunties, wiggling babies and shy teenagers, Somali, Latino, white, Vietnamese, black, Samoan and more, all take their turns in front of the camera, a few exclaiming over their first family portrait.

As families proceed through the game, they learn about the major phases of schooling, from preschool through high school. At a station featuring the theme of preparing children for kindergarten, kids throw balls into buckets that reveal tips such as “read to your children” or “teach your children shapes and colors.” At the end, Highline Public Schools Interim Superintendent Spicciati poses for pictures with kids and talks about graduation and which college degrees can lead to which professions. After the game, WCP staff and volunteers engage families in a community survey about their concerns and the resources in the community. Using brightly colored circle-shaped stickers, families rank the concerns and resources they care about most. As stickers accumulate, placed by both parents and their children, the results begin to reveal stories of the community’s concerns. A top concern for parents is their children’s safety going to and from school, while children are concerned about their safety in school. After the activities have been completed, WCP staff members encourage families to play a role in forming school policies and getting involved with the Promise initiative.

## Community-based Parent Engagement in White Center

An unincorporated area of King County located just South of Seattle, White Center is home to a community full of linguistic and cultural diversity, with a population that is 49% immigrants speaking more than 54 languages. Located in the diverse White Center community, the mission of White Center CDA (WCCDA) is to “promote a vibrant neighborhood and high quality of life for White Center residents and stakeholders through the development of authentic leadership opportunities and community-led, neighborhood initiatives.”<sup>10</sup> WCCDA was formed in 2002 as a resident-led, traditional community development corporation (CDC) through the collaboration and support of King County and the Annie E. Casey Foundation. WCCDA is now the lead partner in the White Center Promise (WCP). Inspired by the federal Promise Neighborhood Initiative and the Harlem Children’s Zone, the White Center Promise Neighborhood Initiative aims to eradicate poverty in White Center through a partnership with Southwest Youth and Family Services (SWYFS), Highline Public Schools, the King County Housing Authority (KCHA) and other key stakeholders. The WCP “zone” covers a 1.36 mile area of the White Center community and includes three schools (White Center Heights Elementary, Mt. View Elementary and Cascade Middle School), downtown businesses, two Hope VI communities (Greenbridge and Seola Gardens),<sup>11</sup> and three parks as well as the larger community. Despite not receiving a Promise implementation award from the U.S. Department of Education, the White Center Promise initiative moved forward with the early learning, out-of-school-time, and family engagement programs in late January 2013.

Although WCP consists of a variety of efforts, our case study focused on White Center Promise’s family engagement work, which includes White Center CDA’s ongoing family engagement program (see Figure 4 for a visual representation of the organizational relationships within White Center Promise’s family engagement initiative):

- WCCDA’s ongoing family engagement program, *Family Connections*, employs parents from the community to act as Family Ambassadors in several Highline Public Schools who work with school staff to meet the needs of families in the program, including parent trainings and support, events, and referrals for basic needs assistance and social services.
- The *Family Success Partners (FSP) Program* (Formerly Family Navigators) brings together the existing family support programs of the White Center Promise partner organizations. “Community builders” from King County Housing Authority, school-based “Family Liaisons” from Highline Public Schools, “Family Advocates” from Southwest Youth and Family Services, and the WCCDA’s Family Ambassadors work to coordinate and streamline their work to provide families with a continuum of services and wrap-around support for a variety of student and family needs.

The *WCP Resident Advisory Council (RAC)* is a voluntary community advisory team made up of White Center Residents whose role is to support and guide WCP efforts by developing a shared vision, streamlining communications, determining common indicators, and implementing a data tracking system to measure progress.

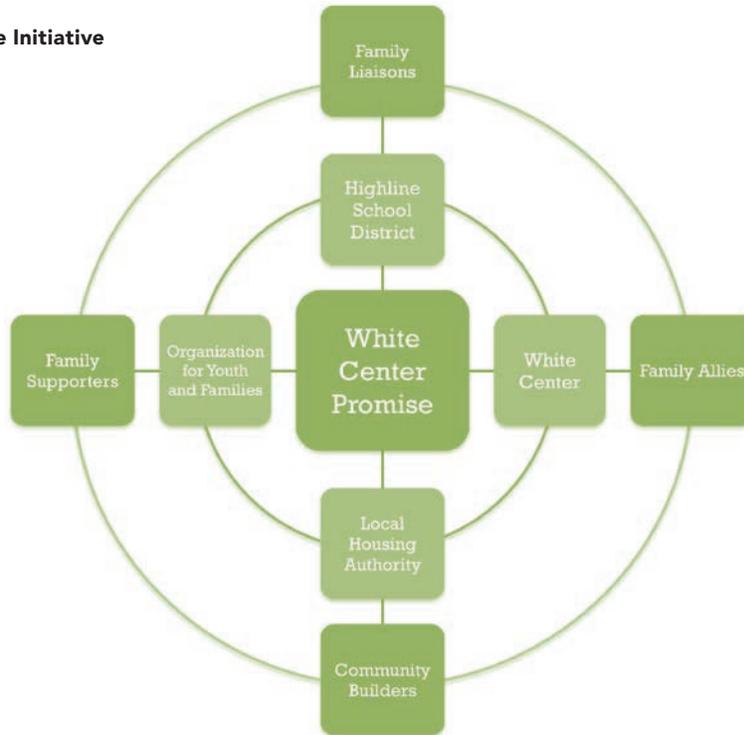
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<sup>10</sup><http://whitecenterpromise.org/>

<sup>11</sup>Hope VI communities are federally revitalized public housing communities. Part of the revitalization process included mixed income housing opportunities.

FIGURE 4.

**White Center Promise Initiative**



**INITIATIVE GOALS**

**Improving Family and Community Well-being**

The overarching goal of White Center Promise is to align approaches, activities, and outcomes around a cradle-to-career continuum of services to improve the well-being of the community. The effort seeks to create successful students, equitable schools, strong families, an engaged community, and a thriving neighborhood. WCP’s family engagement work takes a holistic, two-generation approach to change, which addresses not only education for children but also family and community well-being. As such, their goals reflect both individual and collective aims. Community needs are a central focus. Annually at the community summit, the CDA conducts a community needs assessment and uses the information to set priorities for the upcoming year. The goal of community wellness implies a vision in which young people graduate, attain higher education, and remain (or come back to) a vibrant, healthy community—in contrast to more individualistic goals for student achievement that enable young people to “escape” from their community.

The White Center Promise family engagement work, on the other hand, focuses more on individual economic self-sufficiency of families through social service provision, basic needs assistance, and financial management education. Although the leadership roles available to parents on the Resident Advisory Council are intended to provide a platform for collective community engagement, the RAC had yet to operationalize the vision for their role.<sup>12</sup> (See Appendix D for an overview of the White Center Promise Initiative).

<sup>12</sup>Following the period of data collection, the Resident Advisory Council underwent reorganization.

## **KEY STRATEGIES:**

### **Building Relationships towards Collective Engagement**

White Center Promise's efforts have worked to align residents, community members, business people, educators, and other stakeholders around a shared vision and to improve communication about each organization's work for student and community success. With such strategies, WCP anticipates long-term change for the coming generations.

#### **1. Building Parent Knowledge, Capacity and Support**

**STREAMLINING EFFORTS TO MEET FAMILY NEEDS.** WCP Family Success Partners focused on plans to improve communication and coordination of efforts to enable partner organizations to identify (through a common intake form) and meet family needs. Family Success Partners plan to support a caseload of 100 families on student academic, social and behavior issues and streamline referral services into one point of entry instead of multiple points of entry through community providers. The Family Success Partners would serve as the initial contact,<sup>13</sup> refer families to whatever services they may need, and would also track families through the process to ensure services were received. This focus on addressing individual, rather than collective, family and community needs seemed at odds with WCP's priority on community wellness. The diversity of approaches represented by other partners in the initiative, an interest in all partners coming to consensus, and/or a lack of discussion among partners about changing their practices or approach may have contributed to limiting the extent to which the initiative truly drew on FC's approach as the "backbone" of the Promise work, as originally envisioned by formal leaders.

**COMMUNITY-BASED PARENT EDUCATION.** Through the Family Ambassadors and Family Success Partners, families are encouraged to participate in community-based opportunities to build their knowledge of and capacity for student success in ways that are broadly construed within the context of family and community wellness, not limited to school-based academics. The opening vignette of the Summer Celebration showcases such an event put on by the Promise Initiative itself. In addition, at the White Center Summit families are encouraged to dialogue on neighborhood needs and issues; gain access to family resources; and participate in a series of workshops, presentations and speakers focused around a common theme. Family Ambassadors have also enabled White Center families to participate in a citizenship class offered by OneAmerica, and the financial management piece also falls under this category.

#### **2. Changing Relationships and Organizational Culture**

**RAISING ISSUES OF EQUITY, RACE AND POWER.** WCP leaders do not shy away from conversations about equity, race and power. Many argue that addressing the impact of race, privilege, and power in schools and communities necessitates the ability to notice and talk about those dynamics, and WCP leadership consistently raised these questions in conversations and meetings about the work. Formal leaders of WCCDA saw the organization as a conduit for parent concerns around these issues.

#### **BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS, COLLECTIVE ENGAGEMENT, AND LEADERSHIP THROUGH FAMILY CONNECTIONS.**

WCCDA's long-established Family Connections program seeks to take a strengths-based, culturally responsive approach to building a network of families, connecting them with information and resources, and developing parent leadership (as Family Ambassadors) to influence the educational system. As one Family Connections staff member described, the goal is to "create a culture where parents see themselves as experts in the teaching and in the education of the kids." Family Ambassadors, who serve as community-specific cultural brokers, also meet

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<sup>13</sup>i.e., "Community builders" from the King County Housing Authority, school-based "Family Liaisons" from Highline Public Schools, "Family Advocates" from Southwest Youth and Family Services, and the WCCDA's Family Ambassadors.

regularly with teachers (especially in the early grades)—who provide referrals regarding struggling students—and facilitate parent-teacher interactions. Unlike school-based liaisons, whose work is directed by the priorities of the principal and the school’s agenda, Family Ambassadors are based at the CDA and are, thus, able to focus on a broader community agenda as they help parents to access community resources and recruit them to participate in community events and services. However, the lack of predictable and consistent funding for Family Ambassadors may challenge and constrain the work of sustaining WCP’s vision. Emerging research on Promise Initiatives indicates that many of these initiatives, including the funded ones, struggle in general because people are often compelled to take on extra work in addition to their current roles (Horsford, 2013). Such dynamics limit the potential of initiatives and make it difficult to sustain momentum in many cases.

### 3. Developing Systemic Capacity

**DEVELOPING INDICATORS AND COMMON DATA SYSTEMS.** Through a series of stakeholder meetings, White Center Promise has focused on selecting common indicators of progress to align WCP data measures with the broader Road Map Project indicators. The indicators developed through this process were intended to align common goals, needs, and programmatic capacity across WCP partners in order to provide a more holistic approach to aligning services and resources with families. While this process involved school staff (i.e., Family Liaisons), school and district leadership were not part of the indicator and data system development, which has implications for building systemic capacity with school partners across WCP. Yet, WCCDA’s capacity to work with student data allows for community-based programs to track, assess, and support students throughout the White Center community.

**GETTING SCHOOLS “COMMUNITY-READY.”** While WCP currently does not have access to district infrastructure or the ability to build capacity within that organization, they have made efforts to engage educators and the district within community—rather than school—spaces. For example, the superintendent attended and participated in both the White Center Summit and Summer Celebration. Rather than focusing exclusively on children and parents becoming “school-ready,” the former Family Alliance program director argued that “we need schools to become community-ready.” By providing opportunities for educators to interact with their communities outside school spaces, WCP has begun to move beyond traditional models of parent involvement.

**STRONG FOUNDATIONS FOR CBO COLLABORATION.** Combining WCCDA’s community presence and infrastructure with WCP’s connected and respected leadership has created a strong foundation for collaboration and leveraging of local and federal resources and opportunities. As the lead organization in the WCP, WCCDA has a long history in the community, and is well-known and respected by educators, community members, and parents. WCCDA’s



Photo courtesy of White Center Promise

10 years of Family Connections brought a community presence to the schools in which Family Ambassadors are housed and facilitated the alignment of efforts, collaboration, and communication across multiple organizations. WCP's leadership has significant influence within the broader Road Map region. Their work has the potential to bring together the collective capacity of the individuals in the varied Family Success Partner roles—many of whom have limited time, funding, or support to carry out their family engagement roles and otherwise operate in relative isolation. Due to varied contextual influences on their work (i.e., resources, time, an accountability mechanism), Family Success Partners often perform a range of practices and approaches, from direct service provision and resource/agency referral to information-sharing, relationship-building and cultural navigation. Moving forward, these Promise partner organizations hope to collaborate and combine efforts to maximize supports for families.

## **PARENT ROLES:**

### **Potential for Parent Leadership, Cultural Brokers**

**PARENTS AS POTENTIAL LEADERS.** WCP seeks to place parents in leadership positions through the Resident Advisory Council and as Family Ambassadors in order to operate from a “community frame of reference” focused on community needs within their parent engagement work. While there are opportunities for families to play an advisory role for the project through the RAC, the framework for developing leadership appears still to be evolving. There is a clearer leadership trajectory through the WCCDA Family Ambassadors work, as Ambassadors are involved in helping to shape programming and in direct work with educators. The Family Ambassadors are parents themselves and in that role they strive to build relationships with parents and connect them to resources. For example, one WC Family Ambassador speaks about the opportunities for parent leadership within their parent engagement programming:

[W]e believe in parent leaders. We believe in providing them the skills. . . . We have the capability to really guide them to speak the language of community, so that way they are helping to influence the educational system in really incorporating what people keep on saying.

WCP also provides leadership opportunities for residents in the community to serve in an advisory capacity for the leaders of the WCP initiative within the Resident Advisory Council. Both of these efforts have promise as pathways to empowerment and more collective advocacy.

**FAMILY SUCCESS PARTNERS AS CULTURAL BROKERS.** Family Success Partners work directly with families to help connect them to community resources and school supports. Recruited from White Center community members and former parent volunteers, FSP connect families to community resources. They serve as cultural brokers between schools and families by working directly with families to inform and encourage participation in school and community events. A Family Ambassador describes their role as being the “middle men” between schools and families:

If the parents need something regarding their kid's education because some parents they don't feel comfortable enough to talk straight to the teacher, they can come to us. Some teachers it's so hard for them to contact the parents and they refer that child or that family to us.

## Promising Practices in Family Engagement

White Center Promise’s holistic vision embraces family engagement as a means of improving both student success and community wellness. WCP had made strides in building a critical foundation for its Promise initiative implementation, and the challenges they encountered highlighted complexities and resources needed to ensure a collaborative agenda driven by parents and other community stakeholders. Beyond facilitating connections to community resources, White Center Promise cultural brokers played a key role in partnering with educators and other community organizations to offer cultural activities for students and their families to socialize them into particular dominant cultural domains and enable families to share new experiences. WCP Family Ambassadors also recruited families for school and community events, which engage families in understanding how they could support their children’s educational success within a broader context that included not only more traditional involvement (for example, reading to young children at home) but also engagement around issues regarding the district’s new bilingual/biliteracy goal, housing and foreclosures, substance abuse, transportation, and community annexation to nearby larger cities. Budget constraints appeared to limit capacity in the Family Ambassador program (now called Promise Family Connectors), but WCP’s community-based engagement efforts have begun to broaden the conception of family engagement beyond the four walls of the school and to create avenues for approaching educational success as deeply linked to issues in the broader community such as economic development, housing, transportation, health, and immigration.



Photo courtesy of White Center Promise

# CROSS-CASE FINDINGS

Using the equitable collaboration framework, we share our cross-case findings below, focused on the initiatives' key goals, strategies, roles, and contextual factors.

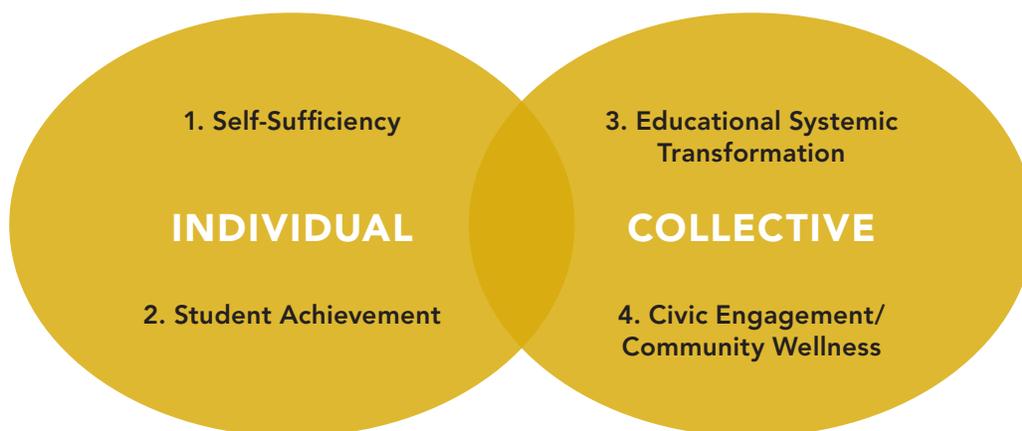
## Cross-Case Goals

We examined the goals of the parent engagement initiatives to better understand not only the formal representation of their aims (for instance, the goals listed on websites, brochures, and grant proposals) but also their underlying theory of action about what they thought would result from their efforts, as reflected in the language, behaviors, norms, and assumptions of the participants. Although we initially applied the lens of equitable collaborations to understand the goals of the initiatives, we discovered a range of goals that went beyond the simple dichotomy of short-term, discrete intervention aims versus systemic transformation goals.

We thus adapted Labaree's (1997) framework to better conceptualize the similarities and differences between the goals among the parent engagement initiatives we studied. Labaree's framework posits simultaneous and often-competing American education goals of democratic equality, social efficiency, and social mobility. Democratic equality aims focus on preparing responsible citizens to maintain a functioning democracy, while social efficiency goals envision education as an investment in a productive workforce; both entail *collective* benefits as a public good. Social mobility goals aim to provide individual students with a competitive advantage in gaining social positions; education thus entails *individualistic* benefits as a private good. We propose that these goals also apply to parent engagement initiatives and the theory of action that underlies them. That is, the goals and theory of action that undergirded the initiatives in this study aligned with a distinction between individual and collective aims. We merged Labaree's framework with the research literature on community-based education reform (including the equitable collaborations framework) and the data from our sites to elaborate a revised model of parent engagement goals (see Figure 5 below):

FIGURE 5.

**Model of Parent Engagement Initiative Goals**





Across the sites, we found a predominance of *individual goals* for parent engagement. Although we saw important variability within each initiative, most of the discourse—both formal and informal—and approaches were aligned with fostering the knowledge, sense of responsibility, and behaviors of individual parents to support their own children’s academic achievement. Both school districts, in particular, sought to develop the capacity of individual parents to work with their own children to support their academic performance, as defined by standardized test scores. For instance, the Federal Way Public Schools’ cornerstone parent workshop, Partnership 101, provided a roadmap for helping parents connect better with their own children and their children’s teachers. Likewise, Kent School District’s Parent Academy for Student Achievement (PASA) program curriculum was designed to help parents become advocates for their own children and supporters of their academic achievement at home. The superintendent in Kent was particularly interested in tracking how well the children of PASA graduates performed academically in order to assess the cost-benefit analysis of the program, and the over-arching PASA goal of creating a college and career-going culture emphasized social mobility for individual students.

It is important to note here that we do not mean to suggest that the academic achievement or social mobility of individual students is unimportant. Like Schutz (2006) and Auerbach (2012), however, we argue that this represents a limited view of student learning and success that isolates the school from its broader community context. When individual achievement and mobility are the end goal, success implies students’ “escape” from their community to a better life. A subset of data from our study suggest a different vision, one that entails young people succeeding both in school and in contributing to the well-being of their communities.

White Center Promise did seek to align its outcomes with its neighboring district in terms of academic achievement, but the initiative also had a broader conception of success that included families and the broader community. WCP espoused a collective vision of overall community well-being and resident leadership for robust democratic participation. However, we found that the discourse and work of the Family Navigators, in particular, was focused predominantly on meeting the needs of *individual* students and families, suggesting an aim of self-sufficiency.

Although we found few examples of initiative goals focused on systemic transformation, some individuals within both districts held a vision of more collective aims. A key Kent district leader talked about how the investment in PASA would result in hundreds of educated parents who would have a far greater impact on the system than the same amount of money invested in support staff. . Similarly, two of the Federal Way School District parent leaders cultivated by district leader Moore went on to be school board members who advocated for the needs of all children in the district. And both the primary district leaders in the district-based family engagement initiatives discussed a vision for expanding the leadership capacity of parents to be able to have a broader impact beyond their own families.

## Cross-Case Strategies

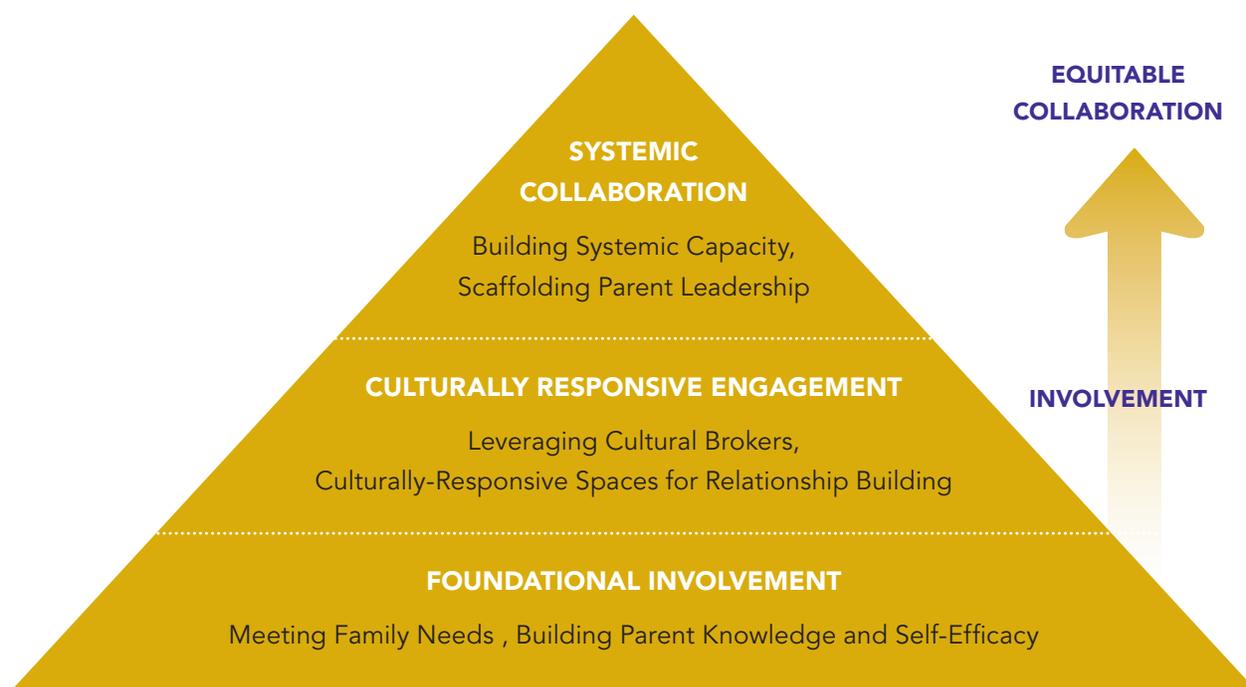
The goals of parent engagement initiatives have critical implications for the types of strategies employed to enact those aims. Drawing from the framework of equitable collaborations, efforts aimed at systemic change seek to move beyond a focus on structures and programs to the deeper (and harder) work of building parent capacity and relationships. In this study, the strategies employed ranged along a continuum, from more traditional approaches typical of many parent involvement initiatives to practices that seek to enact a more reciprocal and equitable relationship between families and schools. Drawing on previous research, we represent this continuum as a pyramid to suggest both the number of parents who may be engaged with those strategies at any given moment as well as the progressive nature of the journey from involvement to collaboration.

The findings from this study suggest three distinct types of strategies: 1) foundational involvement strategies, 2) culturally responsive engagement strategies, and 3) systemic collaboration strategies. Each type of strategy also roughly corresponds to the three common Road Map parent engagement indicators (see Figure 6).

*Foundational involvement strategies* include meeting family needs and building parent knowledge of academics and the educational system (Indicator 1: Parent Knowledge and Confidence). *Culturally responsive engagement strategies* include the use of cultural brokers and the creation of culturally responsive spaces for parent-to-parent relationship-building (Indicator 2: Welcoming and Culturally Responsive School Climate). Finally, *systemic collaboration strategies* build systemic capacity to collaborate with families and to scaffold parent leadership (Indicator 3: Parent Leadership Opportunities and Influence).

FIGURE 6.

### Continuum of Involvement, Engagement & Collaboration Strategies





## 1. Foundational involvement strategies

As we described in the introduction, some traditional strategies can be problematic for their deficit framing of parents and communities and can actually feed a negative cycle that deters non-dominant parent participation. Others, this study suggests, may be foundational strategies for beginning to cultivate more robust forms of engagement between families and schools.

### A MEETING FAMILY NEEDS

The strength of this strategy lies in its holistic focus on helping families to address their basic economic, health, and other needs as a means of enabling them to better support their children's learning and academic success. For example, in the White Center Promise initiative, Family Success Partners from several partner organizations sought to coordinate the identification of family needs and supports and services in meeting them. However, direct service or resource referrals are short-term intervention strategies that rarely build long-term capacity or engagement on their own. Given the challenges that families in the region face, resource referral and meeting immediate needs can be a never-ending task. Most of the strategies employed by the sites in this study worked to build longer-term capacity targeting parents' ability to support their children's academic success.

### B. BUILDING PARENT KNOWLEDGE AND SELF-EFFICACY

All the initiatives in this study were engaged in some form of parent education. These efforts included information about how schools work, schools' expectations for students, identifying whom to talk with to address questions or resolve issues, and academic concepts such as grades, test scores, and standards. For instance, PASA taught parents how to navigate the K-12 school system, make sense of grades and standards, and create a "school-like" home learning environment. In Federal Way, parents learned what questions to ask their children, what to ask in a parent-teacher conference, and whom to talk with to escalate an issue up a "ladder" of authority within the educational system. The place-based initiatives took a broader view of parent education. For instance, at the request of families, White Center Family Ambassadors partnered with a local bank to educate parents about financial management and, on another occasion, held a session on couponing.

Conventional parent education efforts often focus on *giving* parents information without a concurrent focus on receiving feedback and information from them to improve educational systems. To varying degrees, the initiatives in this study were all seeking to build parent knowledge and self-efficacy in more reciprocal and interactive ways. However, the onus remained on individual parents in foundational *involvement* strategies; more robust *engagement* required adapting strategies and organizational cultures to meet the needs of parents and families.

## 2. Culturally Responsive Engagement Strategies

A critical first step in engaging culturally diverse parents is creating a context within which parents and families feel welcome and part of the school community. Given the vast racial, cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity of the Road Map region, this represents a tall order. Across our sites, we identified engagement efforts that we refer to as “culturally responsive” strategies, in reference to the notion of culturally responsive teaching and instruction (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Culturally responsive teaching seeks to know, affirm, and draw on the cultural heritage students bring to the classroom and to bridge home and school experiences. Likewise, our findings suggest that culturally responsive engagement efforts acknowledge and affirm the diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds of families as a source of strength rather than as a barrier to student success.

### A. LEVERAGING CULTURAL BROKERS

The sites in this study leveraged parents, community members, or staff who represent the many cultural communities represented in the student population as “cultural brokers.” Cultural brokers have a foot in two worlds: the world of the school/formal organizations and the world of a specific cultural community (Martinez-Cosio & Iannacone, 2007; Stanton-Salazar, 2010). These individuals help families from non-dominant cultural communities to understand and access information, resources, and opportunities from the dominant institutions. In theory, cultural brokers also help those institutions to address, understand and change community needs and priorities.

Although all the initiatives in this study leveraged cultural brokers, the specific roles differed significantly across the sites. Federal Way’s model of placing full-time liaisons in each school provides ongoing, daily access and support to both parents and educators. Most of the Family Liaisons are bilingual in English and Spanish, though, and any one cultural broker will be hard-pressed to be effective with every linguistic and cultural community in a diverse school. Kent’s PASA employed many more facilitators who were cultural brokers representing multiple languages (English, Spanish, Russian, Ukrainian, Somali, Vietnamese, Burmese, Punjabi, and others), but resource constraints limited the facilitators to the nine-week evening course (and trainings), so they were not with parents on a daily basis and had few, if any, interactions with teachers. White Center’s Family Ambassadors, who at various times represented Latino, Somali, Tongan, and Vietnamese communities, were hired and supervised by the CDA, so their work was not limited to serving only school needs or agendas, but organizational capacity and resources also constrained the coordination, time (most were part-time) and long-term sustainability of those roles (there appeared to be significant turnover over the course of a year).

### B. CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SPACES FOR RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING

To varying degrees, the initiatives in this study all created opportunities for parents to meet and develop relationships with one another, particularly with those who share their home languages and cultures. Kent’s teaching of PASA in five separate classrooms in nine or more languages was perhaps the clearest example of this strategy. Although they were working from a common set of procedures and a common curriculum, the PASA facilitators adapted their recruitment and instruction to specific cultural contexts. For instance, Somali parent leaders went door to door in their community, phone calls and in-person reminders turned out Latino families, and a Burmese cultural broker picked her students up and brought them to the school together.



Across the sites, though, African Americans in particular did not have such culturally responsive spaces, presumably because they speak English as their first language. Similarly, Pacific Islanders, who speak many languages but also include many English speakers, did not have such designated spaces. Numbers also played into this dynamic (e.g., no such spaces existed for Native Americans, who comprise a small portion of the student populations), as limited resources required prioritizing, generally based on the size of the linguistic groups.

### **3. Systemic Collaboration Strategies**

Systemic collaboration strategies seek to change the structures, systems, policies, and practices in educational systems that systematically exclude or marginalize families and students, particularly when they do not reflect the dominant class, culture, and language. We saw the fewest of these strategies across our sites, as they are likely the most challenging to implement because of the implied shift of power that enables non-dominant parents and families to have real influence in educational systems. We did, however, see practices that held promise for realizing such change. Although many of these strategies were not fully realized, they point the way to more equitable and reciprocal interactions and collaboration between families, communities, and educational systems.

#### **A. BUILDING SYSTEMIC CAPACITY**

Both district initiatives in this study built new infrastructure, systems, and capacity to support family engagement. Dedicated human resources for cultural brokers were critical in all three sites; the districts developed new supports and opportunities for family engagement personnel to learn and coordinate their work; and there were a few cases in which partnerships between districts, local housing authorities, and community-based organizations provided new capacity that helped them remove barriers to parent participation (e.g., childcare, transportation, non-school site for programs, etc.).

Educator capacity is a critical element of systemic capacity. Across the initiatives, we noted few strategies for developing teacher and other educator capacity to engage and partner effectively with families to support student success. Federal Way was the notable exception. Their Dynamic Home Visit program (piloted at Illahee Middle School by school counselor Julia Ziggarelli) represents a promising emerging practice that aims to build teachers' understanding and ability to engage with their families and students to improve classroom instruction. The National Equity Center also provided workshops for teams of school staff and parents and Family Liaisons. Although these trainings did not fully realize the impact envisioned by the district, subsequent district efforts have sought to learn from the challenges and successes of this effort to build educator capacity and address equity-related issues. Moore reports new efforts to engage teachers in developing an educator version of the Partnership 101 handbook and workshop, with the intention of explicitly linking to the family engagement expectations in the new teacher evaluation system.

White Center Promise did not have insider access to the system that would have enabled it to build district infrastructure or educator capacity, although the initiative aspired to building capacity at a multi-organizational level through the Promise initiative. WCP was unique, however, in articulating a systemic critique related to issues of race, privilege and power. Especially given the diversity of the student population in the Road Map region, interrupting inequities in the systems that ostensibly serve all students and families may necessitate strategies and work that directly address issues of race, class, power, and privilege.

## B. SCAFFOLDING PARENT LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

All the initiatives in the study sought to develop parents as “leaders” of their own children, and a few parents had the opportunity to be hired into formal cultural broker roles or to take on formal leadership roles (such as School Board membership). However, Kent’s PASA stood out for its efforts to scaffold leadership development and provide multiple roles at multiple levels for parents/family members, particularly in terms of engaging other parents and contributing to the success not only of their own children, but of all the children in a school or district. First, PASA intentionally targeted parents whose children are least well served by the system. This suggests that equitable practice in family engagement—as in instruction—may necessitate intentionally *differentiating* focus, resources, or opportunities, given that existing family engagement mechanisms in schools currently serve some families better than others.

Secondly, PASA provided ongoing supports and multiple opportunities for people to take on “stretch” assignments with increasing responsibility and influence. “Stretch” assignments are tasks or roles that require knowledge or skills beyond individuals’ current capacity in order to enable them to grow and learn. Over the course of a year, Kent parents and community leaders became recruiters, translators, workshop facilitators, trainers, curriculum developers, and even teachers within their communities. Both formally and informally, a system of supports and opportunities scaffolded parents and community members in enacting leadership both in and outside of their communities. For example, after recruiting and facilitating the workshops, one Somali parent established and taught a Somali parent-child native language class at the Birch Creek Housing Development, with the support of the district and the King County Housing Authority. Having spent his youth in a refugee camp, he is now pursuing his GED even while working full time and engaging with his children’s education.



Photo courtesy of Kent School District



## Parent/Family Roles

Although the priorities and strategies varied, all the initiatives in this study were working to build *parent leadership* in education, and even though these visions were not fully realized, we found promising pathways forward, as described above. We found parents and family members playing key roles throughout the system and beyond, from attending parent coffees and trainings to learn about schools to advocating for their children's needs; from sharing resources with other parents to setting community and district priorities and building the capacity of other parents to participate in decision-making.

Interestingly, though, in the planning meetings for all of the initiatives and the broader Road Map Project itself, multiple individuals on multiple occasions raised questions about where the "real" parents were. Similarly, a survey of organizational partners conducted for the formative evaluation of the Road Map Project also indicated that 77% of the respondents "did not know how parents were represented in the Project" (Education Northwest, 2013). Although some of the staff of both districts and community-based organizations identified as parents from the community (and took exception to the notion that they were not "real" parents), we believe this question—"Where are the real parents?"—raises important questions about the role of unaffiliated parents (whose paychecks do not come from organizations engaged in the work) in both family engagement work and in broader, collective efforts to improve academic achievement.

Should unaffiliated parents be involved in planning meetings, particularly when they include multiple organizations seeking to coordinate and align their work? Simple scheduling decisions, such as mid-day meetings, created barriers to participation on the part of parents who did not work for any of the organizations around the table. Some organizational staff resisted the idea of holding meetings at other times. First, some with children did not want to spend their time outside of the workday in such meetings, as it would mean spending time away from their children. Secondly, some questioned whether parents would be interested in or capable of participating meaningfully in such meetings. Rather, some organizational staff said that their frequent interactions with parents and families enabled them to "know what parents need," and suggested it would not be a good use of parents' time to have them participate in such meetings, since organizational staff could represent their needs and interests at the meetings.

Thus, we found ambivalence both within and outside of educational systems regarding the extent to which "real" parents should be directly involved in decision-making to shape initiatives. Shifting from an "input" and "buy-in" mindset and approach to one of "decision-making" and "ownership" is challenging, and the onus needs to be on whole-scale systems change in that effort, not on individual parents or even on individual heroic leaders within educational systems. The work of equitably collaborating with non-dominant families requires more than merely removing barriers and instituting technical interventions. Rather, such collaboration takes time, capacity-building, ongoing coaching, clear and explicit opportunities for increasingly challenging roles and responsibilities, and ultimately, a vision from the formal leadership that informs a systemic, organizational, or regional effort regarding the critical role that parents and communities can play as fellow educational leaders, not merely supporters of a pre-set agenda. We saw aspects of that across all the sites, but no one initiative reflected all the elements. Thus, the collective effort and context within which these initiatives were embedded holds great potential for catalyzing shared learning and more coherent and transformative practices.

## CONTEXT

### Collective Impact “Collabetition”

The final aspect of the equitable collaborations framework relates to the broader context within which parent engagement and other education reforms unfold, particularly the need to address the political aspect of educational change. As mentioned above, we found that superintendent-level or other top formal organizational *leadership* is critical for designating the work as a strategic system-wide priority and allocating resources and infrastructure to implement policies or plans. Principal-level leadership came up time and again across our sites as a critical enabler of or constraint on school-level engagement efforts. Likewise, the *organizational culture* of each initiative powerfully shaped the work. The norms, behaviors, and assumptions that favored default public relations stances to engagement were less conducive to moving towards equitable collaboration than more transparent, reflective learning and practice.

Across our data collection, though, the context of collective impact stood out as both a key opportunity and a challenge. In theory, a collective impact initiative is an ideal context within which to embed efforts to build family and community participation because it draws on a broader segment of the community and explicitly seeks to build the political will for sustained educational change.

In practice, a theme that emerged strongly across the work was what one participant termed “*collabetition*.” That is, the districts, agencies, community organizations, and institutions involved in the Road Map Project were ostensibly collaborating around a common vision and set of indicators. In practice, though, the structures and mechanisms through which this alignment occurred created a sense of constant competition for financial and human resources, media attention, priorities and opportunities for many of the project partners. For instance, much of the \$40 million federal Race to the Top award was allocated through competitive grant processes. Districts became fatigued with the process of having to apply for award after award. Likewise, district leaders voiced concerns that data—and research—on their efforts created comparisons between them that were politically challenging to navigate, both inside and outside the districts. And community-based organizations must rely on districts to elect to work with them in order to be eligible for these funds. Likewise, community organizations and leaders expressed strong concerns about awards for collective impact efforts that highlighted individual organizations or efforts. They suggested that the recognition was yet another way of pitting organizations against one another and putting smaller, grassroots organizations at a disadvantage, as they lack the capacity to work extensively with data or write elaborate award nominations.

On the other hand, a staff member for the Road Map initiative referred to “*collabetition*” dynamics as a critical component of the Project’s theory of action. Referring to the recent successful push to get districts to sign their students up for a state scholarship opportunity, the staff member averred, “That’s our lane. One of our greatest strengths is peer pressure.” Thus, the dynamic of “*collabetition*” operated as both an affordance for and a constraint on efforts within the collective impact initiative.



## CONCLUSIONS

Family engagement is central to the enterprise of creating and spreading equity in education. The findings from these case studies suggest promising approaches for building more reciprocal and equitable participation of parents and communities in schools, within a collective impact context. Each of the parent engagement initiatives we examined is charting a path towards realizing a range of aspects of equitable collaborations, but none has “arrived” at the end of this journey (indeed, it may be that there is no definitive “arrival”). The Road Map collective impact effort offers powerful potential for creating opportunities for ongoing, shared learning and improvement. The impact of family and community engagement work ultimately pivots on the ability of organizations and the individuals within them to reflect on their own practice and to learn from feedback, others’ experiences, and multiple forms of data—not only to hold themselves and each other accountable, but to *improve* their work. Together with Road Map partners, we have begun to develop and implement more robust measures of family engagement work that can be used to examine and improve the systems, policies, and practices. Future research with initiatives to engage in design-based work can explore new approaches to building equitable collaboration and scale up the principles at the core of those efforts. In the end, collective impact efforts present a key opportunity for bringing parent engagement efforts together to build capacity around data, learn from one another, and improve efforts in the hope of building collaboration in which non-dominant parents and community members join in the leadership of sustained educational transformation.

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**The impact of family and community engagement work ultimately pivots on the ability of organizations and the individuals within them to reflect on their own practice and to learn from feedback, others’ experiences, and multiple forms of data—not only to hold themselves and each other accountable, but to improve their work.**

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# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CULTIVATING EQUITABLE COLLABORATION

The case studies in this research suggest promising strategies for strengthening family engagement work within a collective impact context. Equitable collaborations between families, schools, and communities are not, however, built overnight. The findings from this study suggest that such work entails long-term investments, new relationships, and capacity-building of not only parents, but also educators and staff who work with culturally and linguistically diverse communities. We first provide a set of general recommendations and then address recommendations tailored to districts, schools, and collective impact initiatives.

## **1. Create a reciprocal, collective and equitable vision of family engagement tied to improving educational systems.**

Individualistic, deficit approaches to “training” parents are often strongly embedded in the culture and norms of schools and other organizations. Thus, explicit conversations among school/district leaders, educators, families, and communities about the *collective* goals and outcomes of family engagement work must move beyond conventional assumptions and practices. When all stakeholders have a meaningful role in shaping this vision, they can become co-creators of equitable family engagement practices and, as a result, more responsive schools and institutions.

## **2. Recognize and address inequities in power between districts and community-based organizations.**

Community-based organizations (CBOs) can be powerful allies and resources for schools and districts, but the highly unequal power dynamics between CBOs and districts can threaten their ability to collaborate productively and to realize the promise of collective impact. Although the rhetoric of partnerships is everywhere, districts often set the agenda and terms of engagement, relegating CBOs to passive support roles. Because of their greater power, it is incumbent on districts and policymakers to take the first steps to open the lines of communication and provide access to the resources (not only financial resources but also time and space) and decision-making processes that most directly affect the families served by CBOs. Schools can commit to connecting families with CBOs, sharing data, providing space, communicating regularly, and jointly planning school engagement and improvement efforts.

## **3. Recognize and address inequities in power between policymakers, professional educators and parents/families.**

The profound power differentials between policymakers, professional educators and parents/families both within districts and in the broader regional context can stifle the meaningful participation of parents and families and limit their contributions to improving the opportunities to learn for young people. Both research and practice have demonstrated parents’ capacity to engage in core discussions and critical decision-making about the issues that concern them most; professionals and educators who presume parents should not be present or part of policy or organizational decision-making are underutilizing the intellectual and social resources of their communities. Rather than feeling they are losing power or control, professionals and educators can proactively seek out the expertise of parents and families to gain new ideas and additional capacity. Districts and other institutions may need to challenge policies that reinforce power inequities, such as formal education requirements for leadership roles, English-only discussions, or meeting times that create barriers for participation. And organizational leaders must play a key initiating and supporting role in creating the conditions that promote equitable relationships.



**4. Create and sustain a culture of professional learning in family engagement practice.**

Like good teaching, equitable family engagement work is complex, context-specific, and requires constant reflection, collaboration, and efforts to improve. Organizational leaders (in both districts and CBOs) should approach family engagement work as a professional practice that entails ongoing reflection, learning and efforts to innovate as part of a broader culture of learning throughout the organization. Organizations should model and support the collection and use of broad forms of data (including student and family voices) to assess progress and guide improvement.

**5. Provide multiple opportunities for engagement that foster parent-to-parent networks and leadership.**

A range of engagement opportunities enables parents and families to engage in ways that are meaningful and culturally appropriate for them and their children while also growing their capacity and participation over time. While such opportunities may start with workshops and services to meet family needs, promoting parent-to-parent networks and cultivating leadership opportunities can strengthen how schools leverage the knowledge, skills, networks and other assets that parents/families can bring to improve schools and communities. Designated physical space in schools and time for families to meet and build relationships can facilitate these networks. Leadership opportunities can include both formal and informal roles, facilitation and mentoring for other parents, and participation in community, district and school-level committees. Family participation across these roles should reflect the student populations in the community.

## DISTRICTS

**6. Prioritize family engagement work as a strategic, shared responsibility.**

Superintendents play a pivotal role in communicating the strategic priorities and expectations of family engagement work as a shared responsibility that is central to the core work of educating students, rather than the marginalized domain of a few designated staff members. The inclusion of family engagement as a key component of a district's strategic work can signal its importance and highlight roles in the work for every educator, from the superintendent and school board to classroom teachers and support staff. Moreover, dedicated resources—both full-time staff and financial resources for programs—comprise critical foundational infrastructure for sustained family engagement work in schools and across a district.

**7. Invest in building educator capacity.**

Teachers and other educators (including instructional assistants and specialists) are often the first point of contact for families, but they often also feel under-prepared and have weak supports for building reciprocal, learning-focused relationships with families in linguistically and culturally diverse communities. School-centric cultures, a fear of parent voices and power, and limited understanding of issues of race, culture, class, and power can further limit educators' ability to engage productively with parents and families, particularly around issues of teaching and learning. Educational leaders can provide professional development, modeling, and ongoing resources and supports to build teachers' capacity to collaborate with families, particularly through models which first position educators as learners (such as home visits, neighborhood walks, or equity work).

## SCHOOLS

### 8 Cultivate a welcoming learning environment for families and community.

As school leaders, principals play a key role by modeling responsiveness to families and opening new opportunities for collaborating with them. This requires more than an “open door” policy or the inclusion of families as an afterthought. Empowering school leadership practices can build capacity and lead to sharing leadership, planning and decision-making with parents, teachers, other educators, support staff, and community members. Such practices should strive to create “community-ready” schools in which educators see themselves as part of the neighborhood and parents and families perceive the school as a hub for the entire community.

### 9. Identify and leverage cultural brokers to foster culturally responsive relationships between parents/families, teachers, and other educators.

In building trust and highly reciprocal relationships between families and educators—especially when language and cultural differences are present—“cultural brokers” play a key role. These individuals are familiar with the cultures of schools and often already informal leaders in their own cultural communities. Cultural brokers can be district staff, but they should not be restricted to employees. These connectors introduce families to the school culture, build their capacity to advocate for their own and community needs, introduce educators to the cultures of their students and families, and facilitate ongoing, two-way communication between families and schools. Schools need to be culturally responsive to the racial/cultural communities of their students and families, even if they are groups who speak English well, such as African Americans, American Indians and Pacific Islanders.



Photo courtesy of White Center Promise



## COLLECTIVE IMPACT INITIATIVES

### 10. Establish a regional policy for equitable parent/family engagement.

Collective impact initiatives are uniquely situated to prioritize the work that promotes equitable family-school-community collaboration. CCER (or other hub organizations) can convene districts, CBOs, families and other stakeholders to envision and develop policies and strategic efforts around equitable family engagement across the region. The initiative can also identify resources and facilitate capacity-building to implement such a policy with multiple actors at multiple levels of the educational system.

### 11. Foster cross-organizational learning and capacity-building around equitable practice in family engagement.

Collective impact hub organizations such as CCER can play a critical role in building organizational capacity and cross-effort learning to improve family engagement practices. Creating meaningful opportunities for the voices and expertise of parents and families themselves to impact regional priorities and efforts can provide a powerful model for participating organizations. Moreover, Road Map organizations are eager to gain access to indicators, tools, professional development and other supports for improving their work and their approach to collaborating with families in new and more reciprocal ways.

### 12. Create systems, policies and practices of equitable collaboration between organizations within the initiative.

In an equitable collaboration, all the participating organizations feel they have an equal voice and that their knowledge and contributions are valued and legitimate contributions to the shared goals of the effort. Policies and practices that reinforce individualistic competition between organizations for resources, legitimacy, support, or attention can undermine the sustainability and political will of individuals and organizations to sustain the collective effort. One manifestation of this is the equitable allocation of funding and access to funding opportunities between organizations of varied sizes and capacities. Funders can also play a critical role by supporting collective grants that allow collaborating partners to fund aspects of each partners' budget that is allocated to the parent engagement effort.



Photo courtesy of CCER/Road Map Project

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**APPENDIX A.**

**Roadmap Project Theory of Action**

Collective Action at Work



**Alignment**

*Building strong strategic and operational alignment among those whose work can influence the goal. When many sectors of the community—education systems, funders, youth development organizations, libraries, health and housing agencies, and more—align their work to improve Indicators of Student Success, the additive impact will be unstoppable.*

**Parent & Community Engagement**

*Engaging and supporting parents in their role as their child's first teacher, and strengthening the advocacy voice of parents and communities. Research points to the importance of the parent both as teacher and system navigator, and emphasizes the need for strong partnerships among parents, schools and community. The Road Map Project encourages and supports strong community advocacy for excellence and equity for all students.*

**Power of Data**

*Providing data to fuel continuous improvement and community advocacy. It is not enough just to have data—the power comes from using it to improve practice and policy. Building the region's capacity to use data will strengthen and help improve results from cradle to college and career.*

**Stronger Systems**

*Building stronger systems across the whole cradle-to-college continuum. Often we see great work happening but the scale remains small. Systems must be built to help spread effective practices. In some cases, new collaborative infrastructure is required to handle a task that falls outside the responsibility of any one particular entity.*



## Demographics of Three Case Study Sites

FEDERAL WAY		KENT		WHITE CENTER	
<b>COMMUNITY</b>		<b>COMMUNITY</b>		<b>COMMUNITY</b>	
48%	population of color	50%	population of color	60%	population of color
24%	Foreign-born	27%	Foreign-born	34%	Foreign-born
31%	Language other than English spoken at home	39%	Language other than English spoken at home	49%	Language other than English spoken at home
<b>DISTRICT</b>		<b>DISTRICT</b>		<b>DISTRICT</b>	
22,113 students; 23 elementary schools, 7 middle schools, 5 high schools		27,500 students; 28 elementary schools, 6 middle schools, 4 high schools		18,28 students; 18 elementary schools, 4 middle schools, 6 high schools	
0.8%	American Indian/ Alaskan Native	0.7%	American Indian/ Alaskan Native	1.1%	American Indian/ Alaskan Native
12.5%	Asian	17.1%	Asian	14.7%	Asian
4.1%	Pacific Islander	2.3%	Pacific Islander	4%	Pacific Islander
16.6%	Asian/Pacific Islander	19.4%	Asian/Pacific Islander	18.7%	Asian/Pacific Islander
11.4%	Black/African American	11.9%	Black/African American	11%	Black/African American
24.4%	Hispanic/Latino	19.8%	Hispanic/Latino	36.5%	Hispanic/Latino
35.3%	White	39.5%	White	25.0%	White
11.5%	Multiracial	8.7%	Multiracial	7.8%	Multiracial
14%	English Language Learners	17%	English Language Learners	22%	English Language Learners
57%	free/reduced-price meals	52%	free/reduced-price meals	70%	free/reduced-price meals
67%	meet 3rd grade reading standards	69%	meet 3rd grade reading standards	58%	meet 3rd grade reading standards
57%	high school graduates meet min. requirements for state 4-year college	68%	high school graduates meet min. requirements for state 4-year college	55%	high school graduates meet min. requirements for state 4-year college

**SOURCES:** Pathways Report, 2013; Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2013; United States Census, 2010



## **APPENDIX B.**

### **Federal Way Public Schools**

#### **FAMILY AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP OFFICE**

The Federal Way School District is committed to helping staff, families, and community members identify and use strategies, tools and practices that help them become more informed, prepared and involved as effective partners in a collective impact effort to help all students successfully engage in learning and graduate prepared for college. The Family and Community Partnership Office (F&CPO), headed by Director Trise Moore, seeks to (1) create a platform with and for parents to meaningfully engage with schools; (2) create a pathway with and for parents to successfully navigate the school system; (3) deliver presentations co-constructed and presented with parents to create opportunities for parents, educators, and staff to gain knowledge of effective strategies for student improvement; and (4) support partnerships to promote effective communication and collaboration between parents, district staff and community organizations. The F&CPO coordinates parent and family engagement opportunities to provide information and tools to support parents' interest in promoting their children's educational success. One of the four components of the department's framework includes six Family Liaisons working directly with six elementary schools and five middle schools to provide support for teachers and staff working to engage parents in their schools. The other three components of the department's work include: \*1) a Parent Leadership and Advisory team that helps guide the work to ensure all activities represent the authentic parent voice; \*2) collective impact stakeholder sessions called the 'Key Communicators' Group' scheduled quarterly for the past nine years to ensure continuous improvement and accountability to all stakeholders in regard to the activities, practices and policies linked to the work of the department; and \*3) 'Partnership 101' workshops co-facilitated with parents and staff, designed to give staff and parents an opportunity to present tips, research and tools "together" in the school but especially in neighborhood and community locations preferred by parents.

#### **Parent Leadership Institute: Be Informed, Be Prepared, Be Involved**

The 'Parent Leadership Institute' umbrella includes a combination of academically linked student support activities that parents choose and for which they receive a certificate for completion of 30 hours of participation. The framework of the Parent Leadership Institute helps parents choose how they become informed, prepared, and involved and gives parent leaders opportunities to work with other parents to create their own customized partnership process to help support their children's academic success. By connecting Family Liaisons and/or Parent Partners or Parent Leadership Team members with home visits, workshops, small-group sessions, and one-on-one appointments, families gain a clearer understanding of a variety of ways through which they can create their own involvement plans. Activities include (but are not limited to): Partnership 101 Workshops, multi-lingual information/ training booklets, community leadership trainings (Born Leaders), and in-school parent engagement activities and information (i.e., 'Coffee and Conversation with the Principal,' 'Donuts with Family Liaison/Elizabeth,' and 'What Every Parent Wants to Know' Q&A sessions).

#### **Family and Community Engagement Professional Learning Community (F.A.C.E. PLC)**

The F.A.C.E. PLC is a series of staff development workshops designed to help the department implement and improve the above as determined by parents and staff as partners, with sustainability, across the entire system.

**KEY PARTNERS:** Federal Way Public Schools, FWPS Family Liaisons, Puget Sound Educational Service District, Regional Family Involvement Action Team, Community Center for Education Results (Road Map Project), Education Network Collective Impact Group, and the University of Washington, Head Start, Early Head Start.

**KEY CONTACT:** Trise Moore, Director, Family and Community Partnership Office, 253-945-2273, tmoore@fwps.org.

## APPENDIX C.

### Kent School District

#### PARENT ACADEMY FOR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT (PASA)

The Kent School District (KSD) is committed to increasing parent engagement through providing additional access to information and school systems, which enable parents to advocate for their children. KSD is implementing the Parent Academy for Student Achievement (PASA) to create partnerships between parents, students, and educators to support and strengthen the learning environment students need to achieve high standards. PASA is a trainer-of-trainers model that provides a nine-week parent academy using an adapted curriculum and instructional model (from PIQE in California). The program is being piloted in two high-poverty, culturally diverse elementary schools in 2012-2013 (Pine Tree Elementary and Millennium Elementary), with planned expansion into four additional schools (two elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school) in 2013-2014.

#### PASA Logistics

PASA uses a research-based curriculum to train lead parent facilitators at selected school sites in a nine-week parent engagement course. Each week parents complete one PASA module (1.5 hours) delivered by parent facilitators, in one of four main languages (English, Spanish, Somali, and Russian, plus an English-with-translation session for Vietnamese, Burmese, Arabic, Punjabi, and/or Kurdish speakers). To receive a PASA certificate, parents need to attend seven courses. KSD has PASA recruiters call parents in their native languages to encourage them to attend, and childcare is provided.

#### PASA Curriculum

The goal of PASA is to create a learning community in which parents and educators partner together to support every child's educational environment at home and school. PASA is designed to increase parent engagement through education and training aiming to achieve high levels of self-efficacy as part of a college and career-going culture. The parent facilitators act as cultural navigators and teach parents in their native languages about how to navigate the educational system and support their children to achieve academic success. Parents will also learn how to create a positive and lasting educational environment at home using proven academic success tools: for example, committing to a home study location and time of day for homework, creating ongoing conversations with their children and teachers about academic strengths and areas of concern, and discussing children's college dreams and expectations. The sustainability of the program lies in inspiring parents to work towards becoming facilitators.

#### Teacher Training

PASA also offers professional development for teachers. Because parents will learn how to ask teachers specific academic questions, teachers will need to be familiar with the program and be prepared to engage with parents and answer their questions.

**KEY PARTNERS:** Read to Succeed Initiative, South King County Housing Authority, Kent Youth & Family Services, Puget Sound ESD, World Relief, Building Better Futures

**KEY CONTACT:** Dr. Millicent Borshade, Assistant Director for Family and Community Engagement, Kent School District. Millicent.Borishade@kent.k12.wa.us



## **APPENDIX D.**

### **White Center Promise**

White Center Promise (WCP) is a long-term initiative aimed at eradicating poverty in White Center through a continuum of educational results that bring about social change. Their goal is to ensure that all children in White Center graduate from high school and earn a post-secondary credential that leads to a living wage career. They are working to align the voices, work and resources of community members, community organizations and area institutions across systems. Their aim is to eliminate barriers to equity and provide a foundation for family and student success from the time a child is born until he or she transitions from post-secondary to gainful employment. To learn more, see: <http://whitecenterpromise.org/about/>

White Center Promise takes a two-generation family approach, believing that we must make investments not only in education for children, but in all of the areas that affect family stability. These include physical, social and economic improvements, such as health and mental health services, basic education and employment training, local job development, safe and affordable housing, and leadership and advocacy skills for families. Without such strategies, we cannot expect long-term change for the coming generations. The initiative seeks to build family engagement through the following projects:

#### **Family Navigators Project**

This effort builds on the White Center CDA's Family Connections (FC) program with FC Advocates, who represent the various cultures of students and families and work directly with schools to increase the comfort level of parents. The Family Navigators Project brings together family advocates from partner organizations (including FC, Highline Public Schools Family Liaisons, SWYFS's Family Advocates, and King County Housing Authority Community Builders) to streamline resources and support parent engagement efforts in more efficient and relevant ways to meet the needs of families and students.

#### **White Center Resident Advisory Committee**

The WCP Resident Advisory Committee (RAC) seeks to elevate parent voice and leadership opportunities in WCP and the district to ensure authentic parent involvement in their children's education and the WCP structure. The 15-member RAC (30% of whom will be White Center parents and 30% of whom will be WC youth) will provide the WCP Core Leadership Team and staff with information and recommendations to ensure that the WCP is constantly listening to and accountable to White Center's children and families.

**CORE PARTNERS:** White Center CDA, Southwest Youth and Family Services, Highline Public Schools

**KEY CONTACT:** Laurie Bohm, WCP Director, [laurie@wccda.org](mailto:laurie@wccda.org)

