

Wilmette District 39 Community Review Committee

Strengthening Parent Partnerships School Year 2019-2020

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Executive Summary

A. Background

The purpose of the Community Review Committee (CRC) is to advise the Board on specific strategies that help fulfill District 39's mission. District 39's mission is to "nurture, guide, and challenge students to become creative thinkers, collaborators, and socially responsible, compassionate, and productive citizens of a global society [by providing] an environment that supports the academic, social-emotional, and physical well-being of each student." To help achieve this, the CRC chose to research the topic of "Strengthening Parent Partnerships" and investigate the elements of strong partnership practices between schools and parents used within our district as well as in other school systems. Our research and recommendations seek to ensure that all District 39 parents and teachers engage productively and build partnerships that support learning and foster students' academic success.

B. Process

The CRC divided into two subcommittees with one that focused on researching how schools can cultivate parent engagement and another that focused on improving partnerships on important educational topics. Both groups researched current practices in District 39 and neighboring schools. Research also included surveys to neighboring school districts and a survey to D39 parents as well as research from national publications.

C. Findings and Conclusions

An examination of current and best practices on the subject of parent partnerships and the results of surveys caused the CRC to reach the following conclusions:

1. District 39 should ensure parent input is utilized in the development of parent educational event topics and timing.
2. District 39 should conduct a review of district-wide communication practices and methods.
3. District 39 should evaluate current parent-teacher meeting opportunities and explore ways to improve two-way directional dialogue between parents, teachers and administrators.

Research Summaries and Strategic Recommendations

After its year-long study on parent and school partnerships, the CRC makes the following recommendations to improve the teaching and learning in District 39 and to help the district fulfill its commitment to creating a supportive learning environment for all of its students:

1. District 39 should ensure parent input is utilized in the development of parent educational event topics and timing.

Research indicates:

- The importance of strong parent partnerships
- The importance of topic and timing for community events
- An overall parent preference for attending in-person community engagement events

Importance of Strong Parent Partnerships

Numerous studies have established a positive effect of parent involvement on student performance. In both Wilder's and Boonk's studies on the effects of parent involvement, they highlight a positive correlation of parent involvement with student performance. Wilder summarizes his findings:

"The results indicated that the relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement was positive...Furthermore, the findings revealed that this relationship was strongest if parental involvement was *defined as parental expectations* for academic achievement of their children. However, the impact of parental involvement on student academic achievement was weakest if parental involvement was *defined as homework assistance*. Finally, the relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement was found to be consistent across different grade levels and ethnic groups" (emphasis added).

Both found the strongest correlation to exist between academic achievement and parental expectations. Wilder notes that "parental expectations reflect parents' beliefs and attitudes toward school, teachers, subjects, and education in general." In other words, students do not necessarily need 'homework help' from parents, but rather need to observe and sense a positive attitude about school, teachers, and/or particular curricular subjects.

These conclusions were reinforced by Conway and Houtenville, as well as the University of Chicago Consortium's book, *Organizing Schools for Improvement*. In the latter, family involvement was identified as one of the Five Essential Supports for successful schools.

Six Types of Parent Involvement

Joyce Epstein, a researcher focused on partnering with families and schools, has classified six different types of parental involvement that are outlined below.

Six Types of Involvement:

1) Parenting

“Assist families with parenting skills, family support, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions to support learning at each age and grade level. Assist schools in understanding families' backgrounds, cultures, and goals for children.”

2) Communicating

“Communicate with families about school programs and student progress. Create two-way communication channels between school and home.”

3) Volunteering

“Improve recruitment, training, activities, and schedules to involve families as volunteers and as audiences at the school or in other locations. Enable educators to work with volunteers who support students and the school.”

4) Learning at Home

“Involve families with their children in academic learning at home, including homework, goal setting, and other curriculum-related activities. Encourage teachers to design homework that enables students to share and discuss interesting tasks.”

5) Decision Making

“Include families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy activities through school councils or improvement teams, committees, and parent organizations.”

6) Collaborating with Community

“Coordinate resources and services for families, students, and the school with community groups, including businesses, agencies, cultural and civic organizations, and colleges or universities. Enable all to contribute service to the community.”

While communication seems like just one of the six types of involvement, it really is central to parent partnerships. Benner and Quirk, in their article “One Size Does Not Fit All,” reference Epstein’s six types of involvement and state that “*communication can be used as a critical, all-encompassing tool to strengthen the other five.*” Moore illustrates this concept of communication as a central tool in Figure 1 (see Appendix).

Involvement vs. Engagement

As further refinement, Larry Ferlazzo, an award winning educator, author, and columnist, separates parent engagement practices into two categories: Involvement and Engagement. He defines involvement as “doing to,” whereas engagement implies “doing with.” One treats families as clients; the other frames them as partners. Ferlazzo elaborates:

“A school striving for family involvement often *leads with its mouth*—identifying projects, needs, and goals and then telling parents how they can contribute. A school striving for parent engagement, on the other hand, tends to *lead with its ears*—listening to what parents think, dream, and worry about. The goal of family engagement is not to serve clients but to gain partners.”

Involvement tends to be one-way communication (such as “notes home, automated phone calls, requests for assistance for a particular project”) while engagement tries for two-way communication (listening and conversations). True engagement benefits students and improves academic performance. *Learning Heroes* reports that 78% of teachers perceived that “the students whose parents regularly communicate with [instructors] tend to do better academically than students whose parents do not communicate” (“Going beyond”).

Expanding on this model, Rasmussen outlines the benefits of having parents take roles in school “beyond fundraising and baking cookies.” She cites several examples of parents making decisions *alongside* administrators and teachers. Central to this is the recognition of the equality between parents and teachers and their common goal of improving student achievement.

In the NEA policy brief, “Parent, Family, Community Involvement in Education,” they point out the expanded network of adults included in today’s reformed model of parent involvement:

“In the past, parent involvement was characterized by volunteers, mostly mothers, assisting in the classroom, chaperoning students, and fundraising. Today, the old model has been replaced with a much more inclusive approach: school-family-community partnerships now include mothers and fathers, stepparents, grandparents, foster parents, other relatives and caregivers, business leaders and community groups—all participating in goal-oriented activities, at all grade levels.”

The NEA’s reformed model keeps the philosophy of teachers working alongside parents, but it expands the concept of ‘parent.’ The NEA suggests utilizing all of the adults who play a role in student life – whether a parent, caregiver, friend, or community member. If schools want to pursue a “doing with” type of partnership, the approach should include as many adults as possible.

Rasmussen interviewed parents, teachers, and administrators to create a blueprint for total community engagement:

- Make the school inviting
- Strategize ways to involve parents in schools—many don't know how to become involved or feel intimidated because they haven't been in school since they were students themselves

- Make parents equal partners with educators by allowing them a voice in school decisions
- Avoid educational jargon in communication pieces
- Schedule meetings at times convenient for parents, even if those meetings aren't most convenient for educators
- Show respect for parents' perspectives
- Cultivate an open and civil atmosphere in which the principal is a facilitator
- Keep parents well informed and encourage two-way communication
- Celebrate parent participation.

The importance of topic and timing for community events

Families have limited time and resources, as do teachers. Accordingly, any reforms should be considerate of the time and resources of both sets of stakeholders.

Our committee surveyed more than 250 parents to better understand their needs regarding parent educational events. The majority of parents (72%) still prefer detailed emails (followed by flyers or brochures) about important academic topics, likely to allow flexibility in timing their participation. In addition, such materials can be referenced at later dates should the topics become more relevant to a particular family. Important emails or distributions can also be archived on the D39 website by topic. The next most popular option was in-person events, followed in order by interactive/live-streamed webinars, Schoology/Seesaw, and podcasts. The same trends held true for socio-emotional learning, health and safety, back-to-school transitions, finance and operations, but was less pronounced. Educational technology and digital citizenship topics were still preferred to be covered in detailed emails, but alternative communication forms were largely a draw.

However, the survey was completed before COVID-19 caused all in-person events to be canceled and interactive/live-streamed webinars to become the norm. The District has made great use of such technology during the pandemic. Actual attendance rates should be analyzed compared to in-person events to help guide post-pandemic programming options.

Videoconferences can “provide a middle ground, allowing people to come together and feel more personally connected without having to travel” (US Dept of Ed. 2007). When using web-based programs, the District should ensure that the programming is mobile-friendly to avoid overlooking parents without desktop computers (Larson 2019).

In addition to format, CRC Committee data revealed pertinent information regarding parent event availability for live events. The majority of those surveyed (54.72%) preferred evening events, with the majority of respondents unavailable during traditional work hours (8 AM – 6 PM). The Committee urges the District to consider offering childcare or open gym options for families during in-person, after hours events to allow for participation by single-parent/guardian households, encourage equal participation amongst partners, and lower opportunity costs. Live-streamed webinars are also a great way to accomplish these societal benefits while allowing for active parent participation.

What action will D39 likely take as a result of this recommendation?

This District should review/formalize the process used to determine community engagement event topics for the year. The District should use existing communication channels (such as PTO/As) or a short survey to gather feedback before finalizing the year's topics. Topics should be flexible as the most parent engagement seems to come from timely initiatives responsive to parent and community concerns (Baker et al 2016).

The District should also consider parent educational programming through a collaborative lens. Each event should be considered for its goal: what are we doing with parents, rather than what are we doing to parents? (Ferralazzo 2011). Moreover, incentives should be intrinsic rather than extrinsic. Extrinsic incentives, like pay for participation, can actually be more detrimental than helpful. Although they may encourage route participation in the short term like attendance at a particular program, they reduce the motivation to perform more significant tasks or even the basic tasks once the incentive is removed.

The Committee did not analyze whether parents would appreciate greater text messaging, but such informal programs may want to be considered as an opt-in program. Such a program could be modeled after the Brown University Tips by Text messaging program (<https://www.annenberginstitute.org/projects/tipsbytext/overview>). That program has been deemed as effective in increasing parent involvement and closing achievement gaps.

2. District 39 should conduct a review of district-wide communication practices and methods.

- **What does this include?**
This includes a broad review of communication practices used to facilitate stakeholder-to-stakeholder communication including:
 - Teacher-to-parent communication
 - Administration-to-parent communication
 - District-to-parent communication
- **Our Research indicates:**
 - Areas in which D39 can improve communication
 - Need to understand the effectiveness of different methods of communication
- **What action will D39 likely take as a result of this recommendation?** District 39 administrators will conduct a systematic review of communication practices among D39 schools.

Areas in which D39 Can Improve Communication

In the Fall of 2019, the CRC conducted a survey of parent engagement in the district. While many of the questions were focused on communication and event preferences, the last question was open ended (“What can D39 staff and parents do to strengthen the partnership between home and school?”) and gave insight into the perceived importance of issues to parents. Here we see that parents in our district value communication in general as well as the more specific parent/teacher interactions (see Figure 2).

Recognizing Differences Between Parent and Teacher Views

In “Parents 2018: Going Beyond Good Grades,” Learning Heroes found that parents and teachers often differ in their vision of strong communication. They both value parent involvement, but divide in terms of what that encompasses:

“According to parents, highly communicative teachers provide regular email communications, frequently update online portals, call or text, will schedule additional parent-teacher meetings, and send completed work home. Teachers say their most engaged parents attend parent-teacher conferences, respond to teacher communications, help their children with homework, and reach out to the teacher independently.”

Another example of this difference in perception appears in how parents and teachers measure success:

- Parents rank report cards and grades as the top way to determine how a child is achieving while ranking regular communication with the teacher as number 5.
- Teachers rank regular communication with the teacher as the top way to determine how a child is achieving while ranking report cards and grades number 3.

Which Forms of Communication work?

In addition to the CRC parent engagement survey, the CRC sent a similar survey to neighboring school districts. The results show differences in perceived effectiveness of communication tools when comparing school district responses with District 39 parent responses. Of particular interest are the yellow highlighted communication methods (Private Social Sharing Apps, YouTube, Twitter) - social media platforms that the districts ranked high in effectiveness while parents ranked those same methods low. At the same time, parents ranked text messages as the second most effective method while districts ranked it in the bottom half.

Communication Method	School Districts’ Ranking	D39 Parents’ Ranking
Private Social Sharing Apps (Schoology, Class Dojo, etc.)	1	6
Email	2	1
School/District Newsletters	3	3
Community Forums/In-	4	5

Person Events		
District Website/Apps	5	4
YouTube/Video	6	11
Annual Reports/Mailings	7	7
Twitter	8	13
Text Messages (Non-Emergency)	9	2
Live-Streaming Events	10	8
Instagram	11	12
Facebook	12	9
Podcasts	13	10

Communication Policies Review

The CRC is recommending that District 39 should conduct a review of district-wide communications practices and methods. As a local model of this, one of the districts shared in our Neighboring District survey:

“We have a strategic annual communications calendar that helps us balance our frequency so that parents don't experience email fatigue. We are also very intentional about tracking our communication analytics (both internal and external) so that we can see what's working, what isn't and adapt to the ever-changing communications landscape.”

In surveying families, it is important to get a representative sample (to minimize nonresponse bias) as the impacts of decisions made from these surveys will affect all families. The following are two possible strategies to increase the response rate of these surveys. One strategy is to do the survey during events that are known (from past history) to have high participation rates (i.e. curriculum night, open house, parent/teacher conferences). Another is to incentivize the completion of the survey via the classes/schools once they hit a target response level (like 90%) with a reward (like fort day or PJ day).

Individualization is Key

In evaluating how communication methods are used, one of the ways that we can categorize them are into two broad categories: one-way (or informational) and two-way (or dialogue). The most common two-way communication method is the parent/teacher conferences. This importance is illustrated in parent comments in our survey with almost 25% of the comments in the Interactions category related to parent-teacher conferences. Comments referencing the

lack of time during conferences, or the “speed-dating” nature of the format give a sense that many of these parents perceive conferences as the primary two-way communication method available to them, despite the open invitation by teachers for these conversations throughout the year. This suggests the “invitation” is not enough to establish these partnerships; it requires district/school/teacher policies and practices to shift in order to bring families into the regular interactions of learning.

The Center for American Progress conducted a survey analyzing school-family communication and released their results in their February 2020 article by Benner and Quirk: “One Size Does Not Fit All.” Their survey built off of both Learning Heroes’ 2018 parent survey and earlier surveys of 2016. One of CAP’s findings was that, “All three groups reported high value in the communication systems they used, and individualization—regardless of how technologically advanced—mattered the most in value perceptions. Parents reported using fewer methods than teachers and school leaders, suggesting that parents may not find all available systems at their school effective.” At the same time, CAP suggests having “multiple communication entry points” for parents.

In Maher’s *Education Weekly* article, he cites Matthew Kraft, a professor of education and economics at Brown University, who differentiates between one-way communication, which he labels as a “one-way push of information,” and meaningful conversations. Technology does not rate significantly high or low, but individualization is crucial. Kraft reminds us that, “New technology is a platform. It doesn’t necessarily change the nature of the communication.”

In Kraft’s 2017 Educational Leadership article, “Engaging Parents Through Better Communication Systems”, he also cites that frequent personalized communication is effective. He outlined two examples of randomized studies that he conducted on how to accomplish this through conversation protocols for teachers. Kraft also highlighted the main factors that contribute to a low rate of teacher communication: outdated or difficult-to-access contact information, the absence of school-wide communication policies, and teachers’ lack of non-instructional time (Kraft). All of these factors lead to decreased teacher communication.

Kraft suggests that schools should strive to improve interactions between parents and teachers in a systematic way by increasing the “frequency and quality of parent-teacher communication,” whether it involves individualized information about a students’ performance, or guidance to parents about how to support their students in school. For all of these, schools need to provide teachers with clear conversation, email, and online protocols.

Kraft advocates for schools and districts to make active communication as a priority and to dedicate resources to support those initiatives. He further warned, “Without formal expectations combined with sufficient time and the necessary communication infrastructure, teachers may take a passive approach to communication as they shift their attention to other tasks.”

The Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey of 2016 by the National Household Education Surveys Program further highlighted this lack of personalized communication. With

regard to school initiated communication practices, they reported that while 89% of families reported receiving school-initiated communication addressed to all parents (i.e. newsletters, e-mail, reminders), only 62% reported receiving notes or email about their student, and 42% reported receiving phone calls.

In the parent comments of the CRC parent survey from Fall 2019, the chart highlighted that parent/teacher interactions were the second most comment type. In Figure 3 (see Appendix), we see the top responses (orange and blue) requesting more communication. Four of the top five response types (blue) focus on personalized communication - in line with the national research cited above. In addition, there is an emphasis on parent/teacher conferences, whether calling for more or more time.

It is interesting to note that there is a perceived importance placed upon parent/teacher conferences. Indeed, parent/teacher conferences are the event with the highest family participation rate with almost all families taking part. However, timely information and communication requires that parents have more opportunities for two-way communication beyond one or two conferences. Increasing teacher-initiated personalized contact would not only provide meaningful opportunities for dialogue, but also signal to families that communication lines are open.

The Opt In Movement

In their paper, "Is this Technology Useless?" Bergman and Rogers apply the theory of "friction" reduction to parent communication and technology use. In their study, they contrasted opt-in processes (such as directions to go to a website to enroll or replying to a text) to automatic enrollment processes (automatic enrollment of everyone with directions on how to opt-out). They found that by reducing the "friction points," or steps that users needed to undertake, significantly increased participation rates (<8% compared to 96%). They also found that those in the automatic group were more likely to want to use the technology and their students experienced positive outcomes on various measures of student achievement.

However, they also advise that implementation goes both ways: not only getting parents enrolled, but also getting teachers to use the technology consistently. Bergman and Rogers found that it is crucial for "teachers to standardize their use of learning management systems," so that parents can 'opt in' across their child's curriculum. If a parent becomes active with a Spanish teacher as the result of an app, for example, and no other teacher uses the same app, an opportunity for communication across the curriculum is lost.

Communication that is Aligned, Accessible, and Actionable

In order to gain a more accurate and complete picture of their child's education, parents in the Los Angeles Unified School District released a report entitled, "Ready or Not?" that identified how information was conveyed within the school district. Their hope was that, "When families have access to the right information about their children's learning they can more fully contribute

to their children's success and the success of their schools." They focused on three main questions:

- What should my child be learning?
- How is my child doing academically?
- What can be done to accelerate their learning?

Their study analyzed the usefulness of the information based on the following guidelines:

- Is the information aligned with other sources?
- Is the information accessible to families?
- Is the information actionable for families?

Those same criteria can be used to analyze/improve communication practices in D39.

A final note: educators need to recognize that professional jargon does not always translate. Learning Heroes reports that "the language and jargon that educators typically use to talk about social, emotional, cognitive, and academic learning and what parents understand it to mean are often quite different." Use terms that families will understand to make information accessible.

3. District 39 should evaluate current parent-teacher meeting opportunities and explore ways to improve two-directional dialogue between parents, teachers and administrators.

- **What does this include?**
This includes a review of all events and opportunities for parent-teacher-administrator communication on a face-to-face (including teleconferences/zoom) basis at each grade level. This also includes a review of how face-to-face communication opportunities are communicated to parents and staff.
- **What action will D39 likely take as a result of this recommendation?**
District 39 will collectively discuss opportunities for face-to-face dialogue among parents, teachers and administrators. The results of this discussion will determine what actions D39 will take regarding potential increases or improvements to face-to-face (including teleconferences/zoom) dialogue opportunities.

Results of Local Surveys

The CRC distributed surveys to both parents in District 39 and to administration in neighboring districts to evaluate communication practices. Though neither of these surveys specifically rated direct two-way communication between schools and families, inferences deduced from the quantitative data and qualitative statements made by these groups support this recommendation.

Among District 39 parents, 254 completed the survey that was distributed. Here is a summary the findings:

- 72% of parents rely heavily on **detailed email communication** as the source to receive information related to academics, health and safety, social & emotional learning, digital citizenship, back to school transitions, finance & operations.
- Podcasts, in-person events, interactive events, flyers and brochures rank evenly as additional preferred methods of communication.
- Text messages are rated as a highly effective form of communication district wide.
- Traditional social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) are not relied upon as methods of communication. This is not a source for parents seeking school and district information.
- The areas of proactive partner in education involvement are in the areas of
 - Carefully reviewing school newsletters (89%)
 - Checking homework regularly (83%)
 - Maintaining dialogue with teachers (80%)
 - Participation in committees or focus groups (16%)

In the survey, D39 parents were offered an opportunity to provide qualitative statements about communication practices. Here is a summary of the most frequent statements from parents:

- Schoology, the online learning management program utilized by the middle and junior high school, is an on-going challenge for parents and does not prove to be user friendly. Feedback suggests the following:
 - There needs to be more education for parents (perhaps there can be workshops on popular attendance nights such as open house or conferences)
 - There is inconsistency in teachers using the platform
 - The effectiveness of the platform for students, parents and teachers needs to be examined
- Increase duration and frequency of parent-teacher conferences
- Providing clear, direct and concise communication was a theme in parent comments with parents offering the following ideas:
 - Explore ideas for one hub/portal of information District wide
 - Make District 39 website more effective and easier to navigate
 - Consider establishing and communicating a District-wide communications policy
 - Establish a yearly event calendar for parent events prior to the start of the school year

In summary, survey findings from D39 parents highlight opportunities for greater two-way communication in these areas:

- Parents proactively partner in their students' education through maintaining dialog with teachers (80% of parents). However, the comment sections of the surveys suggest parents would like to increase the duration and frequency of parent-teacher conferences.
- Parents report frustration with Schoology, the online learning management system. Therefore, more in person, face-to-face training opportunities could be beneficial.

The CRC additionally reached out to 10 neighboring districts (4 from feeder schools and 6 from comparable districts in terms of demographics and size) and asked them to evaluate how effective their district's communication methods are with parents.

- Over 85% of respondents rated their school district as successful or highly successful when it comes to engaging parents on topics related to social-emotional learning.

- The comments showed that this is a strategic focus for many districts and that they are using various methods to focus on this topic including special events featuring speakers and documentaries, or highlights in newsletters..
- Over 60% of districts rated their schools as successful or highly successful at engaging parents on topics related to health and safety. Districts interpreted this topic broadly to include food allergies, internet safety, etc.
 - One district mentioned that parents have said there is a need for more information on internet safety.
- Over 70% of the districts rated their engagement with parents on topics related to academics (assessments, common core, student data and curriculum) as successful or highly successful.
 - One district described their communication regarding academics as “a well-oiled machine,” citing the addition of video presentations with voice overs as a new method used to assist parents in understanding placement decisions and test results.
 - Another district referenced the use of newsletters, conferences, direct emails and principal coffees.
 - Another district said that teachers are the primary engagement source.
 - Another district said their parents attend in-school sessions, but they would like to improve opportunities to engage parents in the process.
- Most districts think they are doing a good job of engaging parents on topics related to technology and digital citizenship (online safety, social media use, screen time, etc). Some of the methods used include newsletters, websites, teacher emails, forums, guest speakers and workshops.
- The vast majority of districts think they are doing a very good job of engaging parents on topics related to back-to-school transitions. Over 80% of districts rated their efforts as successful or highly successful.

In the qualitative comments, several districts mentioned the importance of using various forms of communications to ensure that they don't cause the parents “fatigue” with any particular method. They also mentioned tracking and analyzing the communication methods to see what works best. Several districts also increase face-to-face interaction through parent committees that serve as an advisory group on certain issues.

Overall, direct communication between parents and teachers and administrators in neighboring districts is just one avenue these districts use to engage parents in a variety of topics. The districts highlighted these two-way communication practices - parent advisory committees, special events with guest speakers, open houses, workshops, conferences, and principal coffees - as opportunities they utilize to keep parent engagement strong.

What Action can D39 Take in response to this recommendation?

After reviewing local and neighboring districts surveys, D39 should evaluate current parent-teacher meeting opportunities and explore ways to improve two-directional dialogue between parents, teachers and administrators. CRC recommends D39 should catalog all events and opportunities for parents, teachers and administrators to communicate face-to-face at each grade level. Once this list is compiled, further analysis of each communication opportunity should take place to indicate the following:

1. What is the purpose or goal of the communication opportunity for fostering engagement? (e.g. is it an information push or a dialog between the schools and parents?)

2. How is the opportunity for face-to-face communication disseminated to ensure the highest participation rate? (email, text, newsletter, flyer? What is easy for all to access?)
3. Is the communication opportunity meaningful for parents, teachers, and administrators? (Is it individualized?)
4. Are there barriers to the communication opportunity (e.g. timing) that favor either working and non-working parents?

Conclusion

The Community Review Committee undertook a year-long study on the topic of strengthening parent partnerships. This topic of study was chosen to ensure that our District continues to meet the needs of our students, parents, and teachers. Our research shows that more strategic and systemic approaches to parent partnerships will provide significant benefits to our students' learning and academic success. Furthermore, the CRC believes that these recommendations will help fulfill its mission to nurture, guide, and challenge students to become creative thinkers, collaborators, and socially responsible, compassionate, and productive citizens of a global society.

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Images:

Fig. 1: Moore illustrates the concept that communication is a central tool that facilitates all of the other categories of a school community.



Figure 2: Results of D39 parent survey.

CRC Family Engagement Survey - Number of Parent Comment Types

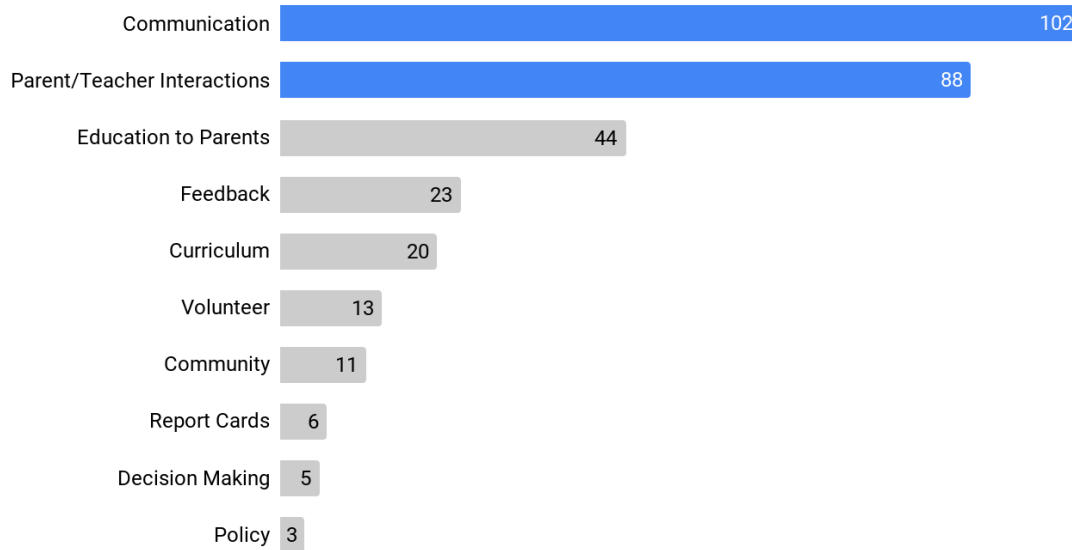
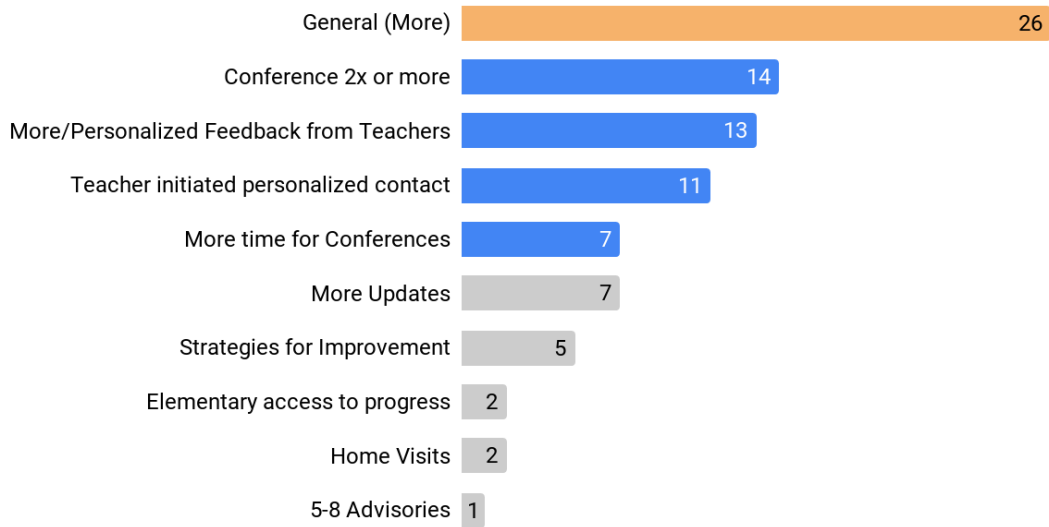


Figure 3: Results of D39 Parent Survey.

CRC Parent Engagement Survey - Parent/Teacher Interactions



Appendix A

D39 Parent/School Survey Comments

- 1.) Improvements to the District 39 website. Making it more user-friendly: easy-access, one-page phone list. District-wide master calendar with events listed.
- 2.) District 39 app/handbook app
- 3.) District 39 quarterly podcast
- 4.) Event scheduling--can childcare be provided at meetings. Livestream parent seminars. Recordable to offer on website for easy viewing. Webinars.
- 5.) Conferences: A. Can there be Spring conferences for higher grades. B.Improvements to "speed-dating" like teacher conferences. --Can conferences be split into several days to allow more time with teachers? Having parents "catch" their children's teachers, specials instructors, LBS, health/PE and cut off by a bell system not conducive to creating partnership/dialogue.
- 6.) Emails from teachers: encourage teachers to update parents with weekly, concise email /,newsletter. Review the week and highlight the week ahead, giving dates for key information and events. Update parents in the teacher newsletter about class "dojo" points/reward system so parents can communicate with their kids and collaborate and discuss at home. At the end of email/newsletter, encourage teachers to ask for feedback, reinforcing the partnership.
- 7.) Offer a main topic in assembly at Curriculum Night
- 8.) Align the 4 elementary schools, creating community within them and district-wide. Can there be more opportunities for community/school events? Go Green Wilmette, Wilmette Historical Society, Wilmette Women's Club. (These organizations could also be helpful for virtual learning/remote "field trips" given pandemic)
- 9.) Report card improvements, with teacher comments provided, district-wide.
- 10.) Help with Curriculum/Schoology--
- 11.) Homework consistency: can principals discuss this with parents--some parents believe there is too much HW, particularly for younger kids. Other parents think the preparation is essential as good preparation for higher-level grades by getting HW in early grades. Can this be offered as a seminar/discussion.
- 12.) Informational videos at home to see curriculum. Parents no longer have textbooks to leaf through to see overall curriculum. Can the website of curriculum include videos to support parents, encouraging partnership.
- 13.) There were many comments regarding using Schoology: can there be teacher/parent training using child's iPad?
- 14.) Offering study guides
- 15.) Viewing parents as partners. Listen to parents concerns and try to understand their concerns.
- 16.) Opportunities to provide seminars and educate parents. Offer small groups to help collaborate, solve or have input on pressing issues.
- 17.) Transparency about expectations for school and progress. Updates about school testing/MAP tests/and results by school. . Transparency about safety, and school issues creates trust.

- 18.) Create opportunities for partnership during back-to-school season. Lay out agenda for school year at beginning of school year. (Reading rally, steam nights, with dates for parents to take time from work.)
- 19.) You-Tube channel at Harper. Can this be offered district-wide per school? Can YouTube be effectively used?
- 20.) Inform parents much sooner about major changes
- 21.) Offer tutoring help for students.
- 22.) Home visits, if necessary to build relationships. (During pandemic, one Teacher in other district user whiteboard on door of child's home so the child could do e-learning)
- 23.) Parents like Seesaw but it's inconsistently used.
- 24.) Ask the Teacher/Ask the School Board nights.

Appendix B

Neighboring District Survey Results

-----What are you most proud of when it comes to parent engagement and communication methods:

- 1.) Communication that is efficient, easy for parents:
 - annual strategic calendar so parents don't experience "email fatigue"
 - tracking of communication analytics (internal and external) so we can see what's working/what isn't and adapt accordingly
 - communication that is timely, visual and effective
- 2.) Ability to reach parents in variety of ways, channels, platforms. (direct email, social media, face-to-face, texting, website. No single method to get message out to entire group.
- 3.) Expansion of face-to-face opportunities for parents and community:
 - Some parent groups regularly meet for advisory purposes, guiding us on cultural consciousness, community engagement. (Parent Advisory Committees, Parent Participation in District Curriculum Committees)
 - volunteering for events
 - expansion of opportunities to encourage parent engagement in school activities
 - meetings focusing on topics, themes that are meaningful for parents.
- 4.) School board prioritizing face-to-face, personal connections.
- 5.) PTO leadership giving feedback regularly, enabling communication to be more efficient, shortening of messages, shifting to social media- that is more aligned with young families. Marketing of Winnetka Parent Institutes to encourage participation.

-----How do schools leverage parent volunteer organizations to have a positive effect parent engagement with the school district?

Partnerships with local rotary, non-profits, police dept and community organizations.

-One district partnered with Family Service of Glencoe to offer parent education and host-follow up.

-One district partnered with Robert Crown and the D181 Foundation

PTO closely working with principals and PTO presidents from all 8 schools meet as a group a few times per year, along with superintendent and communications staff

Parent volunteering through PTO is reported to be down—so shifting away from fundraising focus to community building and that is reportedly helping.

Creation of parent teams or added parents to district committees for major goal areas: SEL, facilities and learning, redistricting.

One district has SEL (social emotional learning) parent advisory committees /Another working to launch a Parent SEL Advocacy Team

District-Wide Parent Advisory Committee on academics/progress reporting

One district has an extensive parent committee to create a Food Allergy Management Plan to educate the school community and break stigma surrounding food allergies.

-----How are topics determined for parent engagement opportunities?

- 1.) Annual climate survey results and each school's SIP plan to determine topics/priorities
- 2.) Discussion as a team: Technology dept/principals, communications office and district administration all make suggestions/give input.
- 3.) "Parent University" series offering learning and engagement programs for parents.
- 4.) Driven by parent feedback, collecting through parent groups and school-based surveys.
- 5.) Topics that align with our Strategic plan, curriculum changes, PTO parent forums
- 6.) Teacher solicitation/Parent Group Leaders
- 7.) Annual parent surveys, advisory committees
- 8.) Evaluations given after every parent-engagement session to ask for topics of interest/align topics to our annual strategic goals/PTO leadership gives feedback

-----What educational topics do your district parents want to know more about:

- 1.) Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and Social Media
- 2.) Special education, SEL
- 3.) Supporting students struggling in reading and math/skills for incoming kindergarten students
- 4.) Resiliency, navigating internet safety/digital media.
- 5.) Understanding how to support academic learning.
- 6.) SEL, working with students with anxiety, depression in a highly competitive environment
- 7.) Bullying, inclusiveness.
- 8.) Board of Ed. Happenings
- 9.) Learning/Achievement success stories
- 10.) Assessments and student growth
- 11.) Grade curriculum and how to support a child at home
- 12.) SEL umbrella: regulation, discipline, bullying, mental health, drugs, sex, gender ID
- 13.) Social Emotional Health and Well-Being specifically for school transitions, including kindergarten and moving on to NTHS
- 14.) Technology: specifically, social media and tech management at home

Question 2: How would you evaluate the effectiveness of your school's parent engagement efforts on topics related to social-emotional learning?

A. There were 8 responses, ranging from Adequate (1)- Successful (5) to Highly Successful (2)

Question 3: Provide explanation/comments for rating on SEL:

A. 8 responses, ranging from Adequate to Exemplary. Some of the comments include:

Robust SEL plan with well-attended special events featuring speakers and documentaries that engage parents from district and across communities. We are increasing efforts on this front as this is a high priority from students and parents.

We report out on social-emotional targets at each grade level through a standards-based reporting system each trimester. We have provided face-to-face and video learning on the topic. SEL Parent Advisory Committees at each School. District wide Parent Advisory Committee. Multiple parent workshops on SEL; Parent SEL Advocacy Team

Q 4 How would you evaluate the effectiveness of your school district's engagement on topics related to health/safety, ie bullying, vaping, sex-ed

A: 8 responses, ranging from Adequate (2) to Highly Successful (2) {Question 5: explanation/ comments included in recommendations on pg. 1}

Q 6. How would you evaluate the effectiveness of your school district's parent engagement efforts, related to academics:

A: 8 responses, ranging from Adequate (1) to Exemplary (1)

Q7: Feedback:

Info provided to parents include using videos with voiceovers to assist parents in understanding placement decisions and test results.

We use standard-based grading and reporting practices issuing NO letter grades all the way through 8th grade. This has allowed us to focus on what and how a student is learning. We provide ongoing support for parents through face-to-face, video library and individual meetings on this topic.

Newsletters, conferences, direct mail, principal coffees
an Annual Report, online dashboard are two initiatives now
present comprehensive annual assessment report to BoE and community. Vet progress reporting with District-Wide Parent Advisory Committee

Q 8. Effectiveness on school district's parent engagement on topics related to tech/digital citizenship

A: 8 Answers ranging from adequate (2) to Successful (4) to Highly Successful (1), Exemplary (1)

Comments:

special week, "D181 Unplugged" in partnership with PTO
guest speakers
learning session in collaboration with RUSH
Offer multiple parent workshops on tech. Ran specific curriculum committee with parent involvement to revise curriculum and programming.

Q10 Rating effectiveness of "Back-to-School" transitions with parent engagement

A: 8 responses, from Successful to Exemplary

Back-to-school picnic

open houses

Back-to-school preview days at targeted grades

½ day transition day for students moving from K-3, 4-8 school with leadership from Jr HS students.

Hold New Trier parent conferences onsite with staff participation

Q12: Rate effectiveness of communication vehicles:

Private Social Sharing Apps: (6 responses) from Effective to Highly Effective

Email: (8 responses) Effective to Highly Effective

School/District Newsletter (7 responses): Effective to Highly Effective

Community Forums: (8 responses) Effective to Highly Effective

District Website/Apps: (7 responses) Effective to Highly Effective

YouTube/Video (7 responses) Somewhat Effective to Effective

Annual Report/Mailings: (6 responses) Effective

Twitter (6 responses) Somewhat Effective to Highly Effective

Text Messages (Non-Emergency) (6 responses) Somewhat to Highly Effective

Live-streaming Events: (4 responses) Effective

Instagram (4 responses) Ineffective to effective

Facebook (6 responses) Ineffective to Effective

Podcasts (5 responses) Ineffective to Somewhat effective.