

Parent Information and Resource Center (PIRC) Evaluation  
Brief Report  
*Prepared by the Center for Program Evaluation and Partnership Development Services  
for Education Collaborative  
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The Parent Information and Resource Center (PIRC) grant provides support to schools with the aim of strengthening the six essential elements of Parent Involvement defined by the National PTA and adopted by the Washoe County School District. The six elements of Parent Involvement include:

- **Communication** between home and school is regular, two-way and meaningful.
- Responsible **parenting** is promoted and supported.
- Parents play an integral role in assisting **student learning**.
- Parents are welcomed as **volunteers** in the schools.
- Parents are **full partners in the decisions** that affect their children and families.
- Parents, school and community **collaborate** in order to enhance student learning, strengthen families and improve schools.

The schools receiving funds from the PIRC grant include five elementary school and one middle school, all of which are Title I schools. The elementary schools include Anderson Elementary, Alice Maxwell Elementary, Desert Heights Elementary, Kate Smith Elementary and Sierra Vista Elementary Schools. Traner Middle School is the only middle school participating in this grant.

The PIRC is a collaboration of the Education Collaborative (EC) and the Washoe County School District (WCSD). Education Collaborative contracted with the Center for Program Evaluation and Partnership Development Services (CPEPDS) for the external evaluation of this grant. As CPEPDS practices an approach to evaluation known as Partnership Evaluation, the Education Collaborative, the Parent Involvement Council (established by the WCSD), and the Parent Involvement Facilitators (PIFs) from each school provided input into the design of the evaluation plan and helped facilitate various aspects of data collection. Preliminary analyses from a teacher survey, a teacher focus group and a parent survey are presented in this report, as well as a description of a visual mapping process and a sample "map" from one school.

## Results

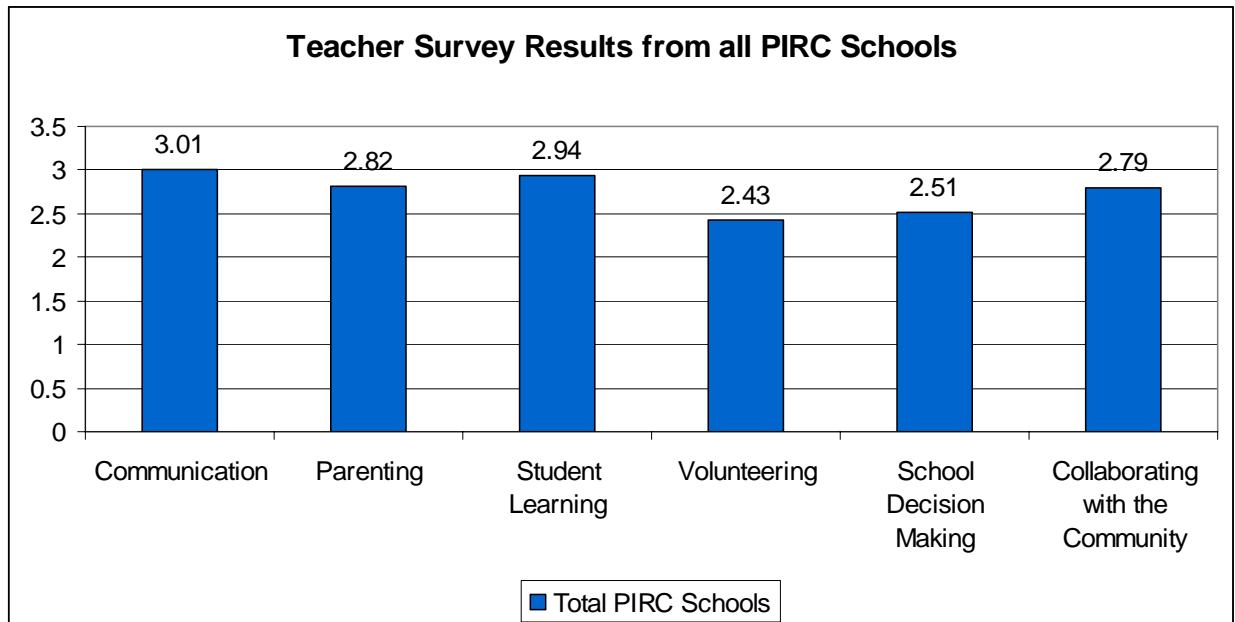
### Teacher Survey

Across all six schools, 184 teachers completed the Teachers' Perceptions of Parent Involvement assessment. Table 1 below shows how many teachers from each school completed the surveys and the percentage of total responses they represent across all schools.

Table 1: Number of teachers participating from each school

Schools	N	%
Alice Maxwell Elementary School	31	16.8
Anderson Elementary School	30	16.3
Desert Heights Elementary School	26	14.1
Kate Smith Elementary School	24	13.0
Sierra Vista Elementary School	27	14.7
Traner Middle School	46	25.0

The questionnaire was based on items from the National PTA's Assessment for Schools to Evaluate Parent/Family Involvement tool. Several items were added based on input from the PIRC grant coordinator. Each section of the survey is related to one of six elements of the WCSD Parent Involvement Strategic Plan. Item means were combined to create a total mean score indicating the teachers' perceptions of the strength of each element within their school. The response scale ranged from one to four, with a rating of a one indicating the school is doing a poor job to a rating of a four indicating the school is doing an excellent job.



As the preceding bar graph illustrates, teachers feel their school is performing well related to communication and involving parents in student learning. It is also evident that teachers do not perceive their schools to be as strong when it comes to having parents actually participate in the schools by volunteering or serving as a decision-maker. The table that follows (Table 2) shows the percentages of teacher ratings and means for each item, as well as the overall mean score for each element of parent involvement. Within each element, most had at least one item the teachers rated as well or high. However, the teachers consistently gave lower ratings to the item under each element related to staff development and training, indicating teachers feel this is not provided to the extent that it could potentially be offered.

Table 2: Individual Item Frequencies, Mean Item Scores and Total Score

<b>COMMUNICATION: Communication between home and school is regular, two-way and meaningful</b>					<b>Mean</b>
<b>How well does your school...</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>3.01</b>
...provide information to parents in a variety of ways (i.e., newsletter, e-mail, home visits, phone calls)	0.5	10.4	50.5	38.5	3.27
...provide all information in the parent's native language and at an appropriate literacy level	2.8	20.8	42.7	33.7	3.07
...disseminate information on topics such as school reforms, policies, discipline procedures, assessment tools, and school grades	2.2	15.6	47.2	35.0	3.15
...provide staff development regarding effective communication techniques and the importance of regular, two-way communication between the school and the family	8.8	25.8	41.8	23.6	2.80
<b>PARENTING: Parenting skills are promoted and supported.</b>					<b>Mean</b>
<b>How well does your school...</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>2.83</b>
...communicate the importance of positive relationships between parents and their children	4.3	16.8	50.5	28.3	3.03
...link parents to family support services and resources in the community	2.7	12.1	42.3	42.9	3.25
...provide a central location where parents/families have easy access to information and resources on parenting	4.9	22.0	43.4	29.7	2.98
...offer workshops, seminars, or trainings on parenting skills	8.4	32.6	37.1	21.9	2.72
...provide staff development regarding the promotion of parenting skills	19.1	37.6	29.2	14.0	2.38

<b>STUDENT LEARNING: Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning</b>					<b>Mean</b>
<b>How well does your school...</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>2.94</b>
...provide clear information regarding the expectations for students in each subject at each grade level	4.4	16.4	44.3	35.0	3.10
...provide clear information regarding student placement, student services, and optional programs	2.2	22.4	37.2	38.3	3.11
...assist parents in understanding how students can improve skills, get help when needed, meet class expectations, and perform well on assessments	5.5	18.7	47.3	28.6	2.99
...provide opportunities for staff members to learn about successful approaches to engaging parents in their child's learning	8.8	37.0	29.3	24.9	2.70
...explain and discuss students' results from assessments like the CRTs with parents, and share ways to improve students' scores	5.6	27.9	37.4	29.1	2.90
<b>VOLUNTEERING: Parents are welcome in the schools, and their support and assistance are sought.</b>					<b>Mean</b>
<b>How well does your school...</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>2.43</b>
...survey parents regarding their interests, talents, and availability to volunteer	15.5	36.5	36.5	11.6	2.44
...maintain a system for contacting parents to volunteer throughout the school year	14.4	28.7	37.0	19.9	2.62
...educate and assist teachers to effectively use volunteer resources	18.7	38.5	30.8	12.1	2.36
...match volunteer activities to volunteer interests and abilities	16.2	40.2	28.5	15.1	2.42

<b>SCHOOL DECISION MAKING AND ADVOCACY: Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families</b>					<b>Mean</b>
<b>How well does your school...</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>2.51</b>
...provide workshops for parents that teach them to influence decisions, raise issues or concerns, and resolve problems at the school	16.0	29.8	42.0	12.2	2.50
...encourage the formation or activities of PTAs or other parent groups that respond to issues of interest to parents	8.8	22.1	41.4	27.6	2.88
...include and give equal representation to parents on decision-making and advisory committees	16.4	24.3	41.2	18.1	2.61
...provide training for staff and parents in how to be collaborative partners and share decision-making in areas such as policy, curriculum, budget, school reform, safety, hiring personnel, and other personnel issues	22.0	34.5	32.8	10.7	2.32
<b>COLLABORATION WITH THE COMMUNITY: Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families and student learning</b>					<b>Mean</b>
<b>How well does your school...</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>2.78</b>
...distribute to staff and parents information on community resources that serve the cultural, recreational, academic, health, social, and other needs of families within the community	7.1	19.1	45.4	28.4	2.95
...develop partnerships with local business, community organizations, and service groups to advance student learning and assist schools and families	7.7	24.7	37.9	29.7	2.90
...collaborate with community agencies to provide family support services and adult learning opportunities, enabling parents to more fully participate in activities that support education	7.1	21.4	46.7	24.7	2.89
...provide staff development on establishing community partners and using community resources	17.2	32.2	31.7	18.9	2.52

#### Teacher Focus Group

A focus group with teachers was conducted late in the school year to discuss challenges and successes with parent involvement, ways in which the grant could provide more support, and what parent involvement means to them. When defining parent involvement, teachers mentioned ideas related to parent involvement in student learning, such as helping their child with

homework or reading to them. They also discussed volunteering in the classroom, but this includes helping with other children, not just their own! They also mentioned spending quality time with their child in their definition of parent involvement, relating to the element of responsible parenting. They added the importance of the school welcoming parents and having an open-door policy.

The teachers described the challenges and barriers to parent involvement, including challenges they face and challenges the parents face. Most challenges are based on communication problems related to culture and language. For the teachers, it is challenging to send everything home in multiple languages. In addition, written communication is not always the best form of communication for some cultures. The front office at some schools is not "user-friendly" and unwelcoming to those who do not speak English. For the parents, time is a major factor. Some parents don't make time, while others cannot make time. Other parents simply don't know how to help. Some are willing to support sports and music, but not academics with the same level of enthusiasm.

Some of the solutions the teachers discussed included ways to bring the parents into friendly, social nights and school improvement projects to make them feel welcome and comfortable in the school environment. They would also would like to learn Spanish, but specified that they do not want to take a formal class because this is not the type of Spanish they need. Rather, they need to learn informal Spanish related to education and classroom vocabulary. Some felt that the PIF at their particular school could use more training, support and organization. In addition, they all felt it was essential the administration at each school demonstrate their support for parent involvement at their school, and other teachers would follow suit.

### Parent Survey

Parent surveys were handed out during parent-teacher conferences at Alice Maxwell, Kate Smith and Sierra Vista. Desert Heights sent their surveys home with their children to give to the parents. Traner did the same, but provided the reward of a pizza party to the class with the highest return rate. Anderson's parent-teacher conferences are conducted at a different time of the year than the other elementary schools, so they handed out their parent surveys at various meetings and events shortly after the other schools had administered their surveys. Of the six schools, more than one-third of the surveys represents parents from Traner Middle School.

Table 3: Percentage of Respondents by School

<b>School</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Alice Maxwell	14.3
Anderson	6.8
Desert Heights	11.1
Kate Smith	19.7
Sierra Vista	9.7
Traner	38.4

*Demographics.* A total of 497 parents from the six schools completed a survey on their perceptions of parent involvement at their school. Of these, 68% were completed in English. Most respondents (81%) are the mothers of the child or children attending the school. More than

half of the respondents (55.2%) are Hispanic or Latino. Just over one-fourth (25.9%) are Caucasian. The remaining sample includes respondents marking Asian or Pacific Islander (8.2%), “other” or more than one race (5.5%), African American (2.3%) or Native American or Alaskan Native (2.3%). The highest percentage of parents has lived in Washoe County for less than five years (28.7%). Almost the same percentage (27.7%) have lived here between six and 10 years, followed by 24.1% of the parents residing in this county between 11 and 20 years. Almost one-fifth of the sample (19.5%) has lived in Washoe County for more than 20 years. Parents were asked to indicate what grade their child or children were in. The results are presented in the table below.

Table 4: Percentage of parents with children in each grade

<b>Grade</b>	<b>%</b>
Pre-kindergarten	5.1
Kindergarten	16.8
1 <sup>st</sup> Grade	10.9
2 <sup>nd</sup> Grade	20.2
3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade	19.6
4 <sup>th</sup> Grade	17.2
5 <sup>th</sup> Grade	14.1
6 <sup>th</sup> Grade	12.3
7 <sup>th</sup> Grade	8.2
8 <sup>th</sup> Grade	6.2

Parents were asked to indicate from a list how they receive news and information from the schools. Almost three-fourths of the parents indicated they received information from their children, followed by newsletters and teachers.

Table 5: Percentage of parents receiving information from the the sources listed

<b>Information Source</b>	<b>%</b>
Newsletter	64.7
Children	74.7
Teachers	60.2
Principal	25.7
Other school staff	21.6
Friends	14.9
Newspaper	7.5
TV	17.0
Other family members	12.9
Other: Internet, neighbors	3.7

Parents were asked to rate the degree to which they agreed with a series of statements related to communication, policies and rules, and the partnerships between parents and schools. As shown in the table below, overwhelmingly, the highest percentage of responses for every item was a

rating of an "agree" followed by "strongly agree," and very few marked responses any lower than that. Only five items had mean scores of less than a three, indicating parents are satisfied with their school overall. The item ranked the highest is that parents feel welcome at their child's school, followed by the school sharing information about their child's attendance and behavior and the school allowing parents to be involved in homework and learning. While none of the items received very low scores, two of the three items with the lowest mean score relate to allowing parents to participate in decision-making. The third item with a lower mean score indicated schools could do more to work *with* parents to strengthen their families.

Table 6: Percentage of parents' responses and item mean scores

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neither Disagree Nor Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Mean</b>
My child's school tells me about my child's academic progress regularly	2.4	2.4	5.7	56.7	32.7	4.15
My child's school tells me about my child's attendance and behavior	2.5	1.7	4.6	48.5	42.7	4.27
At my child's school, teachers, faculty and staff are available when I need them	0.8	4.1	8.1	48.4	38.6	4.20
I am satisfied with the communication between the school and myself	1.2	6.1	8.9	49.6	34.1	4.09
My child's school explains to me what the policies and rules mean, so that I can understand them	1.2	3.2	6.9	58.1	30.6	4.14
My child's school tells me about changes in the school and its policies and rules	0.8	5.4	11.6	50.4	31.8	4.07
My child's school respects and listens to all of the parents when decisions are made about the school and its policies	1.7	2.9	19.0	51.7	24.8	3.95
I know who to talk to if I have a question or concern about policy or rule changes	0.4	7.8	6.2	53.5	32.1	4.09

Table 6 cont'd

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neither Disagree Nor Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Mean</b>
My child's school gives me the chance to help make decisions that make the school better	1.7	8.7	23.2	44.0	22.4	3.77
I am satisfied with the way parents are included in decisions made about my child's school and its policies, educational practices, etc.	1.7	7.9	18.6	46.7	25.2	3.86
I am satisfied with the way my child's school works <u>with</u> parents	2.0	3.2	11.3	54.7	28.7	4.05
My child's school works <u>with</u> parents to make my child's learning better	1.6	0.0	11.4	52.7	34.3	4.18
My child's school works <u>with</u> parents to strengthen our family	1.6	5.3	23.0	44.0	25.9	3.87
My child's school works <u>with</u> parents to improve the school overall	1.2	4.5	14.9	52.9	26.4	3.99
My child's school gives me the chance to be involved in my child's learning and homework.	1.7	2.5	7.9	46.7	41.3	4.24
I am satisfied with the services provided to help me teach my child.	2.5	4.5	10.3	45.0	37.6	4.11
I am satisfied with the services and information provided to help me improve my parenting skills.	2.1	6.2	17.4	44.4	29.9	3.94
I feel welcome at my child's school.	1.7	1.2	5.8	46.3	45.0	4.32

Most parents completing the survey view themselves as both their child's first and most important teacher. Further, more than three-fourths disagree that it is better to let the teacher teach their children how to read, write and do math. Some of the survey respondents who marked "yes," it is better to wait and allow the teacher to teach these subjects wrote in next to the question that they feel this way do because they are not good at reading, writing and/or math. More than 90% of the parents indicated that teaching a child at home provides at least some help with the child learning at school.

Table 7: Parents' perceptions about who are their children's teachers

	Parent	Teacher	Other
Who do you think your child's <i>first</i> teacher was?	88.6	9.5	1.8
Who is your child's <i>most important</i> teacher?	84.9	13.2	2.0
		Yes	No
Is it better to wait and let the teacher teach your child how to read?		22.4	77.6
Is it better to wait and let the teacher teach your child how to write?		20.8	79.2
Is it better to wait and let the teacher teach your child how to do math?		25.7	74.3

Table 8: Percentage of parents responding and mean item score

	No Help	Little Help	Don't Know	Some Help	Yes, it helps	Mean
In your opinion, does teaching your child at home help your child learn at school?	0.8	5.5	2.5	23.5	67.6	4.51

Although only one-fifth of the parents volunteer at their child's school, just 37% have been asked by a teacher to be a volunteer, and less than 10% have been asked by other parents. However, almost 50% of the parents would be interested in serving as a volunteer. Of these, most would like to supervise events or field trips, help in the classroom, or perform clerical or other administrative duties. Several indicated they would like to but specified issues such as time or language barriers (not speaking English well enough). One wrote in that she would like to, but no one ever calls her.

Table 9: Percentages of parents invited to volunteer

	No	Yes
I volunteer at my child's school.	78.9	21.1
Teachers have asked me to volunteer at my child's school.	62.8	37.2
Other parents have asked me to volunteer at my child's school.	91.3	8.7

Table 10: Ways in which parents would volunteer

	Yes
Would you be interested in volunteering at your child's school?	48.5
<i>If Yes... how would you like to volunteer?</i>	
Clerical or administrative duties for the school or parent groups	53.2
Helping in the classroom (reading aloud, working with students, etc.)	67.1
Organizing a parent group or school event (open houses, cultural fairs, etc.)	50.0
Supervising student events or field trips	88.5
Participating on an advisory committee (on school budget, for example)	38.4
Talking to students about careers or hobbies	53.4
Other: music classes, help prepare and serve lunch, help with homework	29.6

Almost three-fourths of the respondents indicate their child's school provides information on responsible parenting and other resources in the community. Almost two-thirds say the school offers workshops or classes on responsible parenting. However, less than one-fifth of the parents have actually participated in such a workshop or class. More than half indicated an interest in attending classes or workshops for parents. Of those, more than half indicated an interest in every type of class listed. The most frequently selected choices were help with homework, improving specific academic skills, improving children's self-image, and building parenting skills.

Table 11: Parents interest in classes or workshops

	Yes
My child's school provides me with information on how to be a better parent.	71.7
My child's school offers workshops or classes on how to be a better parent.	63.4
I've taken a workshop or class at my child's school on how to be a better parent.	16.9
My child's school provides me with resources about other programs in the community that can help me be a better parent.	71.5
	Yes
Would you be interested in attending a class or workshop on how parents can help their children learn?	65.8
<i>If Yes... what types of classes or workshops you would like to participate in?</i>	
Helping with homework	80.3
Improving skills like reading or math	78.9
Testing programs and what they mean	54.2
English as a second language	57.3
Improving your child's self-image	72.5
Building your own parenting skills	72.9
Helping your child explore career choices	67.2
Other: alternative discipline; anger management for children; communication, problems children are facing today; developing ambition and focus in children	12.5

The preliminary analysis of the parent survey indicates that parents are satisfied with the schools efforts overall. However, areas in which schools could consider more development include contacting more parents to volunteer, offering workshops or classes related to student learning and responsible parenting, and finding ways to meaningfully include parents in the decision-making process.

### Visual Mapping

The visual mapping process was designed to help schools view what they are currently doing to involve parents from a different perspective to generate more thoughts and ideas for serving and involving parents. The PIFs began the process by organizing a team of people from their school to meet, including the school's PIF, the principal, a teacher and a parent. However, only two schools were successful at finding a time when all four components of the team were represented.

The meeting began by reviewing the results of their school's teacher survey and discussing reasons why the teachers selected the ratings they did for each element. This moved into the actual mapping process, in which the group wrote down as many events or strategies for involving parents as they could possibly think of related to each element *and* whether this happened before, during or after-school, or during the summer or off-track. For things that related to more than one element or occurred during more than one time segment, they were instructed to write it down multiple times. These were then placed in a chart based on the parent involvement element and time of day, providing a visual for how and when the school is making efforts at involving parents. This provides the schools the opportunity to examine visually which elements they are putting a lot of time an effort and what time of day they are exerting these efforts. As time is a major challenge in parent involvement from the parents' perspective due to some work schedules, breaking down the efforts put forth for each element by time may help schools consider new ideas. An example visual map is attached to this report.

### **Summary**

From both teacher and parent perspectives, the two elements which appear to need the most improvement are parents as volunteers and decision-makers in the schools. While the communication problems that stem from cultural and language differences present a large challenge, the schools tend to work very hard to communicate with parents, using a variety of methods for communicating and translating most communications. While parents have a clear desire for learning how to be involved in student learning and be responsible parents, they are generally satisfied with what the schools are currently doing. Community collaboration was mentioned very little by teachers and parents. From the visual maps, it is clear that the schools have numerous partners and receive funding and other donations from local businesses and organizations, but it is unclear as to the extent these are used to support parent involvement specifically.