

## Building Capacity for Change:

### Engaging the PPS Community on a Large Scale

Prepared by:

The Center for Public Service  
Mark O. Hatfield School of Government  
Portland State University

For NPCC:  
Wendy Willis  
Sarah Giles  
Jim Jacks  
Jessica Rodriguez-Motenga  
Andrea Cano

For CPS:  
Phil Kesiling  
Samuel Henry  
Shannon Grzybowski

Graduate Students:  
Amy Delahanty  
Karli Dahl  
Kelsey Pederson

June 30, 2015

# Table of Contents

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>Summary .....</b>                    | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>Findings.....</b>                    | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>Recommendations .....</b>            | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>Introduction .....</b>               | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>Phase I Overview .....</b>           | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>Phase IIa Overview .....</b>         | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>Phase II Overview .....</b>          | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>Findings &amp; Conclusions .....</b> | <b>7</b>  |
| <b>Recommendations.....</b>             | <b>11</b> |

# Summary

Portland Public Schools is in an era of growth as it welcomes thousands more students into its schools after years of declining enrollment. By 2025, PPS expects an additional 5,000 students over its current enrollment of 48,549. Such growth presents an enormous opportunity for the district to create new approaches for community engagement around important decisions.

PPS's growth will require boundary changes and a continuing realignment in response to growth, shifting demographics and other opportunities and challenges. PPS has committed to better address these challenges by engaging with the community in understanding its values around issues related to boundaries. During the past year and a half, PPS launched an exciting and unprecedented effort to engage the community as it prepares for a decade of growth.

Such an effort requires an enormous amount of staff time, focus and energy as well as: trying new methods, creating new partnerships and re-investing in current partnerships, and identifying new opportunities to reach both broadly and deeply into the district and its community. PPS set extremely ambitious goals for itself in reaching 40% of the community, particularly targeting participation from Title I schools, communities of color, and immigrant communities. Even on an aspirational level, such goals demonstrate a long term and admirable desire to work on ensuring voices often left out of decision-making are invited in and heard. As PPS moves forward with engagement efforts on any type of decision - not just boundaries - keeping such participation goals at the forefront will be a challenging but not impossible feat to achieve.

Beginning in winter 2013-2014, PPS began working with Portland State University's Center for Public Service and National Policy Consensus Center, two Hatfield School of Government centers within PSU's College of Urban and Public Affairs, to explore how to structure and implement a district-wide boundary review process including a robust public engagement component.

At the conclusion of this phase (Phase II) of the project, PPS had received feedback from more than 10,000 surveys, providing valuable feedback on decisions the district is facing both with regard to individual schools and the district as a whole. For example, 71 percent of *PPS 2025* respondents favor middle schools to K-8s. In May 2015, Superintendent Smith announced that PPS would likely return to more K-5s and middle schools (as opposed to the current structure of mostly K-8s). In addition, PPS has laid the groundwork for continuing to build its community engagement infrastructure and has itself discovered additional opportunities to continue to build that infrastructure in future engagement efforts.

Based on Phase II, CPS / NPCC present the following findings and recommendations to PPS in moving forward:

## Findings

1. PPS has developed new tools and capacity to build its engagement efforts and reach.

2. Although community engagement levels were unprecedented, conducting two major consultations back-to-back - centralized in one department - taxed PPS's and the community's capacity/.
3. There are opportunities for additional internal alignment with translation and interpretation to create clear, culturally appropriate translations of survey instruments.
4. There is room to work more robustly with community-based organizations.
5. Online methods for surveying large groups carry the potential to reach huge numbers of people but come with some challenges.

## Recommendations

1. Continue using D-BRAC as an integral part of the PPS boundary review process.
2. Strengthen district capacity and planning efforts for district-wide projects.
3. Continue to strengthen community engagement partnerships, processes, and efforts using a strategic approach. PPS should report back to people who participated in the *PPS 2025* survey and tell them directly how their input influenced particular decisions.

## Introduction

On February 25, 2013, the PPS Board unanimously approved Resolution 4718, which directs staff, "to develop and recommend a process for a comprehensive review of school boundaries district-wide and policies related to student assignment and transfer to better align with the Racial Educational Equity Policy and promote strong capture rates and academic programs at every grade level."

For the District-wide Boundary Review component, in December 2013, Portland Public Schools entered into an Intergovernmental Agreement with the Center for Public Service (CPS) at Portland State University (PSU) to assist the District with developing a process to engage a wide range of stakeholders in a comprehensive District-wide Boundary Review.

CPS proposed a three-phase approach for the "PPS District-Wide Boundary Framework" project, which would recommend next steps at the end of each Phase. As initially outlined from the vantage point of October 2013, the proposed approach would be as follows:

- Phase I (3 months): Initial Assessment and Framework Recommendations
- Phase II (7-8 months): Stakeholder and Community Engagement
- Phase III (4 months): Final Recommendations, Community Deliberations, and Decision Making

To conduct this work, CPS partnered with PSU's National Policy Consensus Center (NPCC) and its civic engagement program, Oregon's Kitchen Table (OKT).

## Phase I Overview

On May 22, 2014, CPS/NPCC issued a Phase I Assessment report entitled “Complex Challenges and New Opportunities: Building the Framework for Boundary Review.”<sup>1</sup> Key findings in this report included: a need for internal clarity and alignment within PPS on the purpose and goals of the proposed District-wide Boundary Review; stakeholder skepticism that boundary review alone could address larger equity issues facing the district; and non-uniform capacity to engage the public across the district. As a result, CPS/NPCC proposed that, rather than move full bore into the proposed Phase II “Stakeholder and Community Engagement” phase as noted above, PPS stop and conduct a “bridge” phase, deemed Phase IIa, to focus on internal alignment and project planning.

## Phase IIa Overview

CPS/NPCC worked with PPS throughout Summer 2014 on building clarity and alignment among PPS leadership regarding boundary review, capacity, and community engagement. On September 30, 2014, CPS/NPCC issued the Phase IIa report entitled “A Values, Growth, and Equity Strategy for District-wide Boundary Review.”<sup>2</sup> That report contained eight recommendations as PPS prepared to move forward with community outreach and boundary review, including the following components:

1. Establish a District-wide Boundary Review Advisory Committee (D-BRAC) to address enrollment issues;
2. Engage the community to establish values that will guide and influence PPS’s decisions across programs and departments
3. Formally consider the values developed by the public to develop a 2025 Vision that builds on the Superintendent’s top three priorities and operationalize the values and vision across the district; and
4. Implement the Community Organizing Framework developed by NPCC to set and reach community outreach targets.

## Phase II Overview

Stemming from the recommendation in Phase IIa, PPS and NPCC began Phase II in October 2014, which included four major components, including the use of NPCC’s Oregon’s Kitchen Table program to host two surveys:

- 1. District-wide Boundary Review Advisory Committee (D-BRAC)**— The committee is charged with providing advice to the Superintendent about a values and policy framework for the district to use in making boundary decisions both in short-term acute cases and over the long term. The Superintendent appointed 26 voting members to D-BRAC including Portland citizens, PPS parents, PPS

---

<sup>1</sup> For details on Phase I, see “Complex Challenges and New Opportunities: Building the Framework for Boundary Review” here: <http://www.pps.k12.or.us/files/enrollment-transfer/PPSFINALMAY22.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> For details on these recommendations, see “A Values, Growth, and Equity Strategy for District-wide Boundary Review” report here: [http://www.pps.k12.or.us/files/enrollment-transfer/PSU\\_Report\\_for\\_DWBR\\_-\\_October\\_2014.pdf](http://www.pps.k12.or.us/files/enrollment-transfer/PSU_Report_for_DWBR_-_October_2014.pdf)

administrators, PPS teachers (and members of the Portland Association of Teachers), Student Representatives and PPS Board members.<sup>3</sup>

D-BRAC began meeting in November 2014 and expects to deliver recommendations to the Superintendent and PPS Board of Directors in July 2015.

- 2. Successful Schools Survey** — The PPS Board directed staff to conduct a climate survey of the district's schools during the 2014-2015 school year. The Successful Schools Survey was intended to "provide PPS administrators, principals, and teachers with transparent, comprehensive data that measures the differential experience and perceptions of PPS staff, students, and families of all races and backgrounds."

From January – March 2015, the survey was open to 5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students, PPS staff, and PPS families of students at all grade levels. The results will be used to plan for continuous improvements of schools and student services. The staff and student surveys were conducted internally by PPS, while the parent and guardian survey was conducted on Oregon's Kitchen Table (both online and via paper). DHM Research, Oregon's Kitchen Table's research partner, provided data analysis of the parent and guardian survey. Surveys were made available in six languages: English, Spanish, Russian, Somali, Chinese, and Vietnamese.<sup>4</sup>

- 3. PPS 2025 Survey**—PPS is looking at 15 years of forecasted enrollment growth with potentially 5,000 more students by 2025. The *PPS 2025* survey solicited feedback on questions that will help shape the school district as it grows.

The survey was available to students, PPS families, staff, and community members for five weeks in April – May 2015 to give people a voice in changes as PPS prepares to serve more students. The results will be used by D-BRAC to help inform and shape their recommendations. DHM Research also provided data analysis of the parent and guardian survey. Surveys were made available online and in paper via Oregon's Kitchen Table and in six languages: English, Spanish, Russian, Somali, Chinese, and Vietnamese.<sup>5</sup>

- 4. Community Organizing** – The Phase IIa report included a comprehensive Community Organizing Framework designed to establish a "new normal" for PPS when conducting community engagement. The framework included a set of nested, segmented activities to ensure authentic and deep engagement with the broad PPS community. In Phase II, NPCC advised PPS on how they might use the community organizing framework to more fully engage traditionally under-represented communities. NPCC / Oregon's Kitchen Table also worked directly with community-based organizations to help conduct outreach for PPS 2025.

This report concludes Phase II. It contains an overview of the key findings from the above activities and a set of recommendations for next steps.

---

<sup>3</sup> See roster of D-BRAC members here: [http://www.pps.k12.or.us/files/enrollment-transfer/D-BRAC\\_member\\_profiles.March\\_2015.pdf](http://www.pps.k12.or.us/files/enrollment-transfer/D-BRAC_member_profiles.March_2015.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> See results of the Successful Schools Survey here: <http://www.pps.k12.or.us/about-us/10281.htm>

<sup>5</sup> See results of the PPS 2025 Survey here: <http://www.pps.k12.or.us/about-us/10563.htm>

# Findings & Conclusions

## *Finding 1 – PPS has developed new tools and capacity to build its engagement efforts and reach*

Throughout Phase II, PPS developed and/or utilized new tools for managing policy change and community organizing activities. These include:

- D-BRAC – The District-wide Boundary Review Advisory Committee is a professionally facilitated committee comprised of 26 voting members, appointed by PPS Superintendent Carole Smith. Members include Portland citizens, PPS parents, PPS administrators, PPS teachers (and members of the Portland Association of Teachers), Student Representatives and PPS Board members. Members bring diverse backgrounds and professional expertise in areas including education, equity, planning, demography, governance, and facilities management. D-BRAC created and adopted formal operating protocols.
- Electronic tools – PPS partnered with NPCC to use Oregon’s Kitchen Table (OKT) to conduct the *Successful Schools* and *PPS 2025* surveys. OKT is a standing online consultation tool that allows people to weigh in on public issues. Because individuals sign-up to participate, OKT already had many Portland-area contacts in its system to send the surveys to. By using contacts already in the OKT system, the *PPS 2025* survey received approximately 1,000 responses in the first week without any additional outreach or advertising. Over 5,000 additional people signed up with OKT to participate in these surveys. In the *Successful Schools* Survey, the majority of survey respondents (both electronic and paper survey respondents as well across different language groups) indicated that in the future, they would like PPS to communicate with them through text messages and email.
- Building staff capacity – PPS reached out to its own family engagement coordinators agents, and other staff in new ways. Family engagement coordinators work with families to ensure “equitable access and support for the academic and personal success of each and every PPS student.”<sup>6</sup> These staff work in different departments across different parts of the district. However, during the surveys and community organizing components of Phase II, PPS brought them together to reach out to students and families in historically under-represented communities. When the family engagement coordinators did reach out to families, there was good response from the community.

## **Conclusions**

- D-BRAC is a well-planned, high-functioning committee with a clear charge, governance structure, core values, timeline, and work plan. Although this is its first iteration, D-BRAC is proving to be an effective tool for PPS boundary discussions.

---

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.pps.k12.or.us/departments/school-family-partnerships/index.htm>

- Using Oregon Kitchen’s Table for surveys allowed PPS to solicit input from a large number of participants and reach people in a new way. In addition, now that PPS and OKT have contact information for thousands more people, it will enable PPS to reach them more easily for future consultations.
- By the nature of their work, family engagement coordinators have tremendous access to students and their families. Further integrating them into PPS’s new Community Organizing Framework will help PPS solicit future input from the families and communities they serve. Repeated efforts to bridge the work of the staff across departments will continue to help solidify a district-wide approach to family engagement.

*Finding 2 – Although community engagement levels were unprecedented, conducting two major consultations back-to-back - centralized in one department - taxed PPS’s and the community’s capacity*

The *Successful Schools Climate* survey and *PPS 2025* survey conducted between January and May 2015, elicited approximately 10,200 responses, comprised of teachers, staff, students, family members, and the general public. However, the preparation and launch for the *Successful School Climate* survey absorbed available PPS staff capacity and resources from early January through the end of March, delaying the timeline and preparation activities for the *PPS 2025* survey. In addition, other PPS activities, such as town hall budget meetings and Common Core testing competed for PPS staff, time, and focus, which delayed the pre-launch preparations and postponed the launch date for *PPS 2025*. Several of these activities targeted input and participation from the same members of the public at the same time.

Although these consultations affected the whole district and sought participation from every department and school, one department at PPS district-headquarters managed them, which required significant and sustained attention, time, and energy from that department’s staff over several months. When other sections of the district took on or shared efforts to engage school communities directly, Oregon’s Kitchen Table saw significant surges. This was evident particularly in individual school participation when principals reached out to teachers and families. Schools that used incentives (for example, free-dress days at Boise-Eliot/Humboldt Elementary School and two raffled bikes at Faubion School) also saw higher survey response rates.

**Conclusions**

- Conducting two major consultations back-to-back drained PPS capacity and staff resources. Coming first, the *Successful Schools* climate survey received more focus and attention from staff and the public. Launching the *PPS 2025* survey just two weeks later confused the public, many of whom assumed it was the same survey and that they had already completed it. In addition, we observed fatigue from staff and the public toward the second survey. This drop-off in participation is not uncommon when there is a seemingly “part two” to a survey, even if the surveys are not connected. A longer period of time between the two likely would have helped alleviate this drop-off. A more ideal pacing / timing would have been a November *Successful Schools* climate survey and a February/March *PPS 2025* survey. The timing of the *PPS 2025* survey - immediately after Spring Break and near the end of



the school year - also may have contributed to fatigue for both staff and community members (particularly parents).

- The consultations would have benefitted from the inclusion and involvement of an expanded core group for continuity to set metrics and milestones, identifying additional staff throughout the system, identifying in-school resources, and engaging them during: 1) pre-survey activities (i.e. survey content development, translation, survey testing, promotion, outreach), and 2) the survey launch in encouraging and monitoring the survey response activity and reporting back challenges and successes.
- Broadening a core group to include PPS staff from other departments would have also led to more of a sense of shared ownership and responsibility for the engagement effort, as well as helping to spread the capacity of staff time and energy.

### *Finding 3 – There are opportunities for additional internal alignment with translation and interpretation to create clear, culturally appropriate translations of survey instruments*

Portland Public Schools Translation and Interpretation department translates PPS documents and interprets during PPS activities for non-English speaking people in Spanish, Russian, Somali, Vietnamese, and Chinese. Additionally, staff in the School and Family Partnerships office, the ESL office, and community agents augment interpretation and translation services. During the course of this project, the translation department was overwhelmed with multiple priorities. In addition, one set of staff translated the survey instruments while another set of staff worked directly with families in those languages to respond to the surveys. As a result, some of the translated survey content was confusing to some community members.

During the *PPS 2025* survey preparatory process, the OKT team met with the Translation and Interpretation interim director and staff to discuss survey content and how various cultures and ethnic communities would understand survey questions. Translation staff were also invited to contact the OKT team directly throughout the translation process to ensure that staff understood the context and meaning of the questions. OKT staff found that when this exchange did occur, the translation process went much more quickly and smoothly. However, some community based organizations (CBOs) had difficulty explaining survey concepts and questions to their constituencies, indicating additional steps should be taken to ensure clear translation and interpretation.

### **Conclusions**

- Including CBOs and other language constituents in the planning and review of each survey instrument, especially as it relates to language translations, could have helped in creating clearer, more culturally appropriate translations.
- Providing ample time for translation staff to plan with survey team and review survey instruments is key to ensuring translations are as comprehensive and culturally appropriate as possible.

- Some of the Translation staff also work as family engagement coordinators, but not all do. Coordinating staff across different departments who work on translations and with families in languages other than English prior to conducting outreach to those families would help ensure consistent messaging.

#### *Finding 4 – There is room to work more robustly with community-based organizations*

Both PPS and NPCC contracted with community-based organizations (CBOs) during the PPS 2025 survey to increase participation by historically under-represented communities. Those CBOs were responsible for collecting and submitting at least 300 surveys from their communities, which provided a benchmark for the CBOs' work. NPCC developed a comprehensive guide to orient CBOs on the process and obligations. However, the contracting process proved to be slower and more complicated than anticipated, which affected the orientation and training as well as the amount of time CBOs had to conduct outreach and distribute surveys.

In addition to the CBOs that PPS and NPCC contracted with, several other CBOs didn't enter into formal contracts but were helpful in informing their communities of the survey. PPS did tremendous work on the Community Organizing Framework to gather names and contact information for parent-leaders in all Title I schools. Because district staff was spread so thin during the two surveys and focused on internal alignment of outreach efforts / staff, they were unable to fully make use the network of parent leaders to help serve as catalysts and do outreach in specific school buildings. This layer of community engagement is a key one for PPS to continue to build upon and utilize.

#### **Conclusions**

- Setting goals with CBOs results in clear expectations and gives each CBO measurable targets to reach. Further, working with CBOs to develop and inform community engagement strategies, signal and resolve potential problem areas, and be a more visible and viable 'face' of the engagement effort to the community they serve and to whom they best relate would have strengthened community outreach efforts.
- Due to D-BRAC's timeframe for completing its work and when contracts could be executed, the project wasn't able to as fully benefit from the network of community-based organizations as it could have.
- In future engagements, it would benefit PPS to develop and activate a building-by-building engagement strategy, utilizing not only PPS staff but also parent leaders, beginning with Title I schools and moving out to cover every school within the District.

#### *Finding 5 – Online methods for surveying large groups carry the potential to reach huge numbers of people but come with some challenges*

One of the benefits of using an online tool is the ability to reach large numbers of people in a short period of time. Both PPS surveys were unprecedented in the level of participation

they received for any Oregon's Kitchen Table conducted over the past three years. PPS received more than 10,000 responses from these surveys in combination.

With any online activity, however, especially ones that are as complex and lengthy as both surveys, there are technical challenges to pay attention to in the future:

#### Challenges:

- Oregon's Kitchen Table moved to a new user log-in system immediately prior to the Successful Schools Survey, which proved to be a learning experience for OKT as well. However, several users were uncomfortable with any such log-in system for submitting their input. Given the number of past participants who were actually asking for a log-in system, OKT wasn't prepared for the level of discomfort. Over time, both PPS and OKT were able to clearly explain why Oregon's Kitchen Table uses a log-in (to ensure privacy, to be able to provide targeted technical assistance, to allow users to change their email or zip code, and to better ensure that results aren't skewed).
- OKT experienced a high level of concern from participants in regards to users' privacy with the new system. An experienced parent volunteer stepped forward to ensure that OKT had an updated privacy policy and moved quickly to ensure the site's security certifications were in place.
- One potential barrier to participation that arose in the final week of the PPS 2015 survey was the discovery that Comcast had begun blocking password re-set emails to Comcast email users from Oregon's Kitchen Table system. It took repeated requests and complaints to Comcast to fix this error. OKT staff were able to work directly with those users who notified them that they were not receiving password reset emails, but it is unclear how many other users with Comcast email addresses experienced this difficulty and did not reach out to OKT for assistance.

#### Conclusions:

- High participation is a significant reflection of the attention and outreach efforts on PPS's part.
- OKT can draw on knowledgeable and skilled community members to assist OKT in anticipating potential challenges that may arise in during an on-line participation tool. During planning stages, OKT could work to identify who within a community might serve in this role.
- Clearer communication about how OKT can assist users and why OKT uses a log-in system may have helped alleviate discomfort and frustrations some participants experienced.

## Recommendations

In order to continue the good work that PPS has begun toward boundary review and robust community engagement, NPCC recommends that PPS follow-up with these recommendations:

### *Recommendation 1: Continue using D-BRAC as an integral part of the PPS boundary review process*

- As previously noted, D-BRAC is high-functioning committee with a clear governance structure. PPS should use D-BRAC to continue to help manage the next steps of boundary change in Fall 2015 after D-BRAC provides the Superintendent with its framework for boundary review (expected July 2015).
- The public should have adequate and transparent ways to provide input into the D-BRAC process once boundaries are proposed. This may include a variety of methods: consider online mapping tools as well as in-person events, where attendees could use touch pads to respond in the moment and anonymously to proposed boundary changes.
- PPS should report back to people who participated in the *PPS 2025* survey and tell them directly how their input influenced particular decisions. For example, 71 percent of *PPS 2025* respondents favor middle schools to K-8s. In May 2015, Superintendent Smith announced that PPS would likely return to more K-5s and middle schools (as opposed to the current structure of mostly K-8s). PPS should let respondents know how their input influenced that decision.

### *Recommendation 2: Strengthen district capacity and planning efforts for district-wide projects*

PPS should develop a cohesive planning and implementation process for district-wide activities across departments. This would require assigning core staff, developing a centralized project calendar that takes into account other district priorities, and post-project evaluation. This may include:

- Creating an organizing team from across departments to drive internal outreach empowered to conduct outreach and engagement across the district.
- Creating a manual that guides users through PPS's document translation process and a glossary of PPS terminology to be updated as needed in all necessary languages. For consistency, the guidelines and the glossary should be used by internal staff translators and contracted translators. An abbreviated glossary could be an addendum to any future survey or document the district produces for wide dissemination.
- Inviting translators, interpreters, and community based organizations to be part of the drafting process for any community engagement consultation / survey tool early on so that they are better able to understand and translate the context and relate it to the communities they represent.
- Aligning staff who work on translation and interpretation and who work directly with families in languages other than English to ensure consistent communication.

- Building-in sufficient lead-time to work with CBOs to ensure all contracts are in place prior to the engagement effort.

### *Recommendation 3: Continue to strengthen community engagement partnerships, processes, and efforts using a strategic approach*

PPS should take a targeted, strategic approach to surveys / on-line consultations. This should include:

- Strategically focusing on 10 schools at a time, week-by-week and providing incentives and support where they are most needed. Based on the *Successful Schools* survey and the *PPS 2025* survey, PPS knows where extra support, incentives, and outreach are needed at different schools.
- Mapping its community assets, relationships, and other partnerships to assist staff working with the community.
- Returning to CBOs and other community partners after the engagement to thank them for their efforts and to gather additional feedback to improve the partnership with PPS and ensuring an ongoing, sustained relationship.

Finally, PPS should review its communications and determine how best to communicate from a) the district to the schools, their principals and staff, and b) from the district and schools to parents. Results from the *Successful Schools* survey show that many parents prefer text messaging. PPS could consider using a text-based system in multiple languages to alert parents of important district engagement efforts, even simply texting a link.