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PARENT & FAMILY FEEDBACK REPORT

Redesigning Oregon's School and District Report Cards

Abstract

Researchers at the Oregon Department of Education conducted 11 regional focus groups with parents who represent historically underserved student groups in order to better understand how to design Oregon's school and district report cards in a way that is meaningful and easy-to-understand. Simultaneously, ODE sought statewide input through an online survey. This report synthesizes the feedback received from parent and family focus groups and the statewide survey.

Oregon Department of Education

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A Special Thank You to our Partners

A sincere and heartfelt thank you to our partners for bringing together parents and families to engage in such meaningful conversations. You created a space where parents and families felt comfortable to share openly and honestly. They asked questions, listened to one another, and offered their own unique and personal perspective. Thank you for making the focus groups a safe place for individuals to have a voice, and to add to the conversation about improving outcomes for each and every child in Oregon. Organizations who helped make these conversations possible include:

Black Parent Initiative
Migrant Parent Association
National Association for the
Advancement of Colored People
Lincoln County School District
Newberg School District
Parent Teacher Association
Redmond Proficiency Academy
Salem-Keizer Coalition for Equality
Self-Enhancement, Inc.
Siletz Tribe
Woodburn School District

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Executive Summary

Background

Rarely are parents of public school students invited to the decision-making table to contribute to statewide reform efforts. Even more rare is for parents of students who are historically underserved to have access to and contribute to such discussions and decision-making.

Our current education system has historically favored and continues to privilege White students over students of color. Likewise, public institutions systemically favor White students in deliberate and unconscious ways. The inequity between Whites and other non-dominant races is a result of long-standing, systemic, institutional oppression.

The Oregon Department of Education (ODE) is vested in grappling with how to effectively support and sustain systems of teaching and learning across Oregon that allow all students to learn, grow, and thrive. With the opportunity to redesign Oregon's school and district report cards, ODE staff wanted to prioritize hearing directly from parents and families who represent students and student groups who are historically underserved.

Focus Groups

ODE staff traveled to 11 communities to meet with parents, both urban and rural; parents of students of color, (African American, Hispanic and American Indian/Alaska Native); parents of students in special populations, (students with disabilities, students of migrant families, and students attending public charter schools). More than a hundred parents accepted the invitation to join a parent focus group in their local communities to add their voice to the conversation.

A total of 11 parent focus groups were facilitated by ODE researchers during the months of September and October of 2017. A total of 102 parents participated. The groups were small, averaging nine parents per group with as few as four and as many as 13. The groups were made up of parents, grandparents, and family members with children in grades kindergarten through 12. Eight groups were conducted in English and three were conducted in Spanish, with simultaneous translation. Parents were asked to talk about what they want to know about their child's school, what information they needed on the school and district report cards, and shown three sample report cards. Feedback was collected through parent's written and verbal feedback, and both sources were used for this analysis.

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Statewide Survey

In addition to the focus groups, ODE released a statewide survey, available in English and Spanish to solicit broad feedback from across the state about the report card redesign process. The survey was open from August to mid-October of 2017. A total of 570 persons responded. The survey results were analyzed in conjunction with the focus group data as a part of this analysis.

Summary of Findings

ODE conducted this research with the aim of 1.) honoring the voices of parents who represent historically underserved student groups; and 2.) using parent input to drive and inform next steps on Oregon's school and district report card redesign. The findings of this analysis produced three themes which call for ODE to measure the quality and success of a school by focusing on:

1. How schools and/or districts create a welcoming, safe, and inclusive environment for all students and their families;
2. A report card design that is simple, multi-colored, and easy to read and understand;
3. Emphasizing data that is relevant and actionable, school-specific data.

Data currently collected by ODE can be utilized to meet the needs described by parents, though in some cases, the data is not currently collected and/or may be better suited in a narrative written by the school or district leader. The table below illustrates how existing measures may be used to develop a prototype that is representative of the voices and feedback received.

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The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), signed by President Obama on December 10, 2015, replaces the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act and affords states greater flexibility. ESSA encourages schools and educators to innovate and create systems that address local needs. Under the new law, every state including Oregon, was asked to develop and submit a state plan to the U.S. Department of Education. [Oregon's State Plan was approved in August 2017](#). The Plan reflects a shared statewide vision for Oregon's students and schools and is proudly founded on extensive outreach and engagement efforts with thousands of Oregonians, including schools and districts, families and communities, tribal leaders, policymakers, and state agency representatives.

Oregon's Commitments

Central to Oregon's State Plan are key commitments that were generated through the feedback and voices of Oregonians. We believe these commitments serve as the foundational tenants and levers to strengthen and shape our educational system to better serve Oregonians.

1. Prioritize and Advance Equity
2. Extend the Promise of a Well-Rounded Education
3. Strengthen District Systems
4. Foster Ongoing Engagement

Redesigning Oregon's School and District Report Cards

Implementation of Oregon's State Plan under ESSA includes the opportunity to redesign Oregon's school and district report cards. The purpose of redesigning Oregon's Report Card is to ensure families and community members have meaningful and actionable information about their local schools and districts, including their school's approach to learning, academic and extracurricular offerings, and student performance. Reports cards also serve as an important tool for continuous improvement planning by local and state policymakers, in conjunction with the communities they serve. The report card shares data that illustrates a school's strengths and areas for improvement. Through the redesign process, ODE will produce two primary communication tools:

1. **An at-a-glance report card.** A full-color printable communication tool designed specifically for families and community members.
2. **An online, multiple measures dashboard.** A web-based tool will contain detailed information about Oregon schools and districts.

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Engaging Parents and Families First

The Oregon Department of Education sought to identify and engage those parents and families who have not been historically engaged in a public education dialogue. To do so, ODE started by partnering with community-based organizations, tribal leaders and affiliates, and school districts to bring together parents and families who represent historically underserved students:

- Spanish-speaking students
- Native American and Alaska Indian students
- Black and African American students
- Migrant youth
- Rural and low-income students
- Students with disabilities and special needs
- Students attending Charter Schools.

In-Person Focus Groups

The Oregon Department of Education held 11 focus groups throughout the state during the months of September and October of 2017. The purpose of the focus groups was to hear directly from parents and families in order to better understand their thinking in response to the following questions:

1. What is important to you to know about your school?
2. What does a parent and family-friendly report card look like?
3. How can we ensure the report card is valuable to you?

Feedback collected during the parent and family focus groups serve as the foundation for the development of Oregon's School and District Report Card. ODE has committed to a comprehensive and inclusive process for engaging stakeholders; a process that values, elevates, and illuminates voices and perspectives of those historically underrepresented.

Online Survey

In order to garner broad, statewide input, ODE solicited feedback about the report card redesign process through a web-based survey available in English and Spanish from August to mid-October of 2017. The survey was announced through a press release, shared via social media, and communicated through state listservs, including Oregon's superintendents and principals, as well as education partners and agencies in an effort to reach parents, educators, and other interested stakeholders. A total of 570 persons responded, and of those who responded, 72.8 percent identified as women and 26.6 as men. The vast majority of respondents identified as White (84.9%) and 9.1 percent identified their ethnicity as Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish.

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The survey contained a total of 14 closed-ended and one open-ended question, which asked respondents for feedback on:

1. *Use and access:* how and why did respondents use the report card?
2. *Information preferences:* what types of information did respondents want to see on the report card?
3. *Design and Clarity:* what type of design was most appealing to respondents?

Data Collection & Analysis

For the focus groups, participants' hand-written notes, as well as their verbal comments and feedback were the primary sources of data. For the survey, both the quantitative and qualitative (open-ended responses) was collected. The survey data was disaggregated to display parent and non-parent responses. For the purpose of this report, the parent data was collected and analyzed, paying close attention to the responses that shared parents' preferences of information to be displayed on the report card as well as the overall design features.

Data analysts read and coded all data to identify common themes. Content analysis procedures were used to organize the data into major themes and subcategories. The results of this analysis can be open to other interpretations and therefore, cannot be generalizable. A summary of the major themes is outlined below.

Emergent Themes

From the data collected – including what participants said and wrote – three themes emerged, which include:

1. A desire to know more about how a school or district creates a welcoming, safe, and inclusive environment for all students and their families;
2. A design that is simple, multi-colored, and easy to read and understand;
3. A report card that emphasizes progress through relevant and actionable, school-specific data.

Theme 1: A desire to know more about how a school or district creates a welcoming, safe, and inclusive environment for all students and their families

Parents and families consistently talked and wrote about the educational experiences of students in Oregon, and how the entire experience – from the moment they enter the school – to the time spent in class, in extracurricular activities and after-school programming, need to include responsive, supportive staff who create a school culture of respect and inclusivity. The overall school environment and the quality of staff were equally important.

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A Welcoming School Environment

Parents used words like *safe*, *welcoming*, and *engaging* to describe the overall school environment and conditions for learning they would like to see. They asked ODE staff to consider providing data about these conditions in graphical and narrative format on the report cards. They asserted that the best way to understand a schools' environment was to hear directly from parents, students, and staff, preferably through a survey where they could rate their experience and share more in open-ended responses. When participants talked or wrote about "welcoming, safe, and inclusive school environment" they routinely brought up the following:

- **Safety and security matter.** Schools should report out about suspensions and expulsions by student race/ethnicity; schools should have plans in place for conflict resolution and preventing and addressing bullying;
- **Cultivating a space for students to learn life skills.** Ensuring students are equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to problem-solve, innovate, and create. May include access to career and technical education, science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM);
- Offer enrichment opportunities within the school day and after;
- The **importance of class size.** Parents want to know their child is receiving individualized and personalized supports;
- Creating a **school culture and climate that values growth** over proficiency and mastery, as demonstrated by statewide end-of-year tests. While state assessment information was of interest to

parents, they believed that assessment data was only one source of information and did not tell the whole story of a student's learning or a school or district's progress.

Skilled and Compassionate Staff

For parents and families, **staff who have positive attitudes** and **show compassion towards students**, want to come to work every day, and **embody culturally responsive practices** helps to create conditions that are welcoming, safe, and inclusive. When participants talked or wrote about staff and teacher quality they consistently expressed the following as important:

"Schools are an avenue for students to access the world. We have to prioritize getting our children what they need to be successful."
– Black Parent Initiative

"Safety and security matter. The front line staff make all the difference. I want to know that my child is welcomed into a school and (as a parent who doesn't speak English), that I am also welcome."

–Woodburn School District PTA,
Spanish-speaking

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- Valuing **diversity and differences**; the importance of knowing the number of bilingual teachers and the percent of teachers of color;
- Creating opportunities to **support social and emotional learning**;
- Front line (office) staff and teachers make all the difference in a students' experience. **Staff should be expected to build relationships, make connections, and meet students' needs**, particularly with students of color, students with disabilities, and students of low-socioeconomic status;
- An expectation that **teachers and staff have access to professional learning** and a vested interest in improving the school's success overall.

Theme 2: A design that is simple, multi-colored, and easy to read and understand

A second theme calls for a design that is simple, multi-colored, and easy to read and understand. Parents who participated in the focus groups and those who completed the survey were prompted to ask questions after being shown three report card samples – Oregon's current school report card, Illinois' state report card, and Ohio's report card. Parents in the focus groups and those who took the survey responded to questions about design and access.

"Ratings on elements like achievement and school culture are easy to understand. They give me a general idea of how things are going and allow me to ask questions when I want to know more."
– Salem-Keizer Coalition for Equality

The Value of Visuals

When participants talked or wrote about the report cards' design, they expressed the following:

- The need for **color, graphics, and symbols**;
- Information displayed in a way that is **clear, concise, uses white space**;
- Uses ratings or grades (similar to the Ohio school report card sample) to provide a quick way to know how each school or district is doing in specific areas like **graduation, student achievement and growth, English language proficiency, student attendance**.

"The current report card makes you feel like you're 1 in 48,000. I want to feel connected; I want to know this information is relevant and meaningful to me and my kids."

–Portland Public PTA,
Student with Disabilities

Access to Information

Access to information was critical for all parents. The majority of parents participating in a focus group did not frequently access the report card while those who participated in the survey did. Access was expressed in many ways, including:

- **Avoiding use of jargon, acronyms, and detailed graphs**;
- Available in **multiple languages**;

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- **Frequent and useful communication;** shared with parents and families through the mail in addition to being posted online as a web resource;
- **Opportunities to discuss the information In-person** to dialogue with other parents and ask questions of school and district leaders about areas of strength and areas for improvement. Parents suggested a mid-year check-point designed at the district level to discuss progress of the school and/or district;
- **A desire to be a part of the planning, problem-solving, and solution-making;** participants stressed the value of parental involvement;
- Identifies who to contact and where to go to access additional information about the school;
- **Contains a narrative about school initiatives from the principal;**
- Ensures the 2-page document really does share “at a glance” information rather than detailed information that can be found online;

Theme 3: A report card that emphasizes progress through relevant and actionable, school-specific data

Parents want information that is relevant, actionable, and specific to their school and community. They talked specifically about the buckets of information they wanted pertaining to students, teachers, and the overall school as well as special programs and access to services.

Student, Teacher, and School Profile Information

Parents desire information about the school as a whole and the makeup of the teacher and student populations. When they talked about or wrote about what is valuable to them, they often expressed the following:

- Student demographic information, including **percent of students of color, second language-learners, students with disabilities;**
- **School-wide information on funding, attendance, and graduation;**
- Access to **school or district priorities and goals;**
- Teacher and administrator information, including demographic information, years of experience, percent of turnover, training, and median salary;

“It’s important to us to know how schools are spending money. I want to know why that additional money is not helping kids most in need make progress.”
–McMinnville School

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Special Populations, Programs, and Services Available

Parents use the report card to make decisions about where to enroll their child, and for that reason care deeply about how the school and district is addressing gaps between White students and those who are historically underserved. Parents expressed a desire to have access to what programs and services are available, particularly in:

- **Supports for students with disabilities or special needs.** A clear understanding of the methods and practices the school employs to ensure each student is making progress;
- The percent of **students who identify as talented and gifted (TAG)** as well as how those students are being supported;
- Programs and pathways for students whose education journey to graduation takes more than 4-years, and/or includes **dual-enrollment, advancement placement or IB**;
- An understanding of **how community-based organizations and parent organizations can be engaged** in school and district wide planning;
- Access to community-based programs.

Recommendations

ODE must be deliberate in its approach to design a prototype (mock-up) of Oregon’s school and district report cards that represent the voices of parents, particularly those who have contributed to a focus group discussion. The methodology and data presented in this report act as an equity lever to amplify and pay homage to those who are historically underserved and underrepresented. While this study may not represent all those who are and have been historically underserved, the findings serve as a starting point in which to act upon for development of a prototype and deepen ODE’s understanding of the needs of Oregon’s diverse communities.

Continued Engagement

To improve engagement moving forward, ODE should create opportunities to communicate and interface regularly with the organizations who contributed to this study, along with others who support parents, families, and students. One recommendation in advancing this work with fidelity is to ensure parents and families who participated in a focus group or by taking the online survey, have an opportunity to view and reflect on the results. Additionally, upon creating a prototype of the new report card, ODE should conduct further research with parents, families, and educators. Conducting additional research creates an iterative process for stakeholders to see themselves and their voices represented in the final product. Overall, if ODE employs meaningful engagement strategies, the organization will gain a deeper understanding of the barriers and opportunities that exist as a part of the work.

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Summary of Findings

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Themes			
	Theme 1 A desire to know more about how a school or district creates a welcoming, safe, and inclusive environment for all students and their families.	Theme 2 A design that is simple, multi-colored, and easy to read and understand.	Theme 3 A report card that emphasizes progress through relevant and actionable, school-specific data.
Possible Measures	Student achievement, growth progress over time on state tests	Student achievement, growth progress over time on state tests	Student achievement, growth progress over time on state tests
	Students achievement and growth by student group	Students achievement and growth by student group	Students achievement and growth by student group
	Number of 8 th graders passing algebra 1	Number of 8 th graders passing algebra 1	English learners on track and English learner proficiency
	Class size	9 th graders on track to graduate from high school	Number and quality of teachers at the school
	Access to computer science classes, science technology, and other math opportunities;	Number of chronically absent students	Number of school days with at least 5 hours of instruction
	Number of students continuing education	4 year graduation rate	Number of teachers returning to work each year
	Information on curriculum and instruction	5 year graduation rate	Number of principals who remain in a school for at least five years

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Themes		
Career and Technical Education opportunities	Drop out rates	Average per student spending by district
Number of students taught by teachers with similar backgrounds	Statement from principal describing school's performance, including:	Demographic information for all students in a school or district
Statement from principal describing school's performance, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> describing how the school prepares students for job opportunities or post-secondary education; school safety policies; school supports aimed at diverse populations; opportunities for parent or community involvement; how the school prepares students for job opportunities or post-secondary education. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> how the school keeps students on track to graduate. 	Statement from principal describing school's performance, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> how the school keeps students on track to graduate; opportunities for parent or community involvement.

Conclusion

The purpose of the engagement with parents – through focus groups and a web-based survey -- was to garner their feedback and perspective in order to serve as the foundation for Oregon’s school and district report card redesign. The emergent themes discussed, including parents’ desire to know more about the conditions of a school that make it safe and welcoming; a design that is simple and relevant to parents; and an overall report card that presents meaningful and actionable data act as a starting point to develop a prototype of Oregon’s 2-page at-a-glance report card. Additional data will be collected and analyzed from continued stakeholder engagement over the course of the 2017-18 school year.