

Our Schools Coalition

SCHOOL BOARDS AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT: THE CONNECTION

School Board effectiveness is positively correlated with student academic achievement¹. Seattle Public Schools has a laudable goal to “deliver on the dream” for every child, but results have fallen short of district & community aspirations.

ACADEMIC OUTCOMES

While there are literally countless examples of daily triumphs in our local schools, systemic success eludes SPS. Between 2008-2013, Seattle Public Schools hit 0 of its 23 self-defined academic targets.² One in four students does not graduate on time; one in three 9th and 10th graders is below grade level in math; and one in five 3rd graders are below grade level in reading. In 2013-2014, 19 schools declined a level or more in the performance index (8 rose and 60 remained the same).

INSTITUTIONAL INSTABILITY

Over a similar time period, there has been chronic executive turnover. In the last 8 years, SPS has had:³

- 7 chief financial officers
- 7 VPs of human resources
- 7 executive directors of special education
- 10 executive directors of schools
- 5 chief information officers
- 4 Superintendents
- 4 chief academic officers
- 4 chief operating officers
- 4 communications directors
- 3 general counsels
- 2 deputy superintendents
- 20% principal attrition in 2012-2013 alone (36 principals and assistant principals)

[SPS does not conduct exit interviews for departing staff, so no hard data is available to illuminate the reasons and trends behind this turnover]

COMMUNITY ADVOCACY

The Our Schools Coalition (OSC) aims to change this trajectory by building broad-based community awareness of the skills and characteristics common to highly effective School Boards. OSC is Seattle’s largest K-12 education coalition, comprised of a diverse set of community organizations, education advocates, parents, businesses, and elected officials. OSC members employ *collective impact* strategies to improve the quality of education for students in Seattle Public Schools.

Research has identified the skills and characteristics that define an “effective” School Board.⁴ The essential elements are unity, stability, good governance and a cohesive vision for high achievement for all children.⁵ Such a board:

- Works as a whole and does not push the agendas of individual members or constituents
- Has a coherent theory of action for change and advances an agenda consistent with its theory
- Governs by policy and eschews micromanagement
- Focuses on academic outcomes
- Reaches out to its community to build public support and bring resources into the schools
- Hires an effective superintendent/CEO and establishes a close relationship of trust

OSC’s next wave of work will build community awareness around effective School Board leadership in two ways:

- 1. Build a 100-member Board Corps, reflective of the districts’ demography, who are collectively well-versed in the *Core Characteristics of Effective School Boards* (see attached Board Corps “Job Description”);**
- 2. Pro-actively provide non-partisan, independent information on the *Core Characteristics of Effective School Boards* to the 30+ organizations that endorse School Board candidates.**

Your organization is enthusiastically invited to reaffirm your OSC membership, or join anew. Membership entails actively participating in monthly meetings (held in rotating locations around Seattle), recruiting Board Corps volunteers, and contributing time and energy (but not dollars – there are no fees) to achieve the goals we have set together. **Your voice is essential.** Be part of the movement to realize the academic aspirations we have for every student in SPS.

Organization

Contact (name & email)

¹ Seeing the Light. Hilary LaMonte and Mary Delagardelle. 2009.

² Seattle Public Schools District Scorecard, 2012-2013: <http://goo.gl/qjihpS>

³ School Board Director Sherry Carr, Crosscut, April 10, 2012 plus independent tally since then. The ED tally may be low, but no other verifiable figure is available.

⁴ National School Board Association Center for Public Education

⁵ Center for Reform of School Systems, www.crss.org

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"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." - African proverb

COALITION HISTORY

2010: "Coalition 1.0"

Founded in 2010, the coalition originally focused exclusively on collective bargaining between the district and the teachers union, identifying teacher contract reform as a singular point of leverage within SPS to positively impact student outcomes. A [case study](#) analyzed the original effort. Both the Superintendent and union Executive Director credited OSC with a major impact on the final agreement, which for the first time connected student achievement to teacher effectiveness; replaced the binary "satisfactory/unsatisfactory" rating system with a 4-tier performance scale informed by data; and created new career and compensation pathways for teachers, among other changes. The National Council on Teacher Quality said, "Seattle's new teacher contract is a big step forward and a vast improvement over what preceded it."

2013: "Coalition 2.0"

The coalition engaged in a second round of contract reform advocacy in 2013. Results were positive but less dramatic relative to 2010. The ratified agreement sustained the changes made in 2010, but broke little new ground, largely due to the new SPS administration's fairly narrow goals.

2015: "Coalition 3.0"

After the 2013 bargaining cycle, OSC members assessed a range of high-impact levers within public education systems. Compelled by the research demonstrating a clear correlation between School Board quality and student outcomes, the coalition elected to focus on School Board quality.

OUR SCHOOLS COALITION MEMBERS

Organizations:

Alliance for Education
AME Church
America's Edge
Black Education Strategies Roundtable
CCER/Roadmap Project
Centerstone (formerly CAMP)
Democrats for Education Reform
East African Community Services
El Centro de la Raza
Horn of Africa Services
League of Education Voters
Moderate Voice of Parents (MVP)
Partnership for Learning
Powerful Schools
Rainier Scholars
Schools Out Washington
Seattle Alliance of Black School Educators
Seattle Breakfast Group
Seattle Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce
Seattle Student Senate

Stand for Children
Teach for America
Teachers United
Technology Alliance
Urban Impact
Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle
Washington Policy Center
Youth Ambassadors

Individuals:

Councilmember Sally Bagshaw
Councilmember Tim Burgess
Councilmember Sally Clark
Councilmember Bruce Harrell
Councilmember Mike O'Brien
Heidi Bennett, Parent Leader
Mona Bailey, Deputy Superintendent, SPS (*Ret.*)
Steve Sundquist, Fmr Seattle School Board Pres.
Kevin Washington, Tabor 100 Education Chair

For more information, including contacting current coalition members for reference, contact Craig Kanaya at 206-282-1990