

## Salt Lake City Site Progress Report

### Project Summary

#### *Change-making Aims*

The goal of the Salt Lake City Design Research Team is to collaboratively design spaces where families have real, collective impact on school-site decision making and can engage in true collaboration with educators. We have strategically chosen to focus our attentions on School Community Councils (SCCs), state legislated decision making bodies that include parents and educators in designing the school's improvement plan and deciding how to spend money from a state land trust. SCCs are the only mandated avenue for family power in schools, and are not working for the majority of our schools in low-wealth communities and communities of color. In fact, based on our work in Phase 1, it is clear that SCCs are not designed with our families and schools in mind. Our task, then, is to redesign school community councils around principles of equity, partnership, and community welcoming. Within this overarching goal, our research project aims to:

- Build the capacity of schools to be responsive to and impacted by families;
- Build the capacity of families to engage in and support other families in participating effectively and collectively in SCCs;
- Build the capacity of SCC chairs to manage conflict and power in productive and democratic ways; and
- Make SCCs more inviting and welcoming to families that have historically been kept out of decision making (families of color, indigenous families, families of refugee and immigrant background).

Our theory of change is that, with this groundwork in place, SCCs can be used by families to shift the power relationships between schools and communities, and shift schools and their resources toward community-identified priorities. This TOC is drawn from research on parent organizing,<sup>1</sup> and the Dual Capacity Building Framework for family-school partnerships.<sup>2</sup>

#### *Co-Design Process and Partners*

Our local co-design team is made up of the following individuals. We are also in the process of bringing on two community researchers and a second graduate assistant.

- Gerardo Lopez, Professor of Educational Leadership and Policy at the University of Utah, serving as PI for the project.

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<sup>1</sup> Mapp, K. L., & Kuttner, P. J. (2013). *Partners in education: A dual capacity-building framework for family-school partnerships*. Austin, TX: SEDL.

<sup>2</sup> Warren, M. R., Mapp, K. L., & The Community Organizing & School Reform Project (2011). *A match on dry grass: Community organizing as a catalyst for school reform*. Cambridge: Oxford University Press.

- Alma Yanagui, Parent Organizer with University Neighborhood Partners at the University of Utah, engaging local parents in the design process.
- Jennifer Mayer-Glenn, Director of Family-School Collaboration at the Salt Lake City School District, engaging school staff in the design process.
- Paul Kuttner, Associate Director at University Neighborhood Partners at the University of Utah.
- Adebimpe Idowu Deji-Olatunde, local resident leader and University of Utah Graduate Assistant for the project.

Thus far, Phase 2 has consisted in finalizing products developed in Phase 1, and planning a second round of design circles (see *Designing Forward*).

1. During Phase 1, members of our design circles came up with a concept to develop a tool that families could use to engage other families in School Community Councils – a way to explain the what and why of SCCs. Following up on this concept, we convened a smaller design circle of parent leaders to design the tool. We then hired a local artist to produce the final tool, a bilingual comic about SCCs. During the fall design circles we will work with families to develop ways of using and assessing the impact of the comic.
2. During Phase 1 we developed a report outlining a set of principles for SCCs. This document has been presented around the district and across the state, and used as a framework for training educators in supporting family leadership.
3. During Phase 1 we saw that there was a need for ongoing support for school staff and parent leaders running SCCs. Co-design team member Jennifer Mayer-Glenn spearheaded the development of a Professional Learning Community at the district for SCC leaders (both administration and families). This learning community met monthly throughout the school year, and led to the production of a growing set of tools (PowerPoints, documents, etc.) that SCCs can use. This learning community will continue next year.

### ***Learning with Families & Communities***

The work described above has helped to increase momentum around SCCs in our district, our communities, and across the state. There are many more conversations happening about SCCs – their problems and possible solutions. One unexpected result of our design research was greater engagement with the Utah State Board of Education to address systemic barriers that hinder SCC success. We were a part of pushing through a change to state policy that allows SCC trust land funds to be used for a wider array of efforts, including socioemotional wellbeing (a key priority of parents), and for family engagement itself.

Though some schools saw increased family engagement in their SCCs through this process, most of the school communities we work with still struggle to implement the core

principles of equitable parent leadership outlined in our report. Some of the weaknesses of our approach so far have become clear, and we hope to address them in the final stages of Phase 2. In particular, we see the need for:

- More critical and explicit work around how to understand and navigate power in SCCs and family-school collaborations
- More systemic supports such as building community engagement leadership teams at schools.
- More of an iterative, back-and-forth between designing and testing.
- More family voice on our core co-design team.