### ROOTED IN RELATIONSHIPS:

## UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF THE PARENT LEADERSHIP TEAM

An analysis on how PLT participation supports parent leaders' skills, confidence, and community engagement.

2025











## Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

2 METHODOLOGY

3 FINDINGS

1 THEMES

5 CONCLUSION

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

#### Suggested Citation:

Hamidani, K., Dayao, M., & McCowan, K. (2025). (rep.). Rooted in Relationships: Understanding the Impact of the Parent Leadership Team. Community Center for Education Results Renton, WA.



## Introduction

The Parent Leadership Team (PLT) was created to center and elevate the voices of parents as partners and leaders in education systems. The PLT is an organized group of 10 parent leaders across the Road Map Region, uniting parents from seven school districts to pursue equitable change and sustainable partnerships in family engagement. As community leaders, PLT members advocate for families, foster equity, diversity, and inclusion in education, and collaborate with teachers, families, and community partners to strengthen student success. They are deeply committed to supporting family leadership, helping families navigate systems, and accessing critical resources.

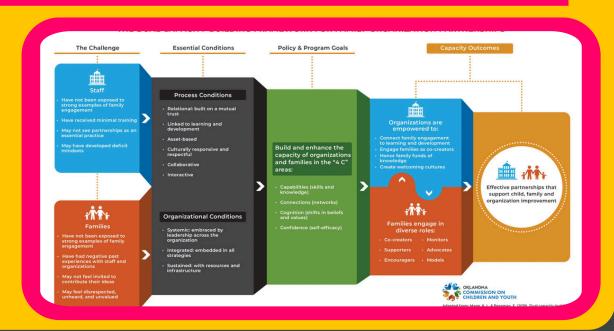
This analysis looks at the deeper impacts of how involvement in the PLT has enhanced parent leaders' skills, knowledge, and connections with the overarching goal to understand how participation in the Parent Leadership Team supports capacity building among parent leaders. The conversations led by researchers at the Community Center for Education Results explore what specific skills parents developed, what knowledge they gained about the education systems, how their confidence shifted towards advocacy, and how individuals' networks expanded within the community.

This report highlights the transformative impact of intentional, relationship-based family engagement. It demonstrates how this approach empowers parents to use their experiences and voices as informed decision-makers, advocates, and leaders who drive equitable change in their schools and communities.



## Methodology

FRAMEWORK FOR FAMILY- SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS



Researchers surveyed 12 parents and interviewed 10 parents from the Parent Leadership Team (PLT), Survey design and interview protocol were developed using the Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnership. he survey explored six key constructs: Collaboration, Engagement, Respect, Mutual Trust, Cultural Responsiveness, and Asset-Based Mindsets and Skills. Specific survey questions including a summary of results are highlighted on the next page. The interview protocol was designed to explore the impact of PLT involvement on the development of parent leaders' capacities, capabilities, cognitions, and confidence.

Through semi-structured interviews, the qualitative analysis draws on participant-centered narratives that focus on skill development, capability expansion, knowledge of school systems and resources, network-building, confidence, and self-efficacy. Each interview was conducted for one hour via Zoom, recorded, and transcribed for analysis. Parent responses were then coded to identify patterns, ranging from early stages of volunteering or participating with limited confidence, to later experiences of facilitating meetings, advocating for others, and serving as trusted community leaders. These themes provide insight into how parents grew as leaders, gaining not only knowledge and confidence but also the ability to engage as informed decision-makers, advocates, and agents of change in their communities.

## **Key Themes**

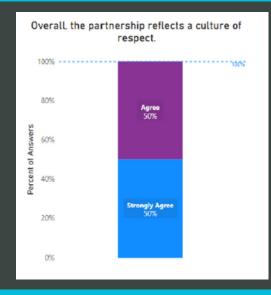








## Survey Highlights



#### RESPECT

#### **Select Survey Items**

- Sense of feeling valued as a member of the group
- Being treated with respect
- Ability to openly discuss any concerns
- There is a culture of respect



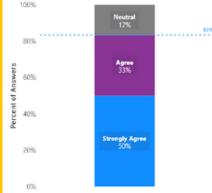
### ENGAGEMENT Select Survey Items

Comfortability expressing onesself authentically

- Access to training opportunities
- Participation is meaningfu
- Communication
- Inclusion in decision making

# My participation in the collective is meaningful to me. 100% 80% Agree \$0% \$0% \$40% \$20% Strongly Agree \$25%

### I feel comfortable expressing myself authentically and/or bringing my full self.



#### **CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE**

#### **Select Survey Items**

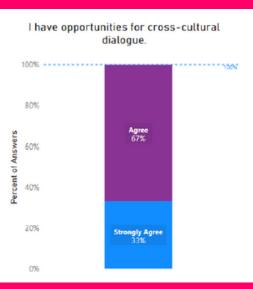
Documentation offered in my native language

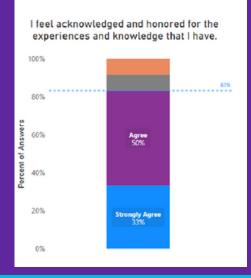
- Opportunities to learn about other cultures
- Opportunities for crosscultural dialogue

#### **COLLABORATION**

#### Select Survey Items

- Encouraged to share my thoughts without fear of judgement
- Culture fosters growth mindset- open to learning and evolving
- Culture is flexible and adaptable





## Collective Strength Through Relationship

## EXPANSION OF CONNECTIONS

A key impact of the Parent Leadership team is its role in fostering meaningful relationships among parent leaders, educators, and community organizations. When interviewing parents on the team, they mentioned that the PLT provided a strong support network, allowing them to connect with parents facing similar challenges. One parent noted that "Before the PLT, I would get frustrated and try do everything and talk to myself. When I started with the PLT, I learned from other parents, and I would share information with other parents as well." This sense of peer collaboration helped reduce feelings of isolation and created space among parents that allowed them to share insights, strategies, and experiences which supported them in advocating for their children's needs in schools. Through these connections and relatable experiences within the education systems, parents were able to gain confidence in themselves and advocate not only at a school level but also became more engaged with school administrators and district leaders. A parent reflected, "I have gained this skill of opening and using my voice, knowing how to have conversations with districts, principals." Many parents in their interviews mentioned that this sense of community helped them gain a sense of belonging in the education system, which resulted in being more comfortable and confident to be able to effectively advocate on their children a behlfs

"The system put us people of color against each other and we are starting to engage and particpate more."



## Strenghting Skills for Collective Impact

#### **SKILL DEVELOPMENT**

Parents share that they have gained self-confidence by leveraging their voice to advocate for their children and families. For example, one parent shared that they "... learned to speak up and don't be shy because this is for my kids. You know, this is not just for the community. This is ...not just for my kids. It's for everybody." Another parent echoed that: "I would say yes, I am [more confident], more of a listener and an observer. And then I only speak up when I feel that I have to, but now, I feel that I am a little bit more confident in who I am as a person. And that my identity is it's not that I'm alone, but it's intertwined with the people that I communicate with. And that what I have to say, is just as important as the next person." They gained strength in the collective, knowing that their voice and their work extends beyond their own children, their own school, their own district and that each person's voice is needed to make an impact.

In addition to learning the importance of using their voice, participants also learned how to put their experiences at the forefront when facilitating discussions with aligned partners, school administrators, educators, and community members. Parents had the opportunity to lead conversations, connect and interact with individuals outside of the PLT, and have meaningful, relatable conversations. A parent shared, "we were invited to be table facilitators. So I have the opportunity to know other people from other organizations and also from other cultures. I really like that part because that way we know more about own challenges and how we can work together." From technology skills gained through the necessity of meeting during a pandemic to finding confidence in using their voices, the participants learned and grew due to their own determination while being supported by their peers.

"I learned that and I encourage...you're a parent, but you can still learn new skills and be a leader too. I feel more confident to talk to people and explain ideas."

YOU [NEED TO] KNOW THE

SYSTEM IN ORDER TO HELP THE

CHILDREN."

#### KNOWLEDGE GROWTH

Many parents shared that prior to the PLT, they had identified barriers in the education system but were unaware how to best engage, they just knew that they had to. A parent stated,"What got me involved was when it was relating to young people, [...] And I saw that we had a lot of problems with our special needs kids, that we had adopted family members, and we found it very difficult to navigate the school district." Their time with the PLT provided exposure to more schools, administrators, and district leaders in the region, which broadened their knowledge of school systems and policies that made navigating a once daunting system a little less daunting. One parent shared the importance of learning more in-depth about school systems and policies, "I definitely got a new knowledge of systems... what it's supposed to look like and how it actually works... Just building rapport with people like OSPI or Washington State Board of Education...I have a little bit of access, which I never thought that I would have." Through their deeper understanding of the education system and their new knowledge of how to navigate these systems, parents were able to communicate directly with stakeholders whom they would not have had access to previously.

For Spanish-speaking parents in the group, there is still much work to be done for inclusive support in the education system. One parent shared,

"...here in United States you know, in Washington, there's a lot of [re]sources that we sometimes trust that a school will provide everything for our kids and then we realize that because they have a lot of children they don't... There is a lot of things to take care when there are [a lot of protocols that they have to follow. I think I'm not saying that school failed... I just learn that like me as a Spanish person, you are sometimes invisible so you have to learn, you [need to] know the system in order to help the children."

Due to these gaps in support and feeling excluded in the existing system, community resources and collective knowledge become even more important. Another Spanish-speaking parent shared, "[Y]ou are the voice for your community. You can make your changes in your community, and you go share everything you learn here and...you gotta know the steps and you want to get a result where you can go and answer and get extra support from other parents [when] you need." For parents who are speakers of other languages, the lack of translation services is yet another barrier in their understanding and navigation of the American education system.



## From Skill To Action

INCREASED AGENCY AND
APPLIED LEADERSHIP

#### CAPABILITY BUILDING

Parents described significant growth in their confidence as it relates to using their skills because of their engagement in the Parent Leadership Team (PLT). Through interviews, parents described entering the Parent Leadership Team with little to no prior experience holding formal roles; however, through their experience of PLT, they slowly started stepping into positions where they facilitated meetings, led discussions and supported other families in the community through the education system. One parent stated that their motivation to join the PLT was "to learn everything about the school system... I wanted to understand, to participate and help my kids." This motivation translated from intention to applied leadership, as parents began actively engaging in school and community settings. For many parents, PLT became a space where they not only learned new concepts but also had opportunities to practice and apply them in real-world contexts. One parent shared how they are now seen as a resource in their school community, stating, "...you know, and, and most of them they didn't speak any English. So what I did I created a WhatsApp group. So in all the time I used to send paperwork to them in Spanish, so that way, they will know what's going on in the school."

This level of engagement and shared experience illustrates parents having increased agency and applied leadership, a key foundational component of capacity building work. Through these experiences, parents grew in their ability to connect learning with action, strengthen partnerships with educators and organizations, and influencing their communities in impactful ways. The PLT is a space where parents are not only encouraged to lead but are provided the tools, guidance, and opportunities to leverage their voices and practice leadership with purpose and impact.

## ROOTED IN RELATIONSHIP, GROWING IN COMMUNITY, WORKING AS PARTNERS

#### **HEALTHY PARTNERSHIPS**

In terms of healthy partnership there is collective agreement that the most common aspects include communication, relationship, and shared goals. In general parents described that there must be good communication. In fact, one member noted that "good communication isn't enough; it has to be great communication ". Participants also prioritize relationship building as a core component of healthy partnership, noting that transparency, respect and authenticity are central characteristics that define high quality engagement. The importance of shared goals within the partnership was also a major theme that emerged from the interviews with PLT members. In describing their collective endeavors, one parents noted that "together we are stronger, we share our goals". In this respect, mission alignment is a necessary aspect of creating shared goals.

PLT members described how it was necessary for them to be a cohesive unit before inviting aligned partners into this work. One parent noted that "I think our whole just progression and work [was] just learning each other first, and then we were able to open it up to the aligned partners". Creating a healthy culture internally, among the PLT was essential to establish before inviting the aligned partners. The sense of unity among the PLT helped set the tone for the entire partnership. With a solid culture in place, members noted that it became easier to voice their concerns and make informed decisions.

In terms of how the aligned partners engage in the partnership, PLT participants agreed that attendance and consistency must be prioritized among all members within the partnership. One key challenge was related to consistency in participation among the aligned partners and the ways in which the lack of consistency impacted the ability to sustain relationships. One parent noted that "to me that was the most challenging part, you know, because we develop relationships with individuals in the partnership and then all of a sudden they're not there anymore". Beyond consistency in attendance, members noted more specifically the quality of how all members show up, noting that "being fully present" within the full collective meetings is crucial. For example, one parent noted that "if you're going to be an aligned partner, you need to be here with it, you're not just showing up". This illustrates that being in attendance alone is insufficient; rather, full engagement during attendance is necessary.

Furthermore, parents described how being present meant showing up authentically as a person, rather than as a title or role that they occupy within their organizations. For example, one participant stated that, "I would say showing up and not so much as floating our titles around, but just being in the space being ourselves". This highlighted the non-hierarchical culture that the PLT is trying to create within the partnership.

## ROOTED IN RELATIONSHIP, GROWING IN COMMUNITY, WORKING AS PARTNERS

#### **OVERCOMING CHALLENGES**

With every partnership, challenges are commonplace. Adapting to time constraints, creating space for discussions and dialogue, communicating with clarity and understanding were key themes that emerged as parent leaders described how they navigated challenging moments as they arose within the partnership. Reflecting on early moments in the partnership, some members described a sense of disconnect between PLT participants and Aligned Partners. The disconnect emerged from the perception that PLT members were not fully aware of the work at the aligned partners we're engaged in within their various organizations. For example, one parent noted that "when they [aligned partners] are participating in the meeting with the [assumption] that we don't know too much or know little about what they are doing". While PLT participants may not have been fully aware of the unique work that aligned partners engaged in, there was a recognition that through partnership, understanding of their work will be made clear. Illustrating this point, one parent stated, "but when you are participating in something [...] you learn more", noting that engaging in the partnership itself is where the learning occurs.

Parent also described the role of communicating amid disagreement. One member noted that "you know it's OK to be in disagreement, but it's how you disagree". This highlighted the role of clarity and communication with one another, recognizing that there will not always be agreement and that the key to moving through moments of disagreement means that everyone is demonstrating transparency and clarity. Finally, parents also described the value of group discussions and brainstorming sessions, and how these were essential activities that enabled the progression of the partnership. A parent described an experience where members were asked to write something that is challenging on chart paper and continued to describe how sharing collective ideas was generative in the midst of exploring challenges. Noting that as a result of this activity, "we can make new goals. New ideas. New opportunities".



WE CAN MAKE NEW GOALS. NEW IDEAS. NEW OPPORTUNITIES ".

## From Parents to Community Leaders: what we gained, what we built

The Parent Leadership Team demonstrates the transformative power of intentional, relationship-centered family engagement. Grounded in the Dual Capacity-Building Framework, the PLT supported parents in expanding their knowledge of educational systems and policies while building confidence, leadership capacity, and the ability to advocate for equitable change in their schools and communities. Their participation led to a deeper understanding of school systems and supported them in navigating previously inaccessible systems. Many parents experienced a shift in agency, developing the confidence to advocate not only for their own kids but for broader community needs. As one parent shared, "I'm really grateful for everything that they gave us—tools to speak up and help others." The PLT created meaningful relationships both among parents within the team and with educators and community organizations, which reduced isolation and fostered collective learning. Members emphasized the value of consistency, transparency, and authenticity in partnerships and highlighted the importance of shared goals and mutual respect in building strong collaborative spaces. Even through challenges, parents described how the importance of open communication and group reflection helped turn difficulties into opportunities for growth. Ultimately, the Parent Leadership Team shows what is possible when parents are positioned as leaders, leveraging their voices, lived experiences, and insights, making it an essential tool for creating equitable and responsive education systems.

