Community Reflections on Diversity

March 2016

In the past 15 years, the communities served by the Northshore School District (NSD) have experienced significant change, becoming more ethnically and economically diverse. New families from South East Asia have joined the school community. Latinos make up a growing share of all Northshore families. And African American, East Asian, and White families are represented across many district schools. In short, NSD increasingly reflects the emerging diversity of the Northwest region.

As part of ongoing efforts to create a positive environment for all students, families and staff, NSD has commissioned Education Northwest, a nonprofit research organization, to produce a series of equity data briefs. These briefs examine perceptions of the social and academic climate in district schools, as well as variation across key academic outcomes. They will inform school district programs and are an important piece of NSD’s equity and diversity action plan.

This data brief describes how Northshore families and staff experience the growing diversity in their community, as well as the opportunities and challenges it raises.

About the project

This report is part of the larger NSD Equity Data Briefs project. This series addresses two key questions:

1. What are the social and academic experiences of various communities and families in NSD?
2. How well is NSD serving the academic needs of all students?

Topics covered in this series include:

- Community reflections on diversity
- Bullying
- Student suspensions
- College and high school readiness
- Support and expectations across academic programs
Key Findings

• Overall, parents believe their child’s culture is valued and that cultural barriers can be addressed. Most parents also feel that their family is welcome at school.

• Parents of children of color are more likely than White parents to report that more could be done to make their families feel welcome.

• African American and Latino parents are more likely than other parents to indicate not feeling welcome is an obstacle to participating in school activities.

• Parents, students, and staff feel that all cultures are generally respected, but ethnic diversity is not explicitly acknowledged or valued in schools.

• Parents, students, and staff report that Northshore’s ethnic diversity is not reflected in school curricula.

• Parents, students, staff, and administrators believe that diversity training would be useful for district staff.

• Parents appreciate and value opportunities to celebrate different cultural traditions.

• Some parents and staff believe that too many accommodations have been made to make holiday celebrations inclusive.
Data Details

This series is based on three data sources: community focus groups, parent surveys, and district administrative data. In the focus groups and surveys, respondents were asked to share their perspectives on several topics about NSD schools, including: welcoming and inclusive cultures, fair treatment of students, academic and social support, bullying, participation, and academic expectations. Surveys were available in both English and Spanish. Analysis of district administrative data included indicators of college readiness, high school transition, school discipline, and early elementary academic performance.

Parent surveys

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<th>School level</th>
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<td>Junior high</td>
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<tr>
<td>High school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Missing/Other</td>
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<td>&lt;1</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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<th>Count</th>
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<tr>
<td>Inglemoor Pathway Schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>Missing/Other</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3,200</td>
<td>100</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent race/ethnicity</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>East Asian American</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>4.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Asian American</td>
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<td>4.8</td>
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<td>African American</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>1.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Latino American</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>3.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>3.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>2,216</td>
<td>69.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>339</td>
<td>10.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>2.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total across all race/ethnicities</td>
<td>3,200</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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Community focus groups

54 focus groups in total
375 participants
32 parent focus groups, one per NSD school
9 student focus groups, one per junior high and high school
6 teacher focus groups
1 administrator focus group
8 culturally specific community focus groups

District trends

- Participation in advanced high school coursework
- Participation in SAT
- Attendance in selective grades
- Course performance in selective grades
- Suspensions
- Grade 3 test scores
Evidence
Overall, parents believe their child’s culture is valued and that cultural barriers can be addressed. Most parents also feel that their family is welcome at school.

In the parent survey, respondents were asked to share their perceptions about their child’s school environment. More than 92 percent of parents agreed or strongly agreed that their child’s culture and language were valued by the school (see Figure 1). In addition, 91 percent thought that staff and parents are able to overcome cultural barriers. The majority of parents also feel their family is welcome in their school (see Figure 2). Across all respondents, 90 percent of parents agreed or strongly agreed that their child feels as if they belong at the school. Eighty-nine percent of parents reported they were greeted warmly when they called or visited the school.

In focus groups, participants across multiple backgrounds also expressed feeling that their culture was respected in schools. “I have never had a problem or had a feeling that the school is disrespectful,” one parent shared. “I cannot even recall a situation where that came up as a question.”

**Figure 1. Most parents feel schools value their child’s culture**

- My child’s culture and language are valued by the school
  - Strongly disagree: 3%
  - Disagree: 5%
  - Agree: 56%
  - Strongly agree: 36%

- At this school, staff and parents are able to overcome cultural barriers
  - Strongly disagree: 2%
  - Disagree: 7%
  - Agree: 64%
  - Strongly agree: 27%

**Figure 2. Most parents feel their child has a sense of school belonging**

- My child feels like he/she belongs in school
  - Strongly disagree: 3%
  - Disagree: 8%
  - Agree: 47%
  - Strongly agree: 43%

- I am greeted warmly when I call or visit the school
  - Strongly disagree: 2%
  - Disagree: 8%
  - Agree: 48%
  - Strongly agree: 41%

Percent of Northshore District parents who indicated:
- ■ Strongly disagree
- ▲ Disagree
- □ Agree
- ▪ Strongly agree

Note: N = 3,200 Northshore District parents.
Parents of children of color are more likely than White parents to report that more could be done to make their families feel welcome.

In the survey parents were asked if they felt that more could be done to make their family feel welcome. More than half of the parents of children of color agreed or strongly agreed that schools could do more (see Figure 3). This view was reported most often by parents with African American or Latino children (59 percent). In contrast, 33 percent of parents of White children reported that their school could do more to make their family feel welcome.

Figure 3. More than half of the parents of children of color report that schools could do more to make their families feel welcome

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/ethnicity</th>
<th>Agree or strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American (N=34)</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino (N=97)</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Asian (N=134)</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Asian (N=126)</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (N=503)</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White (N=1,642)</td>
<td>33</td>
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</table>

Note: Vertical dash represents the district average. Differences between groups were statistically significant (p = 0.000). The racial/ethnic group ‘Other’ includes respondents who identified their child as other race, as other, Native American, or multiracial.

“I’m White and my adopted daughter is Hispanic. She struggles in school, and teachers take a certain tone with her. They change their tone when they find out I’m not Hispanic.”

Junior high parent
African American and Latino parents are more likely than other parents to indicate that not feeling welcome is an obstacle to participating in school activities.

The parent survey asked respondents to indicate what obstacles keep them from participating in school activities. Overall, 17 percent of parents selected “I don't feel welcome” as a major or minor obstacle to their involvement (see Figure 4). African American and Latino parents, however, were more likely to select this option than other parents. Nearly 30 percent of these parents reported not participating in school activities because they did not feel welcome.

Figure 4. Nearly 30 percent of African American and Latino parents reported “I don’t feel welcome” as an obstacle to participating in school activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent indicating not feeling welcome as a major or minor obstacle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>445</td>
<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>2166</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>East Asian</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Asian</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>13</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: Vertical dash represents the district average. Differences between groups were statistically significant (p = 0.000). The racial/ethnic group ‘Other’ includes respondents who identified their race as other, Native American, or multiracial.

Be proactive in engaging and getting to know parents, especially parents from diverse backgrounds. Embrace our growing, diverse community! The school should be a place and leader in the community to create a space for parents to get to know each other.

Elementary parent
Parents, students, and staff feel that all cultures are generally respected, but ethnic diversity is not explicitly acknowledged or valued in schools.

Although the Northshore community has become more ethnically diverse in recent years, many focus group participants noted that this change is not explicitly acknowledged by schools. Parents described the school community as having a “colorblind” culture, in which people do not want to see or talk about difference. In addition, parents reported that while schools do not disrespect individual ethnic communities, they do not explicitly value ethnic diversity either. Similarly, teachers across multiple focus groups said Northshore schools do not explicitly value diversity and do not have intentional strategies for working with a multiethnic community. Quotes are taken directly from focus groups.

“There is not so much a blatant lack of respect, but something more subtle. I do not feel acknowledged. People tend to see themselves as colorblind and do not talk about racial issues.”
Elementary parent

“We have a colorblind culture, not racist. Not devaluing groups, just not seeing differences.”
Elementary parent

“It kind of hits you in the face about how diverse our school is, but the opportunity I think our school misses is honoring the diversity.”
Elementary parent

“There is a lack of intentionality about valuing diversity. Nothing is being done in a coherent, organized, or intentional way to address diversity.”
High school teacher

“The principal at our school has taken a ‘colorblind’ approach to diversity. This has resulted in the ending of many cultural celebrations.”
Parent

“Diversity is more like an unspoken thing. We respect it, but it’s not like we are talking about it in staff meetings.”
Elementary teacher

“Teachers described an overall tone of neutrality toward cultural diversity where no one is disrespected, but diversity is not embraced.”
Elementary teacher

“Northshore has fallen behind other districts in valuing diversity and is trying to catch up.”
High school teacher
Students, parents, and teachers feel Northshore’s ethnic diversity is not reflected in school curricula.

Several focus groups participants highlighted that academic instruction in Northshore does not incorporate the history, experiences, or perspectives of all the communities served by the district. When lessons do include information about the experiences of communities of color, it is usually because of the efforts of individual teachers, rather than shared approaches in academic departments or schools. Parents and teachers recommended incorporating lessons on different groups into the general curriculum so that it is not seen as an add-on.

“This school is majority White and doesn't celebrate Black History month. I recently moved to this district and have forgotten a lot of the Black history I learned at my previous school. I even forgot which month is Black History month, since it is not recognized here.”
Junior high student

“Culture has not traditionally been involved in the class material. It is just not addressed. But it is important for students to gain awareness, especially in light of what is going on in the world.”
Elementary parent

“Embed diversity into everyday teaching and integrate it into the curriculum. It shouldn’t be taught as a standalone or become ‘otherized.’”
Elementary parent

“Because there is no social studies curriculum, it is up to teachers whether or not to incorporate different cultures into the curriculum. Addressing multicultural themes in the curriculum used to be a building goal, but now it’s more trivialized and taught at a surface level.”
Elementary teacher

As diverse as we have become, teachers never integrate diversity into the curriculum. There is an overall lack of acknowledgment by teachers.
High school parent
Many parents, students, teachers, and administrators believe that diversity training would be useful for district staff.

Given the absence of intentional approaches for working with Northshore’s diverse school community, many people recommended the district provide school staff with diversity training. People believe such training would improve communication with families and provide teachers with more tools for serving their students.

“Teachers and staff always go in with positive intent, but don’t always know how to best respond. [They] need training. Staff and administrators need more professional development and established ways of ensuring diversity is valued.”
Administrator

“Increased communication and training would help increase how the school values diversity.”
Elementary parent

“We need tools and strategies to address issues of diversity in a culturally sensitive, appropriate way.”
High school teacher

“We think the district should provide training to school staff, front office staff, as well as the PTA volunteers to engage with parents and students from diverse cultural backgrounds.”
Elementary parent

The faculty and staff can be better trained to identify and respond to the needs of children who aren’t from White, wealthy, educated families.
High school teacher
Parents appreciate and value opportunities to celebrate different cultural traditions.

Many parents, regardless of background, were very positive about multicultural events held at schools, such as evening events centered on food and culture. All parents who spoke felt that these events were positive, showcased the diversity of the school, and introduced others to the positive contributions introduced by various cultures. Parents would like schools to create more opportunities to share their cultural traditions.

“This school does an excellent job overall. It would be great to see more culturally relevant activities.”
High school parent

“At our school, a teacher hosted a potluck and parents ended up bringing their traditional food [from different countries]. All the parents were really excited about the event. Creating these types of exchanges would help people feel more respected.”
Elementary parent

“Activities like the International Fair should be more common at schools across the district.”
Elementary parent

“Cultural events make people feel welcome and respected.”
Junior high school parent

“We loved International Night. We thought it was good for the community, getting the kids to know different cultures, getting everybody to know that we’re different but we’re all one. It helps the whole community know that diversity is good.”
Elementary parent
Some parents and staff believe that too many accommodations have been to make holiday celebrations inclusive.

A small but vocal group of White parents and staff felt disrespected because students are prohibited from celebrating “traditional American holidays,” such as Halloween, Christmas, and Valentine’s Day. They believe the multiple accommodations for other communities has disrupted the school community. They also worry that the policies restricting celebrations make students feel uncomfortable and anxious because they no longer know what is appropriate.

For the most part, parents from other cultures did not feel disrespected that their holidays were not celebrated. However, they did want them to be acknowledged and publicized, so that teachers would understand why students were missing school. For example, Muslim parents had to request time off for their students during holidays each year and wondered why those holidays were not included on all school calendars.

“Changes to school policies—to celebrate or not celebrate holidays such as Halloween or Thanksgiving—deprive the majority of the kids the opportunity to have fun.”
High school parent

“Policies that prohibit students from celebrating traditional holidays, such as Halloween, Christmas, and Valentine’s Day are disrespectful. The new policies make kids feel uncomfortable and anxious at school because they don’t know what they might get in trouble for … It disrupts the sense of community at the school.”
Elementary parent

“There are new policies about how we should not celebrate specific holidays. There is too much trying to make everyone happy, and that is killing the fun for the kids. Every year they say we have ‘Harvest Party’ or ‘November Party’ and then some people have restrictions. My family is into enjoying festivals. We’ll celebrate Indian Independence Day and American Independence Day. I think 95 percent of kids want to do it, and then some kids cannot participate.”
High school parent

“[Celebrating holidays] is a big part of American culture. We live in America, and that’s part of our culture. And I think sometimes people feel like: What about our traditions, what about our culture? We’re so worried about accommodating people who are coming from other places, but are we then losing our sense of what our culture is and our own traditions?”
High school teacher

“Why can’t Muslim students enjoy their holidays like kids from other backgrounds? Other religions are considered in the calendar, so people can get holidays off and they can enjoy their holiday.”
High school parent
Education Northwest works to transform teaching and learning in the Pacific Northwest and across the nation. Our services to states, districts, schools, community-based organizations, and foundations include rigorous research and evaluation of new and existing programs; research-based technical assistance in areas such as equity, school improvement, and distance learning; widely acclaimed professional development in the fields of literacy and mathematics education; and strategic communications that maximize impact.

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