



Strengthening School Community Outreach Workers in the West Contra Costa Unified School District

Marina Balleria

West Contra Costa Unified School District

ISSUE

In the 2016-17 school year, the West Contra Costa Unified School District (WCCUSD) expanded their School Community Outreach Worker (SCOW) position to full time. SCOWs serve as the primary parent-school liaison. However, the Community Engagement Department has observed that SCOWs are struggling to perform elements of their job description because they are being asked to do unrelated activities by school staff.



Ideally, SCOWs would be able to focus on empowering parents and students.

- SCOWs **empower parents to foster student learning at home.**
- SCOWs act as the **central mediator** between families and schools.
- SCOWs identify and **take steps to improve** issues within schools.
- **Connect parents to community** resources.

Currently, SCOWs face conflicting priorities depending on their school site.

- SCOWs are being asked to do activities **outside of their job description.**
- Bilingual SCOWs often act as **translators.**
- SCOW **responsibilities vary** depending upon community and school context.
- **Principals have differing conceptions** of SCOWs' purpose within building.

This project aims to answer:

How can the Community Engagement Department empower SCOWs?

METHODS

SCOW & Principal Survey—I developed an online survey to compare how SCOWs and principals rank the same list of common challenges and goals. Questions were created based on interviews with SCOWs. 68% of SCOWs and 30% of principals responded.

District Leadership Interviews—Interviews with school districts in St. Louis, San Francisco, Denver, New Orleans and Memphis were used for both benchmarking purposes and to





identify any success stories. Districts were chosen to reflect a range of contexts and experiences with the community worker model.

Literature Review—Literature review drew from findings across disciplines on community engagement and applied findings to the WCCUSD context.

FINDINGS

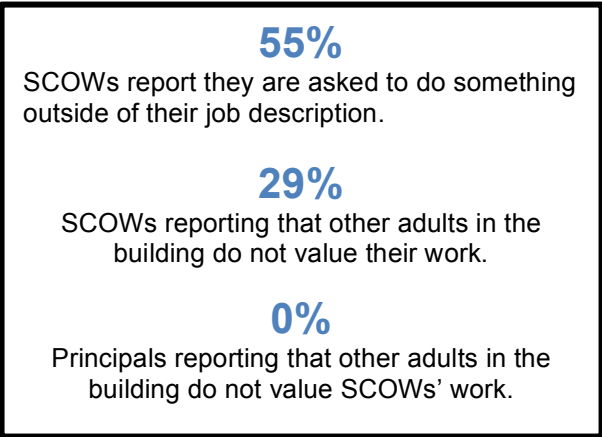
Disconnect between principals and SCOWs.

Principals and SCOWs shared some goals, however, they had differing notions of SCOW's responsibilities.

Similar, yet distinct goals. SCOWs articulated a proactive approach to empowering parents and identifying community resources while principals prioritized on-campus assistance and increased parent involvement.

Diverging ideas about barriers. Principals thought that SCOWs were juggling conflicting responsibilities from different bosses. SCOWs instead reported issues with other adults in the building and being asked to perform duties outside of their job description.

Takeaway There is a lack of clarity between principals and SCOWs about their goals and contributions, and SCOWs feel undermined in their work by school staff and leadership.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Long-term: Create a shared understanding of goals and barriers between SCOWs and principals.

- Create a consistent feedback process that is uniform across all school-sites.
- Continually remind principals of the purpose and contributions of SCOWs.
- Department of Community Engagement & principals will have a shared understanding of each SCOW's contributions to the school.

Short-term: Monthly reports provide a platform for accountability, transparency and support.

SCOWs already track their activities. This information can be collated into a monthly report to be shared during monthly one-on-one meetings with principals:

- Number of parents, staff and students served.
 - Demonstrates impact to principal in clear, concrete terms.
 - Allows principal to monitor progress and find any discrepancies between observed activity and reported activity.
- Percentage time spent on each Family Engagement activity.
 - Tracks time spent on school and district priorities. Highlights time spent on activities that do not align with priorities.
- Challenges & highlights for the month.
 - Creates an open-ended forum for SCOWs to promote specific successes.
 - Allows principals and SCOWs to troubleshoot any challenges

