



# Garfield Elementary Listening Campaign

## Structure

In October 2011, a “Core Team” of 15 people was formed to conduct a listening campaign with Garfield Elementary School families, under the leadership of Principal Nima Tahai and East Bay Asian Youth Center (EBAYC) Director Jamie Lopez. The Core Team consisted of parents, EBAYC staff, classified staff, Principal Tahai,



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and Liz Sullivan, a community organizer contracted by EBAYC. Some of the Core Team members also served on the School Site Council and English Language Advisory Committees, although the Core Team was an ad hoc group working independently of traditional school structures. The Core Team decided to integrate the listening campaign process with the district’s School Quality Review (SQR) self-study as much as possible to avoid duplicative, parallel efforts. The goal of the listening campaign was to create a unifying vision and values statement to guide dramatic improvement in achievement for Garfield students.

## Listening Process

In October and November 2011, 277 Garfield parents and 182 4th- and 5th-grade students completed written surveys. In January, the Core Team conducted 134 face-to-face meetings with parents. The parents who participated in the survey and in the one-on-one visits represented the diversity of Garfield: Latino/a, Vietnamese, African American, Chinese, Khmer, Filipino, Pacific Islander,

Portuguese, Mien, Native American, and others. In addition, Sullivan conducted one-on-one visits with 23 teachers and classified staff.

## Findings

From the surveys and one-on-one meetings, the Core Team learned that families:

- think highly of teachers and the principal;
- like the after-school programs run by EBAYC and Oakland Parks and Recreation;
- appreciate the programs and services that are offered through the parent center and the preschool programs; and
- like the programs and services available for children with disabilities.

When parents were asked to “dream big” for their children, they consistently expressed that they want their children to be caring people who graduate from college and get good jobs.

Families expressed concerns about the academic level of the school. Many would like to see more challenging curriculum and homework. Parents would like to see stronger relationships and better communication between the school and the home. They also mentioned the need for more supervision on the yard, especially before school.

Most teachers felt the school was starting to move in the right direction, but they expressed concern about the uneven level of instruction from classroom to classroom and dissatisfaction with the quality of collaboration among teachers.

### **Achievement Data Analysis by Subgroup**

In February, the Core Team looked at achievement data for the entire school, and for racial subgroups, and discovered that there was a significant achievement gap between Asian students and African American students, and a smaller but still sizable achievement gap between Asian students and Latino/a students. This brought up difficult feelings, and the Core Team took the month of February to create a values framework that would help guide conversations with parents about unequal outcomes between subgroups. The Core Team decided that a “turnaround” strategy, associated with more rapid achievement gains, was preferable to a slower incremental approach of “school improvement.”

### **Vision and Values Statement**

To undertake school turnaround, the school needed a powerful, unifying vision and a common set of values to guide the work. After studying the themes that emerged in the parent surveys and the one-on-one visits, the Core Team distilled a vision and four values. The Core Team then collaborated with teachers to refine the statement. The final version is: **ALL Garfield students will grow into caring and creative adults prepared to graduate from college and succeed in life.**

### **Garfield school values:**

- hard work, perseverance, and education
- teachers, students, and families as partners
- healthy families, school, and community
- diversity as our strength

### **Grade-Level Meetings**

In March, the Core Team organized grade-level meetings for parents to discuss Garfield’s achievement data, including the performance level of racial subgroups, and to get feedback on the proposed vision and values statement from families. A total of 180 parents participated in the grade-level meetings in March. Families expressed overwhelming support for the values and the vision and signed commitment cards to get involved to improve achievement at Garfield.

# Steps to Conducting a School Listening Campaign

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## 1. Identify the purpose of the campaign:

- Who do you want to listen to and why?
- Is the listening campaign about building relationships as well as gathering information?
- What happens to the information once you have listened?
- Is there an invitation or next step for the people you listen to?

**2. Identify who will do the listening.** Will the team consist solely of staff or solely of parents or will it be a cross-stakeholder group?

## 3. Train your team:

- Develop a written outline for one-on-one to visits or small-group meetings, with just a few questions—try to keep it simple. See below for a sample outline.
- Have all team members role-play with each other to get comfortable.
- Encourage team members to jot down notes after conversations so they do not forget.

## 4. Set goals:

- How many people do you need to listen to in order to get the pulse of the school community?
- What subgroups do you need to include whose experience may be different?
- Ask individuals to set their own personal goals as well as to establish an overall goal.

## 5. Set a time frame:

- This is usually 1 to 2 months.
- Time can be adjusted as necessary, depending on your progress toward the overall goal.

## 6. Let the community know in advance about the listening campaign:

- Send a letter from the principal.
- Make announcements in meetings.
- Hang posters in the hall.

## 7. Check in with each other regularly to provide support and encouragement:

- Decide how frequently the team will meet to share what they are hearing. More frequent meetings are better to build momentum and keep people accountable to each other (once a week is best).
- Decide whether you want to add members to the team and train new people as you go or whether you want to keep the group closed.

## 8. Consider conducting a survey, in addition to face-to-face conversations, to reach more people.

The survey should complement, but not replace face-to-face conversations.

## 9. Report your findings back to the community in written format and also in a community meeting:

- Be clear about how the information will guide decisions and actions moving forward.
- Recognize and celebrate the work of the team.
- Thank everyone who participated.

## Outline for a one-on-one or small-group meeting

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**WHY:** The goal of listening is to initiate or deepen our relationships with other people so that we can act collectively to change conditions for students and families.

Through listening to others, we come to understand what they care about. This is important because people will **act** on what they care about.

**HOW:** We listen to people one-on-one or in small groups. A one-on-one visit is a 15- to 20-minute face-to-face conversation. Due to the pandemic, we also listen to people by phone or on Zoom.

**WHAT:** There are three parts to a one-on-one or a small-group listening session:

- 1. Opening:** We introduce ourselves and share why we want to talk with people. We ask “getting to know you” questions and share a little about ourselves.
- 2. Focus:** We ask about people’s concerns and their dreams for their children and for the school and neighborhood.
- 3. Invitation:** Let people know what the next step will be—something they can participate in, such as a report-back session to hear the findings from the listening campaign or a community celebration.

### **AFTER THE MEETING:**

- Jot down notes of important points to share with the rest of the listening team.
- Nurture relationships! Check-in with people by text or email, and set-up another conversation in a few weeks, if they are open to it. This will help to build school leaders.

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