

## An Open Letter to Seattle Public School Parents

August 3, 2010

### WHO WE ARE & WHY WE ARE WRITING

We are fellow Seattle Public School parents, local employers, community volunteers and taxpayers. Above all we are passionate supporters of public education. Our diverse group of over 30 citywide organizations and community leaders came together in March to form the *Our Schools Coalition*. We united to express the community's voice in teacher contract negotiations, to advocate for our children, and to support teachers as professionals.

### WHY THIS SUMMER'S TEACHER CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS ARE SO IMPORTANT

Today, our schools work well for some, but not all. Only 6 of 10 students in the class of 2008 graduated.<sup>1</sup> For nearly all students of color, the graduation rate is much lower. Only 17% of those who do graduate are qualified for college acceptance<sup>2</sup>. Improving these numbers is a moral and economic imperative. More than grades are at stake; a quality education is core to personal, family and community success.

Great teaching is *the key* to educational success. The contract under negotiation right now by Seattle Public Schools and its union (the Seattle Education Association) affects us all, and impacts our children directly. This contract will determine many things, including:

- How many hours a day your child is in school;
- How your child's teacher is mentored, supported, acknowledged and compensated;
- Whether your child's academic progress over the course of the year will factor into his or her teacher's evaluation;
- How great teachers are motivated to teach in our highest-need schools and to stay there;
- Whether, in the event of layoffs, your child's talented first-year teacher will lose his or her job merely because he or she lacks seniority;
- How ineffective teachers are removed.

### WHAT WE PROPOSE

Prior to the start of negotiations in April, the *Our Schools Coalition* presented nine proposals (see reverse for details) to District management and the teachers union. We strongly believe students and teachers will significantly benefit from these proposals, including:

- Providing teachers more time to prepare for class and collaborate with their peers;
- Strengthening teacher evaluations so they are meaningful, tied to student learning, and a useful tool for teachers and administrators. This includes factoring performance into staffing decisions, as opposed to prioritizing seniority;
- Creating new career paths and compensation opportunities for highly effective teachers and those who take on added responsibilities.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO – BY AUGUST 18<sup>th</sup>

**These changes are vital for Seattle students. Negotiations are scheduled to conclude by August 30. Community voices have never before been expressed in this way, on this issue. Parents can have a singular impact on the outcome, which will shape our children's educational future. WE MUST ACT NOW:**

- **CALL or EMAIL your school board representative ([www.seattleschools.org/area/board/contact.xml](http://www.seattleschools.org/area/board/contact.xml)) to support these proposals.**
- **Sign up to speak at the August 18<sup>th</sup> school board meeting (<http://www.seattleschools.org/area/board/publictestimony.pdf>).**
- **Forward this letter to other Seattle Public School parents and community members and urge them to spread the word.**

Survey data shows overwhelming support among parents for these changes (see reverse). Districts across the country have already adopted similar reforms. Today, Seattle has this same opportunity. Make your voice heard on behalf of our children and our community's future.

Respectfully,

**The Our Schools Coalition** ([www.ourschoolscoalition.org](http://www.ourschoolscoalition.org))

African American Parent Community Coalition  
African American Men's Group  
Alliance for Education  
Central Area Motivation Program  
CEER (Coalition for Equal Education Rights)  
CCER (Community Center for Ed Results)  
Council President Richard Conlin  
Councilmember Tim Burgess  
East African Community Services  
El Centro de la Raza  
Greater Seattle Chamber of Commerce

Horn of Africa Services  
Kevin C. Washington, Tabor 100  
King Co. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce  
League of Education Voters  
Mona H. Bailey, Deputy Superintendent (ret)  
New School Foundation  
Partnership for Learning  
Powerful Schools  
Rainier Scholars  
Seattle Breakfast Group

Somali Community Services of Seattle  
Stand for Children  
Technology Access Foundation  
Technology Alliance  
Urban Enterprise Center  
Urban Impact  
Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle  
Washington Policy Center  
WTIA  
Youth Ambassadors

<sup>1</sup> Seattle Public Schools Data Profile & District Summary, December 2008

<sup>2</sup> Seattle Public Schools 2008 Strategic Plan Appendices

## OUR SCHOOLS COALITION PROPOSALS

| Area                                | Proposal (vs. <i>status quo</i> )                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Support Among SPS Parents<br>As measured by citywide poll<br>n=200; in-field March 20-25, 2010<br>“Strongly” or “Somewhat” support |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Teacher Support & Development       | ▪ Increased time with other teachers to plan and share the best ways to teach                                                                                                                                                                                                       | 75%                                                                                                                                |
|                                     | ▪ Increased time to prepare for class                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 68%                                                                                                                                |
|                                     | ▪ More effective mentoring & coaching programs                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 84%                                                                                                                                |
| Performance & Evaluation            | ▪ An improved 4-level evaluation system (vs. <i>satisfactory or unsatisfactory as the only two ways to evaluate teachers</i> )                                                                                                                                                      | 78%                                                                                                                                |
|                                     | ▪ Student academic growth is factored into how teachers are evaluated (vs. <i>principal observation only</i> )                                                                                                                                                                      | 59%                                                                                                                                |
|                                     | ▪ Teacher effectiveness becomes a key factor in staffing decisions, including what school a teacher is assigned to, whether or not teachers get transferred, and whether or not a teacher gets laid off (vs. <i>seniority only</i> )                                                | 79%                                                                                                                                |
|                                     | ▪ The lowest performing teachers are removed in less than 12 months (vs. <i>18 months</i> )                                                                                                                                                                                         | 82%                                                                                                                                |
| Compensation & Career Opportunities | ▪ Teachers get new opportunities for higher pay based on strong performance, taking on added duties, having subject matter expertise in hard-to-staff areas (such as math) or for teaching in schools with many high-need students (vs. <i>seniority &amp; credentialing only</i> ) | 90%                                                                                                                                |
|                                     | ▪ New paths are opened for talented people to become teachers (such as Teach for America)                                                                                                                                                                                           | 60%                                                                                                                                |