



Annual Report for the 2008-09 School Year

City of Seattle

Office for
Education

Families &
Education Levy

January 2010



Executive Summary

This report highlights the outcomes and accomplishments over the past four years of the 2004 City of Seattle Families and Education Levy (FEL). The Levy focused its investments on increasing measurable academic outcomes and closing the achievement gap for students in Seattle. Outcome targets were based on measures of school readiness, academic achievement, dropout prevention and high school graduation. In 2008-09, the Levy achieved the following:

Academic Outcomes

- o 450 preschool children entered kindergarten ready to succeed (out of 516 children served).
- o 826 students met grade-level standards on the WASL after failing to do so the previous year (out of 5,216 students served).
- o 537 at-risk 9th graders promoted to 10th grade on time (out of 720 9th graders served).
- o 1,306 students graduated from high school (out of 1,550 12th graders served).

Key Findings

Early Learning Investments

Our work over the past four years has confirmed for Seattle what is widely known: The achievement gap is present before students enter preschool. Assessment tools implemented through Levy investments indicate that some children enter preschool already two to three years behind in their receptive English language skills. Children also struggle in other developmental areas. To close these gaps, Levy investments are focused on increasing the quality of classrooms and preschool teachers. Classroom- and child-level assessments are used to develop meaningful professional development opportunities to enhance the quality of preschool programming for a broad group of children in Seattle. In order to maximize limited resources, classrooms are now placed into tiers of support, depending on the needs. While high quality preschools can help make up lost ground, for many children the gap persists as they enter kindergarten. The nature of the achievement gap shows the need for deeper investments earlier, in both preschool and elementary school. In order to ensure preschool children are being fully prepared for kindergarten, the Levy will raise its standards for kindergarten readiness and work toward ensuring all children have the educational resources and opportunities necessary to meet those standards.

Elementary School Investments

While the Levy invests deeply in community learning centers at three elementary schools, in general, investments at the elementary school level are dispersed across many schools to provide family support and family engagement activities. These supports are largely viewed as external to the core instructional function of the school and are therefore less integrated into a broader academic strategy. Analysis of our data indicates that we are not having as great of an impact at the elementary level as in our other investments. While Levy-funded elementary programs have largely focused on making meaningful connections with families, students who enter elementary school behind are not getting the academic support they need to close the gap. In 3rd grade, many students of color and those who qualify for free and reduced lunch are achieving reading proficiency at rates significantly below their peers. In math, similar patterns of the achievement gap are evident in 4th grade, and continue to grow as students get older. There is a need to strengthen the Levy's investment at the elementary level to make it a more integral part of each school's academic improvement plan. There is also a need to restructure the family involvement investment for the 2010-11 school year in order to reach families with the greatest barriers to involvement, particularly non-English-speaking families. Finally, it is important to note the district lacks an assessment for grades K-2 that provides information on how students are performing. Such information would allow Levy investments to focus on specific content areas or schools where students in these early grades are struggling, and to better measure effectiveness.

Middle School Investments

While Levy-funded investments support all K-8 and middle schools in after-school programming and academic intervention strategies, the bulk of the investment is focused on four innovation middle schools. These investments are larger and more integrated into the structure of the school. Such investments allow schools to align academic interventions and support services with specific student needs. For example, Levy-funded middle schools have been leaders in the use of WASL and MAP data to schedule students into extra math classes matched with their skill level. While great strides have been made in math, schools continue to struggle with Level 1 math students, who are often two or more years behind grade level and lack basic math skills that prohibit them from accessing grade-level material. There also continues to be a gap in the rates of achievement for different student groups participating in Levy-funded programs. In addition to focusing on improving academic achievement, Levy-funded middle schools are also using new indicators that serve as predictors for high school graduation. For example, students in the Levy-funded Middle School Support Program have a goal to increase the percentage of classes they pass. This goal aligns with the district's scorecard and demonstrates how the Levy is using research-based indicators to promote academic success.

High School Investments

Given some of the positive outcome trends for middle schools, the Levy is utilizing a similar strategy for high school by investing deeply in three schools with the highest number and percentage of 9th graders with indicators that predict dropping out. These indicators were influenced by the work of Mary Beth Celio, who conducted a Levy-funded study on the Seattle Public Schools class of 2006. Findings demonstrate several key indicators for predicting dropouts, including failing classes and poor attendance rates. In response to these findings, the district has developed weekly attendance and grade reports so schools can easily identify students having difficulties. In 2009-10, Levy-funded high schools have performance targets related to attendance and passing classes, which can be easily monitored through the district's weekly data reports. Findings from 2008-09, the first year of implementation, indicate a reduction in the total number of absences for 9th graders, compared to the previous year, with equal or greater reductions made for many students of color and those who qualify for free and reduced lunch. Freshmen were also passing their classes at a higher rate than 9th graders the previous year.

Student Health Investments

Recognizing that there are many barriers to academic achievement, the Levy invests in School-Based Health Centers (SBHCs) and school nurses. These health services, particularly the SBHCs, provide the critical physical and mental health support necessary to remove some of those barriers. Improvements in assessment and referral protocols have had a measurable impact on students' ability to succeed. Recently published research from the University of Washington finds that Levy-funded SBHCs positively impact students' attendance and academic achievement. However, these services are jeopardized by the increasing pressure of growing health care costs. This last year, several mental health counselor positions were reduced by SBHC sponsors as cost-cutting measures. These reductions directly affect the level of critically needed mental health services.

Alignment with SPS Strategic Plan Goals and Research-Based Leading Indicators

Results from the 2009 WASL demonstrate wide and persistent achievement gaps for many students of color and those who qualify for free and reduced lunch. In some instances, those gaps are as large as 50 percentage points. This is not acceptable. In order to reduce this gap, the Levy is seeking to align its investments and outcome goals with those of the district's strategic plan and scorecard. Recent Levy-funded research on leading indicators for predicting academic success or failure is also being used by both the district and the Levy. These indicators help identify students in need, implement appropriate strategies, and determine effectiveness by measuring outcomes. The use of the Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) to assess academic growth of Levy-funded students will further align SPS and Levy efforts. This assessment is particularly critical in the early elementary grades, where no other common assessment data is available.