

Increasing Minority Family Participation in Richmond Public School Board Meetings

Ebonie Johnson

Frank L. Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy

University of Virginia

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Disclaimer

The author conducted this study as part of the program of professional education at the Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy, University of Virginia. This paper is submitted in partial fulfillment of the course requirements for the Master of Public Policy degree. The judgments and conclusions are solely those of the author, and are not necessarily endorsed by the Batten School, by the University of Virginia, or by any other agency.

Honor Pledge

On my honor as a student at the University of Virginia, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this assignment.

Ebonie Johnson

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements and Disclaimer	2
Table of Contents	3
Executive Summary	4
Introduction	5
The Problem	6
Background	9
Existing Evidence	11
Criteria	12
Criteria 1: Effectiveness	12
Criteria 2: Political Acceptability	12
Criteria 3: Accessibility/Reach	13
Alternatives	14
Alternative 1: Hold Civic Empowerment Workshops	14
Alternative 2: Make RPS school board meetings more convenient for families (Physically)	17
Alternative 3: Increase Advertisements for RPS Board Meetings	20
Outcomes Matrix	23
Recommendation	24
Implementation	24
Conclusion	25
Appendix A	27
Appendix B	33
References	35

Executive Summary

In Richmond Public Schools (RPS), too few minority families participate in school board meetings, specifically the [public information period](#). In the fall of 2020, RPS students were 55.4% black, 21% white, 18.5% Hispanic, 3.4% multiple races, and 1.6% Asian students (Education, 2020). Most RPS students identify as a racial minority; however, the participation in the public information period fails to represent these students. Of the 126 speakers over the course of the 2021-2022 RPS school year from October-March, there were 69 white speakers, about 55%. White families are overrepresented in school board meetings while minority families, especially Latino/a (4% of speakers) and Asian families (~0%), are underrepresented. Black families also slightly lag behind by making up only 43% of public information speakers rather than 55% (*see Appendix A*).

With many RPS board decisions taking place during these meetings, the public information period gives the nine-member school board more information about what the RPS community wants. The demographic gap between RPS families and RPS public information period ensures a misrepresentation of the general public opinion.

This problem is not exclusive to RPS and plagues many urban school districts across the country. White families are often overrepresented in decision making for urban districts (Smith et. al, 2011). Educational organizations and researchers have used multiple methods to increase minority family participation in their students' education. This report analyzes the following alternatives to increase minority family participation in RPS school board meetings:

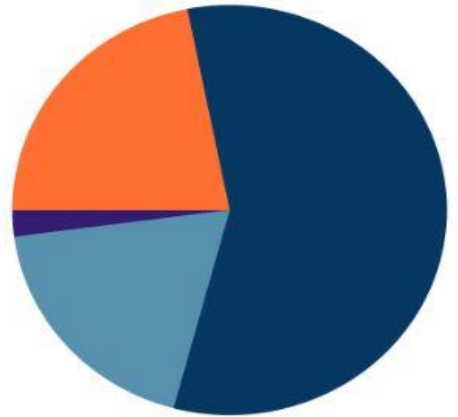
1. Hold Civic Empowerment Workshops
2. Make RPS Board Meetings Easier to Access
3. **Increase Advertisements for RPS Board Meetings**

Each alternative was evaluated with three criteria (1) effectiveness, (2) political acceptability, and (3) accessibility/reach. Of these three alternatives, this report concludes that **increasing advertisements for RPS Board Meetings throughout the community** would be the most feasible for RPS to implement. RPS already has a system in place to distribute flyers throughout the community with the Office of Engagement (OOE), and families would easily be able to access this alternative.

Introduction

Despite the growing minority population in Richmond, minority families still do not make up the majority of speakers in the public information period for Richmond Public Schools (RPS). The two graphs on the right hand side of this paper demonstrate the demographics of RPS students (the top graph) and of the speakers during the public information period (the bottom graph). The dark blue represents the black population, orange represents white, light blue represents Hispanic/Latino(a), and purple represents Asian. White families make up the majority of public information speakers (about 53%) despite only making up less than a quarter of the RPS student population.

This analysis dives into the contributing factors to this gap, presents evidence-based alternative solutions to fix this gap, evaluates these solutions, and recommends a single solution for RPS to implement.



Client Overview

The Richmond Public Schools Office of Engagement (OOE) is dedicated to getting families and community members involved in the school system. The OOE is the newest of the five RPS offices which include the Academic Office, Operating Office, Student Wellness Office, and Talent Office. Originally formed in 2019, the office grew from a 9 member team to a total of 50+ employees by the summer of 2020. The OOE directs the family and community engagement, advocacy and outreach, the Center for Families in Transition (CFIT), Community Partnerships, and the Welcome Center Departments (Richmond, 2021.a).

Currently, the OOE implements multiple programs to tackle family and community engagement as a whole rather than specifically focusing on school board meeting participation. The office holds and participates in community events, community walks, workshops, and mentoring programs for students (Richmond, 2021.a).

The 2018-2023 Dreams4RPS Strategic Plan drives many of the actions taken by the OOE. The plan contains five priorities for the school district which are as follows: (1) Exciting and Rigorous Teaching and Learning, (2) Skilled and Supported Staff, (3) Safe and Loving School Cultures, (4) Deep Partnership with Families and Communities, and (5) Modern Systems and Infrastructure. Although all RPS offices remain conscious of all the goals listed in the plan, the OOE specifically focuses on the fourth tenet of the plan (Richmond, 2018).

Funding for the Office of Engagement is tied directly to the Richmond Public Schools' budget approved by the school board and Superintendent Kamras. This year in response to the COVID-19 crisis and the new federal administration, RPS is slated to receive \$123 million from the federal government in 2021. The plan is to continue to fund federal investments with \$58 million and spend \$65 million to expand literacy efforts (Newsroom, 2021).

The Problem

Problem Statement: In Richmond Public Schools (RPS), too few minority families participate in school board meetings, specifically the [public information period](#).

In RPS, the nine-member elected school board makes school division wide policy decisions. With limited input from low-income and minority RPS families, many of the policy decisions made by the school board solely reflect the needs of the more white, affluent families in RPS (which make up a minority of RPS families). The school board meetings, where votes on school policies are conducted, follow agendas that are often unaligned with the opinions of RPS students and families.

School boards are a “crucial part of local democracy in the US,” (Collins, 2021). Collins’ research found that most Americans, including low-income and people of color, prefer school board governance with public deliberation. RPS school board meetings need to come to decisions that represent the will of more families rather than just a select few.

Vulnerable Groups of Interest

Racial minority families. In the fall of 2020, RPS was, and continues to be, predominantly made up of racial minority students with 55.4% black, 18.5% Hispanic, 3.4% multiple races, and 1.6% Asian students (Education, 2020). With RPS being a majority minority school division, lacking input from these minority groups defeats the purpose of the public comment section in school board meetings. White, middle class parents often are disproportionately involved in urban school districts even with charter schools that are meant to even the odds between lower and upper income households (Smith et. al, 2011).

Low-income families. In RPS, 51.9% of students are classified as economically disadvantaged (Education, 2020). These students either are eligible for free/reduced meals, receive temporary assistance for needy families, are eligible for Medicaid, or are migrant/experiencing homelessness. Parents often work long hours or night shifts to support their families. Having low-income could also lead to lacking transportation or time to contribute to school board meetings.

Contributing Factors to the Problem

Information Asymmetry. In one of the first problem statements I posed to Dr. Brown, I mentioned that many RPS families lack the knowledge of how to advocate for their children. Educators usually do not cultivate “power sharing practices” with low income families and families of color (Cooper, 2009). This leaves many RPS families in the dark about self advocacy techniques. Not knowing how to participate in the public comment section during school board

meetings or when/where school board meetings take place is one barrier to participation in important school policy decisions.

Uncomfortability. Many parents feel uncomfortable participating in the school board meeting process or advocating for their children in general (Smith et. al, 2011). Although some of the school board meetings take place in the schools themselves, the imposing structure of the city council board meeting room can be intimidating to anyone not well versed in public speaking. Parents who are less comfortable with English also are more likely not to be involved (Garcia et. al, 2002).

Lack of transportation. COVID-19 leveled the playing field some by allowing RPS families to attend school board meetings and submit public comments virtually. In a UK study, switching public meetings to online ones lowered participatory costs for housebound people, people with childcare responsibilities, and the elderly (Ward, Gibson, & Lusoli, 2003). With the school board switching back to in-person meetings, RPS families will not have their public comments read if they do not present them in person (School, 2021). Many RPS families lack their own transportation and rely on school buses to send their children to school. Without a car, many RPS parents simply cannot attend school board meetings.

Lack of time. Many RPS parents work long hours to support their families. With 51.9% of RPS students living in “economically disadvantaged” households, these families simply have other priorities over their children’s school board meetings (Education, 2020). After a long day of work, parents may not be willing to attend a school board meeting that could potentially be a half-hour drive away from them. Mothers who work full time are less likely to be involved with their student’s education than those with part-time work (Weiss et. al, 2003). Even if a parent decides to take the trip, they may have to pick up their children from daycare or home and then stop for dinner. In addition, RPS school board meetings have lasted from 6-9:30 pm which runs right into bedtime for younger students.

Consequences of the Problem

Collective Bargaining for Teachers

During the October 4th and 18th school board meetings, RPS teachers continually pushed for collective bargaining as a result of the burnout they experienced due to COVID-19. After these meetings, Superintendent Kamras canceled school for October 29th -November 2nd citing the continued complaints from teachers. After this, these teachers, many of whom were white, continued to push for collective action until the school board had collective bargaining on the agenda for the December 6th school board meeting. The board voted “yes” after the continued persistence of these teachers (*see Appendix A*).

George Wythe High School vs. Fox Elementary School

Although these teachers achieved their desired goal, the complaints of many of the minority families seemed to be pushed to the wayside. These parents have asked for a new building for George Wythe High School for years even before this school year, yet action has only been taken to have a meeting about it in April 2022. Meanwhile, white parents (who outnumbered the minority parents) asked for action regarding the Fox Elementary School building and were met with an immediate response (*see Appendix A*).

Background

Background Outside of RPS

Many urban communities share this same problem with RPS. The Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS) consists of 75 member school districts. These urban school districts, including Richmond Public Schools, advocate for improving the quality of education for inner city students. The Council identifies improving family and community engagement as an essential component to reaching their goal (CGCS, 2021).

To combat the lack of participation from low-income and minority families as a whole, the CGCS implemented multiple programs in urban school districts across the country. In Minneapolis, a Parent University was formed to teach parents about ways to engage in school culture and advocate for their children. In Austin, they held an African-American Parent Engagement conference in 2015 and held multiple focus groups with African-American parents (Council, 2016).

What changes (technological, political, demographic, etc) might come along and make your entire analysis obsolete?

Technological. When the COVID-19 pandemic started, RPS school board meetings switched to a strict Zoom format broadcasted over Facebook. The only way the school board could hear the public's opinion was through public comment submissions through the BoardDocs website. Parents often commented about meetings in realtime, but their voices were not heard. If there were a way to summarize live comments and show them to the school board automatically, then that may be a solution to the lack of involvement from low-income or minority families.

Political. With the Office of Engagement being completely new to RPS, it often needs to prove its worth during school board meetings to ensure that it stays fully funded. The Chief of Engagement, Dr. Shadae Harris, reports how many students and families the Office comes into contact with and highlights success stories during the meetings. If the school board or Superintendent Kamras sees a lack of progress, then they are likely to cut funding to the office

and reduce OOE staff. Fewer staff would ultimately make any recommendations about empowerment workshops hard to implement. There would be no one other than school teachers/administrators or volunteers to operate the workshops.

Demographic. While I worked with RPS over the summer, the public housing complex, Creighton Court, was being torn down. Over the years, the city of Richmond has torn down many of the original public housing neighborhoods and replaced them with more expensive apartment buildings to accommodate for the increase in affluent families moving closer to the city. If this trend continues and leaves little room for affordable housing, many of the minority or low-income families that I am targeting for this project will move away. Although I do not believe the population will shift dramatically in the next five years, in the far future, a demographic change would render my project working with RPS completely obsolete.

Existing Evidence

With the ever-growing number of diverse populations in our schools, decisions made by school boards need to reflect the will of the families and communities they serve. By participating in public comment, these minority families predict decisions driven towards more equitable and justice-oriented solutions (Sampson & Bertrand, 2021). More minority representation in school board members has also been correlated with increased academic achievement for minority students (Kogan, Lavertu, & Peskowitz, 2021). The Education Trust and National Women's Law Center found that requiring community input on decision making in Oakland and Chicago district schools coincided with a decrease in school suspensions for students of color (Patrick, Onyeka-Crawford & Duchesneau, 2020). Increasing parent participation in school activities and increasing civic engagement in low-income and minority communities both have extensive literature detailing working and failing practices; however, there is limited evidence specifically detailing the best practices for increasing family school board participation. To address this issue, I attempt to combine the parent participation and minority/low-income civic engagement literature to construct potential alternative solutions.

Some potential solutions gleaned from the parent participation literature will not be applicable to family participation in RPS school board public comment. Parent involvement studies mostly focus on the effect parents' actions have on their children and not the school as a whole. Parent participation in school board meetings stem from a desire to help their own children which in turn helps children across RPS who may be facing similar problems. Participating in school board meetings also puts greater pressure on parents than simply helping their children with homework or discussing issues with a teacher. The added stress makes it hard to equate some of the parent participation literature with participation in publicly recorded school board meetings.

Also, other potential solutions gleaned from the civic engagement literature will not be applicable to family participation in RPS school board public comment. Much of the civic engagement literature focuses on actions such as voting or running for office. Although both of these actions should continue to be encouraged and researched, neither of them apply to participation in school board meetings. Receiving repeated advertisements through text messages to attend school board meetings would be costly and may not make a difference (Bhatti et. al, 2017).

With all this being said, three strong potential solutions emerged from the combined literature. The first is to better equip these families through civic empowerment strategies. The second is to change the time/location of school board meetings to better reflect the needs of working RPS families. Lastly, RPS could increase advertisements and awareness throughout the Greater Richmond community with flyers.

Criteria

Criteria 1: Effectiveness

This criterion is extremely important to include in order to ensure that the policy alternative actually works. Picking the best alternative that effectively increases the number of low income and minority families is the main requirement of my client.

Effectiveness is calculated by the predicted change in low income and minority family participation (number of families participating). The predicted change in the number of families is determined by applying research data from similar interventions done in similar school districts/divisions.

The strategy for capturing family change in participation is to look at the change in participation for similar interventions in other areas and use that proportion to estimate a change in RPS family participation. In this project, I used the number of families who attended the February 28, 2022, RPS board meeting as a baseline.

For reference, for the February 22, 2022 RPS school board meeting, there were seven registered speakers for the public information section (see Appendix A). Of those seven, there was one black speaker. Eight additional speakers from the community participated in the public comment section, four of whom were black. In order to equally represent the minority members of the RPS community, at least half of the speakers should be black and almost a quarter should be Latino/a (Virginia, 2022). In this school board meeting, only a third of the speakers were minority community members and none of them were Latino/a. White people are overrepresented in school board meetings. They only make up about a quarter of the RPS community, but they were the other two-thirds of the speakers in this meeting.

Criteria 2: Political Acceptability

Without approval from the school board and Superintendent Kamras, the alternatives I propose would not be implemented. Having a measure of political acceptability would help better determine which alternative could be approved of in RPS.

Political acceptability would determine the likelihood of the alternative having lots of opposition or too little support. It would be measured by comparing the intervention to similar ones in the past and how popular they were with the school board and superintendent. This popularity would be determined by the number of votes that a similar intervention gained. This criterion could be

measured on a scale of 1-10 with 1 meaning only one board member agreed/voted for the intervention and 10 meaning the decision would probably be unanimous including Superintendent Kamras.

Criteria 3: Accessibility/Reach

All of the alternatives should reach low income and minority families; however, some may reach more families than others. This criterion would judge how easy or difficult it would be for a RPS family to come into contact with the intervention. This criterion would be slightly different from effectiveness because it only accounts for access to the intervention rather than what the results of the intervention showing up in the school board meeting would entail. For example, a workshop for learning about advocacy might be harder for families to reach/come in contact with than a simple flyer posted in their neighborhood.

This criterion would be measured on a scale that accounts for how accessible the location is to families and how long it takes to interact with families. It would be measured on a scale of 1-3 with 1 meaning not many families will encounter the intervention and 3 meaning many families will encounter the intervention. For example, an alternative set for a single place, once a month may be harder for families to access. On the other hand, spreading out advertisements across the city would be accessible to more families. The length of the intervention would be determined by how much extra time is needed for a family to interact with the alternative and would be measured in hours. For example, interacting with a flyer in a local business might just take 5 minutes (or about .08 hours), but visiting an empowerment workshop would take a good 3 hours out of a family's day. Both location and length would be weighted equally.

Alternatives

Alternative 1: Hold Civic Empowerment Workshops

This would involve holding workshops to teach the greater Richmond community about how to submit public comments and other ways to advocate for their children in schools (possibly including how to form PTAs-there are very few PTAs in RPS). The workshops would be held in existing RPS community engagement hubs across the city and would be run either by Office of Engagement staff (who already hold activities in the hubs) or by other staff members of community hubs. These workshops would take place once a month on Saturdays to be more accessible to RPS families.

Last summer, RPS held the first annual RPS Summer Fest event for families. There were two of them (one on the southside and another on the east end) that brought out thousands of community members. The event paired essential information for the upcoming school year like school enrollment, vaccine information, and community programming with free food, games, and music. The workshops I'm proposing would be on a smaller scale, but they would include free food and fun activities to entice families to attend. For RPS Summer Fest, free lunch was donated by the local Kroger and Walmart, I believe the same could be done for these monthly workshops. Instead of buying new games, RPS could utilize the ones from the summer. The biggest cost would be paying Office of Engagement staff to take charge of these events, the extra planning to run them, and possibly giving them additional advocacy training to run the workshops.

The workshop event would last 2 hours (11am-1pm) and would provide free lunch sometime in the middle (around 12) to families who attend. Families would rotate between three half-hour stations: public comment/school board meeting information, PTA/other advocacy information, and a fun station for children to enjoy.

Criteria 1: Effectiveness

Parents who attended advocacy workshops gave extremely positive feedback for content about becoming more active in their children's schools and understanding their rights as parents (Burbank & Hunter, 2008).

In Georgia, Fair Street Elementary School initiated a program to increase Latino parent involvement in schools. The school serves 70% English Language Learners with most of them being Latino. They ran a 12-week long workshop series that worked with parents to address their needs and promote Latino parent advocacy. The study found that the workshops substantially increased and created sustained parent involvement with their children's school (Dyer, 2009).

A randomized-control study using low-income families as the population found that when given in-person teacher endorsements for participating in a parenting program, parents were much more likely to participate than when they are just given flyers. The study found that the enrollment rate for the parenting program, which will be equated to a school board meeting for the purposes of this analysis, doubled (Abraczinskas et. al, 2021).

Translating the findings of the randomized study to the RPS community, hosting advocacy workshops throughout the community would probably double minority family turnout. So instead of five minority families participating in school board meetings, there would now be about 10 minority families. This would be an increase of *five* families, so it would bring the total of minority families to two-thirds of the speakers. An increase of this size would make minority families properly represented.

Effectiveness Score: 5 families

Criteria 2: Political Acceptability

RPS Summer Fest was originally proposed by Superintendent Kamras as a way to engage families after students not being in school for over a year due to COVID-19. I believe that he would vote in favor of this alternative. It would help to further connect families to the schools.

As of February 28, 2022, Richmond Public Schools' budget for FY23 calls for a switch of some Engagement personnel to the Culture and Climate Department (Richmond, 2022). Although there is no cost attached to this proposal, a switch of Engagement personnel could impact this alternative. School board members may be wary of implementing this option with a smaller staff.

Jonathan Young, a RPS school board member, proposed to reduce community hubs after the FY23 budget was first announced on January 18th (Richmond, 2022.c). The impact of reducing the community hubs would be a decrease in Office of Engagement staff. Since these staff members would be vital to running these workshops, I assume that Young would vote against this alternative.

P.A. Score: Likely that at least 6 out of 10 board members would approve. 2 out 3.

Criteria 3: Accessibility/Reach

Location:

Similar to alternative 2, interacting with this option would take extra effort on the part of the families to get to the advocacy workshops. However, this could be mitigated by partnering with Richmond's local bus system to offer free rides for families. This offer would be more feasible for workshops over offering transportation to board meetings seeing that these workshops would only be once a month. Given all of this, for location, this alternative earned a **2 out of 3**.

Length:

This alternative would take the most time out of a family's day. With this workshop taking 3 hours, this alternative would take **3 hours** for a family to complete and interact with.

Accessibility/Reach Score: $2+3 / 2 = 2.5$

Alternative 2: Make RPS school board meetings more convenient for families (*Physically*)

- Alternative 2a: Changing Meeting Locations
- Alternative 2b: Changing Meeting Times
- Alternative 2c: Streamlining the Agenda and Shortening Meetings

This alternative is a bunch of smaller steps mixed into one. Many RPS families simply can not access school board meetings due to where they are located and what time they take place.

Instead of holding meetings in city hall like they are half of the time now, school board meetings could exclusively be held and rotated around different schools across the city. This way families could walk to school board meetings, if needed. This portion of the alternative still has its tradeoffs. There are [43](#) schools spread out across Richmond embedded into many neighborhoods across the city. Rotating meetings across schools could possibly only allow families to participate physically in meetings once a month or once every two months (since the school board meets only 2-3 times a month). If there was a pressing issue that a family wanted to bring forward, they may have to wait a while before it gets proper attention. Also, some families still may “not feel comfortable coming to the schools or [express] distrust with schools and the educational system,” (Richmond, 2022.c). In this case, families may not want to participate in a school board meeting regardless of if it is closer to them or not.

School board meetings could also be moved to a more convenient time for families. Currently, they are held at 6p.m. biweekly on Mondays. The meetings could possibly be held at 2p.m. on Saturdays to make it easier for working families to get to and participate in them. This portion of the alternative also has its tradeoffs. Holding meetings on Saturdays would create longer work weeks for school board members, Superintendent Kamras, and other school board facilitators and Richmond administrators. Because of this, I believe this portion of the alternative would have weak political feasibility (not many people would vote for it). Also, a weekend meeting could possibly have the opposite effect and cause fewer families to come to meetings. Weekends are often reserved for leisure activities, so adding a meeting to it could conflict with family plans.

Lastly, RPS school board meetings typically last from 6-9:30 or 10 p.m. Simply shortening the meeting time to just 8p.m. could make it easier for working families to stay for the entire meeting. This could involve shortening the presentation time for each department and focusing more on family input and decision making. Again, this portion of the alternative has tradeoffs. A shorter meeting could backfire and translate to less time for public comment and make it harder for families to get the time they need to speak (or they could have shorter allowances on time). This part of the alternative could also negatively affect different

departments by not allowing them to present problems and solutions they've implemented in the schools (families should impact decision making, but the people working in the schools should play a big role too).

Criteria 1: Effectiveness

There is not much literature concerning the timing of school board meetings and their relation to community participation. For this analysis, I look to another form of civic engagement (switching school board Election Days to Saturdays) to liken how they've made participation more convenient and using that to estimate how a change in convenience could be seen in RPS board meetings.

In the 1980s, California school boards were given the opportunity to switch their elections from on-cycle to off-cycle days. When elections are held on days which are not holidays, voter turnout does not reduce randomly across voters. Those with less interest in the school board will probably not vote when it is not a holiday because of the inconvenience. Elections held not during holidays got about half of the voter turnout than elections on holidays (Berry & Gersen, 2010).

Translating the findings of this difference and difference study to the RPS community, making RPS board meetings more convenient would probably double minority family turnout. So instead of five minority families participating in school board meetings, there would now be about 10 minority families. This would be an increase of *five* families, so it would bring the total of minority families to two-thirds of the speakers. An increase of this size would make minority families properly represented.

Effectiveness Score: 5 families; highly effective score 2 out of 3

Criteria 2: Political Acceptability

Jonathan Young, a RPS school board member, proposed to reduce school board district funds, dues, and fees after the FY23 budget was first announced on January 18th (Richmond, 2022.c). The impact of reducing school board funds would be a decrease in flexibility for school board meetings. I assume that Young would vote against this alternative expanding the responsibility of the school board.

With this alternative possibly requiring school board members to work on holidays, I doubt that this option would garner support even outside of Jonathan Young. The school board as a whole

approved the addition of school days off that include both more general school holidays and multiple religious holidays. This year the division included Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur in September, divided Election Day and Parent Teacher Conference holidays into two, added Diwali, closed for Eid-al Fitr, and closed for Juneteenth. They kept the amount of teacher-work days the same as previous years (Richmond, 2021.b). With this information, I assume that most school board members would be reluctant to work during these new holidays or even outside of the work week on Saturdays.

P.A. Score: Likely that 3 or less board members would approve. 3 out of 3.

Criteria 3: Accessibility/Reach

Location:

Out of the three alternatives, this one may still be the hardest for families to get to. Despite the meetings being held exclusively in schools, many parents may feel uncomfortable with going to the school for meetings. However, minority families that are within walking distance of their school will reap the benefits of this option. This alternative also would not offer free public transportation given that school board meetings take place anywhere from twice a month to four times a month during budgeting season. Given all of this, for location, this alternative earned a **3 out of 3**.

Length:

This alternative proposes to reduce the time spent at school board meetings. Unlike the other alternatives, this option also does not require families to interact with something outside of the school board meetings themselves. This alternative adds **0 hours** for a family.

Accessibility/Reach Score: $3+0 / 2 = 1.5$

Alternative 3: Increase Advertisements for School Board Meetings throughout the Community

Many families simply forget or are unaware of school board meetings happening. To fix this gap in information (information asymmetry), RPS could increase advertising for school board meetings by adding them to school calendars, continuing to promote them on social media and through emails, and promoting them through existing family interactions.

This alternative would probably be taken on by the Office of Engagement and flyers/calendars could be distributed during their weekly community walks. Currently, the Office of Engagement has three hubs scattered around Richmond (a southside, east end, and north/west end hub). Each hub has around 8-10 employees who work as family liaisons (each has about 3-4 schools assigned to them). In addition to this, hub employees run community outreach in their area. They have community walks once a week, hold IT service pop-ups in assigned neighborhoods/community centers, and help manage attendance for their assigned schools. Leveraging family liaisons by asking them to promote school board meetings during their various interactions with families could be an excellent way to execute this alternative.

This alternative would address two of the main causes of low minority and low-income family participation in RPS Board Meetings: uncomfortability and information asymmetry. With someone who is familiar with their community handing families flyers, they will feel more comfortable to come present their problems in meetings. This alternative also helps solve the information asymmetry issue. Many families do not receive the division-wide RPS Direct emails or follow RPS social media accounts. Promoting the board meetings in-person throughout communities would be an extra way to ensure that the word gets out to these families.

The biggest tradeoff to this would be the added workload for family liaisons. I believe the added workload would be minimal (seeing as they already are tasked with promoting various RPS events/activities weekly during community walks); however, designing the initial flyers would be added work for the advocacy department within the Engagement Office. Unfortunately, this alternative also fails to directly address the lack of transportation or time for these families to attend RPS Board meetings. Becoming aware about the meetings would make planning to attend them a possibility, but finding the means to attend them would still present a challenge.

Criteria 1: Effectiveness

The Chicago Parent Program was a 12-session parenting program that taught parents child management techniques. The program was targeted towards African-American and Latino parents from low-income, urban communities. When given a flyer with a discount in childcare for participating in a Chicago Parent Program, parents were 15% more likely to attend the program. However, this change was not significantly different from parents who were not given a flyer for the Parent Program and a discount (Gross et. al, 2011).

Translating the findings of the Chicago study to the RPS community, increasing advertisements by posting flyers throughout the community would probably increase turnout by 15%. So instead of five minority families participating in school board meetings, there would now be about 6 minority families. This would only be an increase of *one* family, but it would bring the total of minority families to almost half of the speakers.

Effectiveness Score: 1 family; slightly effective score 2 out of 3

Criteria 2: Political Acceptability

This alternative is unique given that RPS Summer Fest was proposed by Superintendent Kamras along with the advertisements for it. The decision for placing flyers would fall into the hands of the Office of Engagement itself instead of the school board.

As of February 28, 2022, Richmond Public Schools' budget for FY23 calls for a switch of some Engagement personnel to the Culture and Climate Department (Richmond, 2022.c). Although there is no cost attached to this proposal, a switch of Engagement personnel could impact this alternative. The administration does not support this move of family liaisons.

Jonathan Young, a RPS school board member, proposed to reduce community hubs after the FY23 budget was first proposed by Superintendent Kamras on January 18th (Richmond, 2022.c). The impact of reducing the community hubs would be a decrease in Office of Engagement staff. Since these staff members would be vital to posting flyers in the community, I assume that Young would vote against this alternative.

Despite Young voting against this alternative, I assume that all of the other RPS board members would vote for this alternative if it was proposed. It would not require additional resources on the part of the school board itself with the burden lying mostly on the Office of Engagement.

P.A. Score: Likely that 9 out 10 board members would approve. 1 out of 3.

Criteria 3: Accessibility/Reach

Location:

Flyers would be strategically placed in local communities and would be easily accessible to families. Instead of needing to find transportation to go to a specific location, flyers would be posted where families could interact with them organically either when they encounter a family liaison personally or see the flyers they've left behind. Given all this, for location, this alternative earned a **1 out of 3**.

Length:

The time it would take for a family to read a flyer would only be five minutes at most. The flyer would have about a paragraph's worth of content and would be easy to skim over. Rewritten in hours, this alternative would take about **.1 hours** for families to interact with it.

Accessibility/Reach Score: $1+0.1 / 2 = 0.55$

Outcomes Matrix

Both the effectiveness and political acceptability scores were put on scales of 1 to 3. For effectiveness, a very effective alternative would have a low score and an ineffective alternative would have a high score. For political acceptability, a high probability of acceptance is indicated by a low score while a low probability of acceptance is indicated with a high score. The acceptability score was divided into two parts with location and time being weighted equally. The location portion was put on a scale of 1 to 3 with a higher score indicating more difficulty to travel to it. For the time portion, the number of hours was used directly in the calculation.

Overall, for this matrix, lower scores indicate better performance.

	Hold civic empowerment workshops	Make RPS school board meetings more convenient	Increase advertisements for meetings
Effectiveness <i>(Weighted 0.5)</i>	1: This alternative could potentially double the number of minority families attending school board meetings by adding 5 families to participate. This alternative would be extremely effective.	1: This alternative could potentially double the number of minority families attending school board meetings by adding 5 families to participate. This alternative would be extremely effective.	2: This alternative could increase the number of minority families attending school board meetings by 15%, adding 1 family. This alternative would be moderately effective.
Political Acceptability <i>(Weighted 0.3)</i>	2: This alternative would be moderately likely to be accepted by school board members.	3: This alternative would be extremely unlikely to be accepted by school board members.	1: This alternative would be very likely to be accepted by school board members.
Accessibility/Reach <i>(Weighted 0.2)</i>	2.5: This alternative would be harder to access for families. The school locations would be scattered across the school division and it would take 2 hours out of a family's day.	1.5: This alternative would shorten school board meetings entirely and would not involve any time commitment outside of that. Locations scattered around schools may be hard to access.	0.55: This alternative would be relatively easy for families to access. The flyers would be posted throughout their communities and would take little time to interact with.

Weighted Totals	$(0.5 + 0.6 + 0.5) =$ 1.6	$(0.5 + 0.9 + 0.3) =$ 1.7	$(1 + 0.3 + 0.11) =$ 1.4
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Recommendation

Post Flyers Throughout the RPS Community

Overall, this recommendation would be relatively easy to implement. The Office of Engagement already meets with the greater Richmond community often (Richmond, 2022.b). Tacking on these extra flyers would not be very hard to incorporate into their other duties (Richmond, 2022.a). The main issues for implementation would be the flyers not being handed out to families, the flyers being created with incorrect information, or the flyers not being eye-catching enough to attract RPS family attention.

Main Stakeholders

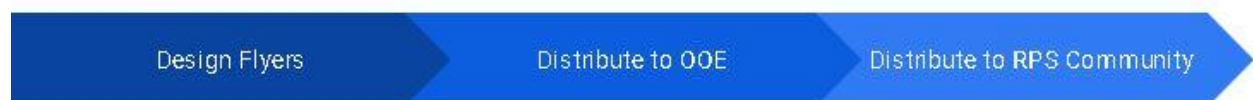
Office of Engagement (OOE)

The OOE, specifically family liaisons, would carry out the bulk of implementing this recommendation. Each team member would need at least a stack of flyers to give out updated information about RPS Board Meetings to families. Family liaisons would keep flyers and talk about them with RPS families at their pre-scheduled community walks, events, and help desk assignments. They would also get permission to post/leave flyers at the local businesses they hold community events at.

RPS Families & Greater Richmond Community

RPS families are the target of this intervention. They will receive flyers either directly from OOE staff or from local businesses. Depending on the family, they might also take extra flyers to give to other families in their neighborhood. Residents of Richmond may encounter the flyers and take one to someone else who has a child in RPS (this has happened before when I advertised RPS services at general Richmond community events-older residents might have grandchildren in RPS or neighbors with children in RPS).

Implementation



1. Designing the Flyer

- This step is crucial for implementing this alternative. The flyer would probably be designed by someone in the OOE staff, specifically the Advocacy Department. The flyer would need correct and updated information about RPS Board meetings and a link (or QR code) to direct families to the steps for submitting public comment. The flyer would also need to be colorful to attract RPS family attention.

2. Distribution of Flyers to OOE Staff

- The flyers would probably be mass printed and distributed at Richmond Alternative School (RAS) where many of the color printers in RPS are. OOE staff members can drop by to pick up flyers at the beginning of the work week and could go back to pick up more flyers as needed.

3. Distribution of Flyers from OOE Staff to the RPS Community

- OOE staff would then take the flyers from RAS to their weekly community walks, events, and help desks that they are already assigned to. They will give flyers to RPS families, local businesses, and other Richmond community members. During more stationary events like help desks, family liaisons can briefly explain the public comment process to RPS families while giving them the flyer.

What Else Could Go Wrong?

Flyers Being Taken Down/Multiple Businesses Refuse Flyers

Some businesses may refuse to hand out flyers to community members. For example, renting offices may have policies that prohibit any type of advertising posted in their offices. In this case, family liaisons need to do their research to determine whether or not they are allowed to post flyers. This is often done when they are planning events to begin with, but there is still room for miscommunication between OOE staff and local businesses. Even if all businesses refused to allow OOE staff to put up flyers, staff members can still get flyers to families through other avenues (community walks and help desk events).

Not Enough OOE Staff to Post Flyers

The proposed FY23 RPS budget calls for a move of OOE staff to other departments (Richmond, 2022.c). RPS would keep the same number of staff, but it is still not clear how many team members will move to different departments. If half of the OOE staff moves (which I believe is unlikely), then there would be significantly less people to implement this alternative, so there would be less of a reach to the RPS community. A solution would be to give flyers out directly to schools as well as OOE staff. This way, the flyers would still be accessible to RPS families.

Conclusion

Currently, RPS simply does not have the capacity to support a more comprehensive intervention. Giving flyers to families and the greater RPS community will help spike interest in school board meetings without putting too much extra stress on current RPS staff. In the future with larger staff capacity, adding virtual/in-person workshops to further explain (in detail) how the public information section works would be a valuable addition to this intervention.

Appendix A

Demographic Data of In-Person Board Meeting Public Information Period RPS 2021-22 School Year posted on YouTube

[RPS Board Meeting 10/4/21](#), Speakers Brief Descriptive Summary:

There were ten pre-registered speakers for this school board meeting:

- **1 white man** Steven Straus (RPS teacher, supports collective bargaining),
- **3 black women** Charlotte Hair (RPS teacher, support of collective bargaining), Kiesha King (RPS teacher, wants better school lunches), Katina Harris (RPS teacher and parent, staff shortage, student & teacher mental health, supports collective bargaining),
- **5 white women**; Jennifer Vanartam (RPS teacher, need help with preschool capacity, support for collective bargaining), Ann Forester (RPS teacher, support for collective bargaining), Paige Ellwinker (RPS teacher, support for collective bargaining), Emily Cavanaugh (RPS parent, asking for better lunches), Jamie Weinstien (RPS teacher, support collective bargaining), Jenny Ogomo (not present)

There were ten unregistered speakers:

- **3 white women** Betsy Mulbourne (RPS teacher, better school lunches, equity report for specialty centers), Melody Winters (Educator, supports collective bargaining), Carrie Tredway (RPS employee, supports collective bargaining),
- **3 black women** Lakeisha Williams (RPS teacher and parent, children for asthma), Jamie Yarnie (RPS parent, wants better school lunches), Tisha Irving (RPS parent, laptops no one is giving them back, not stocked bathrooms),
- **2 black men** Tyrone Bay (Richmond citizen in 2nd district, support for collective bargaining), Daryll Turner (RPS teacher, support strong resolution for collective bargaining),
- **1 Hispanic man** Joey Park (RPS teacher, support for collective bargaining),
- **1 white man** Quintin Robins (Member of Richmond for All, does not want SROs in schools or for home visits)

[RPS Board Meeting 10/18/21](#), Speakers Brief Descriptive Summary:

There were two pre-registered speakers for this school board meeting:

- **1 white woman**; Jennifer Vanartam (RPS teacher, support for collective bargaining),
- **1 black woman** Kiesha King (Love, Educate, and Grow LLC, Math teacher at Richmond Virtual Academy, loves virtual environment gives students opportunity, it needs to stay)

There were thirteen unregistered speakers:

- **4 black women** Rev. Robin Mines (Richmond community member, need George Wythe to be reconstructed), Lakeisha Williams (RPS teacher and parent, wants progress for kids who have asthma) Keisha Banks (55:40 first board meeting heard about it today, works for RPS Food and Nutrition Services, lack of staff, was fired and wants to tell her side of the story), Catina Harris (RPS teacher, wants strong collective bargaining resolution);
- **5 white women** Carey Tredway (RPS teacher, wants collective bargaining), Betsy Mulbourne (equity report for specialty programs, need funding for high schools to help all students), Catherine Marckety (RPS teacher, staffing issues because of new bell schedule), Roushall Ruffner (RPS teacher at River City, supports collective bargaining), Lila Sandridge (RPS teacher, support of collective bargaining);
- **2 white men** Henry Hacker (junior student, knows teachers are struggling, wants collective bargaining), Patrick Horte (RPS teacher, supports collective bargaining);
- **2 black men** Daryll Turner (VP of Richmond Education Association, want a strong collective bargaining resolution), Charles Willis (Richmond community member, Richmond students were murdered, wants help with students at George Wythe, these students have nothing to bargain with)

[RPS Board Meeting 11/8/21](#), Speakers Brief Descriptive Summary:

There were three pre-registered speakers for this school board meeting:

- **2 white women** Amy Macintosh (RPS teacher at George Wythe, learning environment at the school, not enough adults), Jennifer Vanartman (RPS teacher, thanks for the mental health week, wants them to vote for collective bargaining in December),
- **1 black man** Dr. Micheal H. Thompson (Richmond resident, concerns about safety and wellness of staff because of COVID)

There were two unregistered speakers:

- **1 white woman** Ann Forester (RPS teacher, teacher retention),
- **1 black woman** Candace Lucas (Advocates for Justice member, no dyslexia advisor)

[RPS Board Meeting 11/15/21](#), Speakers Brief Descriptive Summary:

There were four pre-registered speakers for this school board meeting:

- **1 white woman** Barbara Hass (librarian at Boushall Middle, new chromebook program with no training, want clear guidelines)
- **1 white man** Shaun Wiser (not present)
- **1 black woman** Kiesha King (RPS teacher, worried about racial bias against students in growth assessment, students were never exposed to the right standards),
- **1 black man** Charles Willis (Richmond community member, wants to acknowledge the homicides of young people in RPS),

There was one unregistered speaker:

- **1 black man** David Jones (founder of a Richmond nonprofit with RPS students, want to give students a chance to play sports)

[RPS Board Meeting 12/6/21](#), Speakers Brief Descriptive Summary:

The decision to make collective bargaining was scheduled for this board meeting.

There were sixteen pre-registered speakers for this school board meeting:

- **2 Latina women** - Jessica Diaz (middle school teacher, support of collective bargaining), Natalie Suarez (teaches history at George Wythe, staff retention, support for ESL students);
- **11 white women** Rachel Hefner (constituent of 2nd district, support of collective bargaining), Nora Sammy (RPS teacher, supports collective bargaining), Ansley Perkins (support for collective bargaining), Ann Forester (RPS teacher, supports collective bargaining), Catherine Sure (RPS teacher, supports collective bargaining), Paige Ellwinker (RPS teacher, supports collective bargaining), Jamie Weinstien (RPS teacher at George Wythe, supports collective bargaining), Bonnie Holland (RPS teacher and parent, retention issue, support for collective bargaining), Megan McPherson (RPS teacher, support for collective bargaining), Betsy Melbourne (RPS parent of four, supportive of collective bargaining), Jenny Ogoumo (RPS parent, support for collective bargaining)
- **1 white man** Kevin Pelletier (RPS dad, support of collective bargaining)
- **1 black woman** Charlotte Hair (teacher at Richmond Community HS, support of collective bargaining)
- **1 black man** Dr. Michael H. Thompson (Richmond community member, teacher bonuses can be paid with COVID-19 relief packages, support for collective bargaining)

There were eighteen unregistered speakers:

- **4 white women** - Rose Sabo (United Campus Workers, supports collective bargaining), Taylor Petty (RPS teacher, supports collective bargaining, wants training for referrals), Samantha Jaffe (RPS teacher, support of collective bargaining), Rochelle Ruffner (RPS teacher, support of collective bargaining),
- **2 white men** - Steven Axeman (RPS substitute teacher, supports collective bargaining), Jacob Neilhelp (RPS teacher, support of collective bargaining);
- **7 black women** - Chiquita Witcher (RPS parent, student athletes requesting a waiver who were in good standing), , Crystal Cory (teacher in RPS, support of collective bargaining); Noni Cory (RPS teacher, sister to Crystal), Sheila Hacket (senior at George Wythe, advocates for George Wythe, supports collective bargaining), Elaina White (student at George Wythe, support collective bargaining), Beth Almore (mother was a teacher, supports collective bargaining), Candace Lucas (School to Prison Pipeline Organization, support for collective bargaining);
- **5 black men** - Jerry Gunner (from Richmond, worked in RPS, supports collective bargaining), Alan Shipman (6th district Richmond resident, supports collective bargaining), Daryll Turner (RPS preschool teacher, support of collective bargaining), Kevin Bar (Richmond resident, support of collective bargaining), Reginald Goodwin (Owner of mental health business in Richmond, was a teacher, support of collective bargaining),

[RPS Board Meeting 1/10/22](#), Speakers Brief Descriptive Summary:

There were no pre-registered speakers for this school board meeting.

There were two unregistered speakers:

- **2 black women** - Tisha Irving (congratulating teachers & principals of her students), Lakeisha Williams (8th district constituent, RPS staff member, congratulate her principal)

[RPS Board Meeting 1/18/22](#), Speakers Brief Descriptive Summary:

There were no pre-registered speakers for this school board meeting.

There were nine unregistered speakers:

- **2 black women** - Andrea Bryant (is a teacher, commented that she's been here before, 176 cases, wants virtual instruction), Beth Awlmore (elementary music teacher; encourages everyone to get vaccinated, housing, collective bargaining thanks);
- **4 white women** Emma Clark (teacher at Huguenot, member of the 4th district, response to Omicron, eviction), Ann Forester (teacher at River City Middle School), Natalie Pateno White (Lucille Brown Middle School - short on cleaning staff, commented she's nervous, it's her first time speaking in front of the board), Jeannie Balkar (RPS parent, thanked hearing about teacher situations, proposed SIT budget ;

- **2 white men**, Cole Oberman (teacher at River City about COVID mitigation), Steven Straus (teacher at River City, some students not complying to mask policy);
- **1 Spanish-speaking woman**, Lisa Dealole (First year teacher, omicron, less than half students attending daily)

RPS Board Meeting 2/22/22, Speakers Brief Descriptive Summary:

There were seven pre-registered speakers for this school board meeting:

- Mary Gresham, the manager of custodial services in RPS, is a black woman who's worked with RPS for 30 years. She brought a complaint about custodian working conditions.
- Emily Cavanaugh, a white mom in the 2nd district, spoke against Schools Build Schools and expressed an urgent need for construction help for Fox Elementary.
- Becky Duval, another white mom in the 2nd district spoke against Schools Build Schools and expressed an urgent need for construction help for Fox Elementary.
- Elliot Clarke, a white man, attended Fox Elementary School and is a construction worker. He urged the Board to keep the original construction plans of Fox Elementary.
- Kim Jones, a white woman, 3rd grade virtual teacher, wants virtual school to continue and wants more funding for RVA's Virtual Academy.
- Teresa Kennedy, another white mom in the 2nd district spoke against Schools Build Schools and expressed an urgent need for construction help for Fox Elementary.
- Jenny Ogomo, a white mom in the 6th district, expressed the need for construction help for George Wythe High School. She asked "how come money is going to Fox and not Wythe?"

There were eight unregistered speakers:

- Lakeisha Jones, black mom in the 9th district, urged the Board to help to fix the attendance system. (Her son's asthma should be counted as excused absences)
- Charles Willis, a black man, Executive Director of the United Communities Against Crime, talked about solidarity between all the hardships people at Wythe have and their relationship with Fox, Wythe can't wait;
- Tara FitzPatrick, a white mom in the 3rd district, wants the board to pass the budget for increased teacher wages;
- Solana Spencer, a black mom to a virtual student;
- Maria Cara Rose, a white mom in the 3rd district, wants board to review the budget quickly;
- Deanie Belker, a white mom in the 3rd district, doesn't want the Schools Build Schools to be revoked because Fox was a tragedy;
- Dennis Colloway, a black man resident of Richmond, asks where are the plans to increase revenue for school infrastructure;

- Elise Boyd, white woman (ICC for virtual learning, wants funding).

[RPS Board Meeting 3/7/22](#), Speakers Brief Descriptive Summary:

There were four pre-registered speakers for this school board meeting:

- **1 white man** Boss Bowshan (RPS parent of children at Fox ES, Fox was burned down but he feels connected to all of the schools, emails and written comments don't get answered)
- **3 white women** Amelia Bowshan (RPS parent reading for another, would like their Fox ES children to be in a physical space as soon as possible), Catherine Ricard (Fox ES PTA President, want students back in a physical space soon), Holly Blanton (RPS parent of children at Fox ES, want students back to in-person learning as soon as possible)

There were six unregistered speakers:

- **4 white women** Becky Duvall (RPS parent of children at Fox ES, supports stop gap option and wants in-person learning as soon as possible), Rose Estes (RPS parent of a child at Fox ES, wants in-person learning and to learn in First Baptist Church as soon as possible), Julia Regatti (RPS parent of Fox ES children, wants her children to do in-person learning), Sara Kendig (RPS parent of Fox ES children, needs her daughter to be back in the building)
- **1 black woman** Tisha Irving (RPS parent, supports freedom of speech, wants parents to be able to volunteer inside of the building)
- **1 black man** Charles Willis (Richmond community member, wants to be cautious of school meals being culturally conscious, share that there are other spaces for Fox children to attend)

[RPS Board Meeting 3/21/22](#), Speakers Brief Descriptive Summary:

There were three pre-registered speakers for this school board meeting:

- **2 black women:** Rev. Robin Mines (Community member, time to move forward with construction and come together, build Wythe as well as Fox, stop pretending the Southside doesn't exist); Kyesha King (teacher at Richmond Virtual Academy, parents want children to stay but no means to),
- **1 black man** Mr. Charles Willis (representing Richmond Highway neighborhood organization, held "Community not Chaos" sign, need George Wythe HS that meets the need of the community)

There were eight unregistered speakers:

- **1 black woman** Tisha Irving (parent of Christopher, wants people to come together to build George Wythe HS);
- **1 black man:** ; Christopher Irving Jr. (14 years old, attend River City Middle School, decision determines if he can go to George Wythe HS);

- **5 white women** Shanet Heady (parent of 10th grader at Thomas Jefferson, 4th grader at Fox, looks forward to George Wythe HS meeting, knows lots of families can't come to meetings; it is powerful to see their faces - use the technology to provide a Zoom option); Becca Duvall (Fox parent, concern about governance, wants public comment in between agenda; policies are proposed without public input); Betsy Mulborn (construction ownership, governance, it is the responsibility of the school board to get schools made; Emily Kavanaugh (parent in 2nd district, coming back and asking to be friends with the Mayor, Richmond is filled with trauma, we need to work together); Elise Boyd (RPS staff, George Wythe floor is crumbling);
- **1 Hispanic man** Omoar (sophomore at George Wythe HS, was not accepted into a math specialty program)

Appendix B

Sensitivity Analysis

Hold Civic Empowerment Workshops

Effectiveness:

This alternative already scores a 1 for effectiveness, so changing this number would only prevent it even further from being the top recommendation for my client. A score of 2 would place this alternative below both the increasing advertisements and making RPS board meetings convenient alternatives.

Political Acceptability

Holding everything else constant, if this alternative scored a “1” with political acceptability, then it would be the recommendation for my client. This alternative is less acceptable than increasing advertisements because it is not something currently built into how RPS operates.

Accessibility/Reach

Even if the length of these workshops were cut in half, this alternative would not be recommended over the increasing advertising alternative.

Make RPS Board Meetings More Convenient

Effectiveness

This alternative also scores a 1 in effectiveness, so an increase in this number would only hurt the chances of this alternative being recommended.

Political Acceptability

If this alternative earned a 1 for political acceptability, it would be ranked above both holding civic empowerment workshops and increasing advertisements for RPS board meetings. This would be unlikely, especially considering the recent vote the school board made to continue having meetings in the same places.

Accessibility/Reach

A score of “1” in this criteria would tie this alternative with the holding civic empowerment workshops alternative. A score of “.5” would rank this alternative above the workshop one, but it would still be below the increasing advertisements alternative.

Increase Advertisements for RPS Board Meetings

Effectiveness

With a score of “1” for effectiveness, this alternative would still be the top choice out of all of the alternatives. If the score was a “3” then this alternative would be the worst one. Holding civic empowerment workshops would be the best choice in this scenario.

Political Acceptability

This alternative is the most politically acceptable. If it went up to a “2” or “3” score, then again, holding civic empowerment workshops would be the recommended option for my client.

Accessibility/Reach

Although it is very unlikely that the time it would take to interact with a flyer would vary significantly, some families may not access them as readily as other families. If this were the case, I would bump the score up to “1.55” and this alternative would be almost tied with the holding civic empowerment workshops alternative.

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