

Parent Empowerment in Education

Measuring What Matters

INPUTS, OUTPUTS & OUTCOMES

This section introduces three core categories of measurement and the range of measures in each category. There is also a fourth category of measurement in the parent empowerment space – **infrastructure** – that we cover in the next section.

As you review this, keep in mind that **this is not advocating that organizations measure**

everything. Not everything you care about needs to be or should be formally measured. Not everything can be measured. And everything you measure incurs a cost. **Your organization should ‘Goldilocks’ what it measures. You should only capture measures that help your organization make better decisions to increase impact (and are practical to collect).**



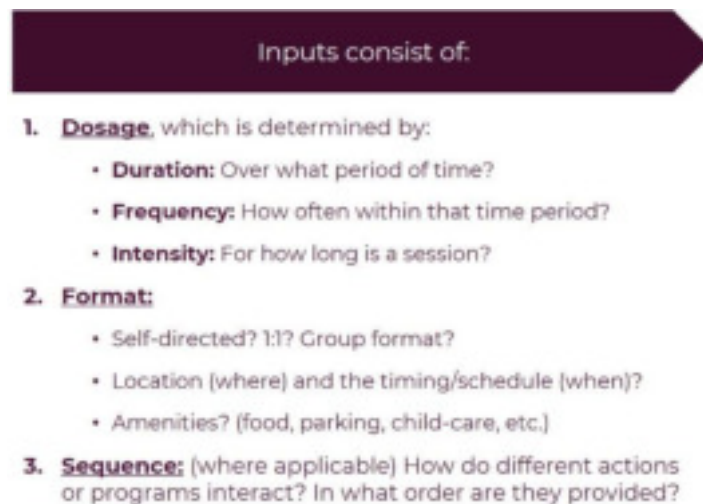
Inputs

Inputs are measures of the investment of people, time and money in your campaign.

For example: The number of hours of training you provide on phone-banking is an input. The number of hours of training you provide teachers on how to engage parents during home visits is an input. The resources to develop a research report or a website with content for parents are inputs. The resources to organize and execute a public action are inputs. These inputs then drive costs associated with personnel and physical content (as well as allocation of overhead).

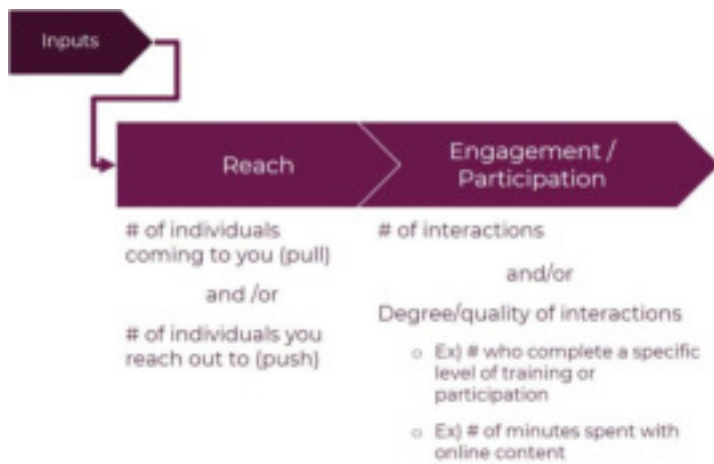
On this website, we focus largely on outputs and outcomes (and infrastructure).

However, **it is important for organizations to articulate inputs in order to assess how well their allocation of scarce resources (investment) achieve their intended outcomes (return).**



Outputs

Outputs are the measures of reach or engagement/participation in your campaign.



For example: The number of community members who complete X hours of training on phone-banking; the number of teachers who complete X hours of training on home visits; the number of individuals who are reached and engage with content on your website.

Some outputs involve the completion of a certain number of hours of participation in programming, which underscores the importance of laying out the dosage in the inputs, as this then determines how to quantify outputs (see the ACT prep example below).

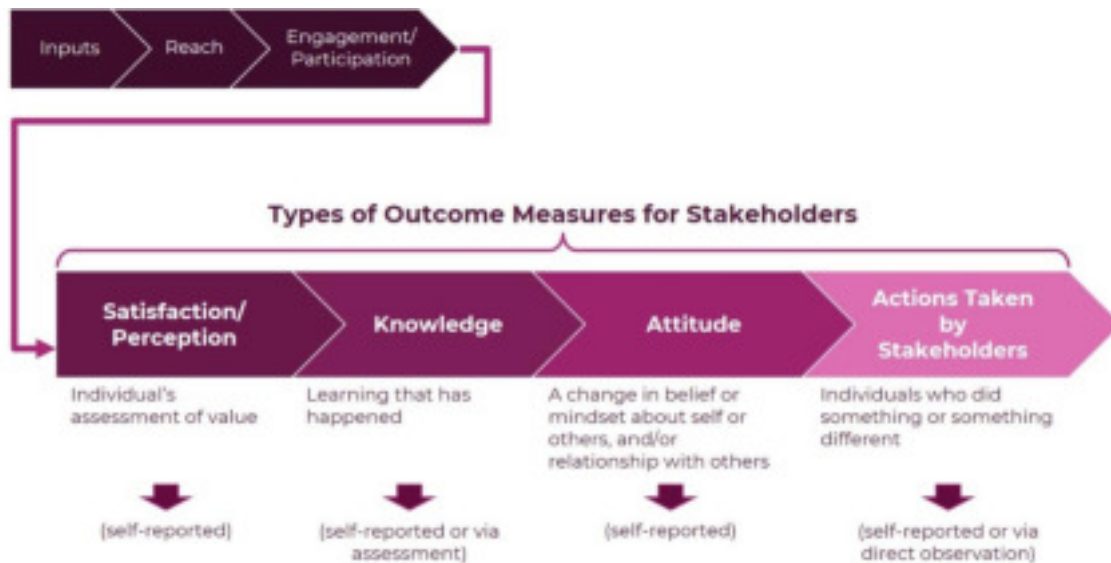
Outputs are not the same as outcomes, but they are important to measure because they tell you if you are more or less likely to achieve your desired outcome(s).

However, outputs are also not a substitute for outcomes.

Outcomes

Outcomes are the measures of benefit or change that your campaign creates.

There are many different types of outcomes an organization can measure to understand if it is creating benefit or change. In education, improving student outcomes (in all the complex and rich varieties these can be measured) is an organization’s ultimate goal. However, an organization can measure a range of preceding outcomes to help understand whether a campaign is on or off track to positively impact student outcomes.



Satisfaction/perception is often the most immediate outcome to measure from programming. High satisfaction is not an automatic assurance that the ultimate desired set of other outcomes you want will happen. However, low satisfaction with an organization's programming can serve as an immediate warning sign that other types of outcomes are less likely to happen. *"Measuring satisfaction enables us to know if we and all of our stakeholders perceive the same existing reality. It also lets us know very quickly if our programming is or is not working to meet the needs of our families,"* advises Samantha Cohen, Senior Managing Director of Family and Community Engagement at the DC- and Puerto Rico-based **Flamboyan Foundation**. Some organizations do this through surveys. Some surveys include a concept called a **Net Promoter Score**, which measures the degree to which participants would recommend your organization or programming to their peers.

"Measuring satisfaction enables us to know if we and all of our stakeholders perceive the same existing reality."

— Samantha Cohen
Senior Managing Director,
Family and Community
Engagement
Flamboyan Foundation

Knowledge lets an organization know if learning is happening that it believes is a necessary precursor to changes in action. This outcome could include knowledge about the performance of a parent's child, their child's school or their community's school system. It could include knowledge about the policies and politics that drive that performance, including who has authority. A knowledge measure could also capture how a parent could do something different – individually for their child or collectively as a group. Organizations can measure knowledge through self-assessment via a survey or a pre- and post-test.

"Measuring how far down a web page a parent reads, or for how long they watch a video, tells us which information and messages they are and aren't getting exposed to. It informs how we craft our future content so we can succeed in providing the knowledge parents value most."

— Donovan Birch Jr.
Digital Strategist
Innovate Public Schools

In the internet era, organizations can also assess knowledge by observing where people spend time with an organization's online content. For example, did the person watch a video or download a report? How far into a video did they watch on average? How far down an article or page did they scroll on average? These can tell an organization a lot about which knowledge in a video, article or page is being consumed or not consumed by their intended audience. *"Measuring how far down a web page a parent reads, or for how long they watch a video, tells us what information and messages they are and aren't getting exposed to. It informs how we craft our future content so we can succeed in providing the knowledge parents value most,"* counsels Donovan Birch Jr., Digital Strategist at **Innovate Public Schools**.

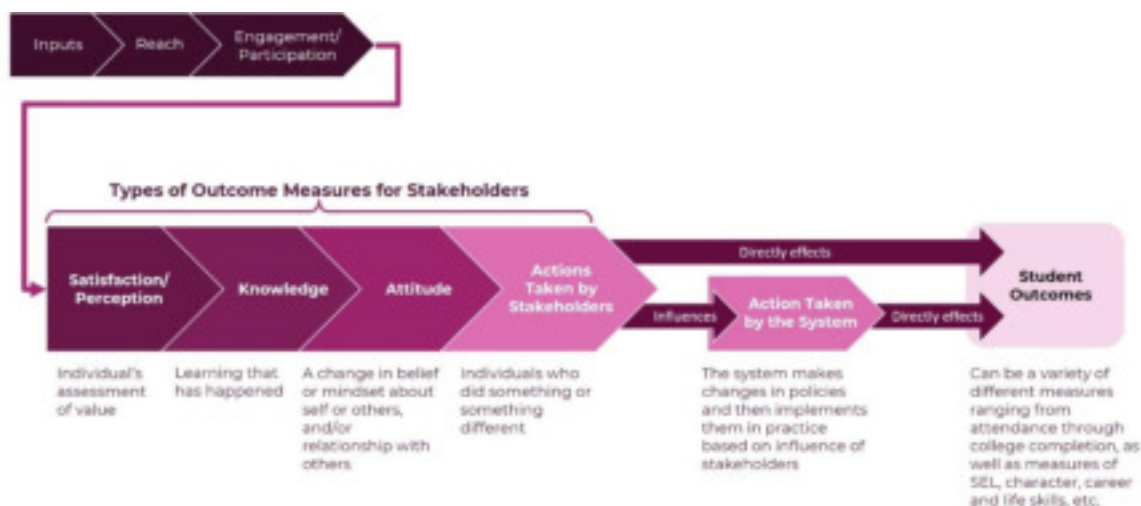
In Parent Empowerment work, **Attitude** is a measure that helps organizations assess whether individuals have made a shift in their belief about the innate power they hold, the potential for their child's achievement, and/or their beliefs about what an educator or education system can and should be able to do for their child. Changing attitudes do not automatically mean a change in actions, but it can be a good predictor. **However, asking a parent to reflect on their attitude can be catalytic because it is asking them to judge if they believe they have the power to make change happen for their child. When the answer is "yes", it is both self-affirming and self-inspiring.**

Actions involve someone doing something or something different with the intent that it leads to educational impact. In campaigns to support parents exercising their power as partners in education or by exercising their choice, parents take direct action that – if succeeding in its intent – directly impacts student outcomes. However, in collective voice (issue) campaigns and vote (electoral) campaigns, parent actions focus on making a system then take actions which, if successful, result in a change in student outcomes.

Further, while outcome measures tend to move in this linear fashion, they by no means always do. For example, an organization can begin by conducting training and then seek to measure satisfaction, knowledge and attitudes. Then, the organization can measure if parents in this training subsequently take action. But if one of those intended actions is something like a house meeting or research meeting, the organization might again seek to measure changes in satisfaction, knowledge and attitudes from that house meeting, and potentially invest in seeing if parents participating in a house meeting then grow in their activism by taking other actions as participants or leaders.

Again, this does not mean everything should be measured. Not everything you care about needs to be or should be formally measured. Not everything can be measured. And everything you measure incurs a cost. **Your organization should ‘Goldilocks’ what it measures. You should only capture measures that help your organization make better decisions to increase impact (and are practical to collect).**

Last, all of these outcomes are interim outcomes on the path to positively changing student outcomes. Some parent empowerment efforts enable parents to take actions that directly benefit student outcomes. Others require influencing changes in the system which – if successfully implemented and adopted – then benefit student outcomes.

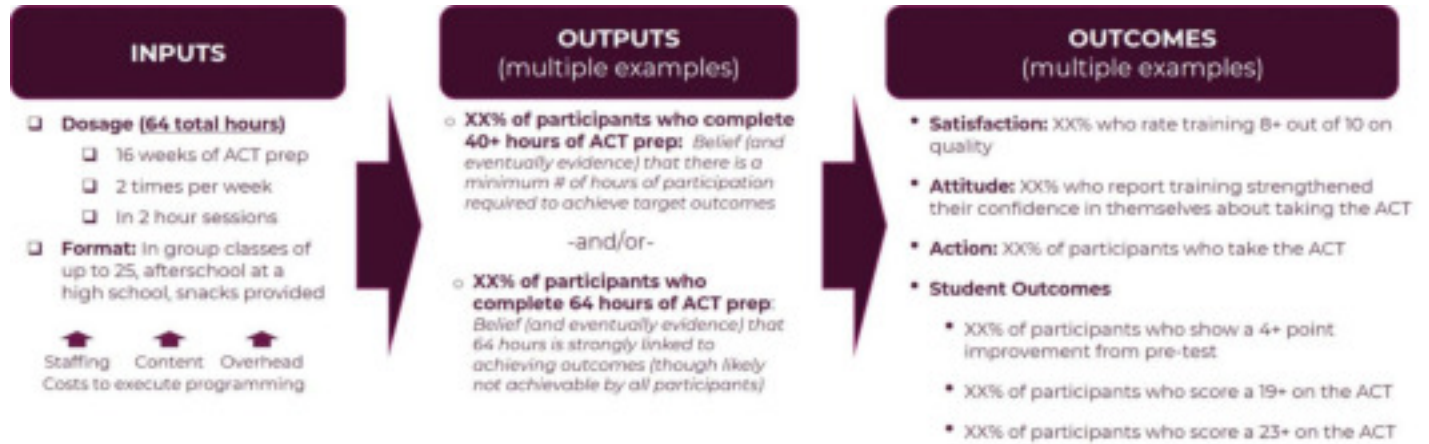


For more on linking parent empowerment work to student outcomes, click [here](#).

A simple example from the supply side

Organizations can lay out a ‘wiring diagram’ of measures that are tracked over time, usually (but not always) in a clear linear progression with success going from left to right (in English) to achieve impact. This also becomes an integral component of an organization’s articulation of its intended impact and theory of change or theory of action.

Here is an example of what it looks like to lay out inputs, outputs and outcomes in a direct-service education program – in this case, ACT preparation:



Please note the “XX’s” in outputs and outcomes. Those are specific targets. Targets are not the same as outputs and outcomes. Rather, they are a specific performance an organization wants to achieve during a specific period of time. For more on Targets, [click here](#).

A more complex example from parent empowerment work

Below is a hypothetical sequence of measures from a collective voice issue campaign.

Not surprisingly, the wiring diagram can get much more complex very quickly for parent empowerment work in linking from inputs to outputs to multiple steps of outcomes that ultimately arrive at student outcomes.



Input for a parent leadership training

- Dosage: 30 hours of training
 - Duration - 10 weeks
 - Frequency - 1 session per week
 - Intensity - 3 hours per session
- Format:
 - Group training of up to 20 emerging parent leaders
 - Dinner, parking and child-care provided

This example starts with a leadership training in support of an issue campaign (Strategy 3 – Parents exercising their collective voice), with the following dosage and details on the format that collectively drive the allocation of people, time and money.

The training is designed with the needs of parents in mind to remove barriers to participation, such as providing child-care, dinner and parking.

Many parent empowerment actions start with workshops, trainings or other events, and continue to offer these to reach parents, engage them, help them understand their innate power, help them set their agenda, and then ultimately take actions (individually or collectively) for their children, schools or school systems.



Outputs from a parent leadership training

- X% of participants who complete XX% of hours of programming and who complete key training milestones
 - Complete story of self
 - Complete mapping network capital

In this example, the primary output is the number of parents who completed the training. This could further be refined as the number who complete 100% of the training sessions, or it may be that this organization has a lower threshold of participation than 100% of sessions to qualify for completion, e.g., maybe 80% of all sessions.

The completion of key deliverables in this example are also part of the outputs from this training – a story of self and mapping network capital.



Initial outcomes (examples)

A sample range of initial outcomes:

- **Satisfaction:** X% who report being satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of the programming
- **Knowledge:** X% who report understanding who holds what specific authority within a school system
- **Attitude:**
 - o X% who report believing this organization is a trusted source of information and counsel
 - o X% who report believing they have and can use their power to advocate for their child
 - o X% who report believing they have and can use their power as a community to drive change

Satisfaction, knowledge and/or changes in attitude are the first outcomes an organization might choose to measure.

While these measures are not the ultimate outcomes an organization likely seeks to impact, they can be valuable as leading indicators that the organization is on track to achieve more significant outcomes.

These measures are also important when larger outcomes are longer-term and/or may be harder to measure.

Still, not all organizations will want to invest in the time and effort to capture all of these initial outcomes (as collecting any measures means expending resources).



Outcomes from campaign actions

A **sample range of actions** parents and an organization may employ to influence those in authority to achieve their impact agenda

- X# of parents who **provide public testimony** at a school board meeting
- X# of **social media posts** made by parents advancing campaign
- X# of people who **attend a public action**
 - o X# of parents who organized and led this public action
 - o X# of media hits from this public action
- X# of people reached through **canvassing:**
 - o X# of parents who participated in canvassing sessions
 - o X# of parents who organized and led canvassing sessions

Any given campaign can employ a range of different actions, and therefore requires an infrastructure of parent power to execute them. In this example, the organization would measure actions around public testimony, social media, a large public action, and canvassing actions (again, these are only a sample of potential actions). Some of these are measures of direct actions by parents, while others are measures of larger participation by other people in the community because of parent actions.

Also, in the case of an action like canvassing, it can be important to measure how many parents organize and lead, and how many participate are members. Both roles are crucial but different, and both are measures of the infrastructure of parent power that enable that action to occur. This is only a sample of potential actions and a small subset of the measures by action an organization can choose to employ in planning, execution and learning.

Further acknowledging the complexity of this work, an organization might not only measure the actions taken by parents AFTER a training, but also potentially a set of actions they take DURING a training, because trainings frequently have a component of doing in order to build an individual's capacity. Trainings also don't just happen before a campaign but can occur throughout a campaign. As mentioned before - it's complicated.



Campaign resolution

- **A vote by those in authority** (such as a school board) to support this parent organization's impact agenda

And/or

- **A decision to change policy by an individual in authority** (such as a Principal or Superintendent)

This may seem like a simple binary outcome: Did a 'Collective Voice' issue campaign influence those in authority to make the desired change?

But it may not be so simple.

First, a campaign may not win initially, in which case it may continue, pause to regroup, or stop and decide to switch to a different impact agenda. There may also be formal mechanisms to appeal to a higher authority if the initial authority does not act to change policy.

Further, individuals in authority (elected or appointed) can change, and decisions can be reversed, which speaks to the importance of organizations building an infrastructure of parent power that remains active and enduring between and across campaigns of all types.



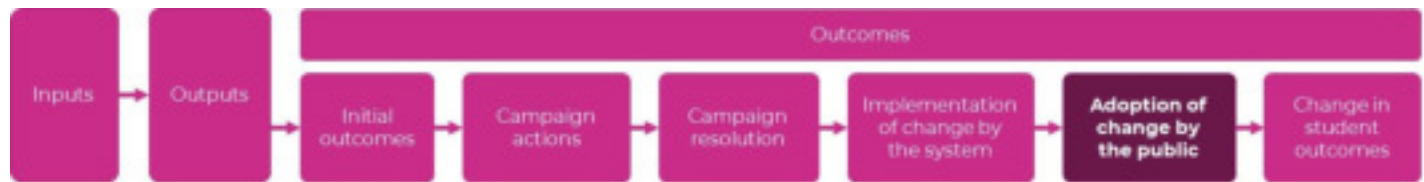
Implementation of change by the system

- Did changes in conditions at the school or district level get made **to enable changes in policy to be implemented?**
 - Policies/regulations written?
 - Change in leadership/governance?
 - Changes in funding allocation?
 - Changes in measurement and accountability?
 - Changes in staffing and training?
 - Changes in culture?
- **Did change actually happening as intended** in schools, classrooms and in the experiences of students?

Winning an issue campaign almost always requires a follow-up implementation campaign at varying levels of formality to ensure the system actually acts on a policy change.

It is inherently hard for systems to change. Unforeseen challenges to implementing change can arise. So can passive and active opposition from within the system. Change in circumstances (such as funding changes, change in who is in authority, etc.) can provide new challenges to getting change implemented. And those who are opposed to a change will likely continue to pursue their agenda to prevent or reverse it.

This also again speaks to the importance of building and sustaining an enduring infrastructure of parent power.



Adoption of change by the public

- Do **parents know about and are they able to capitalize on the changes** in policy that have been effectively implemented?
- What campaign of **informing, training and/or supporting parents** is required to ensure widespread adoption?

Even when the system effectively implements a change, an additional campaign may be required (again, at varying levels of formality) to ensure adoption by parents.

When the system provides new resources – such as advisory support to parents, a unified enrollment system, new student programming, or even new school options – parents in the system may not be able to immediately capitalize on these changes to benefit their children without first an additional campaign of informing, training and supporting them.



Change in Student Outcomes

- Potentially over multiple timeframes: Short-term, intermediate, long-term
- Potentially wide range of student outcomes to consider. A partial list includes: attendance, culture, behavior, academic achievement (GPA, testing), SEL/character, skill development, academic attainment (high school graduation, college going)

Last and definitely not least, did all this hard work of informed, organized parents exercising their power result in performance changes for children? An organization can focus on measuring short-term outcomes most immediately assessed as a result of implementing change, and can also choose to measure a broad set of student outcomes over a longer timeframe.

Multiple ways exist for an organization to link their parent empowerment work to student outcomes. To learn more about how to link parent empowerment efforts to student outcomes, please refer to the tab on student outcomes.