



# STRONG PARTNERSHIPS

## The New Parent Information and Resource Centers

Parent Information and Resource Centers (PIRCs) have been around for a decade, but these federally funded programs are taking on a new look and a new focus in this era of No Child Left Behind. With the reauthorization of the program in 2006, at least one PIRC was established in every state with each center becoming more aligned to NCLB goals for parental involvement. Debbie Ellis, a project director in the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory's Center for School, Family, and Community, heads the new Oregon PIRC. The center will coordinate family involvement activities and provide resources and information throughout the state with a special emphasis on reaching low-income and Hispanic families. She spoke with *Northwest Education* about how the new centers have evolved.

**Q.** *What was the original purpose of the PIRC program?*  
 The original PIRCs were created in 1997 under a five-year grant. The focus was at the early childhood level—helping parents get their children ready for school. In 2002 a one-year extension was offered in which the federal government shifted the focus to the No Child Left Behind Act—things like helping parents understand their rights and responsibilities under NCLB and increasing their awareness of school choice, supplemental services, teacher qualifications, adequate yearly progress (AYP), and their school's report card.

*And then in Oregon there was a gap between the end of that first grant cycle and the beginning of the current funding?*

Right. There was another three- or four-year grant given out, but there wasn't a PIRC in Oregon, or in several other states, during that time. For this new grant cycle, the federal government chose to award at least one PIRC to every state, with several states having two for greatest statewide impact.

*And how has the scope of work changed?*

The federal government has expanded the focus, combining early childhood with NCLB issues. They also wanted to make sure these grants are statewide, rather than local, and

put special emphasis on serving low-income families and schools that are struggling to meet adequate yearly progress.

*What else is different about the new PIRCs?*

There is also a new emphasis on active collaboration among groups that are already doing this work. The U.S. Department of Education wants us to bring the state Title I parent involvement coordinator to the table along with the state PTA director, the state Parent Training and Information Center, and any other partner groups in the state. Here in Oregon, for instance, the Chalkboard Project has a really strong emphasis on parent involvement. And the Oregon Council for Hispanic Advancement also has a strong parent leadership focus. So, we're partnering with both of those organizations, as well as with the Oregon Department of Education. Our role is to help all these organizations work together more effectively—share resources, collaborate—so that we can all have a bigger impact and we're not all reinventing the wheel.

*How will you go about doing that?*

One thing we're planning is an annual family-school partnership summit where we invite a lot of these partner organizations to bring their newest products and provide information about their services to schools and families.

A lot of these groups have already produced some really great resources, but many are only in English or are written at a level that isn't accessible to a lot of parents. We want to help these organizations get their materials translated or provide audiovisual additions and enhancements to their trainings, so that parents with lower literacy levels or limited English skills can have more access to the existing resources.

We also want to bring all these organizations to the table and say, "OK, what's out there already? What's missing? How can this group of people—who are all interested in parent involvement and school partnership issues—make the best use of all the existing resources and have a bigger statewide impact? That kind of networking and collaboration is a big part of the new PIRCs.

*How do you decide who you're going to serve?*

In Oregon the population of Hispanic students has been growing at an amazing rate—there's been a 17 percent growth just in the past two years, for instance. Now, one of every six students in Oregon is Hispanic, and that's expected to rise significantly over the next few years.

Our PIRC grant didn't require a Hispanic focus, but we chose that because of how quickly that student population is changing and the needs that increase generates in our state. An additional focus is on low-income families: Fifty percent of our funding has to serve low-income families. That's built into the grant.

As far as delivering service, we've got a three-level system. Level one services will be provided statewide. That means all schools, all parents, all teachers can have access to the materials. We'll have a lot of Web-based resources in order to reach the largest number of people. Level two services are for high-needs districts and schools. And level three is generally

the schools that are in "improvement" status and have high numbers of Hispanic and low-income families. Level two schools will get more outreach as far as e-mail and telephone technical assistance, while level three schools will receive personal site visits from our staff.

*Is there funding to deal with all the schools that are in improvement?*

In order to expand our funding and work with as many schools as possible, we've been working in collaboration with NWREL's Improving School System's Unit and with the regional school improvement coordinators who have already established relationships with the schools. That way we're not just one more person going to a school and saying, "I'm here to help you with your parent involvement!" Instead, we work directly with the coordinators to help the school identify their parent involvement needs, then set up a specific plan on how we can best help them meet their goals. ■

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Each state has its own PIRC with a focus on statewide issues. Here are the PIRCs in the Northwest region:

### **Oregon PIRC**

Debbie Ellis, Project Director  
Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory  
101 S.W. Main Street, Suite 500, Portland, OR 97204-3213  
800-547-6339, ext. 522, 503-275-9552, ellisd@nwrel.org

### **Alaska PIRC**

Julie Staley, Alaska State PIRC Director  
SERRC, 210 Ferry Way, Juneau, AK 99801  
907-586-6806, julies@serrc.org  
Alaska has set up a unique system with satellite representatives based in the communities that need the most assistance. Those representatives speak the language and know the culture(s) of the community(ies) they serve.

### **Idaho PIRC**

Pat Stephens, Idaho State PIRC Director  
Family Advocate Program  
3010 W. State, Suite 104, Boise, ID 83703  
208-345-3344, pat@familyadvocate.org  
The Idaho PIRC consists of a partnership among five different nonprofit agencies, one each in Coeur D'Alene, Idaho Falls, Pocatello, Boise, and Caldwell-Nampa. Approximately 71 percent of services are provided in direct, in-person train-

ings using the Parents as Teachers model. Other resources include a Web site, a newsletter, and statewide presentations. Idaho has maintained a similar PIRC system since receiving its original grant in 1997.

### **Montana PIRC**

Naomi Thornton, Montana State PIRC Director  
Word, Inc., 127 N. Higgins, Missoula, MT 59802  
406-543-3550, futures@wordinc.org  
The Montana PIRC will focus on expanding, supporting, and providing resources to parents and schools, particularly in communities with high poverty and a large Native American population.

### **Washington PIRC**

Sue Schlegel, Washington State PIRC Director  
Columbia Basin College Foundation  
P.O. Box 6877, Kennewick, WA 99336  
509-544-5770, sschlegel@esd123.org  
The Washington PIRC system includes five centers in rural areas with high-minority populations: North Franklin County, Pasco, Prosser, Othello, and Walla Walla. Services include on-site activities and bilingual Web-based resources. Some activities will also be statewide. As part of the grant, Washington will conduct a three-year research project that studies a home-visit model for the parents of two-year old children in each of the service areas.