



Learning Together

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction • John T. Benson, State Superintendent • 125 South Webster Street • P.O. Box 7841 • Madison, WI 53707-7841 • (800) 441-4563

Family Involvement in Early Childhood Programs:

Choosing the Right Program for Your Child

There are many kinds of early childhood programs for young children ages 0-5. Some programs are home-based, while others are in more formal settings, such as centers and schools. They include Head Start and preschool programs, both public and private. Regardless of the location, the extent of your family's involvement in your children's early childhood program makes a big difference in how well children adjust and how much they learn. When families take part in their young children's education programs, children do better in school, and the quality of their education can improve.

What is family involvement, and how can families choose early childhood programs that encourage it? This article looks at these questions, and provides information on how to choose an early childhood program that encourages family involvement.

What is Family Involvement?

Family involvement means that families work together with caregivers and teachers to create an atmosphere that strengthens learning, both at the program and in the home. It includes the many ways that family members can influence children's education. For example:

- *You can be a customer* because early childhood education is a service for families. Like other customers, you can tell programs what you like and don't like about the program, and offer ideas about how to make it better.
- *You can be a supporter* of the program by giving materials (snacks, classroom supplies) to the program. You can sell things (baked goods, t-shirts) to raise money, and ask for donations from local businesses who want to support the program. You can find new families by advertising in local newspapers, and places where families go during the day.
- *You can be a volunteer*. You can work at your child's program and help teachers in the classroom or at snack time or lunch. Sometimes helping at school lets you go to teacher training workshops on issues like health and safety. Sometimes it

means taking part in classroom activities like reading to your children.

- *You can be an advocate for the program* by talking to school board members and local politicians about the benefits of the program and the need for continued funding. It is your job to let the community know the importance of the early childhood program.
- *You can be on the parent-teacher association (PTA) or on a parent advisory board* that helps plan the program, hire staff, and raise money. This job lets you have a direct say in how the program affects your family.
- *You can be a learner*. Research shows that parents' child-rearing practices and beliefs are related to the child's performance in school. A good early childhood program can help you learn about your own children's development and what you can do to best support their learning and social skills. They can offer you ideas about how to help your children learn at home. They can provide information about what aspects of the home, what parents do, and what their attitudes are that are most important to children's early school success.
- *You are the best resource for information about your child*. Each child is special, and you can help the program adapt to your child's individual differences. If your child has a disability, this is particularly important.

How to Choose a Program that Promotes Family Involvement.

If you are looking for an early childhood program that encourages family involvement, you need to do two things. First, tell the program's director that you and your family want to be involved in your child's education while in the program. Second, ask what opportunities are available for family involvement in the program. Below are some questions that you can ask when looking for a program that encourages family involvement.

How does the program show that family involvement is a good idea? All family members, including parents, brothers, sisters, and



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grandparents, should feel welcome in the program. Are program activities open to my whole family? Do program staff seem willing to listen to my ideas? Do the written materials from the program talk about family involvement?

How does the program respond to each family's needs? Every family faces its own set of challenges, and programs should understand the individual strengths and needs of each family. Are meetings scheduled after work so that I can come? If meetings are at night, is child care provided? Do teachers speak any languages other than English? Will my child's teacher visit our home to get to know the family better? Are my family's holidays celebrated at my child's early childhood program?

How does the program let families know what happens during the day? Communication between home and the program is an important part of family involvement. Program and home activities should complement each other. Families need to know what children are doing in their programs. They may wish to reinforce some of these activities at home. Teachers or caregivers need to know what children are doing at home so that program activities can take advantage of these learning opportunities. Are there regularly scheduled parent-teacher conferences? Do teachers have "call-in" hours? Is there time to speak with teachers when I drop off or pick up my child? Is there a daily log book that tells me what my child did during the day? Is there a newsletter that tells me what is going on at the program?

How does the program offer ideas about how families can help children learn at home? Children are learning all the time, especially when they are home. But families often need guidance on how they can take advantage of these opportunities. Programs that value family involvement should provide ideas on how families support their children's learning at home. Is there a lending library where my children can get books to take home? Does the lending library have books on parenting? Does the program provide parenting tips on developing my child's language, art, and math skills?

How does the program encourage families to help at the center? Family members have many skills that programs can use. Can I share family stories with my child's class? Can I schedule a

time to read stories with the children? Can I help plan field trips? Can I go on field trips with the class? Can I schedule a field trip to visit my place of work? Can I volunteer to help at recess or lunch?

How does the program support the whole family? Family involvement includes ways that programs support families, both at the center and in the community. How does the program help me meet other families? Does the program offer coffee hours where I can meet other parents and make new friends? Is there a parent education center where I can get parenting tips and meet other families in the program? Some programs can even help parents find services in the community that they need.

How does the program value family members as advisors? Family members have good ideas, and programs need to hear them. Does the program have a parent advisory board? Can I help interview new staff members? Can I help decide what happens during my child's day? Can I tell program staff how I think the program could be better?

How does the program respect and use parent expertise about their child? If your child has a disability, does the program ask you to provide training and information to the staff?

How much you choose to be involved with your children's program is up to you. The questions listed above can guide you as you look for a program for your child. Programs that value family involvement need to understand that your family is busy. Even if you can't commit to regular participation, you should feel welcome whenever you are able to help. Remember, no matter how small your involvement, your children benefit when the whole family is involved in their early childhood program.

This issue of *Early Childhood Digest* was prepared by Priscilla Little of the Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) and based on HFRP materials, including *Raising Our Futures*, *New Skills for New Schools*, *Early Childhood Reform in Seven Communities*, and *Family Centered Child Care*. For copies of these publications, please write to HFRP at 38 Concord Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02138, call at 617/496-4304, or visit the website, <http://hugsel.harvard.edu/~hfrp>.

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Building Better Citizens:

Uniting Schools, Families, Students, and Communities

More than one-third of the 1,325 high school students responding to the 1997 Wisconsin Youth Risk Behavior Survey reported riding at least once in the past 30 days with a driver who had been drinking. About 16 percent said they, themselves, had driven a car after drinking.

Nearly one-quarter of all students reported seriously considering suicide in the past 12 months, and one-fifth reported attempting suicide in the same time period.

Four in 10 students reported having sexual intercourse. Nearly half of students who had sex said they were 15 or 16 at the time.

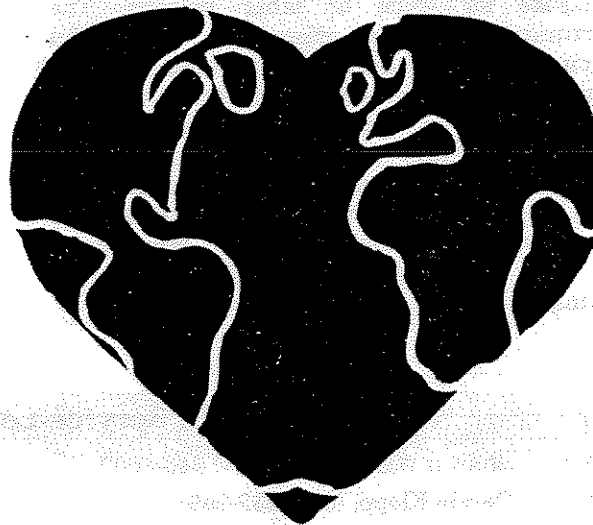
The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction encouraged the 43 public high schools participating in this survey—and all who read the Youth Risk Survey Report—to keep one question in mind: “How can we use this information to help improve the health and safety of Wisconsin students?”

To help address that question, State Superintendent John Benson announced the creation of the Wisconsin Citizenship Initiative, an effort to provide leadership to schools and communities to promote core values they identify as vital for the survival of a strong democracy. Such values could include courage, honesty, respect, civic responsibility, and individual responsibility.

Seven Characteristics of Successful Schools

The DPI recently published *Citizenship: Building a World of Good* as a tool kit to help schools explore assets, associations, and actions they can take to ensure their environments are healthy and safe for students. Seven characteristics, in particular, stand out as common in schools that are successful in developing caring, contributing, productive, and responsible citizens. These schools have:

Core Values: School and community members alike can identify citizenship qualities, such as honesty and responsibility, that all agree to foster in children. These qualities are modeled by staff and students alike and set the standard for acceptable behavior.



Safe and Orderly Places: Students and staff feel respected, and the climate and culture of the school is drug-free and safe from any form of violence. Children and adults learn constructive ways to settle differences, and peaceful conflict resolution is the norm.

Family and Community Partnerships: The contributions of all who make up the school community are honored and celebrated. Parents, caregivers, and community members have a variety of opportunities to make meaningful contributions to school programs and student citizenship development.

Address Societal Issues: Prevention of risk behaviors, such as violence, alcohol, and other drug abuse, AIDS/HIV, and teen pregnancy, are a valued part of the school's programs. Services are



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reflection on their experience. The self-esteem of parents and students alike will improve when they work together to improve their schools and communities.

Parents' initial resistance or lack of enthusiasm will decrease as they and their children find working together on service projects not only rewarding but also helpful in strengthening family bonds. Adult family members should be given options for participating in Youth Service-Learning or Adult Volunteer projects without being made to feel guilty if they are unable to participate for work or other reasons. The opportunity should be offered for meaningful participation to *all* parents. Too often, a small group of parents are consistently active in their children's schooling, while others feel unwanted in the school, or may not know how to become involved. The goal should be to reach all parents, and to help them understand that no matter their income level, educational background, language or race, they can contribute to their children's learning.

What funding opportunities are available from DPI?

All Wisconsin schools, public and private, are eligible to receive Youth Service-Learning and Adult Volunteer mini-grants to undertake service-learning projects. Grants are also available to help community-based organizations initiate service-learning projects with schools. All grants are administered by Wisconsin's 12 Cooperative Educational Service Agencies (CESAs). The entire program is financed through the Learn and Serve America program of the Corporation for National Service.

The DPI and the CESAs sponsor regional service-learning trainings for teachers and members of community-based organizations in the fall of each year. For information on the service-learning mini-grant process or on service-learning in general, please feel free to contact your CESA Youth Service-Learning contact listed below, or call Jeff Miller, Service-Learning and Community Partnership Coordinator at DPI at 1-800-441-4563 or 608-261-7494. Your school can tell you which CESA to call.

CESA Youth Service-Learning Coordinators

CESA 1: Sharon Wisniewski, (414) 546-3000
CESA 2: Carole Klopp, (608) 232-2861
CESA 3: Gary Baxter, (608) 822-3276
CESA 4: Judy Aakre, (608) 785-9373
CESA 5: Joyce Unke, (608) 742-8811
CESA 6: Jackie Schoening, (920) 236-0531

CESA 7: Jim Kampa, (920) 492-5960
CESA 8: John Knickerbocker, (920) 855-2114
CESA 9: Fred Skebba, (715) 453-2141
CESA 10: Mary Lorberter, (715) 720-2036
CESA 11: Cindy Becker, (715) 986-2020
CESA 12: Jim Lee, (715) 682-2363



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available to students and staff who may be facing such issues in their own lives.

Positive Relationships: Students feel personally known and cared for by at least one adult in the school. Students and community members are viewed as resources for supporting one another.

Engage Students' Minds: Schools use many strategies and approaches to make learning relevant for students. Classrooms are interactive places that often take learning beyond the schoolhouse door.

High Expectations: Students are expected to do their best and experience success. All students and staff are expected to model positive behaviors that embody good citizenship.

CITIZENSHIP

Building World Good

Citizenship Building Blocks

How can schools "build a world of good" and cultivate the seven characteristics of successful schools for citizenship? Following is an overview of a simple seven-step process to help make citizenship part of your school's culture. Each step is explained in more detail in the actual Toolkit.

Link with existing school improvement efforts. Planning to help children become caring, contributing, productive, and responsible people should be part of a single school improvement plan. Rather than duplicate existing planning processes, consider adding citizenship to your current school improvement goals. These programs can be excellent vehicles for citizenship:

- Goals 2000
- Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards
- Improving America's Schools Act (IASA)
- Site-based management/decisionmaking
- Strategic planning
- Lifework education
- Wisconsin Partnership Schools Network

Make a commitment. Adopt a resolution. Publicly proclaim your citizenship goals by creating your own school resolution. Be sure to involve staff, parents, community members, and students in developing this document. It will help key constituents think similarly about citizenship goals and purposes, and becomes a first step in establishing a vision for what the school and community hope to achieve through their collective effort.

Assemble a citizenship team. All good ideas need a group of committed people willing to provide time and leadership for ideas to become reality. Include on your team representatives of the teaching staff, support staff, administration, families—including those with working parents, single parents, and those who may not normally be involved—community members, enough active members to make progress, and a leader to coordinate the team's work and communicate its goals to others. Consider:

- Invite a small group of opinion leaders to meet with your team to explain the timelines, goals, and possible outcomes of your team.
- Establish a timeline and give a definite beginning and end to the team's work.
- Gain the consensus of all team members for meeting times, places, length of meetings, and agenda items. Then stick to them!
- Meet at different times and locations so all members can attend.
- Integrate new members if others must leave.

Plan for success. Focus on small changes. Allow the team to plot some "baby steps" to provide for public input, definite progress, celebrate present successes, and plan future action. Begin with a self-assessment of your school's strengths and weaknesses, how family and community members are involved, and how all students can connect with the citizenship initiative.

Foster citizenship in multiple ways. Schools offer many activities and programs that promote the development of citizenship. Here are some examples of programs your school might connect with:



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- youth service learning
- peer mediation
- mentor programs
- character education
- vocational student organizations
- parent-teacher organizations

Continually inform your community. Schools have a responsibility to inform the public about their initiatives and success stories. Many media are required to offer public service time or space to promote publicly-supported endeavors such as education. Consider all newspapers, radio, and television media in your area, as well as your school building or district newsletters to get the word out about citizenship. Create a network of thoughtful "key communicators" to react to your

team's draft proposals, focus on the positive aspects of the citizenship effort, address current issues before they escalate, and help plan for future issues.

Evaluate your results. Take time to survey team members, students, staff, and family and community members at large about how things have changed as a result of the citizenship focus, how they rate the progress of the team, and issues they would like to see addressed as the work continues.

Note: All Wisconsin public schools received copies of the 1997 Wisconsin Youth Risk Behavior Survey Report and the Citizenship Toolkit. To obtain additional copies, please contact your CESA or the DPI Student Services, Prevention & Wellness Team, 125 S. Webster St., P.O. Box 7841, Madison, WI 53707-7841 or call (608) 266-8960.



A Lifelong Gift to Children: Fathers Involved in Learning

by Randall L. Glysch
Ph.D. Program, Department of Child and
Family Studies,
University of Wisconsin-Madison

The best gift a father can offer his children is himself; in other words, to be available and accessible. Fathers who frequently let their children know that school is a priority and who spend time monitoring and being involved with their children's school progress will be giving children lasting messages about the importance of learning.

Involved fathers influence their children's development and school success in a way that promotes happy, confident individuals. Children learn valuable life skills and positive behavior from supportive fathers that they remember and emulate long after reaching adulthood.

Research has shown that children with involved fathers generally experience more school success and do better academically than children whose fathers are not involved. The importance of father involvement in helping children succeed in both school and life cannot be overstated.

Here are a few ideas about what fathers can do to help promote their children's learning:

- **Talk to your children** and take an interest in what they are doing in school. Praise them when they do well on classroom assignments and projects. Ask them specific questions about what they learned at school during the day. For example, try asking, "What letters are you practicing in kindergarten?" or "Did you like studying the pioneers in social studies this week?" instead of "What did you do in school today?"
- **Play with your child.** Whether you enjoy fixing the car, tossing a ball, constructing with Tinkertoys, or checking out the Internet, your child learns from you. Play is child's work. What better way to create great childhood memories than to do things together that you both enjoy?
- **Communicate** and work with your child's teacher. Don't hesitate to pick up the phone and talk or write

notes to your child's teacher about ideas for helping your child learn at home.

- **Volunteer.** Most teachers are thrilled to have fathers volunteer in their child's classroom or on school trips or projects. Do you have a hobby or career that children may want to learn about? Children know that learning is important when they see fathers taking the time to help at school.
- **Read!** Read to and with your child and, just as importantly, read yourself. Show your children interesting pictures in the newspaper and read aloud funny stories or interesting items that you come across. Children need to get the message from their fathers—not just mom—that reading is an interesting, valuable way to spend time.
- **Visit the library together.** Pick out books that you both like, bring them home, and read them together. Talk about what you are reading and look up the answers to questions, at home or in the library, together.
- **Emphasize the importance of academics.** Take time to explain to your child how what you learned in school helps you as an adult, either in your job or in everyday life.
- **Support your school's rules and goals.** Most schools send home handouts, newsletters, or a parents' handbook that outlines basic rules, procedures, and learning goals. It's good to familiarize yourself with them and try to set up some basic expectations for your child's conduct, safety, and responsibility both at home and at school.
- **Be a voice for fathers and parents** in your school. If possible, commit time to serving on a school committee, council, or PTA to represent the perspective of parents. Your experiences and commitment as a father means that you have a unique and valuable contribution to make at the school level. Your voice will ensure that decisions made about school policies, plans, and textbooks reflect the interests of parents in their children's learning.
- **Be a link to the community** for your child and school. Do you know individuals, civic groups, or businesses in your community that would provide



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A Lifelong Gift to Children
Families Involved in Learning

resources or information to supplement your child's learning? Learning happens everywhere, not only in the classroom.

• **Keep learning.** Remember, parenting is a skill that has to be learned like any other skill. Take advantage of workshops or presentations that your school or

community offers to help parents address tough issues about child development, discipline, alcohol and drug abuse prevention, and learning. There's no such thing as a "perfect parent," only loving parents who are willing to keep trying and keep learning to help their children.

A father and child activity:

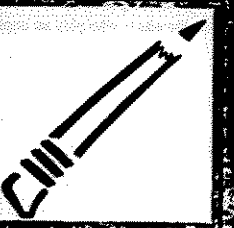
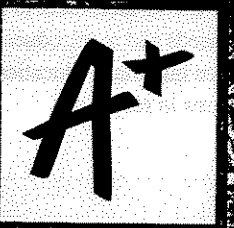
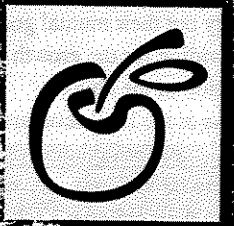
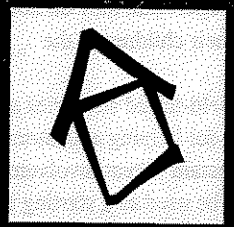
Create Your Own Family Stories

Here is a simple activity fathers and children can do together to nurture learning as well as their own special relationship. Creating and telling family stories helps children realize that stories come from real people and are about real events. Children love hearing stories about themselves, and family stories will give children a sense of their own special place in history.

Here's what to do to create your own Family Stories:

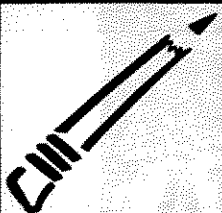
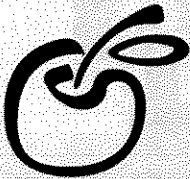
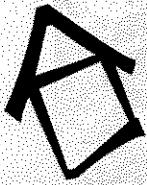
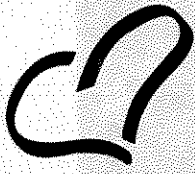
- Tell your child stories about your parents and grandparents — where they came from, how they grew up, what their homes were like, what they did in their spare time, how they celebrated holidays, or unusual things that happened to them. You might even put these stories in a book and add old family photographs.
- Ask your child to tell you stories about what happened on special days such as birthdays, family vacations, and holidays.
- Reminisce about when you were a little boy. What are your happiest memories? What struggles did you have? How did you cope with them? Talk about your brothers and sisters, things that happened at school and on summer vacations. Who was your favorite teacher? Why? What did you like least about school?
- Create a new family story. Write a trip journal with your child. Recording special events and pasting photographs into a journal ties the family story to a written record connecting the past, present, and future. Or, make everyday events special by writing about those that you enjoy doing together, such as trips to the market, library, park, or school.

Whether we always want to be or not, we are examples to children about how life should be lived. When fathers and children do things together, learning becomes fun and important.



Teacher's
Guide
to
Parent
and
Family
Involvement

National PTA



Introduction

The PTA has developed this guide in response to teachers' requests for practical ways to work with parents and spark their interest in their children's learning. Surveys reveal that most parents would give more attention to their children's schooling if they received greater direction from educators on how to do it effectively. Yet, given the societal circumstances and pressures many of today's families face, recent graduates of teacher education programs and even veteran educators report that they do not always feel equipped to advise parents on how to support their children in the education process.

This guide offers research and survey results as well as field-tested strategies and activities from PTA members—both parents and teachers—for helping educators build and sustain parent involvement.

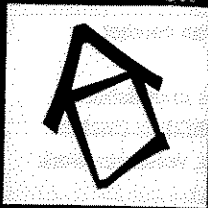
It can be used as a starting point or supplement to other programs. Through this guide, the PTA—the nation's oldest and largest child advocacy organization—provides tools for parents and educators to carry out their mutual goal of providing for the growth and education of the child.

PTAs at the local level are natural sites for initiating programs to build parents' involvement in their children's school and education. PTAs often serve as the respected representative of parents before the school administration, and schools often rely upon PTAs to alert them to parents' needs and to introduce or enhance important education programs in response.

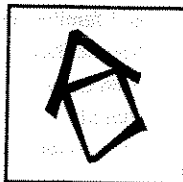
Parent involvement has been a main concern of the National PTA since the organization's founding in 1897. One of the PTA Objects is "to bring into closer relation the home and school, that parents and teachers may cooperate intelligently in the education of children and youth." This commitment to children and families continues to this day.*

*Throughout this guide, there are references to "parent" involvement. However, PTA recognizes that, more and more, other adults—grandparents, aunts, uncles, stepparents, guardians—may carry the primary responsibility for a child's education, development, and well-being. Therefore, all references to "parent" involvement include the adults who play an important role in a child's family life.

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Reaching Out to Parents and Families



Teachers are a critical link in establishing and maintaining solid parent involvement efforts. Without teachers who are actively committed to encouraging parents in the important roles they can play, schools have a difficult time recruiting parents and keeping them involved.

Many parents would like to play a more active role in their children's and teens' education, but they don't know how. In addition, several major social changes, such as the increase in the number of single-parent families, households where both parents work, the increase in different cultures from which families come and children living in poverty, have made it harder to keep parents involved.

Teachers can...

- Use the secret that gets parents to attend meetings at school: Pick up the phone and call them. Many parents do not feel welcome at school. To get parents involved takes a personal effort—a handwritten "Hope you can make it!" on the printed announcement may do it.
- Use videotapes to show busy parents their students in action. Send tapes home. Or, show them while parents wait for conferences.
- Hold several open house programs throughout the year, including visitation days and unrehearsed regular days where parents see a real class in action. Again, a personal invitation is the key to good attendance.
- If applicable, share with parents experiences they had with their own children. This breaks down barriers, brings teachers out of their "teacher" role, and helps parents see them as a fellow parent.
- Design learning contracts to involve school, parents, and students.
- Help parents set realistic goals for their students.
- Recognize what parents are doing to help students—praise them for their efforts.
- Use simple evaluation forms to elicit parent feedback on every meeting or event.

"What Teachers Can Do" is excerpted and adapted from "Getting Parents Involved," which originally appeared in *Vocational Education Journal*, Vol. 66, No. 6, September 1991, pages 34-35+. Permission to reprint has been granted by *Vocational Education Journal* and John H. Wherry, Ed.D.



How Parents Make the Difference

Study after study indicates that parent involvement increases student achievement. "The evidence is now

beyond dispute. When schools work together with families to support learning, children tend to succeed not just in school, but throughout life. The form of parent involvement chosen is not as critical to the success of children as the fact that it be reasonably well-planned, comprehensive and long-lasting." (Anne T. Henderson & Nancy Berla, *The Family Is Critical to Student Achievement*, 1994)

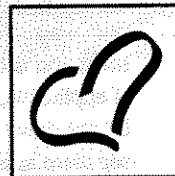
Teachers in schools where parents are actively involved find that their jobs become easier. Working in partnership with students and parents creates an environment of trust, positive interactions, and optimism for what can be accomplished. Having the support of parents relieves considerable stress for teachers who often feel they are struggling alone to improve children's achievement. Effective parent involvement programs can prevent teacher burnout and the loss of hardworking, dedicated teachers.

How Teachers Make the Difference

As child advocates supporting teachers, PTAs work with the school to encourage teachers to...

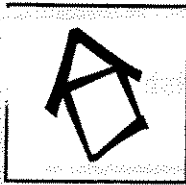
- Maintain high expectations for every child to learn and achieve
- Examine their own assumptions about students' abilities and interests based on behavior, nonstandard English or lack of English, physical appearance, or family background and to remain alert to negative student images
- Take time to get to know the community represented by the children they teach—the history of their interactions with the school, their values and customs, local heroes, favorite pastimes, child-rearing practices, worries, and aspirations
- Treat all children and their families with respect
- Welcome every family into their classroom and make them feel comfortable in the school
- Establish and maintain open, two-way communication with parents and families in the following ways:
 - Contact the parents of all children regularly, for positive as well as negative reasons.

- Establish regular times when parents can contact teachers.
- Provide a variety of options for parents to collaborate with teachers in the teaching of their children (including homework activities, class projects, volunteer work in the classroom and on field trips, etc.).
- Participate in staff training about parent involvement.
- Participate in school activities designed to help staff and families get to know each other.
- View cultural diversity as a resource and teach children to value it.
- Identify and use ways to validate children's experiences outside of school and incorporate them into instructional activities.
- Collaborate with other professionals and parents to address particular children's learning or emotional problems.
- Keep abreast of parent involvement activities; seek input from key players, i.e., parents, the principal, teaching staff, and revise activities as necessary.
- Never give up on any child or parent.



Areas where students experience improvements from parent/family involvement in their education

- Achievement
- Motivation and attitudes toward school, homework, and teachers
- Behavior
- Attendance
- Self-concept
- Rate of suspension for disciplinary reasons
- Communication with teachers and parents/families



Parents and Teachers Building Partnerships

The most common way teachers and parents come together on behalf of students is through the parent-teacher conference. The meeting is an occasion for parents and teachers to *mutually* exchange information and share observations and insights about the student. It is an opportunity for the partnership to solidify and grow.

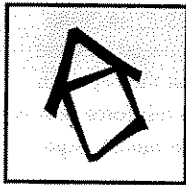
The conference is a means for both parties to coordinate efforts that will help the student overcome problem areas and fully benefit from the education experience. In this setting, efforts can become concrete work plans with both parties accepting specific responsibilities and identifying check points for touching base on how each is doing with his or her part of the agreement.

Parents appreciate teachers who understand their students and view education within the context of whole life experiences, both at school and in the home. When parents and teachers listen to each other and strengthen their partnership efforts on behalf of students, everyone benefits.

In *Parent Involvement: A Review of Research and Principles of Successful Practice*, Rhoda M. Becher notes, "It becomes very clear that extensive, substantial, and convincing evidence suggests that parents play a crucial role in both the home and school environments with respect to facilitating the development of intelligence, achievement, and competence in their children." Her research documents that effective parent programs are guided by these perspectives:

- All parents have strengths and should know that they are valued.
- All parents can make contributions to their child's education and the school program.
- All parents have the capacity to learn developmental and educational techniques to help their children.
- All parents have perspectives on their children that can be important and useful to teachers.
- Parent-child relationships are different from teacher-child relationships.
- Parents should be consulted in all decisions about how to involve parents.
- All parents really do care about their children.

(Henderson & Berla, *The Family Is Critical to Student Achievement*, 1994)



Making Parent-Teacher Conferences Work

In parent-teacher conferences, parents look to teachers to answer specific questions about their child's performance, such as...

- What are my child's best and worst subjects?
- How well does my child get along with others?
- What kinds of assessments are being done? How does my child handle taking tests?
- How can I support my child's learning at home?

Teachers can look to parents to provide insights or answer specific questions related to the student about...

- Preferred learning styles
- Special interests or talents
- Areas of difficulty
- Sudden changes at home (the death of a relative or favorite pet, for example)
- Special problems (such as parents divorcing or competition among siblings) that may affect a child's well-being and school performance
- Reaction to the classroom experience

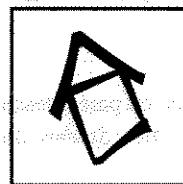
(For more information on parent-teacher conferences, order the National PTA brochure, *Making Parent-Teacher Conferences Work for Your Student*. Available in English and Spanish. Refer to "Resources" section on page 11.)

Ten Things Teachers Wish Parents Would Do

1. Be involved. Parent involvement helps students learn, improves schools, and helps teachers work with you to help your child succeed.
2. Provide resources at home for learning. Utilize your local library, and have books and magazines available in your home. Read with your children each day.
3. Set a good example. Show your children by your own actions that you believe reading is both enjoyable and useful. Monitor television viewing and the use of videos and game systems.
4. Encourage students to do their best in school. Show students you believe education is important and that you want your children to do their best.
5. Value education and seek a balance between school-work and outside activities. Emphasize your children's progress in developing the knowledge and skills they need to be successful in school and in life.
6. Recognize factors that take a toll on students' classroom performance:
 - a. Consider the possible negative effects of long hours at after-school jobs or in extracurricular activities. Work to maintain a balance between school responsibilities and outside commitments.
 - b. View drinking and excessive partying as serious matters. While most parents are concerned about drug abuse, many fail to recognize that alcohol, over-the-counter drugs, and common substances used as inhalants are the most frequently abused.
7. Support school rules and goals. Take care not to undermine school rules, discipline, or goals.
8. Use pressure positively. Encourage children to do their best but don't pressure them by setting goals too high or by scheduling too many activities.
9. Call teachers early if there is a problem so that there is still time to solve it. Don't wait for teachers to call you.
10. Accept your responsibility as parents. Don't expect the school and teachers to take over your obligations as parents. Teach children self-discipline and respect for others at home—don't rely on teachers and schools to teach these basic behaviors and attitudes.

Ten Things Parents Wish Teachers Would Do

1. Build students' self-esteem by using praise generously when appropriate while avoiding ridicule and negative public criticism.
2. Get to know as much as you can about each child's needs, interests, and special talents as well as the way each child learns best.
3. Communicate often and openly with parents. Contact them early about academic or behavior problems, and be candid rather than defensive when discussing school problems.
4. Assign meaningful homework on a regular basis that helps children learn. Provide parents with direction on how they can work with their children to make the most out of homework activities.
5. Set high academic standards for all students. Expect all of them to learn, and help them to do so.
6. Vary your teaching methods—make learning challenging and relevant to children and their world.
7. Care about children, since children learn best when taught by warm, friendly, caring, and enthusiastic teachers.
8. Treat all children fairly, and don't play favorites.
9. Enforce a positive discipline code based on clear and fair rules that are established at the beginning of each school year. Remember to reinforce positive classroom behavior rather than just punish negative actions.
10. Encourage parent and family involvement by reaching out to involve parents in their children's education. Show them how they can help their children at home. Remember that parents want to work with teachers to help their children do their best.



Adapted from *The National PTA Talks to Parents: How to Get the Best Education for Your Child* by M.J. Cutright, Ph.D. Copyright 1989 by the National PTA.

Practical Ideas for Involving Families in Children's Learning



Teacher Strategies

Teachers can often reach out to parents and families with the help of practical activities and strategies. Most of the time parents have available to work with their children involves evenings after work or on weekends. They need help from teachers to make this time as valuable for their children as it can be. In order to be most effective, parents

need to know what is happening at school, what homework has been assigned, and what topic areas are being studied in order to take advantage of community events or programs that would enhance their child's learning. (For more information on helping children improve homework skills, order the National PTA brochure, *Helping Your Student Get the Most Out of Homework*. Available in English and Spanish. Refer to "Resources" section on page 11.)



Strategies for Elementary Students

These activities support parents and families as they work together with students to encourage learning:

Parent Packets

Packets of information from the school provided to parents at the beginning of the school year that outline parental support opportunities and expectations, academic goals and expectations for the child's grade level, instructions for monitoring a student's progress, information about how parents can help promote achievement, and other helpful school orientation materials.

Weekly Letters

Informal newsletters made up of handwritten text about class activities. Included on each newsletter would be a "Parent Activity" with instructions for how parents can share an activity with the student. Include a place for parents and students to share what happened with the teacher.

Weekly Parent Totes

Manila envelopes for sending completed work home and for returning information to teachers. The envelope includes a comment page taped to the front with space for comments from the teacher and responses from parents.

Homework Hotlines

Phone system for accessing daily class and homework information.

In a study conducted at Johns Hopkins University's Center for Social Organizations, researchers found that 80 percent of parents said they could spend more time helping their children at home if they received guidance from teachers.

Class Night/Math Night/Reading Night, etc.

An evening once a month devoted to providing parents with instruction about how to monitor student progress and provide appropriate assistance in a particular subject area. Can also include special training sessions for home enrichment programs, such as Family Math or Family Geography.

Parent Assignments

Special tasks for parents to do with their students and then report on their child's response/performance, e.g., a bag of Cheerios for a young child to count out with the parent reporting if the child had any difficulties counting.

Parent-Teacher Conference Worksheets

Student progress reporting sheets in an outline format covering the topics to be discussed during the conference, such as student progress to date, areas of strength or areas that need improvement, how parents can help their students in trouble areas, what to watch for, progress anticipated for the future, and other types of information to help parents stay up-to-date on their student's school experience.

Parent-Teacher-Student Contracts

Contracts designed to help each member of the partnership understand his or her role and what is expected for school achievement and success.

Cooperative Projects

Projects developed for parents to work on with their children, e.g., "design a country," family brainteasers, or team problem-solving exercises. Can be scheduled as an evening session when parents can come to the classroom for instructions and help getting started.

Reading Challenges

Challenge programs designed to have parents and children read together with regular reports that generate points or move the class mascot toward its goal. Might also involve a theme, such as "Mystery Month," "Science Fiction Month," and so on. Can have rewards for parents as well as for children. Idea can be adapted for other subject areas also.

Parent-Teacher Telephone Calls

Regular interaction in a more personal way about a child's progress. Includes some practical tips for how parents can work with their child to encourage or promote progress.

Parenting/Education Information

The sharing on a regular basis of information related to improving parenting skills through such means as a *Parents Make a Difference* newsletter or programs about education reform or new initiatives explaining how they will help stu-

dents and how parents can make them more effective. Also communication about special issues of interest to parents such as Attention Deficit Disorder and other education or health/safety concerns.



Strategies for Secondary Students

Many ideas from the elementary level listed above can be adapted or adjusted for secondary level students and their parents. Following are additional ideas:

Study Skills Workshops

Workshops where students must be accompanied by a parent. Would include tips for studying, preparing for tests, and other skills for learning subject matter.

Research Projects with a Parent Component

Projects designed with a role for parents—helping with a community survey, trying out a science experiment, reviewing student-compiled resource lists, proofreading, making suggestions, etc.

Open House and Activities Fair

Open house designed to give parents the opportunity to go to each of their students' classes for a short time to meet the teacher and learn about course objectives. An activities fair can provide information about extracurricular activities and school policies as well.

Career Planning

Regular presentations and mail-out information about how parents can inform students of career options and guide them through the decision-making process for course work.

Parents as Audience

Programs using parents on a regular basis as the "audience" for student work, with sign-off required by a parent and where possible, instructions for parents about what to look for and the opportunity for parent suggestions.

Parent Assignments

Special tasks for parents to do with a follow-up report of their student's response/performance. For example, "Discuss the upcoming local elections (define topic) with your student, then sign at the bottom of this page." Topics can range from social issues, politics, popular trends, news events, and so forth.

Student Portfolios

Samples of student work collected to reflect student progress can be reviewed by parents or family members on a regular basis.

Looking to the Future

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Teacher Training in Parent and Family Involvement

While the strategies noted in the previous section are practical ways for teachers to involve students, parents, and families within the context of individual classroom settings, overall research and current teaching practices indicate that specific and ongoing parent involvement training for educators is greatly needed.

In her 1993 study, *Developing Home-School Partnerships: From Concepts to Practice*, Susan McAllister Swap summarizes, "Given the widespread recognition that parent involvement in schools is important, that it is unequivocally related to improvements in children's achievement, and that improvement in children's achievement is urgently needed, it is paradoxical that most schools do not have comprehensive parent involvement programs."

The majority of school systems do not offer any formal training to help teachers understand the pressures that modern families face. Encourage your school district to train teachers to work with parents. There are many ways teachers can help facilitate parent involvement and work in partnership with families in the best interest of their students. Teacher training programs can include the following:

- General information on the benefits of and barriers to parent involvement
- Information on and awareness of different family backgrounds and lifestyles
- Techniques for improving two-way communication between home and school
- Information on ways to involve parents in helping their children learn in school and outside
- Ways that schools can help meet families' social, education, and social service needs (*Strong Families, Strong Schools: Building Community Partnerships for Learning*, U.S. Department of Education, 1994)

Individual schools can provide training to current school staff; colleges with teacher training programs can expand the range of courses taught and required, and states can be encouraged to change the requirements for teaching certification (Shartrand, Krieder & Erickson-Warfield, *Preparing Teachers to Involve Parents: A National Survey of Teacher Education Programs*, 1994).

A paper released by the Harvard Family Research Project in August of 1994 analyzed the certification requirements of all 50 states and discovered that a minority specifically mentioned parent involvement. Most of the states that did list parent involvement training among their requirements used vague terminology, such as "working with parents," with no additional elaboration.

National PTA Response

Over the years, PTA congresses have worked diligently at the state and local levels to further the cause of including parent and family involvement training in teacher educa-

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tion. In addition, the National PTA has continually upheld the importance of teacher education in its position statements and resolutions.

National PTA Policies

Three National PTA policies in particular address the issue of teacher education:

Teacher Preparation and Staff Development (1977, revised and reaffirmed 1981 and 1987)

This position statement recognizes that the quality of education provided by a school is largely dependent on the competency of its teaching staff.

The National PTA supports preservice and in-service education "designed to initiate and strengthen professional excellence in instruction, teaching techniques, including classroom management and basic skill development, academic knowledge, human understanding and parent and community involvement."

Strengthening Support of Public School Teachers (adopted by the 1983 convention delegates)

An applicable section of this resolution reads: "And be it further resolved that PTAs/PTSA's become increasingly involved in activities that strengthen respect and support efforts to upgrade the quality of public school teachers, thereby improving the image and stature of the profession."

Teacher Preparation for Parent/Family Involvement (adopted by the 1993 convention delegates)

In this document, the National PTA resolves to work to include parent involvement training for teacher certification in every state, as well as on the national level through the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education. The National PTA further resolved to "urge its state constituents to work with their state's universities and colleges of education to develop and require specific training to effectively involve and include parents/families in the educational process of their children."

(For a full copy of PTA position statements and resolutions pertaining to teacher education, contact your state PTA office.)

Other National PTA Initiatives in Support of Teacher Training

Parent/Family Involvement Summit

The National PTA voiced its support for training teachers in parent and family involvement skills at the national Parent Involvement Summit that it convened in April 1992.

Participants in this summit acknowledged the important component of teacher education by identifying this crucial step for institutions of higher education: "Provide preservice and in-service training for educators on a variety of mechanisms for parent/family involvement."

Goals 2000 Implications

The National PTA launched a successful campaign to encourage U.S. legislators to include parent involvement among the nation's eight education goals to be met by the year 2000. The result was National Education Goal #8, which reads, "Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children."

The PTA also affirmed the related National Education Goal #4: "The nation's teaching force will have access to programs for continued improvement of their professional skills and the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills to instruct and prepare all American students for the next century."

Pilot Project with American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education

Past and current indicators suggest that there is a need for the National PTA to continue to work more collaboratively with college educators to offer parent and family involvement training as a component of teacher education curriculum in preservice and in-service teacher education.

Efforts with leaders of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE), who share similar goals and aspirations for teacher training on parent and family involvement, have given rise to a joint teacher training partnership with the National PTA.

Seven pilot sites are involved in the teacher training initiative: Alabama, Alaska, California, Florida, Indiana, Kentucky, and Pennsylvania. Two other states, Missouri and Vermont, have also supported the project through their own efforts in partnering parents and teacher educators. These state PTA congresses and their AACTE-matched university partners continue to establish and implement parent involvement training for both preservice and in-service teachers based on mutual goals and activities.

The National PTA looks forward to continued involvement with AACTE and others seeking to increase parent and family involvement skills and training. As these efforts progress, it is crucial that family advocates step forward to take the lead in fostering a nationwide awareness of the importance of parent involvement in teacher education.

Resources

The following are publications available through the National PTA Catalog. For full descriptions of these materials, send your request for a copy of the catalog to National PTA, 135 S. LaSalle St., Dept. 1860, Chicago, IL 60674-1860. To order these publications by credit card, phone (312) 549-3253.

Companion Pieces to This Guide

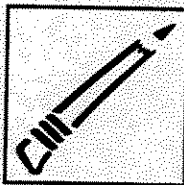
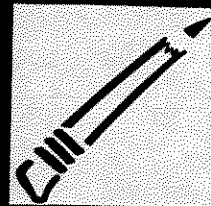
- *Parent Plus: A Comprehensive Program for Parent Involvement* (K-350)
- *Leader's Guide to Parent and Family Involvement* (G-302)

Brochures for Parents and Educators

- *Helping Your Child Become a Good Reader* (B-323)
- *Helping Your Student Get the Most Out of Homework* (B-307) (In Spanish: S-321)
- *Make Art a Part of Your Child's World* (B-311)
- *Making Parent-Teacher Conferences Work for Your Student* (B-312) (In Spanish: S-322)
- *Mirrors: Leading Children to Self-Esteem* (B-110)
- *Partners in Education: The Principal and the PTA* (B-316)
- *Partners in Education: The School Board and the PTA* (B-317)
- *Partners in Education: The Superintendent and the PTA* (B-318)
- *Partners in Education: Teachers and the PTA* (B-314)
- *What to Tell Your Child About Prejudice and Discrimination* (B-111)

Planning Kits, Guides, and Videos for Parents and Educators

- *Smart, Include Art: A Planning Kit* (K-338)
- *Common Sense: Strategies for Raising Alcohol & Drug Free Children* (K-102)
- *Ebony/National PTA Guide to Student Excellence*, video and parent guide (V-354)
- *The Family Nest (El Nido de la Familia)*, Spanish video with accompanying parent involvement tips in Spanish and English (SV-355)
- *Mirrors: A Film About Self-Esteem* (See catalog for special ordering instructions.)
- *Safeguarding Your Children* (VP-150)



Find the National PTA online!

The National PTA has established a Web site honoring 100 years of parent involvement and child advocacy.

Here you can get a wealth of information regarding parent and teacher

involvement issues, projects, activities, and other related topics. The National PTA Web site offers text, photos, and video clips designed to encourage parent involvement.

Computer users with access to the Web can find the National PTA Web site at <http://www.pta.org>

Feel free to browse through the Web site. In addition to education issues, it provides information on the PTA's mission and programs such as Safeguarding Your Children

and Reflections. For communicating more effectively with the National PTA, there's also a digital version of the National PTA Catalog of resources for parents and educators and an "e-form" that allows you to send your comments and thoughts directly to the PTA. Direct any questions to National PTA through the Web's e-mail.

On the National PTA's Web site look for **FREE** information that can be downloaded! Periodically a brochure or fact sheet will be available free of charge for a limited time.

Take advantage of these important resources! If you do not have a computer at home or school, check your local library. Contact the National PTA for more information.

Organizing Parent Workshops

Workshops are excellent ways for schools and parent organizations to inform parents about children's development, skills, abilities, curriculum, and course content. Once a decision has been made about the target audience, planning can focus on how best to address their concerns.

Workshop Format

- Consider the interests and needs of the audience.
- Determine the information base before launching into a presentation. How much do most parents already know?
- Determine what equipment, materials, handouts, and questionnaires will be needed. Remember that visuals can break up the monotony of a session.
- Map out the agenda, including registration, presentations, breaks, meals, small group discussions, sharing of comments, summary, and evaluation.
- Choose a time and length that is convenient for the target group. Remember that many parents work during the day and that parents may become restless after a couple of hours.

Workshop Location

- The location of the workshop should be accessible if it is to be successful. The location should be near public transportation and provide access for the disabled.
- The facility should be large enough to accommodate all planned activities, especially if the participants will divide into groups.
- Find out if the facility has or can provide all necessary equipment. Often items such as chalkboards, microphones, and flip charts can be provided, thus eliminating the need to transport such items.

Workshop Speakers

Finding good resource people is very important to the success of a workshop. Decide how these speakers fit into the workshop. Do they have information that cannot be gained from other sources? What is their history with the subject area of the workshop? Are they sensitive

to the issues? Have they given successful presentations to similar groups?

- Identify the issues that need to be emphasized or conveyed.
- Tell the speaker what messages to be clear about.
- Research community groups, state and national organizations, and professional groups to find which are currently involved in similar activities.
- Contact local teachers, counselors, and school administrators to find out what can be learned from their personal experience.
- Don't overlook your own school's or district's staff, including teachers, guidance counselors, and school psychologists.
- Ask your local speakers' bureau, library, and professional associations for their lists of public speakers.
- Check with county extension staff.

Publicizing the Workshop

Publicity can make or break the workshop. If people do not know about the workshop, they cannot participate.

- Create a need. If parents feel it is necessary or it will be helpful to participate, attendance will likely be higher. Make each person feel his or her attendance is important.
- Encourage word of mouth communication. Suggest that everyone bring a friend.
- Design flyers, posters, and news releases and decide how and where to distribute the materials.
- Use the local media. Send an announcement of the workshop to local radio and television stations for airing as a public service announcement. Send a news release to the local newspaper. Include the date, place, time, charge (if there is one), purpose of the workshop, and the name and telephone number of a contact person.
- Take advantage of former successes. Highlight those items which made the last workshop or seminar a success.

- Use the expertise of other community groups to publicize the workshop.
- For individual contact, send invitations and notices at least three weeks prior to the workshop. Follow up one week before the event with phone calls or correspondence.

Conducting the Workshop

- Set up registration tables where participants can sign in upon arrival. This not only helps determine attendance but also provides an excellent record of names and addresses for follow-up.
- Have name tags available for each participant.

- Have workshop packets available for participants, if appropriate. This saves time and allows participants an opportunity to become familiar with the planned activity.
- Allow time for participants to fill out a questionnaire before the workshop begins to find out what they already know; have them complete another one six or eight weeks after the workshop, to gain feedback on the effectiveness of the activity. Feedback is important in planning further workshops.

Source: National Urban League, Inc., What Students Need to Know, Education Initiative, New York, N.Y. 1989. Contact: Stephanie G. Robinson, Ph.D., Director of Education. (212) 310-9000.

50 Ideas for Parent Involvement

These ideas could be used at an inservice or workshop on teacher-parent communication. Parent involvement takes planning, and a good program takes time to establish. Parent involvement programs are successful if

- they provide information about which parents really care or which they really need.
- they are convenient for parents.
- they are administered in a supportive climate.
- they use a variety of communication methods.

Listed below are 50 ideas for parent involvement. Mark those that you

- (+) tried with success within the last three years
- (0) tried, but with limited success
- (√) plan to do this year
- (x) think will never work in your school
- (/) have never tried

Some of these ideas can be facilitated by teachers; others need an administrator's initiative to be implemented. In small groups teachers can share their successes and offer practical suggestions to those teachers who have experienced limited success. Encourage teachers to analyze these 50 ideas, to suggest ways to make ideas work, or to offer alternative ones.

1. ___ Schedule parent-teacher conferences at the convenience of both parties, either after school or in the evening. Sometimes a visit to the home may be the only way to visit a parent. Teachers may offer this option.
2. ___ Distribute an evaluation for parent-teacher conferences. Ask how effective the conference was and what additional kinds of information parents want about school classroom activities, communication, or other concerns.
3. ___ Sponsor a parent-child or parent-faculty athletic event, such as a one-mile race, donkey ballgame, basketball game, or tennis tournament.
4. ___ Allow families to play together in the school gym at a weekly Family Recreation Night.
5. ___ Send home unit goals so parents can help children reach the goals set by the teacher.
6. ___ Let younger children take envelopes or folders home on Friday to their parents with the week's work enclosed. Invite two-way communication on the envelope or a preprinted postcard.
7. ___ Organize field trips or classroom activities and ask for parent participation.
8. ___ Offer computer and family math programs during which parents and students can learn together.
9. ___ Invite parents to select a book or chapter or poem to read to their children's class. This emphasizes a lifelong reading commitment.
10. ___ Encourage students to adopt pen pals who are business leaders. The letters often provide the impetus for getting busy executives involved in school.
11. ___ Invite parents to volunteer to help with after-school activities in which their children show an interest (drama club, music, Girl/Boy Scouts, other).

12. ___ Establish a homework hotline. This could be a tape recorded message to call, a computer modem hookup, or a parent network.
13. ___ Have a monthly birthday calendar for students and staff posted in the hallway. Have the school food staff make cupcakes or a birthday cake for celebrants. Add new students when they arrive. The calendar could also be distributed in homes or sold as a money-maker.
14. ___ Make a bulletin board available for parents to share family photos and other memorabilia.
15. ___ Invite children new to the district or school and their parents to a Get-Acquainted Hour the week before school starts.
16. ___ Invite new teachers and new parents on a tour of the district. Point out facilities available in the area, places that could be used for field trips, boundaries of attendance area, youth center, and other community sites which may be of interest to the parents.
17. ___ Develop a slide presentation or video orienting parents and students to the school.
18. ___ Announce a Parent Visitation Day followed by an after-school meeting during which parents can offer constructive suggestions or ask questions.
19. ___ Place a "Welcome to Our School" sign and a map at the school entrances.
20. ___ Organize a partner system for new students. Students who will make newcomers feel comfortable are good ambassadors; they also build self-esteem if they participate. Call the parent and describe your effort to make the new student feel welcome. Plan activities and follow through to cover at least two weeks.
21. ___ Sponsor a talent show which involves students, parents, faculty, and administrators.
22. ___ Develop a well-organized volunteer program. Let parents, grandparents, non-parents, and business people know they are needed.
23. ___ Invite parents to help with instructional activities for students, such as bike rodeos, book and video swaps, theatre workshops, or art shows.
24. ___ Encourage a parents' group to sponsor a health fair at school in which various community agencies bring exhibits and displays.
25. ___ Work with the Chamber of Commerce, realtors, or other groups to send a packet of information about the school to new residents in the community and invite them to visit.
26. ___ Hold a School-Community Awards Day. Let students, staff, and volunteers nominate recipients from the school and community for various services and excellence. Certificates of appreciation can be given to the nominees and details can be released to the press.
27. ___ Request that parents who visit the school complete a survey about their interests, needs, and concerns.
28. ___ Obtain parent surveys on key issues, policies, home-school communication, community needs, and interests. Ask a local club to mail the survey and count survey answers.
29. ___ Ask students, perhaps as a classroom project, to conduct a survey of parents to evaluate the school and collect ideas for improvement. Distribute survey results to all parents.

30. ___ Improve the quality and frequency of the school newsletter. Set up an idea exchange by asking parents to send in ideas. Publish the ideas in future issues. You can also check with your state's National School Public Relations Chapter for help.
31. ___ Publish a curriculum calendar or syllabus in your school newsletter or in your local newspaper.
32. ___ Ask other local organizations to print parent involvement tips and information about programs in their publications.
33. ___ Ask the local media to cover school board meetings, if this is not standard procedure.
34. ___ Design an up-to-date logo, perhaps with the help of an art student, so people will immediately recognize letters or notices from your school.
35. ___ Set up a speaker's bureau. Include students, parents, community leaders, and school staff who will be willing to talk about the school's programs to interested individuals, groups, and businesses or who are willing to share interests and talents with the students.
36. ___ Encourage school and community summer activities workshops and enrichment programs.
37. ___ Have a seminar for single parents. Think of ideas about how to become more involved in school. Be prepared to listen to their unique problems and help them find solutions. Have a seminar for two-career families, too.
38. ___ Organize rap sessions between the principal or superintendent and the students to promote better communication.
39. ___ Conduct a class for parents on family health and nutrition concerns; it could be taught by the school nurse, a registered dietitian, or human service agents.
40. ___ Make sure parents of students at risk are aware of resources, tutors, or support services to help them solve their school-related problems.
41. ___ Provide research on such things as average hours of sleep per night by grade, number of hours devoted to homework, television viewing habits, and other topics.
42. ___ Ask your community agencies to lend their vans or buses to transport parents and senior citizens to school functions.
43. ___ Try to get media coverage of special school events.
44. ___ Place suggestion boxes in key locations in the school and community. "I Have An Idea" cards near the boxes encourage positive contributions. For this to be effective, someone needs to respond to each suggestion.
45. ___ Attract parents to school events by putting their children on the programs. Children can introduce speakers, perform, serve as ushers, be greeters, or have many other duties.
46. ___ Plan an evening movie (film or video) night for teenage students, parents, and teachers. Hold a discussion of the movie afterwards.
47. ___ Initiate enrichment courses or evening talks on communication, discipline, peer pressure, study habits, careers, or drug and alcohol abuse for junior high school students and their parents.
48. ___ Invite a few parents and community leaders for an informal meeting with the principal. They might get an update on school programs or information about staff concerns which may be looming (possible alcohol use among students, antisocial group formation, or other problems which are parent-related).

49. Encourage parents to attend athletic events. When their children participate as (band members, athletes, cheerleaders, or in some other capacity), parents usually will attend. Work on getting other parents involved also. Publish an activity calendar in your local

newspaper that includes academic as well as athletic events.

50. Exude enthusiasm when you talk to parents. Let them see that you really are interested in them and what they are doing.

RESOURCES

U.S. Department of Education
1-800-USA-LEARN

National Education Association (NEA)
(202) 822-7200

Hand in Hand Institute for Educational Leadership, Inc.
(202) 822-8405 ext. 25

National Community Education Association
(703) 359-8973

Points of Light Foundation
(202) 223-9186 ask for customer information center

National PTA
(312) 670-6782
web site <http://www.pta.org>

Wisconsin PTA
(608) 244-1455

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI)
125 South Webster Street
P.O. Box 7841
Madison, Wisconsin 53707-7841
(608) 266-9757 or (800) 441-4563

National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education (NCPIE)
Box 39
1201 16th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036

First Day of School Foundation
web site: www.firstday.org
P.O. Box 10
Bennington, VT 05201-0010

The Parent Institute
(800) 756-5525
P.O. Box 7474
Fairfax, VA 22039-7474

National Association for Partners in education
(703) 836-4880
209 Madison Street, #401
Alexandria, VA 22314

Retired Senior Volunteer Program of Waukesha County

Wisconsin Intergenerational Network (WIN)
(608) 238-7936
P.o. Box 5171
Madison, WI 53705-0171

Wisconsin Council on Children and Families
(608) 284-0580
16 N. Carroll Street
Madison, WI 53703

North Central Regional Educational Laboratory
(708) 571-4716
1900 Spring Road, Suite 300
Oak Brook, Illinois 60521



Learning Together 2

Resources for Family-Community Involvement with Schools

Contact these institutions or organizations for publications, speakers, and a variety of user-friendly materials to advance your family-community-school partnership efforts.

Appalachia Educational Laboratory
P.O. Box 1348
Charleston, WV 25325
(304) 347-0400

Center for Early Adolescence
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Suite 233, Carr Mill Mall
Carrboro, NC 27510
(919) 966-1148

Center on Parent Involvement
Johns Hopkins University
c/o Joyce Epstein
3505 N. Charles St.
Baltimore, MD 21218
(301) 338-7570

Cornell University Family Matters Project
7 Research Park, Cornell University
Ithaca, NY 14850
(607) 255-2080 or 255-2531

Council of the Great City Schools
1413 K St., N.W., 4th Floor
Washington, DC 20005
(202) 635-5431

Home and School Institute
1201 16th St., N.W.
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 466-3633

Institute for Responsive Education
605 Commonwealth Ave.
Boston, MA 02215
(617) 353-3309

National Coalition for Parent Involvement
in Education
119 N. Payne St.
Alexandria, VA 22314
(703) 683-6232

National Committee for Citizens in Education
10840 Little Patuxent Pkwy., #301
Columbia, MD 21044-3199
(301) 977-9300
(800) NETWORK (638-9675)

National Congress of Parents and Teachers
1201 16th St., N.W., #619
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 822-7878

National School Boards Association
1680 Duke St.
Alexandria, VA 22314
(703) 838-6722

National School Volunteer Program
701 N. Fairfax St., #320
Alexandria, VA 22314
(703) 836-4880

Parent Involvement Center
Chapter 1 Technical Assistance Center
RMC Research Corporation
400 Lafayette Rd.
Hampton, NH 03842

Parent Involvement in Education Program
San Diego County Office of Education
c/o Janet Chrispeels
6401 Linda Vista Rd., Room 407
San Diego, CA 92111-7399
(619) 292-3500

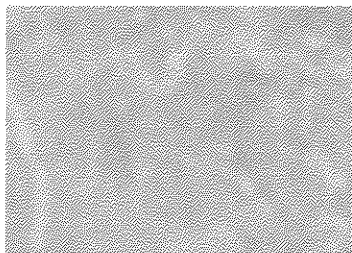
National Standards

for

*Parent/Family
Involvement
Programs*

National PTA®

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National PTA®

330 N. Wabash Ave., Suite 2100
Chicago, IL 60611-3690
(312) 670-6782
Fax: (312) 670-6783
Website: www.pta.org
E-mail: info@pta.org

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Foreword

Affirming the significance of parent and family involvement has been a priority of the National PTA since its founding. Over the past 100 years, National PTA has consistently demonstrated that effectively involving parents and families in support of children and their education produces meaningful and lasting results.

In the midst of the current climate of education reform, National PTA maintains what numerous research studies and years of experience as advocates on behalf of children have demonstrated to be true: *Parent and family involvement increases student achievement and success.*

The overall importance of parent and family involvement, as the foundation for all other education reforms, warrants the same consideration and attention as other areas for which national standards are being developed. Therefore, the establishment of standards to guide parent involvement programs and evaluate their quality and effectiveness is crucial.

The National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs were developed by the National PTA in cooperation with education and parent involvement professionals through the National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education (NCPIE). Building upon the six types of parent involvement identified by Joyce L. Epstein, Ph.D., of the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University, National PTA created program standards of excellence. These standards, together with their corresponding quality indicators, were created to be used in conjunction with other national standards and reform initiatives in support of children's learning and success.

In recent years, through unwavering advocacy efforts, National PTA secured parent involvement as one of the eight National Education Goals:

Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional and academic growth of children.

It is with this fundamental goal in mind that the National PTA invites all education and parent involvement representatives to support these National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs, so that student success can soar—in school and beyond.

Lois Jean White, National PTA President, 1997–1999

Ginny Markell, National PTA President-Elect, 1997–1999

Joan Dykstra, Immediate Past National PTA President, 1995–1997

Why National Standards?

National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs

- Standard I:** Communicating—Communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful.
- Standard II:** Parenting—Parenting skills are promoted and supported.
- Standard III:** Student Learning—Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.
- Standard IV:** Volunteering—Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought.
- Standard V:** School Decision Making and Advocacy—Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families.
- Standard VI:** Collaborating with Community—Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families, and student learning.

Introduction

Over 30 years' research has proven beyond dispute the positive connection between parent* involvement and student success. Effectively engaging parents and families in the education of their children has the potential to be far more transformational than any other type of education reform.

The National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs and their quality indicators are research based and grounded in both sound philosophy and practical experience. The purpose for the standards is threefold:

- To promote meaningful parent and family participation
- To raise awareness regarding the components of effective programs
- To provide guidelines for schools** that wish to improve their programs

* Throughout this document are references to "parent" involvement. All such references may be interpreted broadly to include the adults who play an important role in a child's family life, since other adults—grandparents, aunts, uncles, step-parents, guardians—may carry the primary responsibility for a child's education, development, and well-being.

** Throughout this document are references to "schools." All such references may be interpreted broadly to include other programs that serve children and families, i.e., other academic, specialty, or community programs.

The program standards are guidelines for leaders of institutions with programs serving parents and families. Therefore, the intended audience includes principals, administrators, educators, and parents who are in positions to influence and improve parent involvement programs. When the standards are used as guidelines, they can direct leaders as they move from discussion to action in developing dynamic programs to improve student achievement through parent involvement. As with any effective long-term reform, the overall integration and implementation of standards should be based on local needs and circumstances.

The National PTA will regularly review and revise the standards to ensure that they are dynamic and responsive to future demographic trends and research. Future versions will be shaped through collaboration with other groups working on standards for teacher preparation, core academic content, and other related school reform initiatives.

Special features of this guide

The research that led to the development of the National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs is summarized in the following section. The **research summary** provides insights to how parent and family involvement is directly linked to student success, quality schools, and effective reform strategies.

Research studies indicate that although the six program standards are closely related, each produces distinct, and in many cases, unique gains for students, parents, or schools. **Quality indicators**, listed with each program standard, identify the important elements of each standard if those distinctions and unique gains are to be realized. They inform local leaders about what contributes to effective programs and fosters success.

Gains for students are greatest when parents participate in activities in each of the six standard areas; therefore, **sample applications** for putting ideas into action accompany each program standard. Also included, in Appendix A, are checklists for the quality indicators of each program standard to help assess how effectively each standard is represented in parent involvement programs.

Research Findings

When it comes to parent involvement and its powerful influence, the knowledge base is broad and clear. The challenge comes in transforming knowledge into practice, and practice into results.

The most comprehensive survey of the research is a series of publications developed by Anne Henderson and Nancy Berla: *The Evidence Grows* (1981); *The Evidence Continues to Grow* (1987); and *A New Generation of Evidence: The Family Is Critical to Student Achievement* (1995). Citing more than 85 studies, these publications document the profound and comprehensive benefits for students, families, and schools, when parents and family members become participants in their children's education and their lives.

The findings listed below are from the pertinent research.

Parent and Family Involvement and Student Success

- When parents are involved, students achieve more, regardless of socio-economic status, ethnic/racial background, or the parents' education level.
- The more extensive the parent involvement, the higher the student achievement.
- When parents are involved in their students' education, those students have higher grades and test scores, better attendance, and complete homework more consistently.
- When parents are involved, students exhibit more positive attitudes and behavior.
- Students whose parents are involved in their lives have higher graduation rates and greater enrollment rates in post-secondary education.
- Different types of parent/family involvement produce different gains. To have long-lasting gains for students, parent involvement activities must be well-planned, inclusive, and comprehensive.
- Educators hold higher expectations of students whose parents collaborate with the teacher. They also hold higher opinions of those parents.
- In programs that are designed to involve parents in full partnerships, student achievement for disadvantaged children not only improves, it can reach levels that are standard for middle-class children. In addition, the children who are farthest behind make the greatest gains.

- Children from diverse cultural backgrounds tend to do better when parents and professionals collaborate to bridge the gap between the culture at home and the learning institution.
- Student behaviors, such as alcohol use, violence, and antisocial behavior decrease as parent involvement increases.
- Students are more likely to fall behind in academic performance if their parents do not participate in school events, develop a working relationship with their child's educators, or keep up with what is happening in their child's school.
- The benefits of involving parents are not confined to the early years; there are significant gains at all ages and grade levels.
- Junior and senior high school students whose parents remain involved, make better transitions, maintain the quality of their work, and develop realistic plans for their future. Students whose parents are not involved, on the other hand, are more likely to drop out of school.
- The most accurate predictor of a student's achievement in school is not income or social status, but the extent to which that student's family is able to (1) create a home environment that encourages learning; (2) communicate high, yet reasonable, expectations for their children's achievement and future careers; and (3) become involved in their children's education at school and in the community.

*The evidence is now
beyond dispute.
When parents are
involved in their
children's education
at home their
children do better
in school.*

Henderson and Berla

Parent and Family Involvement and School Quality

- Schools that work well with families have improved teacher morale and higher ratings of teachers by parents.
- Schools where parents are involved have more support from families and better reputations in the community.
- School programs that involve parents outperform identical programs without parent and family involvement.
- Schools where children are failing improve dramatically when parents are enabled to become effective partners in their child's education.
- The school's practices to inform and involve parents are stronger determinants of whether inner-city parents will be involved with their children's education than are parent education, family size, marital status, and even student grade level.

Parent and Family Involvement and Program Design

- The more the relationship between parents and educators approaches a comprehensive, well-planned partnership, the higher the student achievement.
- For low-income families, programs offering home visits are more successful in involving parents than programs requiring parents to visit the school. However, when parents become involved at school, their children make even greater gains.
- When parents receive frequent and effective communication from the school or program, their involvement increases, their overall evaluation of educators improves, and their attitudes toward the program are more positive.
- Parents are much more likely to become involved when educators encourage and assist parents in helping their children with their schoolwork.
- Effective programs are led by a team of administrators, educators, and parents, and have access to financial resources.
- When they are treated as partners and given relevant information by people with whom they are comfortable, parents put into practice the involvement strategies they already know are effective, but have been hesitant to contribute.
- One of the most significant challenges to conducting an effective program is the lack of instruction on parent and family involvement that educators and administrators receive in their professional training.
- Collaboration with families is an essential component of a reform strategy, but it is not a substitute for high-quality education programs or comprehensive school improvement.

Standard 1

Communicating

Communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful.

Communication is the foundation of a solid partnership. When parents and educators communicate effectively, positive relationships develop, problems are more easily solved, and students make greater progress.

Too often school or program communication is *one-way* without the chance to exchange ideas and share perceptions. Effective home-school communication is the *two-way* sharing of information vital to student success. Even parent-teacher conferences can be one-way if the goal is merely reporting student progress. Partnering requires give-and-take conversation, goal setting for the future, and regular follow-up interactions.

Quality Indicators

Successful programs:

1. Use a variety of communication tools on a regular basis, seeking to facilitate two-way interaction through each type of medium.
2. Establish opportunities for parents and educators to share *partnering* information such as student strengths and learning preferences.
3. Provide clear information regarding course expectations and offerings, student placement, school activities, student services, and optional programs.
4. Mail report cards and regular progress reports to parents. Provide support services and follow-up conferences as needed.
5. Disseminate information on school reforms, policies, discipline procedures, assessment tools, and school goals, and include parents in any related decision-making process.
6. Conduct conferences with parents at least twice a year, with follow-up as needed. These should accommodate the varied schedules of parents, language barriers, and the need for child care.
7. Encourage immediate contact between parents and teachers when concerns arise.
8. Distribute student work for parental comment and review on a regular basis.
9. Translate communications to assist non-English-speaking parents.
10. Communicate with parents regarding positive student behavior and achievement, not just regarding misbehavior or failure.
11. Provide opportunities for parents to communicate with principals and other administrative staff.
12. Promote informal activities at which parents, staff, and community members can interact.
13. Provide staff development regarding effective communication techniques and the importance of regular two-way communication between the school and the family.

Sample Applications

Use a Variety of Communication Tools

- Explore program and community support options for improving mail, telephone, fax, or e-mail access and use for educators and parents. For example, automated phone systems are a powerful tool for getting information to parents—from daily assignments and attendance reports, to parenting tips and student achievement information.
- Create class or program newsletters for parents that contain tips for helping children learn in the home, fun activities to do as a family, and other useful ideas.
- Establish a routine method for parents to review their children's work on a regular basis. For example, use manila envelopes or folders to send student work home each week with a place for parent comments on the front cover.
- Implement additional feedback opportunities for parents and family members such as surveys on current program issues or special parent guest columns in the school newsletter.
- Sponsor program or community events that allow educators and parents to interact on a social basis in addition to standard parent-teacher conferences or school/program meetings.
- Develop a parent handbook to provide positive, practical information about your school or program. Include information on how parents can support their child's efforts to succeed.

Program Orientation

At the beginning of the school or program year, offer orientation sessions that include the following:

- Course or program expectations and goals
- Developmental and skills information
- Information on how/when to contact program staff or administration
- Process for handling program questions/concerns
- Strategies to support learning at home
- Testing/assessment information and procedures

Always include a time for questions and answers to address specific parent or family concerns. If possible, provide a video recording of the event to share with those unable to attend.

Building Partnerships

With so many students, how can educators build effective partnerships with each of their parents? One teacher sets aside 10 minutes a day to telephone, e-mail, or send postcards to parents. Once a month the teacher is able to make at least two contacts with each family represented in the class. Most conversations focus on student successes and upcoming activities for parents and families. Because of the consistent contact and accessibility, parents are more eager to respond and support student/class goals.

Standard II

Parenting

Parenting skills are promoted and supported.

Parents are a child's life support system. Consequently, the most important support a child can receive comes from the home.

School personnel and program staff support positive parenting by respecting and affirming the strengths and skills needed by parents to fulfill their role. From making sure that students arrive at school rested, fed, and ready to learn, to setting high learning expectations and nurturing self-esteem, parents sustain their children's learning.

When staff members recognize parent roles and responsibilities, ask parents what supports they need, and work to find ways to meet those needs, they communicate a clear message to parents: "We value you and need your input" in order to maintain a high-quality program.

Quality Indicators

Successful programs:

1. Communicate the importance of positive relationships between parents and their children.
2. Link parents to programs and resources within the community that provide support services to families.
3. Reach out to all families, not just those who attend parent meetings.
4. Establish policies that support and respect family responsibilities, recognizing the variety of parenting traditions and practices within the community's cultural and religious diversity.
5. Provide an accessible parent/family information and resource center to support parents and families with training, resources, and other services.
6. Encourage staff members to demonstrate respect for families and the family's primary role in the rearing of children to become responsible adults.

Sample Applications

Reach Out to All Families

- Find out which ethnic groups are represented in each school or program. Provide translation and other support services when needed. Be sensitive to cultural differences, and find appropriate ways to communicate acceptance and respect.
- Affirm parent responsibilities by consulting parents prior to providing special services for children, such as counseling or other social services.
- At least once a year, schedule a school or program event with workshops given by professional personnel or local parent educators to help parents deal with parenting issues. Provide child care and transportation to encourage parents and family members to participate.
- Develop “family kits” built around relevant themes with games, videos, conversation starters, or other tools for parents to interact with their children on a specific topic. For example, a kit could be built around the theme of setting family goals or developing house rules.

Respecting Diverse Family Cultures and Traditions

Quality schools and programs must be culturally sensitive to increasingly diverse student and family populations. Appreciating the traditions of families from various cultures requires, first of all, an awareness and acceptance of their differences.

Find ways to help parents and families value and share their distinctiveness. Cultural fairs or other opportunities to celebrate specific ethnic holidays or traditions may help parents and family members develop a sense of belonging and ownership in the school and community. Making resources available in the parents' first language remains critical in responding to the needs and concerns of the parents and families served.

Parent and Family Resource Centers

Designate an area in your school or community for parents and family members to call their own. The “center” should be tailored to respond to the issues and concerns of your school or program members.

The center's function could vary from providing an informal gathering place for parents to share information, to providing comprehensive access to community services. A wide array of family resource and support materials including videos, brochures, and other publications are often included. Some centers have expanded to provide parenting workshops, toy-lending libraries, or English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. Highlighting “what's new at the family center” in each school newsletter and sponsoring special family or education events at the center throughout the year helps to increase the center's visibility and effectiveness.

Standard III

Student Learning

Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.

Student learning increases when parents are invited into the process by helping at home. Enlisting parents' involvement provides educators and administrators with a valuable support system—creating a team that is working for each child's success.

The vast majority of parents are willing to assist their students in learning, but many times are not sure what assistance is most helpful and appropriate. Helping parents connect to their children's learning enables parents to communicate in powerful ways that they value what their children achieve. Whether it's working together on a computer, displaying student work at home, or responding to a particular class assignment, parents' actions communicate to their children that education is important.

Quality Indicators

Successful programs:

1. Seek and encourage parental participation in decision-making that affects students.
2. Inform parents of the expectations for students in each subject at each grade level.
3. Provide information regarding how parents can foster learning at home, give appropriate assistance, monitor homework, and give feedback to teachers.
4. Regularly assign interactive homework that will require students to discuss and interact with their parents about what they are learning in class.
5. Sponsor workshops or distribute information to assist parents in understanding how students can improve skills, get help when needed, meet class expectations, and perform well on assessments.
6. Involve parents in setting student goals each year and in planning for post-secondary education and careers. Encourage the development of a personalized education plan for each student, where parents are full partners.
7. Provide opportunities for staff members to learn and share successful approaches to engaging parents in their child's education.

Sample Applications

Foster Learning at Home

- Report research findings on how parent involvement can promote student success in school newsletters.
- Provide information sheets to guide parents in helping students with a particular skill—for example, information that explains how to help a young child with reading or how to help a teen with a research project.
- Some projects readily lend themselves to involving parents or other family members. Examples include personal interviews on specific topics or reports based on visits to community museums or points of interest. Provide advance instructions and specific guidelines for each project.
- Ask parents to take an active role in reviewing student portfolios. Parents have the opportunity to review project expectations, discover their child's areas of strength, and gain insight in how to help their child improve.

How Much Help Is Too Much?

Offer suggestions to parents on how they can help their children learn, including questions to ask and practical ways to practice skills. One English teacher describes how parents can ask questions and make suggestions to help students learn and practice writing skills. Studies have found that writing improves when students seek advice from others and write for an audience. Parents and family members can provide that needed feedback and support.

Sample Home-to-School Communication

Design homework assignments to include parent sign-off. Provide instructions about what to look for in each assignment, and offer a quick check-off response such as:

- My child understands and correctly applies this skill.
- My child needed help on this, but overall seems to understand this lesson.
- My child needs further instruction on this skill/lesson.

Other comments _____

Parent signature

Student-Parent Workshops

Provide brief workshops on specific topics of interest to students and parents. Topics might include a series on study skills, new information on a particular curriculum area such as math or science, or college and career planning. When applicable, include hands-on learning activities and detailed information to help both parents and students practice new skills.

Standard IV

Volunteering

Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought.

When parents volunteer, both families and schools reap benefits that come in few other ways. Literally millions of dollars of volunteer services are performed by parents and family members each year in the public schools. Studies have concluded that volunteers express greater confidence in the schools where they have opportunities to participate regularly. In addition, assisting in school or program events/activities communicates to a child, "I care about what you do here."

In order for parents to feel appreciated and welcome, volunteer work must be meaningful and valuable to them. Capitalizing on the expertise and skills of parents and family members provides much needed support to educators and administrators already taxed in their attempts to meet academic goals and student needs.

Although there are many parents for whom volunteering during school hours is not possible, creative solutions like before- or after-school "drop-in" programs or "at home" support activities provide opportunities for parents to offer their assistance as well.

Quality Indicators

Successful programs:

1. Ensure that office staff greetings, signage near the entrances, and any other interaction with parents create a climate in which parents feel valued and welcome.
2. Survey parents regarding their interests, talents, and availability, then coordinate the parent resources with those that exist within the school and among the faculty.
3. Ensure that parents who are unable to volunteer in the school building are given the options for helping in other ways, at home or place of employment.
4. Organize an easy, accessible program for utilizing parent volunteers, providing ample training on volunteer procedures and school protocol.
5. Develop a system for contacting all parents to assist as the year progresses.
6. Design opportunities for those with limited time and resources to participate by addressing child care, transportation, work schedule needs, and so forth.
7. Show appreciation for parents' participation, and value their diverse contributions.
8. Educate and assist staff members in creating an inviting climate and effectively utilizing volunteer resources.
9. Ensure that volunteer activities are meaningful and built on volunteer interests and abilities.

Sample Applications

Organize for Effective Use of Volunteers

- Develop a survey to gather parent and family volunteer information including special skills or talents. Provide opportunities for those who are able to volunteer during the day, those who are able to commit to regular service, and those who can participate occasionally at home or at work. Be sure to follow up with volunteers on a timely basis.
- Provide a consistent place and process for parent volunteers to sign in and list the hours served. In addition, provide surveys regarding school or program climate. Encourage volunteers to offer their suggestions by using “anonymous” response forms.
- Invite parents to join their child for lunch whenever convenient. If possible, provide a free lunch during the year.

Volunteer Orientation

Take time to train volunteers regarding school or program protocols, routines and procedures, volunteer expectations, and equipment usage. In addition, provide a central location for volunteers to work with secure places for personal belongings.

Give clear instructions for completing volunteer tasks as well as the appropriate staff or teacher contact name if more information is needed. Look for creative ways to show appreciation for volunteer support on an ongoing basis.

Volunteer Information Packet

As part of the volunteer orientation, provide a packet containing the following important information:

- Accident procedures
- Building map
- Emergency exit plans
- Equipment operating instructions
- Parking information
- School or program handbook
- Sign-in/out policies
- Suggestion forms
- Volunteer welcome letter and list of benefits
- Volunteer work locations
- Where to go for help and supplies

Standard V

School Decision Making and Advocacy

Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families.

Studies have shown that schools where parents are involved in decision making and advocacy have higher levels of student achievement and greater public support.

Effective partnerships develop when each partner is respected and empowered to fully participate in the decision-making process. Schools and programs that actively enlist parent participation and input communicate that parents are valued as full partners in the educating of their children.

Parents and educators depend on shared authority in decision-making systems to foster parental trust, public confidence, and mutual support of each other's efforts in helping students succeed. The involvement of parents, as individuals or as representative of others, is crucial in collaborative decision-making processes on issues from curriculum and course selection, to discipline policies and over-all school reform measures.

Quality Indicators

Successful programs:

1. Provide understandable, accessible, and well-publicized processes for influencing decisions, raising issues or concerns, appealing decisions, and resolving problems.
2. Encourage the formation of PTAs or other parent groups to identify and respond to issues of interest to parents.
3. Include parents on all decision-making and advisory committees, and ensure adequate training for such areas as policy, curriculum, budget, school reform initiatives, safety, and personnel. Where site governance bodies exist, give equal representation to parents.
4. Provide parents with current information regarding school policies, practices, and both student and school performance data.
5. Enable parents to participate as partners when setting school goals, developing or evaluating programs and policies, or responding to performance data.
6. Encourage and facilitate active parent participation in the decisions that affect students, such as student placement, course selection, and individual personalized education plans.
7. Treat parental concerns with respect and demonstrate genuine interest in developing solutions.
8. Promote parent participation on school district, state, and national committees and issues.
9. Provide training for staff and parents on collaborative partnering and shared decision making.

Sample Applications

Enable Parents to Participate as Partners

- Share annual reports of school performance and program information with parents at an open meeting to review current progress and solicit input for future goals. Respect for parent perspectives fosters increased understanding of school challenges, more effective program goals for improvement, and overall increased parent and community support.
- Communicate school/program procedures for addressing parent concerns including appropriate contact person and the process for defining the problem and developing and implementing solutions. Publicize successful changes in the school or program as a result of parent initiation and involvement.
- Include a mini-poll (one question) of parent opinions in each program newsletter covering a wide range of topics over time. Utilize parent feedback in making school/program decisions.
- Develop workshops or include parents in ongoing training on relevant topics such as developing parents as advocates, mastering skills for supporting learning, identifying and supporting learning styles, resolving difficulties, and fostering student achievement.

Parent Involvement in Making Program Decisions

By recruiting parent representatives to serve on committees dealing with policies and program decisions, administrators acknowledge the importance of parents' knowledge of and experience with children.

To ensure ongoing effective parent participation in the decision-making process, policy makers can work to create an environment where parents can:

- Attend open meetings on school/program issues
- Receive clear program goals and objectives
- Ask questions without fear of intimidation
- Understand confusing terminology and jargon
- Monitor the steps taken to reach program goals
- Assist their children in understanding program expectations and changes

Problem Solving Know-How

Promoting positive, constructive parent advocacy begins with frequently publicizing the process for dealing with concerns.

Parents need to understand the steps to problem solving and feel that the administration is genuinely interested in responding to their concerns in a constructive and fair manner.

The process should include identifying the problem, keeping the focus on the student's needs, avoiding blaming, meeting with the proper person(s) involved, gathering pertinent facts and information, brainstorming potential solutions, developing an action plan, and implementing and checking on progress. Repeat each step as necessary to resolve the problem.

Standard VI

Collaborating with Community

Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families, and student learning.

As part of the larger community, schools and other programs fulfill important community goals. In like fashion, communities offer a wide array of resources valuable to schools and the families they serve.

When schools and communities work together, both are strengthened in synergistic ways and make gains that outpace what either entity could accomplish on its own:

- Families access community resources more easily;
- Businesses connect education programs with the realities of the workplace;
- Seniors contribute wisdom and gain a greater sense of purpose; and ultimately,
- Students serve and learn beyond their school involvement.

The best partnerships are mutually beneficial and structured to connect individuals, not just institutions or groups. This connection enables the power of community partnerships to be unleashed.

Quality Indicators

Successful programs:

1. Distribute information regarding cultural, recreational, academic, health, social, and other resources that serve families within the community.
2. Develop partnerships with local business and service groups to advance student learning and assist schools and families.
3. Encourage employers to adopt policies and practices that promote and support adult participation in children's education.
4. Foster student participation in community service.
5. Involve community members in school volunteer programs.
6. Disseminate information to the school community, including those without school-age children, regarding school programs and performance.
7. Collaborate with community agencies to provide family support services and adult learning opportunities, enabling parents to more fully participate in activities that support education.
8. Inform staff members of the resources available in the community and strategies for utilizing those resources.

Sample Applications

Develop Partnerships with Local Business and Service Groups

- Work with community partners to hold special events such as health fairs, technology nights, or other learning opportunities to inform parents and families of community resources and services. Keep the events family-focused by providing activities suitable for both children and adults.
- Recruit school or program volunteers from senior citizen groups. Provide recruitment information that is highly specific about tasks to be performed, timeframe, and specific program requirements. Find creative ways to show appreciation to seniors for their assistance.
- In the local chamber of commerce newsletter, include a request from the school district superintendent for employer cooperation and encouragement of parent attendance at parent-teacher conferences and other parent involvement activities.
- Furnish local employers with information sheets containing parenting/parent involvement ideas.

Employer Support

Innovative businesses have established policies that enable parents to support their children's learning more easily. Some are allowing parents to adjust work schedules to attend parent-teacher conferences or serve as volunteers. Other employers distribute school and program information or recognize employees who give personal time to support schools.

Potential Partners

Within each community is a unique mix of organizations and service agencies that can offer valuable supports to parents and families. Consider the following partner categories:

Businesses
Chamber of commerce
Charitable organizations
Churches
Civic groups
Foundations
Local government
Local media
Military groups
Nonprofit associations
Senior citizens
Youth groups

Community Service Learning

More and more schools are providing students with the opportunity to learn by serving in the community. From soup kitchens and clean-up projects, to volunteer activities in government and business, these hands-on student opportunities are especially powerful when linked to class discussions and curriculum objectives.

In some cases where student skills have been linked to employee needs, not only have employers expanded opportunities for student learning, but their companies have also benefited. Through these programs, employers are able to complete important projects, while students benefit from new learning experiences in actual work settings.

Challenges and Opportunities

Engaging parents in highly effective ways requires confronting the challenges that have previously prevented that interaction. The challenges listed below are among those to be overcome, but each also offers numerous opportunities to truly transform parent and family involvement.

Administrative Leadership

The principal or program director plays a pivotal role in making parent and family involvement a reality. Educators and other staff sense the level of priority administrators give to involving parents. The climate in a school is created, to a large extent, by the tone set in the office of administration. If principals collaborate with parents, educators will be more likely to follow suit.

Sometimes there is a misperception that partnering with parents, particularly in the decision-making process, will diminish the principal's authority. Yet, the top management models in America are open and collaborative, encouraging subordinates to share their concerns and engaging managers and workers in cooperative problem solving rather than making decisions through strict hierarchical systems. Such an approach need not diminish the manager's authority, but can lead to better decisions—in businesses or in schools.

Without administrative leadership, long-term progress in family-school partnerships is difficult to achieve since genuine change requires systemic solutions and coordinated efforts with consistent leadership support.

Working together to implement the program standards, principals and teachers can accomplish a great deal. When parent involvement becomes a mutual program goal, and parents, educators, and administrators work together as a team to develop a plan for reaching the standards, substantial progress results. The principal provides the leadership; the program standards provide the vision.

Affirming Diversity

Programs serving parents and families must be aware and sensitive to the changes in our society represented by the word diversity. Successful programs increase awareness of all cultures represented. The importance of using translated materials and language interpreters, as needed, cannot be overstated.

We often hear the term “common courtesy,” but courtesy is not common; it is culturally determined. The values, attitudes, manners, and views of all populations represented in the community should be respected and honored. The religious holidays and observances of all groups are to be given consideration in the context of the total program serving parents and families.

Not only are programs called upon to serve culturally diverse populations, but the structures and supports for families are continually changing as well. The predominant scenario in most households includes both parents working outside the home. In addition, single-parent families are on the rise as well as the number of grandparents who serve as primary caregivers for their grandchildren. These patterns of change in family structure indicate that the current needs of families are indeed diverse, requiring heightened sensitivity to the increasing demands of home life.

As our society increases in the numbers and groups of diverse populations represented, only those programs willing to be flexible, sensitive, and supportive to the parents, children, and families they serve will be determined effective and worthwhile.

Parent and family involvement is a wise investment for communities.

Systemic Support

Research is clear that parent and family involvement is a wise investment for communities truly concerned about student achievement. If parent involvement traditions and habits are to be transformed, there must be adequate support from the education authorities outside the school.

Proactive parent involvement policies and practices at the district, state, and national levels are prerequisite. From school boards and district offices to state and national departments of education and national professional associations, principals and educators need to know their leaders are willing to support and encourage them as they seek to implement change.

Supporting parent and family involvement need not be expensive, but financial resources as well as moral support improve chances of success. Support may be in the form of a program coordinator, better access to telephones, or resource center materials to reach out to parents. When policy makers and education leaders make parent involvement a priority, their actions and the support systems they provide reflect their commitment.

Teacher Preservice and Inservice Preparation

Even with the preponderance of research establishing the connection between effective parent involvement and student achievement, few teachers receive substantive preparation in how to partner with parents.

Recent surveys of current practice are revealing:

- Most parent involvement preparation occurs in early childhood or special education courses.
- No state requires a separate course in parent involvement for teacher licensure.
- Only a handful of states require parent involvement preparation as part of a course.

- A minority of the states include parent involvement in their competency standards for teachers/administrators or in their standards for teacher/administrator training programs.
- No state requires parent involvement coursework for recertification or renewal of a license.

Still, there are promising signs. Both of the national associations that either accredit or set standards for teacher preparation programs, NCATE (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education) and NASDTEC (National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification), have recently added or strengthened indicators aimed at parent involvement. The National Board for Professional Teacher Standards has included parent involvement competencies in its standards. Several states are discussing ways to strengthen parent involvement requirements. While each of these efforts could be strengthened, they are a step forward and should begin to alter current practice.

In the meantime, providing teachers with parent and family involvement inservice and other professional development opportunities becomes critical. The National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs provide a good basis for this preparation, indicating what practices lead to quality. Teachers should also be familiar with the research base and focus on communication and interpersonal skills, particularly those that help parents feel comfortable and respected.

The use of mentoring, peer coaching, mini-presentations with follow-up, and other collaborative methods for professional development suit this topic very well. Rather than waiting for educators to take special courses or providing a “one-shot” inservice presentation, schools and programs should look for ways to present knowledge of good practice with ample interaction among the faculty and staff and frequent opportunities for checking back and evaluating progress.

Aside from the benefits of increased student performance, effective parent and family involvement provides educators with a much needed support system. Research indicates that schools that work well with families have improved teacher/staff morale and have higher ratings of teachers by parents.

Effective parent and family involvement provides educators with a much needed support system.

Where to Begin

Belief in the importance of parent and family is the necessary starting point, but the following steps outline a process for initiating and maintaining momentum toward change:

1. Create an Action Team

Parents, educators, administrators, and others deemed appropriate must be represented and involved in reaching a common understanding and in setting mutual goals to which all are committed.

2. Examine Current Practice

Review the current status of parent and family involvement. Survey staff and parents to ensure a clear understanding of the current situation. The “Checklist for Quality Indicators” self-evaluations, beginning on the next page (Appendix A), are useful tools.

3. Develop a Plan of Improvement

Based on the evaluation of current practice, identify first steps and priority issues, including developing a parent/family involvement policy. Pay close attention to developing a comprehensive, well-balanced plan that includes activity in each of the six standard areas (Appendix B).

4. Develop a Written Parent/Family Involvement Policy

A written parent/family involvement policy establishes the vision, common mission, and foundation for future plans. See guidelines for developing a policy (Appendix C) and sample policy statement (Appendix D).

5. Secure Support

For optimal success, keep stakeholders—those responsible for implementation, those who will be affected, and those outside the school/program who have influence over the outcome—aware of the plan and willing to lend support to its success. Financial resources need to be determined and secured.

6. Provide Professional Development for School/Program Staff

Effective training is essential. The best models for training are those that provide staff with several opportunities to interact with the issues, work together, and monitor and evaluate progress.

7. Evaluate and Revise the Plan

Parent and family involvement is not a one-time goal. It merits a process of continuous improvement and a commitment to long-term success.

Appendix A

Standard I: Communicating

Communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful.

Checklist for Quality Indicators

1. Use a variety of communication tools on a regular basis, seeking to facilitate two-way interaction through each type of medium.
2. Establish opportunities for parents and educators to share “partnering” information such as student strengths and learning preferences.
3. Provide clear information regarding course expectations and offerings, student placement, school activities, student services, and optional programs.
4. Mail report cards and regular progress reports to parents. Provide support services and follow-up conferences as needed.
5. Disseminate information on school reforms, policies, discipline procedures, assessment tools, and school goals, and include parents in any related decision-making process.
6. Conduct conferences with parents at least twice a year, with follow-up as needed. These should accommodate the varied schedules of parents, language barriers, and the need for child care.
7. Encourage immediate contact between parents and teachers when concerns arise.
8. Distribute student work for parental comment and review on a regular basis.
9. Translate communications to assist non-English speaking parents.
10. Communicate with parents regarding positive student behavior and achievement, not just regarding misbehavior or failure.
11. Provide opportunities for parents to communicate with principals and other administrative staff.
12. Promote informal activities at which parents, staff, and community members can interact.
13. Provide staff development regarding effective communication techniques and the importance of regular two-way communication between the school and the family.

Consistently Evident	Frequently Evident	Seldom Evident	Not Evident

Standard II: Parenting

Parenting skills are promoted and supported.

Checklist for Quality Indicators

1. Communicate the importance of positive relationships between parents and their children.
2. Link parents to programs and resources within the community that provide support services to families.
3. Reach out to all families, not just those who attend parent meetings.
4. Establish policies that support and respect family responsibilities, recognizing the variety of parenting traditions and practices within the community's cultural and religious diversity.
5. Provide an accessible parent/family information and resource center to support parents and families with training, resources, and other services.
6. Encourage staff members to demonstrate respect for families and the family's primary role in the rearing of children to become responsible adults.

Consistently Evident	Frequently Evident	Seldom Evident	Not Evident

Standard III: Student Learning

Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.

Checklist for Quality Indicators

1. Seek and encourage parent participation in decision-making that affects students.
2. Inform parents of the expectations for students in each subject at each grade level.
3. Provide information regarding how parents can foster learning at home, give appropriate assistance, monitor homework, and give feedback to teachers.
4. Regularly assign interactive homework that will require students to discuss and interact with their parents about what they are learning in class.
5. Sponsor workshops or distribute information to assist parents in understanding how students can improve skills, get help when needed, meet class expectations, and perform well on assessments.
6. Involve parents in setting student goals each year and in planning for post-secondary education and careers. Encourage the development of a personalized education plan for each student, where parents are full partners.
7. Provide opportunities for staff members to learn and share successful approaches to engaging parents in their child's education.

Consistently Evident	Frequently Evident	Seldom Evident	Not Evident

Standard IV: Volunteering

Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought.

Checklist for Quality Indicators

1. Ensure that office staff greetings, signage near the entrances, and any other interaction with parents create a climate in which parents feel valued and welcome.
2. Survey parents regarding their interests, talents, and availability, then coordinate the parent resources with those that exist within the school and among the faculty.
3. Ensure that parents who are unable to volunteer in the school building are given the options for helping in other ways, at home or place of employment.
4. Organize an easily accessible program for utilizing parent volunteers, providing ample training on volunteer procedures and school protocol.
5. Develop a system for contacting all parents to assist as the year progresses.
6. Design opportunities for those with limited time and resources to participate by addressing child care, transportation, work schedule needs, and so forth.
7. Show appreciation for parents' participation and value their diverse contributions.
8. Educate and assist staff members in creating an inviting climate and effectively utilizing volunteer resources.
9. Ensure that volunteer activities are meaningful and built on volunteer interests and abilities.

Consistently Evident	Frequently Evident	Seldom Evident	Not Evident

Standard V: School Decision Making and Advocacy

Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families.

Checklist for Quality Indicators

1. Provide understandable, accessible, and well-publicized processes for influencing decisions, raising issues or concerns, appealing decisions, and resolving problems.
2. Encourage the formation of PTAs or other parent groups to identify and respond to issues of interest to parents.
3. Include parents on all decision-making and advisory committees and ensure adequate training for such areas as policy, curriculum, budget, school reform initiatives, safety, and personnel. Where a site governance body exists, give equal representation to parents.

Consistently Evident	Frequently Evident	Seldom Evident	Not Evident

Standard V: continued

4. Provide parents with current information regarding school policies, practices, and both student and school performance data.
5. Enable parents to participate as partners when setting school goals, developing or evaluating programs and policies, or responding to performance data.
6. Encourage and facilitate active parent participation in the decisions that affect students, such as student placement, course selection, and individual personalized education plans.
7. Treat parent concerns with respect and demonstrate genuine interest in developing solutions.
8. Promote parent participation on school district, state, and national committees and issues.
9. Provide training for staff and parents on collaborative partnering and shared decision making.

Consistently Evident	Frequently Evident	Seldom Evident	Not Evident

Standard VI: Collaborating with Community

Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families, and student learning.

Checklist for Quality Indicators

1. Distribute information regarding cultural, recreational, academic, health, social, and other resources that serve families within the community.
2. Develop partnerships with local business and service groups to advance student learning and assist schools and families.
3. Encourage employers to adopt policies and practices that promote and support adult participation in children's education.
4. Foster student participation in community service.
5. Involve community members in school volunteer programs.
6. Disseminate information to the school community, including those without school-age children, regarding school programs and performance.
7. Collaborate with community agencies to provide family support services and adult learning opportunities, enabling parents to more fully participate in activities that support education.
8. Inform staff members of the resources available in the community and strategies for utilizing those resources.

Consistently Evident	Frequently Evident	Seldom Evident	Not Evident

Appendix B

Action Plan Worksheet

Area of Focus: _____

Goal: _____

Activity: _____

What Will Be Done? _____

Purpose of the Activity: _____

Who Will Do This? _____

When? _____

Materials/Resources Needed: _____

Evidence of Success: _____

Appendix C

Developing a Parent/Family Involvement Policy

The process of developing policies should include:

- administrators
- businesses
- community-based organizations
- parents
- students
- teachers
- other key stakeholders

The policies should contain the following:

- Opportunities for all parents to become involved in decision making about how the parent/family involvement programs will be designed, implemented, assessed, and strengthened.
- Outreach to encourage participation of parents who might have low-level literacy skills and/or for whom English is not their primary language.
- Regular information for parents about the objectives of educational programs and their child's participation and progress in those programs.
- Professional development for teachers and staff to enhance their effectiveness with parents.
- Linkages with special service agencies and community groups to address key family and community issues.
- Involvement of parents of children at all ages and grade levels.
- Opportunities for parents to share in decision making regarding school policies and procedures affecting their children.
- Recognition of diverse family structures, circumstances, and responsibilities, including differences that might impede parent participation. The person(s) responsible for a child may not be the child's biological parent(s), and policies and programs should include participation by all persons interested in the child's educational progress.

From: Developing Family/School Partnerships: Guidelines for Schools and School Districts, National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education

Appendix D

Model Parent/Family Involvement Policy

The Board of Education recognizes that a child's education is a responsibility shared by the school and family during the entire period the child spends in school. To support the goal of the school district to educate all students effectively, the schools and parents must work as knowledgeable partners.

Although parents are diverse in culture, language, and needs, they share the school's commitment to the educational success of their children. This school district and the schools within its boundaries, in collaboration with parents, shall establish programs and practices that enhance parent involvement and reflect the specific needs of students and their families.

To this end, the board supports the development, implementation, and regular evaluation of a parent involvement program in each school, which will involve parents at all grade levels in a variety of roles. The parent involvement programs will be comprehensive and coordinated in nature. They will include, but not be limited to, the following components of successful parent involvement programs:

- Communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful.
- Responsible parenting is promoted and supported.
- Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.
- Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought.
- Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families.
- Community resources are made available to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning.

The Board of Education supports professional development opportunities for staff members to enhance understanding of effective parent involvement strategies. The board also recognizes the importance of administrative leadership in setting expectations and creating a climate conducive to parental participation.

In addition to programs at the school level, the Board of Education supports the development, implementation, and regular evaluation of a program to involve parents in the decisions and practices of the school district, using to the degree possible, the components listed above.

Engaging parents is essential to improved student achievement. This school district shall foster and support active parent involvement.

This sample policy is based, in part, on the Parent Involvement Policy adopted by the California State Board of Education.

Appendix E

Project Ideas

When planning PTA activities, consider projects in each of the six standards to ensure a comprehensive approach to parent involvement. PTA projects should supplement and enhance those sponsored by the school. Some projects or activities may address more than one standard, such as a project that enhances parenting skills and student learning, or a project that combines volunteering and collaborating with community.

Communication

- **Sponsor annual or semi-annual events where educators and parents can get acquainted** and interact on an informal basis. Themes might include Monthly Breakfast Club, Wild West Fest, Star Search Talent Show, Back to School Social, or Family Sock Hop. Encourage interaction by including “ice breakers” or activities where parents and staff have to interact and can get to know each other better. For example, design a fill-in-the-blank quiz where the object is to match parents and teachers to favorite things/activities, such as “find someone who: loves chocolate, collects baseball cards, plays softball, loves to go camping, has a great family pasta recipe, builds bird-houses,” etc.
- **Promote parent/teacher conferences by conducting support activities.** In consultation with school staff, **develop a Preparing for Parent-Teacher Conferences publication** or flier with sample questions to assist parents in partnering with teachers. If your school offers evening conferences, consider sponsoring a free or low-cost meal to enable parents to come right after work. Distribute calendars for recording upcoming student events, assignments, and dates when parents should check back with teachers on student progress. Assist parents who attend conferences to find classrooms, counseling offices, and support materials.
- **Sponsor a Question Round Up or a Suggestion Derby** to help motivate communication from parents. Offer prizes, and give sample topics. Publish outstanding entries to encourage future participation.
- **Offer to design and print Happy Grams** for teachers to report positive behavior or achievement to parents. Consider covering mailing costs if necessary.
- **Participate in the development of a Parent Handbook** that meets the needs of parents and encourages active participation. Promote the handbook with parents, highlighting examples of the important information in the book in school newsletters and other forms of home-school communication.
- **Publicize the hours when administrators and teachers are available for parent visits** and any procedures for contacting teachers on the telephone or in writing. Promote use of these opportunities for discussing children’s progress.
- **Advocate before school policy makers regarding the need for staff to have adequate access to telephones** and other means of communication. If your school has an automated homework hot line or other parent information system, promote its use among parents.
- **Appoint a PTA newsletter chairperson or committee to work with the school to help produce or contribute to the school newsletter** to make it relevant, useful, and timely for parents. Include a two-way communication mechanism in the school newsletter such as a question-and-answer section or a mini-survey in each edition. In secondary schools, encourage mailing of the newsletter directly to parents.
- **At Back to School Night and/or a faculty meeting, present a “How to Partner” Role Play of a parent-teacher conference** where parents and teachers share information and plan for the future.

Parenting

- **Sponsor** regular parenting classes or an **annual Parent University** in cooperation with local professionals. Provide child care and transportation if possible. Consider seeking donations for a **Toy Lending Library** where parents can check out an age appropriate toy for their child when the class is over.
- **Host a VIP (Very Important Parent) column** in the school's newsletter to highlight parent tips, show real-life examples of how to handle parenting challenges, and provide general information for parents. The newsletter might also include a tear off form for submitting questions to be answered by a parenting professional in a "Dear _____" column.
- **Distribute parenting information** at parent-teacher conferences.
- **Gather donations for Family Kits** that could be checked out for use at home. These kits could be built around a theme and include videos, books, conversation starters, games, and other materials to support positive parenting practices.
- **Start a Parent Book Club.** Advertise the current selection, give parents a chance to meet to discuss it, or just include excerpts in the school newsletter.
- **Assemble a Family Resource Center** with a broad array of materials and information for parents. Local businesses and agencies are often willing to help fund this kind of project. Convene a committee to oversee development, operation, and review of the center.
- **Host activities at the school** that bring parents and children together, from **Lunch Buddies** where parents can drop in to eat lunch with children to inviting parents to sit with their child during school assemblies.
- **Create "Together Grams,"** a half-sheet flier with one activity idea for parents to do with their children, such as "Talk to your children about when you were their age." On the back, provide information about why the activity is valuable for kids and how it supports academic learning.

Host a parent class on the use of the National PTA resource *Building a Healthy Child*, an interactive health activities kit for children in grades K–6 to promote parent-child discussion of important health topics and to reinforce school lessons. The 10 easy-to-use, low-cost health activities can be set up as independent learning games or as parts of a larger health fair event. Activities range from building self-esteem and physical fitness to poison prevention and bike safety. This program encourages and promotes:

1. home-school communication and cooperation
2. parenting participation by providing parent-child interaction
3. student learning about important health topics

Student Learning

- **Sponsor a "Parents Make the Difference" evening** where parents can get an overview of what students will be learning, how students will be assessed, what parents should expect, and how they can assist and make a difference. These could be for an individual class, grade level, or subject area. At the secondary level, these events might focus around a particular academic discipline, such as Science Achievement Night. Teachers from various courses—biology or chemistry—would conduct sessions giving tips about how to achieve in their particular class. (Be sure to make it clear what parents will receive and how their participation will enhance student achievement.)

- Following the first report card period, **sponsor study skills sessions** where parents come with their students to learn how to improve grades and study habits. Specifying that a parent should attend with the student tends to increase the influence of these sessions.
- **Include a "Did You Know?" column in each school newsletter**, highlighting the research in the *National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs* booklet on how parent involvement affects student success. When parents understand the value of their participation, they're much more likely to get involved.
- If your school uses portfolio reviews as part of student assessment, **offer to assist teachers in organizing portfolio reviews** as part of parent-teacher conference night. The PTA could promote the event, contact parents, and arrange the logistics for these sessions. Teachers would conduct the review sessions.
- **Conduct a Parents Supporting Success activity.** At the beginning of the year, distribute a bingo-like card, where each box contains a parent activity that supports student learning. Students, whose parents have initialed all the activities on the card by the end of the term, receive some kind of recognition or academic support prizes like flash cards or books.
- Offer to provide funds or seek donations to **create Exploration Kits** that support teachers' activities in an academic subject area. The kits can contain a list of activities, related videos, books, writing supplies, learning toys, or games that provide ideas and ways for parents and children to explore an academic subject together. Teachers could circulate the kits among the students or make them available at parent-teacher conferences for parents to check out.
- **Sponsor academic events**, such as **Science Fairs or Geography Bees**. Be sure to remind parents how they can support their child's learning through participating in such events.
- **Publicize ways parents can support student learning.** Have students create posters or signs to display in the halls during parent-teacher conferences with tips for parents. Get the local newspaper to run articles with specific suggestions for parent involvement. Look for creative methods to get the message out and get parents involved.

Volunteering

- In cooperation with the school administration, **conduct a School Climate Survey**. Is your school's climate sunny and friendly to parents? Or is it fair to partly cloudy? Use the information received to guide efforts to make the school's climate more inviting.
- **Host a How You Can Make a Difference orientation session** for parents and volunteers each year. Invite school staff to address relevant topics, demonstrate equipment use, and provide parents and other volunteers with a packet of timely information.
- **Create a Volunteer Center in the school.** While it may take creativity, almost any facility can accommodate some sort of welcoming area for volunteers, from a corner of the library to an area in a hallway with a couple of lockers for personal belongings. Put up a bulletin board for announcements, and be sure there is a place to sign in and record volunteer hours.
- **Show appreciation.** Thank volunteers throughout the year, in the school newsletter, at special events, and using personal thank-you notes. **Consider creating a Wall of Fame display** or bulletin board with pictures of volunteers helping with school activities and events. Showing what and how much can be accomplished by volunteers can encourage others to get involved.

- **Create volunteer opportunities** that go beyond traditional tasks that volunteers perform. For example, at the secondary level, consider a **Parents in the Halls program** which encourages parents to drop in and get their exercise walking at the high school, instead of at the gym. After picking up a volunteer badge at the office, these parents perform an important service by increasing the adult presence in the building and thereby reducing behavior problems. As a side benefit, parents get acquainted with the school.
- **Publish a Volunteer Resource Book**, listing the interests and availability of volunteers for school staff members' use. Survey parents regarding their interests, so volunteer work will be meaningful. Be sure to determine how frequently a volunteer would like to participate, including the option of just one time per year. Include options for those who are available to help at home. Use the resource book to help match school needs with volunteer interests.
- **Recruit one Room Representative** for each classroom who would be responsible for coordinating volunteer activities for the class. This person would work closely with the teacher in matching interests and needs.
- **Publicize the contributions of volunteers.** Tally the hours given over the course of the year and present the school with a symbolic check for the value of the service.

School Decision Making and Advocacy

- **Facilitate parent participation** on school committees and other community groups, such as a city council. Advertise committee assignments well in advance and actively recruit representatives. Where possible, elect those who will be representing the PTA and find ways for them to report to the membership. One school calls its parent program **Partners for Progress**, and the participants are invited to report on their progress at each PTA meeting.
- **Continually seek out parent perspectives** and input by including a mini-poll (one question) in each school newsletter and providing a space for feedback. Set up a special voice mail box at your school or email box to receive feedback from your mini-polls.
- **Frequently publish the school's process for resolving parent concerns:** how to define the problem, whom to approach first, how to develop solutions and so forth. Encourage parents to address problems early before they grow.
- **Sponsor an Advocate Training Program** where parents learn how to advocate effectively for their children in school situations such as parent-teacher conferences, at school board meetings, and in public forums where decisions are being made that affect children.
- **In cooperation with the school administration, sponsor a school accountability meeting** where school officials describe school programs, services, and performance data. Following these presentations, parents, staff, and community members discuss the information received and make suggestions for future goal setting. As an annual tradition, this becomes a process for continuous improvement.

Host a special Earth Day event (April 22) or one "green" activity a day as a part of National PTA Earth Week—the week in which Earth Day falls each year. From sponsoring a "Waste Free Lunch Day," at school to helping make your community "radon free," your PTA can find out what other environmental programs are already underway in your community to get children, parents, teachers, school officials, and community leaders involved. This project encourages and promotes:

1. student learning and support of environmental issues
2. volunteering and leadership opportunities
3. involvement and collaboration with the entire community

- Encourage the school to **develop a Student Advocacy Handbook** with information about how parents can participate more effectively as partners with students and the school. Include the process for resolving concerns, ways to improve parent-teacher conferences, tips for good study habits, how to develop cooperative relationships, and so forth.
- **Sponsor seminars** to inform high school parents about how to be involved in the decisions affecting course selection, career planning, and preparation for post-secondary opportunities. These seminars could be for particular age groups (e.g., Freshman Orientation Luncheon or Sophomore Night), or for particular topics (e.g., Preparing for College Entrance Exams or College Expo).
- Work with students, parents, teachers, school administrators, community leaders, and businesses to **develop a parent/family involvement policy** to establish the vision, common mission, and foundation for parent/family involvement programs in your community.

Collaborating with Community

- **Host an annual Health Fair.** Using a carnival-like atmosphere, community health providers host booths and workshops to inform parents and teens about student health topics and available services. Invite local hospital personnel or paramedics to provide demonstrations of emergency care or safety techniques.
- **Host an annual Book Fair.** Activities can include author talks, storytelling, a used book exchange/sale, a puppet show, literary costume contest, games that promote literature or reading skills, create-your-own-book activity, or a library card sign-up drive. Invite local businesses or book stores to sponsor the event.
- Contact alumni from the school to **participate in an Alumni Sponsors Program.** School alumni would be asked to volunteer time or make a donation to the school.
- **Seek business partners for school programs,** such as an **Adopt a School program.** Work to match businesses with appropriate sponsorship opportunities. A local bakery could be asked to donate cookies twice a year; a local waste removal company could be asked to donate dumpsters for a **Spring Clean-Up day.**
- **Sponsor an annual Give Back Day** where students go out into the community to perform needed work or services. Coordinate your student activities with local authorities, a Chamber of Commerce, or city council to find the most appropriate and beneficial services that students might give back to the community.
- **Offer PTA volunteers to assist a Chamber of Commerce** or community group in one of its annual events or programs. Your PTAs involvement in community activities can help build goodwill and support for your PTA and its activities.

Make **Teacher Appreciation Week** an annual event for your PTA, school, and community. Whether you create recognition awards, hold a special event, or ask local businesses to “adopt” a teacher, it’s your chance to promote teachers’ hard work, dedication, and involvement. Prior to the week, ask teachers to complete the phrase, “If I had only one wish, it would be...” Provide supplies and volunteers to help each class create a mural that describes and depicts each teacher’s wish. This program promotes:

1. home-school cooperation and student learning
2. volunteering opportunities and support of teachers
3. involvement and collaboration with the entire community

- **Involve senior citizens in volunteer projects and programs.** Host an open house at a local senior citizen center to recruit volunteers. You may want to organize a **Senior Volunteer Day**, where once a month seniors are invited into the school to assist as hall/lunch monitors, library assistants, or reading tutors. For secondary schools, you could start a **Senior-to-Senior Program**, where high school seniors would host senior citizens coming into the school to share life or work experiences as a part of a social science or history class.
- Ask the local newspaper or Chamber of Commerce newsletter to **include reminders about upcoming parent-teacher conferences.** Provide facts about the importance and impact of parent involvement on student success and request employer cooperation in allowing parents to attend conferences.
- **Develop** paycheck size cards with **tips for how parents can foster their child's success.** Contact employers about including the cards with employee paychecks.

For additional support:

Resources in support of the national standards can be found on the National PTA website at www.pta.org/programs/invstand.htm. Other resources supporting child advocacy programs are located on the website at www.pta.org.

Additional copies of the *National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs* booklet can be ordered by using the form on page 42 (Appendix H).

One very successful and popular PTA program that addresses all six of the standards for parent and family involvement programs is the **National PTA Reflections program**. Each year, the National PTA Reflections program recognizes outstanding student works in literature, musical composition, photography, and visual arts. The Reflections program encourages and promotes:

1. home-school communication and cooperation
2. parent participation and support of arts in education
3. student learning and expression through the arts
4. volunteering and leadership opportunities
5. arts advocacy and arts in education awareness
6. involvement and collaboration with entire community

Over the past 28 years, more than 10 million students, along with their parents, schools, and communities, have participated in the program through local PTAs. Contact your state PTA for information on starting a Reflections program for your PTA.

Appendix F

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Appendix G

Acknowledgments

More than 40 national education, health, and parent involvement groups have endorsed or support the National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs. The National PTA thanks the following organizations and institutions for agreeing to uphold these standards.

The ASPIRA Association Inc.

*Christa Stephens, Manager for
Parental Involvement Programs*
1444 I Street N.W., Suite 800
Washington, DC 20005
(202) 835-3600

Academy for Educational Development

*Lois Paul, Assistant Director
for Administration*
1875 Connecticut Avenue N.W.
Washington, DC 20009
(202) 884-8000

***American Academy of Pediatrics**

*Joe M. Sanders Jr., M.D.,
Executive Director*
141 Northwest Place Boulevard
Elk Grove Village, IL 60007-1098
(847) 981-7396

American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education

David Imig, Ph.D., Executive Director
One Dupont Circle N.W., Room 610
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 293-2450

***American Association of School Administrators**

Gary Marx, Executive Director
Leadership for Learning Foundation
1801 North Moore Street
Arlington, VA 22209
(703) 528-0700

American Federation of Teachers

Sandra Feldman, President
555 New Jersey Avenue N.W.
Washington, DC 20001
(202) 879-4400

***American School Counselor Association**

*Canary C. Hogan, Ed.D., NCSC,
President*
801 North Fairfax Street, Suite 310
Alexandria, VA 22314
(703) 683-2722

***American School Health Association**

Susan Wooley, Executive Director
7263 State Route 43
P.O. Box 708
Kent, OH 44240
(330) 678-1601

***Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development**

*Gene R. Carter, Ed.D.,
Executive Director*
1250 North Pitt Street
Alexandria, VA 22314-1453
(703) 549-9110

***Association of State and Territorial Health Officials**

*Cheryl A. Beversdorf, Executive
Vice President*
1275 K Street N.W., Suite 800
Washington, DC 20005-4006
(202) 371-9090

Center for Law and Education

Paul Weckstein, Codirector
1875 Connecticut Avenue N.W.
Suite 510
Washington, DC 20009
(202) 986-3000

Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University

Joyce L. Epstein, Ph.D., Director
3505 North Charles Street, Suite 200
Baltimore, MD 21218
(410) 516-8800

Community Solutions International

Linda Moore, President
1222 Hemlock Street N.W.
Washington, DC 20012
(202) 882-2182

Corporation for Educational Technology

Alan T. Hill, President
17 West Market Street
Indianapolis, IN 46204
(317) 464-2076

Council for Exceptional Children

Jay McIntire, Policy Specialist
1920 Association Drive
Reston, VA 22091
(703) 620-3660

***Council of Chief State School Officers**

Gordon Ambach, Executive Director
One Massachusetts Avenue N.W.
Suite 700
Washington, DC 20001-1431
(202) 408-5505

Council of the Great City Schools

Michael Casserly, Executive Director
1301 Pennsylvania Avenue, Suite 702
Washington, DC 20004
(202) 393-2427

Family Education Network

Carroll T. Miller, Publisher
Statler Building, Suite 1215
20 Park Plaza
Boston, MA 02116
(617) 542-6500

Family Impact Seminar

Theodora Ooms, Executive Director
1730 Rhode Island Avenue N.W.
Suite 209
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 496-1964

Hand-in-Hand—Parents, Schools, Communities United for Kids

Alfred Ramirez, Program Director
1001 Connecticut Avenue N.W.
Suite 310
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 822-8405

* Added 5/98

Howard University Graduate Programs in Urban School Psychology

*LaMonte G. Wyche Sr., Ph.D.,
Director, Howard University,
School of Education*
2400 6th Street N.W.
Washington, DC 20059
(202) 806-7350

MegaSkills Education Center of the Home and School Institute

Dorothy Rich, Ed.D., President
1500 Massachusetts Avenue N.W.
Washington, DC 20005
(202) 466-3633

National Association of Elementary School Principals

*Samuel G. Sava, Ed.D.,
Executive Director*
1615 Duke Street
Alexandria, VA 22314
(703) 684-3345

National Association of Partners in Education

Sara Melnick, Director of Development
901 North Pitt Street, Suite 320
Alexandria, VA 22314
(703) 836-4880

***National Association of School Nurses**

Beverly Farquhar, Executive Director
P.O. Box 1300
Scarborough, ME 04070-1300
(207) 883-2117

National Association of School Psychologists

Kevin Dwyer, Assistant Executive Director
4340 East West Highway, Suite 402
Bethesda, MD 20814
(301) 657-0270

National Association of Secondary School Principals

*Thomas F. Koerner,
Acting Executive Director*
1904 Association Drive
Reston, VA 20191
(703) 860-0200

National Association of State Directors of Vocational Technical Education Consortium

*Kimberly A. Kubiak,
Executive Director*
444 North Capitol Street N.W.
Suite 830
Washington, DC 20001
(202) 737-0303

National Coalition of Title I/Chapter I Parents

Carla Jones, Acting Executive Director
National Parent Center
1541 14th Street N.W.
Washington, DC 20005
(202) 547-9286

***National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education**

Arthur E. Wise, President
2010 Massachusetts Avenue N.W.
Suite 500
Washington, DC 20036-1023
(202) 466-7496

The National Council of La Raza

Ariana Quiones, Education Specialist
1111 19th Street N.W., Suite 1000
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 785-1670

National Dropout Prevention Center

Jay Smink, Ed.D., Executive Director
Clemson University
205 Martin Street
Clemson, SC 29634-5111
(864) 656-2599

National Education Association

Warlene Gary, Manager
1201 16th Street N.W.
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 822-7155

National Head Start Association

Sarah Greene, Chief Executive Officer
1651 Prince Street
Alexandria, VA 22314
(703) 739-0875

***National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities**

Suzanne Ripley, Director
P.O. Box 1492
Washington, DC 20013-1492
(800) 695-0285

National Middle School Association

Sue Swaim, Executive Director
2600 Corporate Exchange Drive
Suite 370
Columbus, OH 43231-1672
(614) 895-4730

National School Boards Association

*Anne L. Bryant, Ed.D.,
Executive Director*
*Jeremiah Floyd, Associate
Executive Director*

1680 Duke Street
Alexandria, VA 22314-3493
(703) 838-6700 (Bryant)
(703) 838-6740 (Floyd)

National Urban League

*Velma Cobb, Director of Education
and Youth Development*
120 Wall Street
New York, NY 10005
(212) 558-5355

Parents As Teachers National Center inc.

Mildred Winter, Executive Director
1001 76 Corporate Square Drive
Suite 230
St. Louis, MO 63132
(314) 432-4330

Project Parents Inc.

Jeanne Belovitch, President
24 Appleton Street
Boston, MA 02116
(617) 451-0360

School Improvement Council Assistance

Jean Norman, Director
College of Education
University of South Carolina
Columbia, SC 29208
(803) 777-7658

Websters International

*Virginia C. Schmidt, Public
Relations Director*
240 Wilson Pike Circle
Brentwood, TN 37027
(615) 373-1723

* Added 5/98

Appendix H

National PTA Order Form

National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs booklet

Thank you for your interest in the *National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs* booklet developed by the National PTA.

Noted below is information for ordering copies of this booklet. To ensure proper handling of your request, please make sure all information is printed clearly. You may copy this form for multiple orders.

Please send me additional copies of the *National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs* booklet.

<u>Quantity</u>	<u>Price</u>		<u>Postage & Handling</u>
1-10	\$2.00 each	+	\$5.00
11-25	\$2.00 each	+	\$7.50
26-50	\$1.50 each	+	\$10.00
51-100	\$1.25 each	+	\$18.00
More than 101	\$1.00 each	+	Actual postage/handling cost

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Quantity Ordered _____ Price & Postage Total _____

Method of Payment (Only one of the following will be accepted—no purchase orders or invoices.)

- Check enclosed (Made payable to National PTA)
 Credit card charge (circle one): VISA MasterCard

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Chicago, IL 60674-1927