The Power of Family School Community Partnerships

A Training Resource Manual
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# Family School Partnerships

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Compiled, Coordinated, & Facilitated
By
Warlene D. Gary and Robert Witherspoon (2011)
The National Education Association has long championed the engagement of parents, families, and communities in all its resources, programs, and publications. The need to build and strengthen family-school-community partnerships has emerged as a major challenge in public education. We know that partnerships are essential for helping students achieve at their maximum potential. Most school professionals now realize that the job of educating students cannot be achieved by their efforts alone. Rather, it requires a collaborative effort with families, communities, and other stakeholders.

Some measure of parent and community involvement has always been a cornerstone of public schools. However, that involvement has usually been directed and guided by the schools and, for the most part, has focused on fundraising initiatives, volunteering, and supporting school activities. We now understand that families and the broader community also must be included in decision making and school governance. We also realize that the learning that occurs within the family and community contributes to school success, and so we need to give greater recognition and support to these collaborative efforts.

Unfortunately, the need to increase family and community involvement comes at a time when many families and communities are under siege, overburdened, and dissatisfied with public schools. Despite the resurgence in family and community involvement and a wealth of materials and resources, practice and attitudes have not changed very much. This is especially true for poor families and families often referred to as "minorities."

The NEA’s Priority Schools Campaign has as a core strategy an evidence-based framework for change: To develop family, school, and community partnerships, transformation in low performing schools must move educators from conversation
and awareness activities to working synergistically with parents to raise achievement levels for their children. In an organizational context, synergy is an increase in effectiveness or achievement through cooperation or combined action of some type. Providing parents with the skills to work in a collaborative environment toward a common goal of school reform will ensure that priority schools will achieve far more. Stephen Covey said “synergy catalyzes, unifies, and unleashes the greatest power within people.”
“None of us is as smart as all of us”
—Japanese Proverb

It is a pleasure to be able to say a public thank you to all the people who made this training manual possible. First, we offer our deepest appreciation to the National Education Association. Through the tireless efforts of the NEA Priority Schools team’s initiative, family, school, and community engagement will be further highlighted and implemented. We acknowledge the incredible vision of the NEA Priority Schools team under the leadership of Dr. Sheila Simmons. Through her guidance, this manual was produced in a collaborative effort with the National Education Association family. To Dr. Denise Alston, NEA Senior Policy Analyst, our staff liaison, who spent countless hours coordinating information and people who could assist us, we commend your dedication to the mission and to this project. Although, words do not adequately convey the depth of our appreciation, we offer our thanks to Phil McLaurin, Roberta Hantgan, Jan Hagey, and Rachelle Estes. Your generous and gracious spirit was a joy. Thank you, thank you, and thank you.

We hold the family, school, and community pioneers who continue to fight the good fight in the highest regard. We could not have revamped, researched, added, created, networked, developed, molded or launched this manual without the work of our mentors and colleagues. Dr. Joyce Epstein, Dr. Heather Weiss, Dr. Sam Redding, Norman Fruchter, Anne Henderson, Dr. Karen Mapp, Ollie Moles, and Arnie Fege are just a few who have dedicated their talents to this great discipline. And we offer a special tribute to two giants in the field of family, school, and community partnerships: Dr. Dorothy Rich, founder of the Home and School Institute and MegaSkills, and Sue Ferguson, chair of the National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education. These great innovators are no longer with us, but they have left a formidable legacy in this field. To them we would say, “Your voice and activism on behalf of families, schools, and communities is sorely missed.”

Finally, to all the organizations too numerous to name, a hardy and resolute group who have stayed the course researching, producing, and sharing resources that will lead us to a better future for all our children, families, and communities, we say, “Keep the faith and stay strong. Thank you!” Samuel Johnson said it best, “Nature seems to have implanted gratitude in all living creatures.” It is with gratitude, pride, hope, and great pleasure that we have assembled this body of work.
Introduction

This manual has been designed to assist you (Association leaders, staff, and members) with facilitating family-school-community partnership training sessions which are designed to help participants create and build partnerships in their own local communities. This training manual contains excerpts from current research and theory, as well as examples of field-tested practice, and includes strategies for involving families, schools, and communities in building partnerships. Special emphasis is placed on priority schools to assist in raising the academic achievement of their students. In addition, there is a section that features National Education Association resources that are available to use in conjunction with efforts to enhance implementation of the Family-School-Community Partnership Initiative in your communities.

Organization of the Manual

This manual is structured with (6) modules. Within each module are:

1) Objectives
2) Content pages
3) Mini-discussions
4) Activities with process instructions
5) Strategies
6) Background reading/resource materials

Your facilitator’s manual contains the originals of all participant handouts. You will need to duplicate them in enough quantities for the registrants, as well as providing extras where necessary. The PowerPoint slides are available through download from the NEA Priority Schools Campaign website (www.neapriorityschools.org).

How To Use this Manual

No one training program can cover every community or school’s needs. To fit your unique local situation and unique group of participants, adapt or add to these materials as you see fit. Many school professionals, especially teachers and principals, have had little formal experience in developing positive relationships with families and communities. If this is the case for participants in your training, you may choose to follow the manual closely. If your participants have had more partnership experience, you may choose to skip certain sections or add other material, to fit their particular needs.
While this manual provides a wealth of information, there are some key topics in partnership building that should be covered more in depth. These include leadership development, diversity, team building, and strategic planning.

The manual includes content and processes that were identified by years of research by experts as important components to enhancing family, school, and community partnerships.

**Training Options**

Not every school, district, or community will have either the time or the resources to utilize this entire manual. With this in mind, we recommend a few training options to create a one-two-hour module. (See Bob’s suggestions from Training Formulas)
“We believe partnerships with parents, families, communities, and other stakeholders are essential to quality public education and student success.”

*NEA core value on partnership*
The Power of Knowledge
Module 1

“Parents, families, educators, and communities—there’s no better partnership to assure that all students pre-K to high school have the support and resources they need to succeed in school and in life.”

—NEA President Dennis Van Roekel

Introduction

Throughout its history, working in partnership with families and communities has been a foundation of the National Education Association’s work. The Association adopted a strategic focus on membership organizing, developing community partnerships as a strategy for closing the gaps in student achievement. The Family-School-Community Partnership Initiative has complimented and provided support to NEA leaders/members for more than a decade. The vision of the Association, “a great public school for every student,” cannot be achieved without the core value on partnership, which must be a central thread that runs throughout our work.

The Family-School-Community Partnership (FSCP) training and resources will generate energy, expand the foundation, increase the knowledge and skills to support Association leaders/members to intensify partnerships with families and communities in schools that serve low-income children. The FSCP training will specifically complement the Priority Schools Campaign (PSC) to meet the new federal requirements of the School Improvement Grant (SIG) legislation under Title 1 of the Elementary Secondary Education Act.

Working in partnership with families and communities will increase the abilities of each partner to learn more about each other to support the goals, hopes, and dreams of our children. A tremendous benefit of partnership will be an increase in knowledge of families, schools, and communities and an appreciation for the strengths each partner brings to the table. We know that KNOWLEDGE is POWER and that when POWER is shared; the responsibility for educating children and improving schools also is shared. When working in true partnership, partners learn more from and about each other,
grow to respect each other, share more, and do more. The end result is “a great public school for every student.”

**Objective**

This module is designed to increase the knowledge and skills of Association leaders/members to understand the Priority Schools Campaign and support its implementation in those schools supported by the campaign. The module also will increase the skills of Association leaders/members to implement family and community research-based education strategies that improve student achievement.

**CONTENT**

**Mini Discussions**
1. Families-School Community Partnerships: Why are we here?
   - The Priority Schools Campaign
2) Research update: Family and Community Engagement and Student Achievement

**Activities**
1) Defining Family Involvement/ Engagement: What do we mean?
2) Core Beliefs in Family Engagement – The Ten Truths
3) Connecting with My School Community — Eco-Map

**Visuals (Located on PowerPoint)**
1) Module 1: The Power of Knowledge
2) The Power of Knowledge: “We believe”… NEA Core Value on Partnerships
3) Priority Schools Campaign: Five Elements of Change
4) Quote: Dennis Van Roekel
5) Definition: “A philosophy, culture” – Dr. Joyce Epstein
6) Epstein Framework on Involvement
7) Epstein Framework on Involvement (2)
8) Definition: Title 1 Parent Involvement
9) Definition: National Family and Community Engagement Working Group
10) “Parent and Community Involvement Linked to Learning”
11) Students with Involved Families...
12) What Successful Schools Do?
13) What Families Can Do? Middle/High Schools
14) Necessary Supports for School Improvement
15) Community Schools
16) Community Schools (2)
17) Community Organizing
18) Community Organizing (2)
19) Community Engagement Essentials
20) Ten Truths of Family Involvement
21) Ten Truths of Family Involvement (2)

**Strategies**
1) Strategies for Priority Schools
2) Engaging Families To Improve Achievement: Advice from the Research
3) Communities, Associations, and Schools Together for Public Education: A Comprehensive Strategy for School Improvement

**Background Readings**
1) News release: NEA president draws attention to family, community involvement in schools
2) NEA Policy Brief—Parent, Family, Community Involvement in Education
3) Research Brief: Parent Engagement in Education
Mini Discussion 1

At no other time in our nation’s history has public education been under such intensive scrutiny as it is today. Our education system is challenged with declining status on the international level as other nations out-perform us; the growing achievement gap between low-income students and their higher performing peers; unequal and inadequate funding and access especially for our urban and rural students; the pressures of high-stakes testing, the growing attacks against public schools; the high levels of poverty and lack of support for the needs of the whole child; and the changing federal landscape with new priorities and changes in federal funds that have forced competition for funding between states, districts, and schools.

Families now have other options for educating their children. We routinely see families stand in line to get their children into specialty schools such as charter schools and they are pressured by education management companies and the potential use of vouchers to attend private schools. Teachers are constantly criticized, are pitted against each other, and are often made to feel incompetent as education leaders.

Why are we here? If we ever needed to come together as families, schools, and communities, in support of public education, we need to now. This challenge must be a call to action for the Association.

Priority Schools Campaign (PSC)

The Association’s Priority Schools Campaign (PSC) is to help transform low-performing schools, also referred to as priority schools. PSC is not a new initiative as the Association has always focused its resources to address the challenges in low-performing schools. PSC unites all stakeholders — students, administrators, policymakers, parents, and communities — in a collaborative mission to fulfill the promise of public education. PSC is changing the game and moving the conversation to action.

Grounded in five research-based elements of change, the core of the Priority Schools Campaign is the recognition that shared responsibility and collaborative effort are the keys to students reaching their potential. The campaign is working with and through NEA state and local affiliates to:
• Leverage community assets
• Improve staff capacity and effectiveness
• Develop family and community partnerships
• Improve district and local association capacity and collaboration
• Improve student achievement and learning

The Priority Schools Campaign is the mandate of NEA’s 2009 Representative Assembly that the organization directs its resources towards priority schools. The Association seized on the public policy window afforded by the Obama Administration’s School Improvement Grant program to leverage NEA resources as a complement. Such collaboration is a POWERFUL force to improve student performance.

The Family-School-Community Partnership training will support NEA leaders/members working in priority schools.

“We do not have to close a school, fire most or all of its teachers, or turn it into a charter school to improve it. There is a better way. Successful and innovative models of public education that involve partnerships among government, parents, community organizations, education unions, businesses, and foundations are happening around the country. For long-term, sustainable school transformation, shared responsibility and collaboration are essential.”

NEA President Dennis Van Roekel
Mini Discussion 2

Research Update: Family and Community Engagement and Student Achievement

The Association has worked in partnership with families and communities throughout its history and has witnessed firsthand the effect of family and community engagement on student achievement and as a way to improve schools. A growing body of evidence shows the influence families and communities have on children’s achievement. When schools and families work together in partnership, develop strategies to support each other, students and schools both benefit.

We now have concrete definitions of parent involvement and have witnessed a shift from involvement to engagement that spans the years of pre-school through high school.

Studies have provided the field with specific strategies that target types of partnerships activities that influence achievement. The Association’s efforts to intensify partnerships must take these recommendations and assist our schools in their implementation. One of the key messages in the research is that we must begin to look at the engagement of families and communities as an overall strategy to improve achievement. Another key finding is that programs and efforts to engage families make a difference. The challenge for many schools, especially those implementing SIGs is to move away from a series of parent “activities” and ensure that families and communities are a core strategy to improve achievement. SIG legislation requires that families and communities play a significant role in the implementation of SIGs. We have a short window of opportunity to make it happen.

The role of the Association will be essential to ensure attention is paid to the research strategies and that we provide assistance to local schools to intensify partnership efforts with families and communities and to strengthen relationships between families and teachers. The role of our education support professionals is critical to make it happen. Family-School-Community Partnerships: They won’t happen unless we try.

“These are all our children, and we will benefit by or pay for what they become”.

James Baldwin
Activities

Module 1 | The Power of Knowledge
Activity 1: Defining Involvement/Engagement

Purpose

This brainstorming activity will help participants build on their knowledge and understanding of involvement/engagement and to acknowledge the influence families have on children’s growth and development, by reflecting on their own experiences.

Time Required

20 minutes

Materials

Note cards, chart paper, markers.

Room Arrangement

Groups of 6-8 at tables

Process

Have participants brainstorm in groups at their tables: What did the parents/caring adults in your family, school, community do to help you grow and develop?

Have groups report out, highlighting key comments on chart paper.

Debrief the activity using Visual 5-7: Six Types of Involvement Framework.
Activity 2: Core Beliefs in Family Engagement—The Ten Truths

Purpose
To inform participants about the research-based core truths which are the foundation for successful partnerships with families.

Time Required
20 minutes

Equipment/materials
Activity 2 Handout: Ten Truths
Visuals 20-21: Ten Truths

Room arrangement
Groups of 6-8 at round tables

Process
Have participants complete Activity 2 Handout: Ten Truths, discussing the responses in groups. Groups report out, highlighting any significant differences in scoring.

Summarize using Visuals 20-21: Ten Truths of Family Involvement/Engagement and the discussion of the research highlights.
### Activity 2 Handout:

**TEN TRUTHS OF FAMILY INVOLVEMENT**

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<td>1</td>
<td>All families have hopes, dreams, and goals for their children.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>The home is one of several spheres that simultaneously shape a child.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>The family is the central contributor to a child’s education.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Family/engagement must be a legitimate element of education.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Family engagement is a process, not a program of activities. It requires commitment, energy, effort and resources.</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Family interaction with their own children is the cornerstone of involvement.</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Family engagement requires a vision policy, and framework.</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Most barriers to family engagement are found within school practices.</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Any family can be “hard to reach.”</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Successful family engagement nurtures relationships and partnerships.</td>
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Activity 3: Connecting with My School Community

Purpose

To increase participants’ awareness and appreciation for the school community they serve.

Participants will reflect on the community they grew up in, the community they currently live in, and the school community they serve.

Time Required

30 minutes

Materials

Note cards, blank eco-map, chart paper, markers; Activity 3 Handout: My School Community Eco-Map (blank)

Room Arrangement

Groups of 6-8 working at round tables

Process

- Participants will write on a note card 3-5 characteristics of the community they grew up in, 3-5 characteristics of the current community in which they live, and 3-5 characteristics of the school community they serve.
- What are some common characteristics of the communities?
- What are some stark differences in the three communities?
- Complete the eco-map, follow the instructions, and identify three strategies you would like to implement to strengthen “weak” or “stressful” relationships in the school community you serve.

Keep these goals in mind for the activity on action planning later in the training.
Activity 3 Handout: My School Community Eco-Map

Instructions: Think about the communities that affect your school and the type of relationship your school has with each: strong and supportive, weak, or stressful. Then, complete the eco-map below. When you are done, you will have a better grasp of the sources of support and the resources that may be available to support students. On the back of the sheet, write down what you/school might be able to do to strengthen the relationships you identified as “weak” or “stressful.”

_________ (bold or shaded) “Strong and Supportive Relationship”
------------ (kind of broken shaded lines) “Weak Relationship”
>>>>>>> (kind of zigzag lines) “Stressful Relationship”
STRATEGIES FOR PRIORITY SCHOOLS

While there are differences among former low-performing schools, there are also important similarities in how they approached improvement. A 1999 study by the U.S. Department of Education — Hope for Urban Education — found common elements in its profiled schools:

1. **Small steps** — Each school identified and pursued an important, visible, yet attainable first goal. They focused on attaining this goal, achieved success, and then used their success to move toward more ambitious goals.

2. **Children first** — All school staff made a conscious effort to put aside their own interests, and committed to focusing on serving children first. By doing so, tensions decreased while respect, appreciation, and value for the students increased.

3. **More instructional time** — Schools created more instructional time within the school day, specialized by targeted skills or subsets of students. More time also was provided outside of the traditional school day.

4. **Student responsibility** — Educators fostered in students a sense of responsibility for appropriate behavior. They also put into place multifaceted approaches that helped students learn responsibility for their own behavior — resulting in a sharp decrease in discipline problems.

5. **Shared responsibility** — The school staff united to share responsibility for improvement, and engaged in a variety of activities central to the success of the school.

6. **Instructional leadership** — Each school spent more time on instructional leadership activities that ultimately improved teaching and learning. Specialized assistants coached teachers on instructional issues, and principals actively promoted improved instruction. This resulted in higher levels of achievement and a renewed sense of hope.

7. **Aligned standards** — Educators worked to align instruction to the standards and assessments required by the state or district. Teachers and administrators worked together to understand what students were expected to know and be able to do, and to implement instruction that ensured students would learn what was expected of them.

8. **Resources and training** — Schools actively pursued the resources and training that teachers perceived they needed to get their students to achieve at high levels. As a result, teachers responded with greater willingness to support school initiatives.

9. **Time for collaboration** — Each school created opportunities for teachers to work, plan, and learn together around instructional issues. This time became an important part of the reform effort, generating continuous improvements in the instruction.

10. **Parental involvement** — Each school made efforts to win the confidence and respect of parents, primarily by improving the achievement of students. Once parents saw tangible evidence of the school’s concern for their children, successful partnerships were built and parents more willingly participated and contributed to the success of the school.

11. **Persistence** — Educators persisted through difficulties, setbacks, and failures. In spite of challenges and frustrations, school staff did not stop trying to improve their school.

—Adapted from the U.S. Department of Education
Strategy 2

Engaging Families to Improve Achievement: Advice from the Research

Taken together, decades of research strongly suggest that families have a major influence on their children’s achievement in school and through life. When schools support families to be involved at home and at school, students of all backgrounds achieve at higher levels. In short, when parents are involved in education, children do better in school, and schools get better.

According to *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family and Community Connections on Student Achievement*, a review of recent research published by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (2002), students with involved parents are more likely to:

- Earn higher grades and test scores, and enroll in higher-level programs
- Be promoted, pass their classes and earn credits
- Attend school regularly
- Have better social skills, show improved behavior and adapt well to school
- Graduate and go on to post-secondary education

Key Findings

*Families of all backgrounds are involved at home.* Several studies show that families of all income and education levels, and from all ethnic and cultural groups, are engaged in supporting their children’s learning at home. White, middle-class families, however, tend to be more involved at school. Supporting more involvement at school from all families may be an important strategy for addressing achievement gaps.

*Programs and special efforts to engage families make a difference.* For example, teacher outreach to parents results in strong, consistent gains in student performance in both reading and math. Effective outreach practices include meeting face to face, sending learning materials home, and keeping in touch about progress. Workshops for parents on helping their children at home are linked to higher reading and math scores. Schools with highly rated partnership programs make greater gains on state tests than schools with lower-rated programs. Practices like these should be included in a school’s parent involvement policy and school-parent compact.

*Higher-performing schools effectively involve families and community.* Schools that succeed in engaging families from diverse backgrounds share three key practices:

- Focus on building trusting, collaborative relationships among teachers, families and community members
- Recognize, respect and address families’ needs, as well as class and cultural differences
- Embrace a philosophy of partnership where power and responsibility are shared
Effective Practices

Link the school's parent involvement efforts to student learning.
- Include information on standards and exhibits of student work at open houses and back-to-school nights.
- Engage parents and students in math and reading games at Family Nights. Explain where students' skills need to be stronger. Use scoring guides while making craft projects, to let parents know how to use them.
- Use the school newsletter to discuss test results and what students are doing to meet higher standards.
- Use the annual school and district Report Cards as a chance to have focused conversations with parents and community members about each school's strengths and weaknesses — and how teachers, parents and community members can work together to make improvements.

Match practices to grade levels. Programs that are linked to gains in children’s learning take children's age and developmental needs into account.

1. Families with young children:
   - Home visits from trained parent educators with cultural backgrounds similar to their own, or with knowledge of their culture
   - Lending libraries that offer games and learning materials to build skills at home
   - Discussion groups with other families about children’s learning
   - Classes on how to stimulate their children’s mental, physical and emotional development

2. Families of elementary and middle school students:
   - Interactive homework that involves parents with their children’s learning
   - Workshops on topics that parents suggest, like building their children’s vocabulary, positive discipline strategies, and supporting children through crises
   - Regular calls from teachers, not just when there are problems, about how their children are doing in class
   - Learning packets in reading, science and math, with training in how to use them
   - Meetings with teachers to talk about their children’s progress and what they’re learning

3. Families of high school students:
   - Regular meetings with teachers and counselors to plan their children’s academic program so that it matches goals for post-secondary education and a career
   - Information about program options, graduation requirements, test schedules, and post-secondary education options and how to plan for them
   - Information about where to find academic support, such as help with homework,
tutoring, after-school programs, and special classes. Include subject areas covered and associated costs.

- Explanations of courses students should take to be prepared for college or other post-secondary education
- Information about financing post-secondary education and applying for financial aid

**Facilitate transitions.** Children of all ages do better when they make a solid adjustment to school. By adjustment, we mean that students feel comfortable and respected, feel they belong at school, and feel supported by teachers. Here are some practices that research suggests help students adjust as they enter a new school:

- Offer families and students tours of the school and opportunities to visit and observe in the classrooms.
- Meet with students and families at the feeder schools or programs to introduce staff, explain the school’s programs, and answer questions.
- Make home visits the summer before school starts to begin building a relationship with each family.
- Work with families to prepare children for the next level and help them plan for postsecondary education and a career.

**Build close personal relationships between families and school staff.** The more that parents and teachers can work together, the better children adjust to school and can integrate the separate experiences of home and school.

- Create a “joining process” that welcomes parents into the school, honors their participation, and continually connects with parents.
- Give teachers time to meet one-on-one with parents and families.
- Recognize and build on families’ cultural values and the ways they are involved with their children’s learning.
- Identify “cultural brokers” – staff or community members who understand the families’ cultural backgrounds – to help school staff and parents learn strategies for interacting with each other.

**Recognize and address specific parent and community needs.** Schools that have been successful in engaging families from diverse backgrounds ask parents about barriers to their involvement and what would help them be more involved at school and at home. Then they respond with practices like these:

- Provide childcare and arrange transportation for programs and activities
- Provide interpreters for ESL families
- Schedule workshops, activities, conferences and events at times that are convenient for families
- Encourage family members to send a substitute family member to a meeting or activity, if a parent cannot attend
- Provide learning kits, books, games and other materials for families to use at home
- Connect families to necessary social, health and community services.
Bridge class and cultural differences. One reason that middle class families tend to be more involved at school is that they have what researchers call “social and cultural capital.” They speak the same language as educators, know “the rules,” can arrange childcare and transportation easily, and feel entitled to treat teachers as equals.

- Understand your own cultural context. What are the rules (written and unwritten), expectations and behaviors of your school and its staff? Does the school reward deference and feel that criticism is inappropriate?
- Share families’ cultural traditions and norms – what educational goals do they have for their children, how do they encourage learning at home, and how were their parents involved in education?
- Create small, friendly settings. This can be class meetings, small group conversations, home visits, and one-on-one conversations. A family center is a safe, friendly place for families to gather and meet.
- Invite families and community members to tell their education stories
- Ask families about their expectations and goals for their children.

Develop families’ sense of confidence and power. Researchers call this “efficacy.” Studies find that when parents have a sense of confidence and power, their children do better in school. For example, we want parents to feel they can help their children do well in school, and be happy and safe. We also want parents to feel that they can overcome negative influences on their children (such as violence and drugs), and have a positive impact on the school and neighborhood. Many practices that help empower families, such as those listed here, are required by the No Child Left Behind law.

- Engage families in planning how they would like to be involved at school.
- Consult a representative sample of parents and families, not just the PTO leadership, about school policies and proposed actions.
- Involve families in action research. Ask them to develop and conduct surveys of other families. Invite them to observe in the classroom, review books and materials, and visit other schools to gather ideas.
- Make it easy for parents to meet and discuss concerns with the principal, talk to teachers and guidance counselors, and examine their children’s school records.
- Invite families to attend staff development sessions and faculty meetings.
- Facilitate families’ connections with youth groups and programs for young people.
- Work with families to help them monitor their children’s activities. Create a school directory, so they can contact other parents.
- Offer workshops on communicating with their children, about topics they suggest, such as talking with children about drugs, dating, problems with friends or family, and values.

Support families’ efforts to improve the school and community. When parents feel they have the power to change and control their circumstances, their children tend to do better in school. Their parents are also better equipped to help them. When
schools work with families to develop their connections, families become powerful allies of the school and advocates for public education.

- Give families information about how the education system (and local government) works. Make field trips to district offices and school board meetings.
- Keep voter registration forms and information about local government agencies in the school office or family center. Develop a student-run voter registration drive.
- Invite candidates for school board and other local offices to speak to families at the school.
- Open the school to community meetings and collaborate with local organizations that can reach out to and organize parents and community members.
- Go with families to press local officials about needed funding, programs or law enforcement.
- Work with families to develop action research skills to document problems in the neighborhood.
- Invite local banks and businesses to talk with families about their services, loan programs, and employment opportunities.

**Develop the capacity of school staff to work with families and community members.** All school staff, from the principal to the custodian, can benefit from learning more about how to work effectively with parents and community members. Design educational opportunities for all school staff that:

- Help staff recognize the advantages of school, family and community connections
- Explore how trusting and respectful relationships with families and community members are achieved
- Enhance school staff’s ability to work with diverse families and understand their cultural backgrounds
- Enable staff to make connections with community resources
- Explore the benefits of sharing power with families and community members.

**Work with local after-school programs and supplemental service providers to link their content to what students are learning in class.**

- Form a partnership between after-school program staff and teachers. Encourage them to share ideas and knowledge about the students, observe each other at work, and attend staff development sessions to update and build their teaching skills.
- Inform supplemental service providers about the school’s curriculum and learning programs (especially math and reading).
- Share textbooks and other learning materials with program staff.
- Give program staff information about students’ progress and academic needs.

Strategy 3

COMMUNITIES, ASSOCIATIONS AND SCHOOLS TOGETHER FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION:
A COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

The Comprehensive Strategy — Communities, Associations, and Schools Together for Public Education — has four components:

- School Transformation
- Community Organizing
- Public Engagement/Public Relations
- Organizational Capacity Building

Each component is broken into sub-categories with specific detailed activities that can be implemented at the schoolsite and/or district-wide. A full description of the comprehensive strategy follows.

SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION COMPONENT

This component addresses transforming all schools to high performing school by improving student achievement, improving family involvement, and improving school climate.

IMPROVE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

- Develop and deliver a rigorous curriculum that will prepare students with the knowledge and skills needed for the 21st century.
- Align district curriculum with state standards.
- Focus on the fundamentals of learning for every student (reading, writing, math, and computer literacy).
- Implement classroom/district strategies to bring all students to grade level in reading, writing, and math.
- Emphasize the goal of all students reading by the 3rd grade.
- Develop quarterly learning contracts with parents for ongoing assessments and instructional adjustments.
- Create and support effective professional development opportunities for teachers, especially on issues identified by teachers as critical areas. Provide opportunities for teacher-to-teacher learning and link new teachers with veteran teachers as mentors. Develop workshop for K-3 teachers to focus on reading skills and literacy assessment techniques.
- Participate in the NEA Read Across America national initiative to improve student reading and help parents understand the link between reading and learning success.
- Create a “Homework Hotline” for students and parents to follow up classroom assignments and activities.
- Recognize students for their achievements.
- Reduce class size.
- Expand technological capacity to support teaching and learning at school sites.
- Implement district-wide support programs delivered at the school site to improve student achievement and enhance standardized test scores:
  - Institute district-wide the “Saturday Club” for students to develop test-taking skills and participate in a variety of academic and cultural enrichment activities.
  - Hold test review for all students identified for intensive tutoring on skills needed.
  - Hold “Writer’s Workshop” for all students having difficulty with the writing process.

IMPROVE FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

- Support public school choice. Inform parents of choices in magnet schools, open enrollment areas, special attendance permits and other options to allow parents choice in their children’s education. Make all schools, schools of choice.
- Make a commitment to families to keep them engaged in their child’s progress and take an active role by signing the quarterly learning compacts that set the standards of learning. This compact is a commitment by parents to their child’s academic success.
■ Create a family-friendly atmosphere in every school:
  □ Create Parent Centers at each school for parents to have a “place of their own” to meet and confer with each other and the school staff.
  □ Display signs and symbols of “Welcome to Your School” throughout the school.
  □ Support and communicate with school site PTOs on issues facing their children.
  □ Encourage teachers and staff to maintain effective parent/teacher relationships and contact.
  □ Recognize parents for their efforts.

■ Inform parents of the curriculum standards for their child’s grade and how to use them, along with report cards to monitor their child’s progress.

■ Encourage parents to spend 15 minutes a day with their child: reading aloud, listening to them read or discussing homework.

■ Encourage parents to keep the television turned off and phone off-limits for two hours a night.

■ Encourage parents to assist teachers in class: tutoring, reading to students, sharing experiences, and serving as room parents.

■ Encourage parents to become involved in school governance, through the School Site Council and other site-based efforts.

■ Encourage parents to provide classroom support at home — by making phone calls for the teacher and preparing materials for class.

■ Inform parents of the State’s Accountability System and how it impacts their school and their child. Explain how the Accountability System is linked to their critical involvement in the academic progress of their child.

■ Encourage parents to serve as translators for other parents and to translate school materials like the school newspaper and other forms of communication from the school.

■ Provide parental training on issues:
  □ Parenting skills
  □ English as a Second Language
  □ Things to Know: Your Local School
  □ Tips for Student Success
  □ Family, School, Community Partnerships

■ Develop policies to hold parents responsible for student attendance and punctuality.

■ Identify and eliminate barriers to family involvement.

■ Encourage parents to obtain library cards for their children by the 3rd grade.

■ Introduce programs like “family math” to familiarize parents with learning activities and strategies to reinforce school learning at home.

■ Establish a “Parent Hotline” or a telephone tree so that families stay in touch with the school. Make sure it is available to all parents, regardless of the language they speak.

■ Make all communication (written and oral) with parents and families bilingual, this includes school and district forms, newsletters, and letters from school staff.

■ Designate a “family advocate or parent coordinator” at the school site to assist with family involvement activities.

IMPROVE SCHOOL CLIMATE

■ Develop and enforce the rules and regulations of the student code of conduct. Encourage schools to develop a system of accountability and responsibility for students and parents to make these rules and regulations effective.

■ Develop a district-wide safe school agenda to be individualized for school sites with input from families and communities.

■ Promote cultural awareness in academic and cultural activities. Build on the strengths of the community to assist in organizing these activities.

■ Draw on the support of families and the community to reinforce the basic values of trust, honesty, and respect for others.

■ Implement effective classroom management and discipline techniques at every school.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING COMPONENT

This component focuses on organizing outreach to families, communities, and local businesses to build effective partnerships for student success.

ONGOING SYSTEM OF COMMUNICATION AND OUTREACH

■ Identify a cadre of community leaders to build solid ties with parent, community, and religious organizations and to share in the responsibility for outreach to the constituency they represent.

■ Mobilize the community to advance quality education and to combat the threats to public education.
- Develop an ongoing system of communication and outreach with parents and the community by building on existing efforts and techniques like:
  - Citizens Organized for Public Service (C.O.P.S.)
  - House meetings
  - Walk for Success
  - Door-to-door Canvassing
  - House Visits
- Develop community training workshops to educate and inform the community about critical local and state school issues (e.g., vouchers, state standards, etc.). The workshop can allow parents to ask questions or request clarification about concepts/issues/programs before consent or decisions are to be made.
- Provide translation for non-English-speaking parents and community members at meetings, conferences, and school events.
- Translate big problems into specific, winnable issues.
- Link school issues to broader community issues.
- Implement the NEA Family-School-Community Partnership Program and training:
  - Provide new concepts of partnerships with families and communities in public education.
  - Provide participants with skills and strategies to develop positive relationships between the family, community, and the school.
  - Provide techniques to increase the flow of information to parents and communities.
- Encourage community members to volunteer in the school at before- and after-school programs, especially those programs implemented to improve student achievement.
- Encourage community members to serve as mentors to students, providing support and coaching as students begin to think about work, college and life after high school.
- Encourage community-based organization, religious congregations and local business to get to know your neighborhood school, its principal and school staff.

IDENTIFICATION OF ALLIES AND COALITION BUILDING

- Develop a community mapping strategy to identify allies and potential allies to broaden the support base for public education.
- Work with existing coalitions to advance public education:
  - Coalition of Public Education
  - Parents for Public Schools
  - Other Coalitions/Task Forces

COMMUNITY POLITICS/POLITICAL ACTION

- Identify the formal and informal power structures in the community, including the players, their connections and their positions on education issues, especially vouchers.
- Reach out to local politicians/state legislators/Congress with mailings, briefings, and visits to seek support for public education and the defeat of any voucher legislation. Push for more supportive legislative policy framework around our issues.
- Reach out to African-American and Latino policymakers to build ties and persuade them to become advocates for public education.
- Develop strong ties with other advocacy and community organizations and work on “their” issues too.
- Support pro-education candidates.
- Participate in state-wide legislative activities (e.g. lobby day, hearings, etc.).
- Develop a Parent and Community Guide for pertinent academic issues to inform and educate the community before consent or decisions are made.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT/PUBLIC RELATIONS COMPONENT

This component addresses the purposeful effort to build a collaborative constituency for change and improvement in public schools by engaging the public in public schools.

MESSAGE DEVELOPMENT AND MESSAGE DISCIPLINE

- Develop a concise, consistent message and stress the importance of message discipline. For example, the messages could be on:
  - A Quality Education for Every Child
  - Creating Priority Schools
- Develop a message box for each message.
- Develop training for delivery, consistency, and clarity of message.
- Strengthen media relations:
  - Develop media campaign where appropriate to target African-American and Latino communities to solicit their assistance in creating priority schools.
Identify media outlets, especially minority outlets
- Establish your contacts
- Find out media deadlines
- Monitor the media (Clips, radio, and TV)
- Organize writing letters to the editor
- Develop speaker's bureau
- Conduct editorial briefings
- Use talk radio
- Stay on message

PREPARE DISTRICT/SCHOOL MEDIA PACKET
- District-at-a-Glance Fact Sheet
- District Organizational Structure
- Listing of Schools and Principals
- Other pertinent district/school information

CONDUCT “GOOD NEWS” CAMPAIGN TO MARKET SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL DISTRICTS
- Develop "school stories" for each school and highlight successful students, teachers, and programs.
- Develop "Great Schools" brochures to publicize what's happening in schools and show the results.
- Conduct a letter writing campaign to parents, outlining:
  - Thanks for supporting schools
  - Describe new and innovative school programs
  - Describe achievement gains made by students
  - Here's how you can help save our schools
- Write letters to parents of children who left the school district to attend private or other public schools, outlining:
  - We miss you and your child in our schools
  - Describe new and innovative programs
  - Describe achievement gains
  - Hope to see you back in September or sooner.

PUBLIC CONVERSATIONS ABOUT PUBLIC SCHOOLS
- Come together and hold meaningful community conversations and improve communication between schools and communities to build common ground among stakeholders that lead to better relationships, improved teaching and learning, greater community trust in schools, deeper parent/community involvement, more supportive legislative policy framework, and responsible and positive media participation.
- Move forward and convert conversations into concern-driven activity and deliverables for children.
- Sustain the momentum of the conversations and actions by building structures to support the deliverables, developing and sustaining leadership and assessing and improving programs addressing student achievement.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING COMPONENT

Whether the organization is the local/state affiliate, the school site, or the school district, there is a certain set of skills, knowledge, tools, data and commitments needed to carry out the above strategies in a systematic manner.
- Assure leadership buy-in by committing time and resources to the effort.
- Form a joint committee with teachers, school district, and the community to implement the quality public education agenda. Publicize and encourage full participation and support.
- Inform, educate, and train all employees on the critical academic issues facing schools and the quality education agenda to address these issues.
- Provide training for all employees, parents, and communities on relationship building, communication skills, reaching consensus, and the importance of creating a shared vision of academic success.
Background Readings
NEA president draws attention to family, community involvement in schools

Two-day summit highlights importance of community support in ESEA reauthorization

WASHINGTON - September 14, 2010 - The National Education Association (NEA) today wrapped up a National Summit on Family, School and Community Engagement that brought together representatives from 20 other national organizations. A key focus of the conversation over the two days was the need to press for strong provisions on community, parental and school engagement when Congress works on the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). This national event was a culmination of community engagement summits held in various states over the past 12 months.

"As educators, we know that the development of the whole child extends beyond the walls of the classroom," said NEA President Dennis Van Roekel. "We must harness the coordinated power of social services, parental engagement, service-learning opportunities for students, extended learning and afterschool programs to ensure our children's success."

Summit participants, who came from organizations from the National PTA to the Boys and Girls Clubs and state elected leaders, discussed ideas for boosting community and parental involvement in schools that serve our neediest students. NEA members across the country are rolling up their sleeves and doing their part. NEA’s Priority Schools Campaign is the Association’s commitment to transforming persistently low-performing, priority schools into great public schools for everyone. Educators are already working side-by-side with students, parents and community leaders to attract and keep the best educators and necessary resources at schools with the greatest need, typically schools in high poverty communities that are chronically underfunded, understaffed and unsupported.

“For long-term, sustainable school transformation, shared responsibility and collaboration are both essential,” said Van Roekel. “All stakeholders must be at the table, working together for the benefit of students. We need to keep parents and the community involved from pre-k through high school to ensure success.”
“It’s important to develop a statewide plan that gets families, schools, businesses and policymakers together, which can be used as a model at the federal level,” said Rebecca Valdez, a member of the Nebraska State Board of Education. “Businesses should be encouraged by governors to provide four days of annual devoted to workers to participate in parental involvement activities.”

On Monday, 2006 National Teacher of the Year Kimberly Oliver Burnim led a conversation about the roles played by teachers and the communities in which they teach. Oliver Burnim, an educator at Broad Acres Elementary School in Rockville, Md., emphasized the importance of taking a broader view of supporting student learning.

“We have to look at kids holistically, outside of the classroom and inside, and engage everyone involved in a child’s life in the learning process,” said Oliver Burnim. “We have to meet their other needs and give children the message that we believe in them and that they can do it.”

For information on priority schools to www.neapriorityschools.org
Follow us on twitter at www.twitter.com/NEAmedia
For pictures from the summit go to http://www.flickr.com/photos/neapr/sets/72157624956136536

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The National Education Association is the nation’s largest professional employee organization, representing 3.2 million elementary and secondary teachers, higher education faculty, education support professionals, school administrators, retired educators and students preparing to become teachers.

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Parent, Family, Community Involvement in Education

Parents, families, educators and communities—there’s no better partnership to assure that all students pre-K to high school—have the support and resources they need to succeed in school and in life.

—NEA President Dennis Van Roekel

Supporting teaching and learning requires addressing students’ social service needs, as well as their academic ones, and this broad-based support is essential to closing achievement gaps. The positive impact of connecting community resources with student needs is well documented. In fact, community support of the educational process is considered one of the characteristics common to high-performing schools.

How do parents, families, and communities get involved?

Parent, family, and community involvement means different things to different people. A research-based framework, developed by Joyce Epstein of Johns Hopkins University, describes six types of involvement—parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community—that offer a broad range of school, family, and community activities that can engage all parties and help meet student needs. Successful school-parent-community partnerships are not stand-alone projects or add-on programs but are well integrated with the school’s overall mission and goals. Research and fieldwork show that parent-school-partnerships improve schools, strengthen families, build community support, and increase student achievement and success.

States press for more partnerships

Data compiled in 2005 show that 17 states have directed all districts or schools to implement parental involvement policies. Seven states—Alaska, California, Indiana, Minnesota, Nevada, South Carolina, and Texas—have obligated schools or districts to develop policies linking parent-community partnerships to school improvement plans, and in Delaware, schools applying for school improvement grants must include parental involvement strategies in grant applications. In addition, many states promote parental involvement in early literacy, school safety, and dropout prevention.
programs, as well as in initiatives addressing the needs of at-risk youth and English Language Learners. Some state policies echo the provisions of Section 1118 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) that direct schools and districts receiving Title I funds to use a portion of those funds to involve parents, educators, and the community in the shared responsibility of improving their students’ academic achievement.

Although the research unequivocally affirms the positive and long-lasting effects of parent, family, and community involvement on student learning, this data is often overlooked in local, state, and national discussions about raising student achievement and closing achievement gaps. Education reform efforts that focus solely on classrooms and schools are leaving out critical factors essential for long-term success. What happens before and after school can be as important as what happens during the school day. Even the most promising reforms can be “reversed by family, negated by neighborhoods, and might well be subverted or minimized by what happens to children outside of school.”

While education is clearly an asset to the individual, it also benefits families and serves the common good. Education is a core value of our democratic society, and it is in everyone’s self-interest to insure that all children receive a quality education. Our democracy, as well as our economy, depends on an educated citizenry and skilled workforce.

Too many policymakers, community leaders, and even parents still view schools and student learning as the sole responsibility of educators. While educators take their professional responsibilities seriously, they also recognize that they cannot do it alone. They need and depend on the support from parents and community members.

One dynamic too often observed is that parent involvement in education tends to decline as their children go up in grade, with a dramatic drop once students reach middle school. In fact, the lack of parental involvement is viewed by teachers, administrators, the public, and even parents of school-age children, as the single biggest problem facing our nation’s schools.

To promote student growth and school success at every grade and age, well thought out parent-community-school partnerships, linked to school improvement goals, are needed in every community.

Epstein’s Framework on Involvement

- **Parenting.** Assist families with parenting skills, family support, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions to support learning at each age and grade level. Assist schools in understanding families’ backgrounds, cultures, and goals for children.

- **Communicating.** Communicate with families about school programs and student progress. Create two-way communication channels between school and home that are effective and reliable.

- **Volunteering.** Improve recruitment and training to involve families as volunteers and as audiences at the school or in other locations. Enable educators to work with volunteers who support students and the school. Provide meaningful work and flexible scheduling.

- **Learning at Home.** Involve families with their children in academic learning at home, including homework, goal setting, and other curriculum-related activities.

- **Decision Making.** Include families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy activities through school councils or improvement teams, committees, and other organizations.

- **Collaborating with the Community.** Coordinate resources and services for families, students, and the school with community groups, including businesses, agencies, cultural and civic organizations, and colleges or universities.

What hinders involvement?

Parents see lots of roadblocks to getting involved in their child’s education. Some point to their own demanding schedules and say they don’t have extra time to volunteer or even attend school activities, much less get involved in bigger ways. Others reveal how uncomfortable they feel when trying to communicate with school officials, whether that’s due to language or cultural differences or their own past experiences with school. Some say they lack the know-how and resources to help their child, or they express frustration with school bureaucracies or policies they find impossible to understand or change.

Some parents complain that they rarely hear from the school unless there is a problem with their child’s behavior or performance. Others say the information provided by the school is not comprehensible either because of educational jargon or because the parent or family member does not read or understand English.

Some families criticize school personnel for not understanding the plight of single parents, grandparents, foster parents, or other caregivers. Others say they lack transpor-
tation to attend school events or have no child care for younger siblings. While some schools have made great strides in engaging parents and others in the educational process, there is still much more that can be done.

**How can we engage more stakeholders?**

Here are some specific ways that schools can engage more parents, families, and communities in education:

- Survey educators and families to determine needs, interests, and ideas about partnering.
- Develop and pass family-friendly policies and laws (i.e., leaves of absence for parents/caregivers to participate in school or education-related activities; flexible scheduling to encourage participation by diverse families).
- Provide professional development on family and community engagement for school faculties.
- Offer training for parents and community stakeholders on effective communications and partnering skills.
- Provide better information on school and school district policies and procedures.
- Ensure timely access to information, using effective communications tools that address various family structures and are translated into languages that parents/families understand.
- Hire and train school-community liaisons who know the communities’ history, language, and cultural background to contact parents and coordinate activities.
- Collaborate with higher education institutions to infuse parent, family, and community involvement in education into teacher and administrator preparation programs.
- Develop an outreach strategy to inform families, businesses, and the community about school and family involvement opportunities, policies, and programs.
- Regularly evaluate the effectiveness of family involvement programs and activities.

There are a number of parent-family-community-school partnerships that have documented their results:

The **National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS)** recognizes schools, districts, states, and organizations that demonstrate excellence and continual progress in developing and sustaining comprehensive, goal-oriented programs of school, family, and community partnerships. Some 600 NNPS Partnership Award winners have been recognized since 1998 for programs and practices that improve family and community involvement resulting in increased student achievement and other indicators of success in school.12

The **Parent-Teacher Home Visit Project** is a partnership between the Sacramento City Teachers Association, a faith-based community organizing group, and the school district. Since 1998, teams of educators and parents have visited students and their families at home, built trusting relationships, and shared instructional tools. Evaluations of the project report increased parental involvement, improved parent/teacher relationships, and improved academic achievement.13

The **Chicago Parent Centers** model has been cited as evidence that parent participation has a major impact on children’s academic success and social development, and that it is a sure strategy for reducing the dropout rate. Each year that parents took part in the program increased the chances—by 16 percent—that their child would complete high school. For students whose parents were involved for the whole six years of the project, more than 80 percent graduated from high school, compared with 38 percent of students whose parents did not participate.14

Since 1987, more than 375,000 immigrant parents in California have increased their knowledge and skills to support their children’s academic achievement and enrollment in higher education by participating in the **Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE)** program. Since then, PIQE programs have expanded to other cities in Arizona, Texas, and Minnesota. A recent study documented that children of Hispanic parents who completed the San Diego PIQE program achieved a 93 percent high school graduation rate and 79.2 percent student enrollment in college or university.15

**Call to Action**

NEA believes that significantly more emphasis must be placed on the important roles that parents, families, and communities can and must play in raising student performance and closing achievement gaps. The Association has long advocated policies to assist and encourage parents, families, and communities to become actively engaged in their public schools and become an integral part of school improvement efforts.
While some states and school districts have enacted laws and policies to encourage parent-community-school partnerships, more enforcement is needed. At the same time, promising, locally developed practices should be rewarded, sustained, and expanded.

References


Resources

**NEA/PTA Parent Guides.** A series of 10 parent guides were developed to give parents and caregivers some tips to help their children with a variety of subjects and school transition experiences. www.nea.org/parents/parent-guides.html


**Communities in Schools** has connected community resources with schools to help students succeed in school and in life. During its 30-year history, the organization has coordinated the delivery of resources into schools in a way that is responsive, cost-efficient and results-oriented. www.cisnet.org

**Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships** (John Hopkins University) conducts and disseminates research, programs, and policy analyses that produce new and useful knowledge and practices that help parents, educators, and members of communities work together to improve schools, strengthen families, and enhance student learning and development. www.csos.jhu.edu

**Parent Involvement Schools of Excellence Certification Program.** The National PTA, in partnership with national school principals’ associations, recognizes, through a nationally accredited method, parent and family involvement in education and showcases schools that are implementing outstanding parent-community-school partnerships. www.pta.org
Research Brief
Parent Engagement in Education

What are the Definitions of Family Engagement in Education?

The term *parent involvement* can evoke a variety of definitions from different audiences. Because of changes in society, the concept of *parent involvement* has been expanded to include extended family and caregivers. In addition, we must recognize that the relationship between families and schools should include shared responsibility and two-way communication. We suggest that the term *family engagement* better describes this relationship.

**Family engagement comprises all activities that parents undertake to help their children learn and do well in school and through life.**

- As their children's first teachers, families support healthy development, reinforce what children are learning at school, develop the values and life skills children need to become responsible adults, and provide a home environment that promotes learning.
- As supporters of education, families contribute their knowledge and skills to the school, enriching the curriculum and providing extra services and support to students.
- As advocates, parents guide their children through the education system, plan for their children's future, and make sure that schools serve their children well.
- As decision-makers, parents serve on advisory councils, committees, and school improvement teams, taking part in joint-problem solving at the school and district levels.
- As active community members, families organize and take advantage of community learning opportunities and other resources and participate in civic activities that promote a positive environment for all residents (Henderson and Mapp, 2001).

This inclusive definition takes into account that family engagement takes place at home as well as in school and community settings, and that parents play several different roles in their children's education.

In the No Child Left Behind legislation of 2001, the federal government defined *parent involvement* as:

"Regular, two-way and meaningful communication about student learning and other school activities."

Dr. Joyce Epstein, director of the National Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships, has developed a six-part typology that expands *parent involvement* to include the following categories:

**Parenting, Communicating, Volunteering, Learning at home, Decision-making, and Collaborating with community.**

In 1997, the National PTA adopted these types as the basis of their standards for parent involvement.

For more information about parent engagement, contact The Indiana Partnerships Center at www.fscp.org.
How Does Family Engagement Influence Student Achievement?

A review of 50 recent studies (1995-2002) on how family engagement affects student achievement found that students with involved parents are more likely to:

- earn higher grades and test scores and enroll in higher-level programs,
- be promoted, pass their classes, and earn credits,
- attend school regularly,
- have better social skills and show improved behavior, and
- adapt well to school. These students are also more likely to graduate and go on to post-secondary education (Henderson and Mapp, 2002).

Studies of early childhood programs that instill support for student learning into the home environment can demonstrate dramatic effects on student achievement and other outcomes over the long term. Studies of the Child-Parent Program in Chicago found that participation at ages 3 or 4 is associated with educational and social outcomes that continue for at least 18 years. The longer parents participated, the greater the results for children. Children whose families participated from 4-6 years had higher reading and math achievement, and lower rates of special education, grade retention, and child maltreatment. They were also 40% more likely to graduate from high school (Reynolds and Clements, 2005).

What families do to encourage their children will be more effective if teachers ensure that parents are getting good information about what their children are learning at school. A study of Title I schools showed that test scores in math and reading between third and fifth grade grew at a 40-50% higher rate for students whose teachers reported high levels of parent outreach. The outreach to parents was through face-to-face meetings, sending materials on ways to help their children at home, and regular telephone contact (Westat and Policy Associates, 2001).

School programs and activities that inform, support, and encourage parent involvement at home are related to higher gains in achievement and longer-lasting effects. Practices that are logically linked to specific outcomes are more likely to have a positive effect. For example, holding workshops about applying to college influences students’ grades and courses completed (Simon, 2000). Practices that encourage parents to read to children at home affect students’ reading achievement (Epstein and Sanders, 2000).

“As a result of community, family, and school collaborations, schools in Madison County, Indiana have seen a marked increase in ISTEP+ scores. Over a four-year period, the county saw an increase from 45% to 69% passing ISTEP+.

“We saw significant improvement as a result of the work we did, connecting families and schools with the focused goal of improving student achievement. We worked closely with our state Parent Information and Resource Center (PIRC), The Indiana Partnerships Center, which was an invaluable resource to us.”

Mary Lee Ewald, Director of Madison County CAPE (Community Alliances to Promote Education)

“Monitoring how children use their time, engaging in home learning activities, and expressing high expectations for their children have a greater effect on student achievement than does family income or structure. Reginald Clark’s studies of what families do at home, across all backgrounds, have found that many high-achieving children live in single-parent households where the mother does not have a college education.” Beyond the Bake Sale by Henderson, Mapp, et al.


For more information about parent engagement, contact The Indiana Partnerships Center at www.fscp.org.
What are Some Essential Elements of Parent Involvement Programs?

Linking Involvement to Learning

Activities and programs for families will be more effective if they are linked to what students are learning and focus on improving academic achievement. Some simple examples include mentioning how the students’ field trip to the zoo is connected to their science unit on the study of wildlife, and providing examples of follow-up questions parents can ask their students after the field trip.

Joyce Epstein and her colleagues have developed an effective program called TIPS (Teachers Involving Parents in Schoolwork) that is specifically linked to improving an aspect of learning (math and reading).

Epstein found that “the strongest and most consistent predictors of parent involvement at school and at home are the specific school programs and teachers’ practices that encourage and guide parent involvement...Parents are more likely to become partners in their children's education if they perceive that the schools have strong practices to involve parents at school” (emphasis added).

Welcoming Culture

In their research, Kathleen Hoover-Dempsey and Howard Sandler found that three key concepts influence the choices parents make about being involved in their children's education. Effective programs should take all three into account:

1. How parents develop their job description as a parent, which is known as role construction and is influenced by their cultural background.
2. How confident parents feel about their ability to help their children, also known as efficacy.
3. Whether parents feel invited—both by their children and the school. Of the three factors, invitation is very often the most important.

In addition, Karen Mapp offers a framework called “the joining process” that connects families through a focus on their children and learning. This process welcomes families into the school and honors families’ participation. This creates a school community in which people say they feel “like family” and are more likely to become loyal members who take part in their children’s education consistently.

Providing Parents with Knowledge and Skills

Schools can help parents feel empowered and capable of supporting children’s learning by providing them with general knowledge about the learning process and specific skills and strategies they can use to promote their children's overall growth in learning (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker and Sandler, 2005).

Many commonly-used activities and events, if well-designed and grade-specific, can initiate the parent involvement process:

- Take-home folders
- Parent/family nights
- “Take the test” nights
- Make-it Take-it workshops

Additionally, it is essential that communication with families—in print and in person—be in a language and format that is family-friendly.

Strong Commitment and Leadership for Parent Engagement

The leadership of parent involvement programs needs to be linked to the infrastructure of the school improvement process. Consistent leadership from an individual who is the driving connecting force for all parent involvement initiatives is essential. This person also ensures that parent involvement activities are well-connected to the rest of the school plan. The school leadership team needs to have a primary individual who can provide consistent and dedicated direction to family engagement initiatives over the course of the year and across grade levels or parent groups. In addition, the principal needs to be a consistent presence in the development and implementation of parent involvement strategies.

For case study examples, see “The Boston Story” and “The New York Story” in Beyond the Bake Sale by Henderson, Mapp, et al.

For more information about parent engagement, contact The Indiana Partnerships Center at www.fscp.org.
Do Schools and Families See Parent Engagement Differently?

Over the past thirty years, the definition of parent engagement has evolved to encompass a variety of activities both at home and in school (Jeynes, 2005). Researchers have found that families interpret their roles in their children’s education in a variety of ways. Families’ home culture and their perceptions of schools are powerful factors of parent involvement (Harry, 2005; Lopez, 2001; Scribner, Young, & Pedroza, 1999; Woestehoff, 2006; Ho-Sui-Chu and Willms, 1986).

For example, Lopez found that migrant parents of successful students perceived themselves as being “highly involved” in the educational lives of their children but did NOT regularly attend school functions. The families defined involvement as teaching their children the “value of education through hard work.” They took their children to the fields and explained this is the work they would have to do unless they finished school (Lopez, 2001).

Scribner and colleagues’ study of high-achieving majority Hispanic schools found that school staff tended to see parent involvement as participation in activities and events at the school, and being available as volunteers and fundraisers. After working more closely with families, teachers realized that the parents’ primary concern was to help children be successful academically and socially and to strengthen the home-school relationship.

While schools and parents often hold different understandings of what parents’ roles should be, schools can take important steps to welcome and honor families’ participation in a number of ways. Often, a personal invitation is key. Additionally, information needs to be shared in warm, respectful ways, and the method of presentation needs to be geared to the parent audience.

For Further Reference:


www.fscp.org The Indiana Partnerships Center, Indiana’s Parent Information and Resource Center.


About this Publication

This research review is the product of a Research Review Team, conducted by The Indiana Partnerships Center and the Center of Excellence in Leadership of Learning (CELL) at the University of Indianapolis. The primary text for this document was created by Anne T. Henderson and adapted for this publication by Dottie Hutcherson of The Indiana Partnerships Center. The following individuals were part of the Research Review Team: Anne T. Henderson, Annenberg Institute for School Reform; Sue Blackwell & Allison Howland, Indiana University Purdue University-Indianapolis; Jerrell Cassidy, Ball State University; Mary Lee Ewald, Madison County CAPE; Julie Havill-Weems, Indiana State Improvement Grant; Joyce Johnstone, University of Notre Dame; Dee Jones, Indiana PTA; Shana Ritter, Indiana University; Cathy Stephen, Randolph Eastern School Corporation; Larry Stillson, Mishawaka Board of School Trustees; Mary Jo Ratterman, Brian Reid, & Azure Smiley, University of Indianapolis; and Jackie Garvey, The Indiana Partnerships Center.

For more information about parent engagement, contact The Indiana Partnerships Center at www.fscp.org.
“Seek first to understand, then to be understood.”

Stephen R. Covey
The Power of Communication
Module 2

Introduction:
Communication is as much a part of our daily lives as is sleeping and eating. Our daily existence depends on our ability to speak, listen, read, write, and observe. Sometimes our communication flows easily like a calm sea, at other times it is like a traffic jam. Depending on our audience and our purpose, we turn left or right, keep straight ahead or detour. Occasionally there are fender benders where we hurt each other with our words, ignore each other by not giving our full attention and listening.

Effective communication is essential for building family-school-community partnerships and is the foundation for strengthening relationships and all other partnership efforts. It is the key to “great public schools.”

Objective
The purpose of this module is to build the communication capacity of Association leaders/members in their efforts to increase partnerships with families, schools, and communities in support of increased academic achievement.

CONTENT

Mini-Discussions
1) Communicating with Families and Communities
2) Federal Programs (Title 1/SIG): A Vehicle To Empower Families

Activities
1) Communication Styles
2) Mapping Current Communication Efforts
3) Gathering Good Ideas: Type 2-Communicating

Visuals (Located in PowerPoint)
1) Module 2: The Power of Communication
2) Communication as a Foundation … NEA Core Value on Partnership
3) Elements of Successful Communication
4) SIG: Broadcasting the Basics
5) Family-School-Community Partnership through Social Marketing
6) Title 1 ESEA
7) Title 1 NCLB
**Strategies**
1) A Model for One-Way and Two-Way Communication
2) Steps to Success: Energizing Your School-Family Compact
3) Family Friendly Schools Walkthrough Checklist
4) Title 1 NCLB Training/Information for Families
5) Some Tips on Writing for Parents

**Background Readings**
1) Making the Most of School-Family Compacts
2) NEA Policy Brief: The Federal Role in Transforming Struggling Schools
Mini Discussion 1
The challenge to families, schools, and communities is clear: How do we work together in partnership to improve academic success for all students?

Communication as a foundation

“Effective communication is essential for building family-school-community partnerships and serves as the foundation for strengthening all other partnership efforts.”

In schools, the purpose of our communication is to build partnerships with families and communities in support of student achievement. Our interactions with families and communities should support that purpose. However, directing our communications purposefully takes skill. It is an art that we learn and practice over time.

Our communication styles are all different and our interactions with our colleagues are very different from our efforts to communicate with families and communities.

Communication with families and communities must be viewed as a dynamic process—two-way and mutually beneficial. With that kind of successful communication as a model and goal, we will examine the concrete communication skills of speaking, listening, and observing. Finally, since we use a lot of jargon in our daily interactions with our colleagues, we must make that jargon understandable to families and community members who aren’t familiar with our terms and are often hesitant to ask us the meaning.

This is even more important in our Title 1 schools. Families served by Title 1 often have had negative experiences with schools and if we are honest with ourselves, we usually contact families from poor communities when there has been a problem, making that first contact uneasy and difficult. This is not a good first impression for families or educators. Now that the Association is intensifying its efforts at working towards partnerships, the relationship between families, schools, and communities must project a feeling of “we are in this together,” keeping our children at the heart of our work.
Stephen Covey’s quote, which opens this module, ‘Seek first to understand and then to be understood,’’ is at the heart of our communication work. Whether working together in partnership to meet the educational needs of children or towards school, family, and community goals, there must be a concerted effort to seek to understand and be understood. Our partnerships must be based on understanding, mutual trust, and respect.

Three central elements are essential to communication as a dynamic, two-way, mutually beneficial process:

- Effective communication is the foundation of successful relationships and partnerships.
- Whether formal or informal, effective communication is respectful and clear.
- To communicate well, one must consciously practice the skills needed as well as plan the communications process.

Two primary challenges we face as we develop our for two-way, mutually beneficial communication plans:

- Teachers say they are least prepared to communicate/engage parents (MetLife Survey, 2005).
- Current approaches to communication with minority parents emphasize a deficit viewpoint of Black and Hispanic achievement (Center for Research, Evaluation, Assessment, and Training in Education (CREATE), Howard University, 2011).

There are no easy answers, but by thinking creatively with our partners, solutions can be found through nontraditional approaches.

**Social Marketing**

Social marketing is defined as “systematic application of marketing along with other concepts and techniques to achieve specific behaviors for the ‘social good.’” The basics concepts of social marketing include:

- Using commercial marketing technologies;
- Influencing rather than forcing change;
- Results in voluntary behavior change;
- Targeting specific audiences;
- Focusing on personal welfare. (Source: *Social Marketing: What can it do for PIRCS*. RMC Research)
It is difficult to view education as a product; in reality an educated citizenry benefits the social good.

In social marketing, targeting our audience is the goal. Title 1 and SIG target the involvement of families and require their participation. In social marketing, the needs, values, wants, and perceptions of our partners must be addressed. Communication considerations may include the following:

- Awareness. Are families aware they should be involved? Do families know about Title 1/SIG?
- Perception. How will families be perceived? (by school staff, by other families, etc.)
- Intention. What is the purpose/aim you expect to achieve?
- Action. What do you want families to do?

**Steps Schools Should Take (with families/community members)**

- Gather information from audience (formal/informal);
- Work together to build consensus around key messages;
- Provide communication support;
- Empower everyone to be a spokesperson; give them the tools.

Keep in mind that in commercial marketing, messages are provided multiple times, in multiple formats, in a variety of places, using multiple approaches. Don’t rely on the usual letter home in the book bag, wordy flyers, and the use of education jargon.

**Observations**

A final component of communication we will examine is a welcoming environment. How do families/communities view the schools their children attend?

Researcher Kathleen Hoover -Dempsey identified three concepts that influence families getting involved in children’s education. They are:

- Parents understand that they **SHOULD** be involved;
- Parents feel **CAPABLE** of making a contribution;
- Parent feel **INVITED** both by their children and the school.

Of the three, invitation by the schools is viewed as the most important.
Research has informed us that when schools and families work together to support student achievement, everyone benefits. The best way to nurture a strong relationship is to create a friendly and welcoming school environment for the families and communities the school serves.

Developing a “Walkthrough Checklist” is an opportunity for everyone to work together. Collaborating to develop a survey instrument, compiling the data, and making recommendations from the survey is a way to start a positive relationship that will enable partnerships to flourish.

**Elements of Successful Communication**

- A dynamic process, two-way and mutually beneficial
- Conscious thought and planning
- Speaking respectfully and listening actively
- Plain language writing
The top three things for schools to do to “toot their horn” are:

1) Tweet/Twitter, Facebook, put on website, send news release to local media showcasing the good news. Keep partners informed of good news.

2) If you’re building relationships with the business community, create a distribution list and let them know every time there are student gains on test scores—give them a reason to invest. Send notes home to parents. Create your own news article, using photos of smiling students and educators. Ask local churches and grocery stores to post on their bulletin boards. Promote, promote, promote!

3) Let other schools know what you are doing; promote your success in school newsletters/magazines that go out to parents and the community and through the district website.

**Remember that:**

- Every interaction is an opportunity to build partnerships.
- Positive communication is an important first step.
- As we interact with families and communities, we become better communicators.
- In this era of technology, people are constantly acquiring new communication strategies.
Mini Discussion 2

“The past is a rich resource on which we can draw in order to make decisions for the future”

Nelson Mandela

The emergence of parents as leaders has been one of the unexpected highlights of federally funded programs, especially Title 1 and Head Start. This is especially true for poor and minority parents. Without formal training, they often found themselves in leadership roles in Title 1.

These two programs; Project Head Start (1964) and (Title 1) of the Elementary Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, were signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson. Title 1, currently amended under the “No Child Left Behind Act” is the largest federal commitment to state and local school districts to meet the educational needs of children attending schools in poor communities. The involvement of parents is a major requirement in Title 1. The National Coalition of Title 1 Parents championed parental involvement by advocating for legislative requirements to ensure it happened.

Several additional federal education programs that include the requirement that parents are involved include:

Bilingual Education Act of 1968
Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975
Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR-UP)

It is important to note, these programs would not have existed without the influence of the civil rights movement and the Brown v. Board of Education (Brown) decision (1954), in which the U.S. Supreme Court declared “racial segregation in public school unconstitutionally deprives students of equal education opportunities.”

It also is important to recognize the National Congress of Colored Parents and Teachers (NCCPT), founded in 1926 by Selena Sloan Butler in Atlanta, GA. NCCPT, a forerunner in the fight for equal education, which was founded to address the needs of African-American children, later merged with the National PTA in 1970.
Under the Obama administration, Title 1 schools that are the lowest performing are eligible to receive School Improvement Grants (SIGs). SIG funds must be used “to raise substantially student achievement in the persistently lowest-achieving schools in the state.” Schools receiving SIG funds must select from four intervention models:

- TURNAROUND MODEL
- RESTART MODEL
- SCHOOL CLOSURE MODEL
- TRANSFORMATION MODEL

The Association supports the Transformation Model through the Priority Schools Campaign (PSC) and provides support to NEA leaders/members in schools receiving SIG funds.

In the Transformation Model, “The school district replaces the principal with a highly capable principal with either a track record of transformation or clear potential to successfully lead a transformation.”

Many of the schools receiving SIG funds have not previously implemented Title 1 (especially middle/high schools) and may not be familiar with the Title 1 parent involvement requirements.

Other steps that will assist schools implementing SIG program include:

- Broadcasting the Basics: Title 1/SIG requires considerable communication with families and communities. Some important first steps may include the following:
  - Who are the schools receiving SIG funds?
  - What is SIG?
  - Where will services be provided?
  - When, that is, what is time frame of the SIG program?
  - Why was our school selected? (School achievement data, etc.)
  - How will we succeed? How will parents/families/communities partner to help the school improve?

These are only starting points as schools will need to include families and community members on the school improvement team, continue ongoing conversations with families and in communities as well as provide training and professional development opportunities with our partners.
Activity 1: Communication Styles

Purpose
It is important that families and community members feel welcomed and valued when working in partnership with school staff. This fun and simple communication styles activity will help set the stage for working in partnership.

To provide participants an opportunity to examine their individual communication styles and to understand the importance of individual styles when working in partnership with families and communities.

Time Required
20-25 minutes

Equipment/Materials
Activity 1 Handout #1: Assessment Worksheet
Activity 1 Handout #2: Q&A Follow Up Sheet

Directions:
Participants complete the worksheet by circling 6-8 statements that describe them best. They draw a vertical line to connect the stars top to bottom and then a horizontal line to connect the stars left to right. The four quadrants that are now created are shown on the follow-up sheet. Follow the instructions and group the participants in pairs or triads to share the answers to questions 1 – 3. Debrief the activity using questions 4 in the full group.
# Activity 1 Handout #1: Assessment Worksheet

Introduction: People have preferences in the ways they enjoy taking in and giving out information. Below are some possible preferences you may have. **Circle the 6-8 statements that describe you best.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I understand well most things that I read.</th>
<th>I’d rather read the book than watch the movie.</th>
<th>calendar or planner</th>
<th>I leave notes for other family members.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I look at a newspaper or book every day.</td>
<td>To learn how to do something, I like to read the instructions.</td>
<td>I recopy information that I want to remember or understand better.</td>
<td>I take a lot of notes at meetings.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I like to spend free time reading.</td>
<td>I keep the I-pod/music or TV on for company.</td>
<td>I prefer to write down my ideas before I say them.</td>
<td>I keep in touch with people by writing notes and letters.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hearing other people discuss things helps me form my ideas.</td>
<td>I remember almost everything I hear.</td>
<td>I prefer to read out loud rather than silently.</td>
<td>I learn well by discussing my ideas with others.</td>
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<td>I like to close my eyes and really take in the sounds around me.</td>
<td>To learn how to do something, I like to watch and listen to someone demonstrate it.</td>
<td>I like to tell stories.</td>
<td>I love to spend time on the telephone.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I like to listen to stories about people and their lives. Reading is relaxing.</td>
<td>I enjoy keeping a daily journal,</td>
<td>I like to take part in conversations.</td>
<td>I like to ask questions to understand better.</td>
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Activity 1 Handout #2: Q & A Follow Up Sheet

Draw a line across the page connecting the two stars. Next, draw a line from the top to the bottom of the page connecting the two stars. Each quadrant represents one mode of communication. The quadrant in which you have the most items circled may be your preferred communication style.

<table>
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<th>reading</th>
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It is important to note that no communication style is better than another. All four styles are useful and important for effective communication.

1. According to this exercise, which is your preferred communication style?

2. Does this make sense to you? Why or why not?

3. Give an example of how you have used your preferred communication style in your work.

4. What does this information suggest for future communication in family-school-community partnerships?

Adapted from Communication with Parents: Training Guides for the Head Start Learning Community, RMC Research Corporation, for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1996.
Activity 2: Mapping Current Communication Efforts

Purpose:

This activity is designed to help school think and plan consciously about communicating with families and communities and how communication efforts can be improved.

Time: 60 minutes

Materials:

Chart paper, Activity 2 Handout: Current Efforts to Communicate with Families.

Room Arrangement:

Groups of 6-8 at tables.

Process:
Participants should work in small groups and reflect upon the current ways the school communicates with families and communities. Chart the strategies in the boxes on the handout.

Reflect on the following questions:

- Which of our strategies were one-way messages/ two-way messages?
- Which strategies related to student achievement?
- Which specific audiences were reached?
- Which audiences were we likely to miss?
- What communication strategies must we implement to reach the target audiences? (SIG families/communities)

Remember that effective communication is essential for building family-school-community partnerships, and serves as the foundation for strengthening all other partnership efforts.

Debrief activity using visual 3, Communication Elements
Current Efforts To Communicate with Families in Our School
Activity 3

GATHERING GOOD IDEAS
Ideas to Strengthen All Six Types of Involvement

WHAT MIGHT YOU LIKE TO TRY IN YOUR SCHOOL?

WHAT QUESTIONS DO YOU HAVE?

WHAT INFORMATION DO YOU WANT?

**TYPE 1:** PARENTING. Assist families with parenting skills and setting home conditions to support children as students, and assist schools to understand families.

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<th>Good Ideas</th>
<th>Questions? / What information do you need?</th>
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**TYPE 2:** COMMUNICATING. Conduct effective communications from school to home and from home to school about school programs and children's progress.

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**TYPE 3:** VOLUNTEERING. Organize volunteers and audiences to support the school and students.

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**TYPE 4: LEARNING AT HOME.** Involve families with their children on homework and other curriculum-related activities and decisions.

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**TYPE 5: DECISION MAKING.** Include families as participants in school decisions, and develop parent leaders and representatives.

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<th>Questions? / What information do you need?</th>
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**TYPE 6: COLLABORATING WITH THE COMMUNITY.** Coordinate resources and services from the community for families, students, and the school, and provide services to the community.

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<th>Good Ideas</th>
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*Source: School, Family, and Community Partnership: Your Textbook for Action, by Joyce Epstein.*
Strategy 1
A Model for One-Way and Two-Way Communication

Use this model to reflect on your communication style with families.

Communication can travel in two directions:

- One-way communication is linear and limited because it occurs in a straight line from sender to receiver and serves to inform, persuade, or command.

  SENDER ➔ MESSAGE ➔ RECEIVER

- Two-way communication always includes feedback from the receiver to the sender and lets the sender know the message has been received accurately.

  Feedback ➔ Receiver ➔ Sender ➔ Message

In two-way communication, communication is negotiated. Both sender and receiver listen to each other, gather information, and are willing to make changes to work together in harmony. Their intent is to negotiate a mutually satisfactory situation.

How can I assure that I use both one-way and two-way communication with families and communities?

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<th>One-way communication strategies I have used:</th>
<th>Two-way communication strategies I have used:</th>
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<th>One-way communication strategies I plan to use:</th>
<th>Two-way communication strategies I plan to use:</th>
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Adapted from: Working Together: School, Family, Community Partnerships, Center for the Education and Study of Diverse Populations, New Mexico Highlands University, 2006.
Steps to Success:
Energizing Your School-Family Compact

1. Hold a staff meeting with teachers to explain what compacts mean, the outcomes you want, and how the process will roll out.

2. At grade-level meetings, decide how to roll out the process. If you start with students, teachers can ask their class to brainstorm what they should do to be responsible for their own learning. Vote on the five most important.

3. At next grade-level meetings, pick top five student themes across the classes. Then brainstorm what teachers should do to help students. Vote on the top five themes.

4. To get ideas from families, hold a breakfast (or a fun evening event). Make it fun, have translators, welcome families. Share how students are doing and what skills they need to improve. Ask parents to brainstorm what they could do at home to support their children’s success AND what information and support they would like from teachers to do that.

5. Type up the major themes and send them home with students for parents to circle their top five.

6. At grade-level meetings, pick the top five themes from the families. Then develop the compact companion for each grade level. Include the school vision and the major goals of the school improvement plan.

Using the five top themes from the conversations, list what students, teachers and parents will do. On the back panel, list at least two learning activities for families. These should be specific to each grade and linked to the school data and school improvement plan.

7. Give out the compact companions at parent-teacher conferences, and personalize them for each student.

8. In staff meetings, identify any professional development that teachers would like to implement the compact. Identify resources needed to send materials and workshops for families.

9. Line up support from community partners.

10. Develop monthly family contact logs for teachers with families’ telephone numbers and other contact information, so teachers can be in touch with parents at least once a month.

* * *

Developed by Anne T. Henderson, with help from Elise Francis and Rosanna Bannock, literacy coaches at M.D. Fox Elementary School, Hartford, Connecticut
"Family Friendly Walkthrough" Checklist

Is your school Family Friendly?
Research shows that when schools and parents work together to support the education of a child, not only does the student perform better in school, but all throughout life! The best way to nurture a strong relationship between school and family is to create a friendly and welcoming school environment for the families of the students. This is the primary method of improving parental involvement!

What is the purpose of the Family Friendly Walkthrough Checklist?
The North Carolina Parent Information and Resource Center (NC PIRC) distributes this Family Friendly Walkthrough as a tool to help schools assess their "Family Friendly" practices. Together, schools, parents and the community can look at strategies that will help make the school more inviting to families and the community. This tool was adapted from the New Jersey State PIRC "Family Friendly Walkthrough Checklist" and the Alaska PIRC "Family Friendly Walkthrough".

Walkthrough Components: Three areas will be evaluated during the walkthrough.

✔ Welcoming Environment
✔ Policies & Practices to Engage Parents
✔ Home-School Communication

Suggested Walkthrough Guidelines:
✔ The suggested size of the walk-through team is 6 -9 people. The recommended make up of the team is at least one representative from administration, faculty and support staff with at least an equal number of parents. To complement the team consider your school custodian, secretary, a bus driver, a cafeteria worker, a neighbor, a community leader, an English as a second language parent, and or others who represent the various cultures in your community.

✔ Select a team leader to coordinate the walkthrough. Each team member can complete the walkthrough separately or as a team but each person must complete his or her own checklist.

✔ After the team has completed the walkthrough, the team leader will collect the checklists and a brief meeting should be held to discuss the results and how to address areas that need improvement.
School: ___________________________ Date of walkthrough: ___________ Team Leader: ___________________________

Observer’s Name: __________________________________________________________

☐ Parent  ☐ Community Member  ☐ School Administrator  ☐ School Faculty  ☐ Other

1. Use the “rating scale” below to score the items under each area and provide comments and suggestions in the designated section.
2. Please return your completed checklist to your team leader and plan to attend a brief meeting to discuss and address the findings.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A. Welcoming Environment</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Visible signs that direct parents and visitors to the parking area.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. The front entrance can be easily identified and the school’s entryway is inviting with a sign/banner/bulletin board welcoming parents</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. There are signs by the school entrance that clearly guide or show visitors to the main office. Signs are translated into the languages represented in the school community.</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>4. The school creates displays of student achievement, student work and art (reflecting the diversity of the school community), and school news are visible when entering the school.</td>
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<td>5. The office staff immediately recognizes visitors with a smile, answers the phones politely and easily provide adequate information.</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>6. There is a sofa or comfortable chairs available in the office area for visitors who need to wait.</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>7. There is a parent resource room or comfortable area available where parents have access to books, educational materials and resources.</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>8. The school has volunteers or designated staff to act as mentors who provide tours, guidance and support to newly enrolled families</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. The school is clean and well kept including classrooms, hallways, bathrooms, and all other areas.</td>
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<td>2</td>
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Observer’s Name: __________________________________________________________
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<tr>
<th>Area being rated:</th>
<th>1</th>
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<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>Comments / Suggestions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>B. Policies &amp; Practices to Engage Parents in student Achievement</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1). School has a school-parent compact tailored to your school &amp; community. (Required by Title I)</td>
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<td>2). School has and shares a school-level parent involvement policy. Parents were involved in the development of the plan. (Required by Title I)</td>
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<td>3). Professional development for staff includes trainings/workshops on working with diverse families and parental involvement.</td>
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<td>4). The school has a Parent Coordinator or home-school liaison that helps to connect all parents from all backgrounds and the school.</td>
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<td>5). Student work is displayed throughout the school. The work also includes a description of the purpose of the work and the standard that it meets.</td>
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<td>6). School holds events early in the year to welcome families, make introductions and share how parents can be involved.</td>
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<td>7). The school offers workshops for parents to help them understand the classroom curriculum and how they can help their children at home</td>
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<td>8). The school actively recruits and welcomes new parents/guardians from all backgrounds for school committees such as the PTA/PTO</td>
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<td>9). The parent handbook with school policies, school calendar and other information are provided to the parents/guardians at the beginning of the school year in a format that is easily understood.</td>
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<td>10). Parents are informed of the process of scheduling meetings with teachers or school staff.</td>
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Observer's Name: ________________________________
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<th>Area being rated:</th>
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<th>Comments / Suggestions</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>C: Home-School Communication</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. The school has a system in place for ongoing assessment and feedback from parents regarding the school climate.</td>
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<td>2. Principal &amp; staff invite parents to ask questions &amp; express concerns. They respond to such communications in a two-way fashion.</td>
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<td>3. School informs families of policies, events, &amp; opportunities using a variety of media – e.g., newsletters, flyers, website, meetings, and volunteer phone tree.</td>
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<td>4. Written materials are translated into other languages according to the school community’s demographic make-up.</td>
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<td>5. Parents are surveyed regarding their interests, talents, and availability to volunteer.</td>
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<td>6. School &amp; teachers inform families on how they respond to family concerns and how to access help.</td>
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<td>7. School has user friendly website that is updated regularly to keep parents informed.</td>
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<td>8. The school establishes a tone of respect for all families, regardless of culture, ethnicity, language or disability.</td>
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<td>9. The school offers a variety of opportunities for teachers and parents/guardians to meet face-to-face, such as open house, parent conferences, class visits, etc.</td>
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Observer’s Name: ____________________________
## Strategy 4

### Strategy Information/Training Specifics for Families under Title 1 of NCLB

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Long Term</th>
<th>Short Term</th>
<th>Information and Training Implications for Parents/Families—NCLB Title I</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Other</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>School Improvement Status/SIT</td>
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<td>Parent Involvement Policy—District</td>
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<td>Evaluation of Policy</td>
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<td>School Parent Policy</td>
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<td>Planning, Review, and Improvement of Title 1 Programs &amp; Policy</td>
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<td>Curriculum Used at School</td>
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<td>Forms of Academic Assessment Used To Measure Progress</td>
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<td>Proficiency levels students expected to meet</td>
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<td>Family-School Compact</td>
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<td>School Responsibility</td>
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<td>Parent Responsibility</td>
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<td>Monitoring attendance</td>
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<td>Homework completion</td>
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<td>Television watching</td>
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<td>Volunteering in child’s classroom</td>
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<td>Decision making</td>
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<td>Use of extracurricular time</td>
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<td>Communication on an Ongoing Basis (minimum)</td>
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<td>Parent Teacher Conferences</td>
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<td>Frequent Reports to Parents on Child’s Progress</td>
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<td>Reasonable access to Staff, Opportunities To Volunteer and Participate in Child’s Class, Observation of Classroom Activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Long Term</td>
<td>Short Term</td>
<td>Information and Training Implications for Parents/Families — NCLB Title I</td>
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<td>Capacity Building for Involvement</td>
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<td>State standards</td>
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<td>State &amp; local assessments</td>
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<td>How to monitor progress and work with educators to improve achievement</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Provide materials and training to help parents work with their children to improve achievement (literacy training/using technology)</td>
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<td>Educate teachers, other staff with assistance of parents, value of parent’s, contributions of parents as equal partners.</td>
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<td>Coordinate/integrate parent involvement with other programs/activities (Head Start, Even Start, Reading First, etc.)</td>
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<td>Information related to school and parent programs sent in a format/language parents can understand</td>
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<td>Opportunities for parents of ELL, disabilities, migrant</td>
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<td>Information from Parent Information and Resource Centers (PIRC)</td>
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<td>Other Training/Engagement Considerations</td>
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<td>Working together in partnerships (team building)</td>
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<td>Understanding/using data to improve achievement</td>
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<td>Annual Title 1 meeting</td>
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<td>Regular meetings</td>
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<td>Reservations/Funding for parent activities</td>
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<td>Free tutoring (SES)</td>
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Strategy 5

Some Tips On Writing For Parents

Know Your Message
What is the main thing you want your reader to know? Take some time to get it down to a sentence that is easy to understand. Test it on people you want to reach.

Plan Before You Write
Who do you want to reach? What do they care about? Speak to that. Would they rather read a brochure or a poster? Find out—make some phone calls, talk with people, ask staff members who deal with your audience.

Put Yourself in Your Reader’s Shoes
Take your reader’s point of view. Use “you” and “we” instead of bureaucratic language. Write as if you’re writing to a specific, real person.

Organize to Meet Your Reader’s Needs
Think through the questions your reader is likely to have, and answer them. Put the most important information first. If you are writing about steps a reader must take, follow those steps. Include a table of contents with long documents.

Use Subheads and Visual Cues
Break the text up with subheads, artwork (if it is appropriate), and “pull quotes”—a good phrase or sentence from the text set off from it in large letters.

Use Lists
Bulleted lists present information clearly. Keep the same form throughout: if the bulleted items begin with verbs (“call the school,” “interview SES providers,” etc.) make sure all the items begin with verbs.

Use Simple, Everyday Words
Use common words. Instead of “approximately,” use “about.” If you need to use a technical word, define it. Make sure acronyms like SES are clearly defined.

Be Concise
Don’t use unnecessary words. Instead of “similar types of programs,” use “similar programs;” instead of “has an influence on,” use “influences.”

Keep Your Sentences Short
Rewrite sentences that run longer than about 15 words. Use simple sentences instead of complicated ones. Keep sentences down to one idea each.

Produced by the University of the State of New York. The State Education Department
Use Active Verbs
Instead of “transportation will be provided by the school,” write “the school will provide transportation.” And instead of “bilingual classes will be available for your child,” write, “your child may take bilingual classes.” Write in the present tense.

Read Your Writing Aloud
Your mistakes will stand out. You will hear sentences that go on too long, words your reader may not understand, and places you have not been clear. You will hear if you sound stuffy rather than human.

Always Revise
Leave yourself time to re-read what you’ve written. You can almost always improve it—or at least catch typos and spelling errors.

Include a Contact Name and Number
Make it easy for your reader to get more information.

Some Tips on Design

Be Generous With White Space
Leave plenty of space around your text—put spaces between paragraphs and leave your margins fat.

Be Stingy With Typefaces
Most computer programs give you lots of typefaces. Resist the urge to use them all. Use no more than two—one for the body and another for the headings.

Don’t Use All Capital Letters
THEY ARE HARD TO READ.

Use Big-Enough Type
Type should be easy to read. If you use a small size, leave plenty of white space between lines and at both margins.

Make the Right Margin Ragged
Text that is justified—where both the left and right margins are straight lines—is much harder to read than text with “ragged right” margins.
Module 2 | The Power of Communication
Making the Most of School-Family Compacts
Anne T. Henderson, Judy Carson, Patti Avallone and Melissa Whipple

Three urban schools made their Title I school-family compacts a powerful tool for student achievement.

Wouldn't it be great if the administrators and teachers at a school—particularly a school with many at-risk students—could sit down with parents and exchange ideas about what part each might play in supporting students' learning? Imagine if parents could hear directly from teachers what teachers believe their kids most need to learn, how teachers plan to structure that learning, and precisely what parents can do at home to reinforce it. What if teachers could hear each caregiver's view on what most helps his or her particular child? And what if this meaningful interaction could happen through an existing protocol, one that most schools now perceive as a burdensome requirement?

As staff members in Connecticut's Department of Education and as consultants on school-family collaboration, we've worked with several elementary schools that initiated such meaningful conversations by transforming school-family compacts, which all Title I Schools are required to create, from boilerplate language into vehicles for collaboration. Creating the compact became a catalyst for authentic school-parent cooperation.

A Missed Opportunity—Seized in Connecticut

No Child Left Behind stipulates that each school in the Title I program must develop an agreement, or "compact," that outlines how parents, school staff, and students will share responsibility for improving academic achievement. Compacts describe how the school and parents can work together to help students achieve the state's standards.

For most schools, compacts are a missed opportunity. As Judy Carson—who supports family engagement in Connecticut schools—found in reviewing compacts submitted by the state's schools, such documents rarely described activities that directly affect learning. Most compacts parroted general language in the law about parents' responsibility to support children's learning, for example, by monitoring their school attendance or their TV watching. And most were gathering dust on the shelf. This is true across the United States; a report from the U.S. Department of Education concluded that the parent involvement requirements, including compacts, are one of the weakest areas of Title I compliance (Stevenson & Laster, 2008).

Research shows that all students benefit from family involvement in education, and low-income and minority students benefit the most (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Most parents want timely information about school goals and learning strategies so they'll know what to do at home to support their children's achievement. This is the kind of information compacts were intended to provide—but a document asking parents to pledge that they'll get their kids to bed on time doesn't provide it. So Carson and several colleagues in Connecticut's Department of Education decided that if school-family compacts have to be created, schools should use the process to spark authentic conversations and listen to parents’ ideas about learning.

In 2008, the department initiated a program to improve school-parent compacts, bringing several consultants onto their team. This team designed a training curriculum, "A New Vision of Title I School-Parent Compacts," that they offered as free professional development for Connecticut's urban school districts.

Connecticut launched the effort with a Compact Conference that summer. Participants from five urban districts across the state learned how to transform compacts into plans for partnership among teachers at common grade levels and among parents of learners in those grades. Revised compacts would list specific actions that parents, students, and teachers could take to improve performance; they would be linked to current school improvement plans and grounded
in achievement data. Participants learned about promising practices to promote parent-teacher collaboration, explored practical home learning ideas, and made plans to seek parents’ input. The state offered schools committed to this process follow-up support in the form of professional development and advice from team consultants. Here’s how three urban elementary schools put this process into action, focusing on students’ reading achievement.

Reaching Out to Wary Parents

Macdonough Elementary School in Middletown, Connecticut, serves 80 percent low-income students (the highest percentage in the Middletown School District). In 2008, Macdonough had high staff turnover and a reputation for being a “not-so-good” school in a run-down, working-class neighborhood. Although the school had recently improved under the leadership of principal Jon Romeo, word had not gone out beyond the immediate neighborhood. A redistricting plan to improve racial balance was poised to move one-fourth of the district's elementary students to different schools, including moving many new kids to Macdonough. Parents packed school board meetings to express concerns.

Romeo realized that Macdonough had to create positive relationships with new families fast and assure them that it would provide high-quality academics. When Romeo first heard about the program to improve Title I compacts, “To be honest, I groaned,” he admitted. The school’s compact hadn’t been revised in a while and was sitting on the shelf. But the school needed to work more closely with families to close the achievement gap between its middleclass and low-income students. Romeo realized that co-creating a compact was a way to start; so he assembled a team of teachers, curriculum specialists, and parents to take this on.

Sample School-Family Compact

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1st Grade Teachers Will</th>
<th>1st Grade Families Will</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▪ Conduct daily small-group reading instruction.</td>
<td>▪ Make reading a daily part of family time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Read aloud each day to students.</td>
<td>▪ Ask children questions about books they’re reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Provide take-home reading materials for students.</td>
<td>▪ Visit the local library on a regular basis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Provide homework that supports topics learned at school.</td>
<td>▪ Complete homework assignments with students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Take weekly trips to the school library.</td>
<td>▪ Attend family literacy events at Macdonough School.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Keep families informed of children's reading progress and ways to support learning at home.</td>
<td>▪ Stay in touch with teachers about reading progress.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Macdonough Elementary School, Middletown, Connecticut

Drawing on what they learned at the 2008 Compact Conference and on help from consultant Patti Avallone, Macdonough’s teachers invited families to family-friendly evening learning events, such as an author's tea, organized by grade level. Romeo confessed, “We were afraid if we mentioned compacts they’d stay away. We enticed them with a fun event featuring their children.”
After each activity, teachers pulled parents into the library and asked them to share ideas on improving students’ reading. Romeo talked to the group about grade-level goals, and teachers showed parents what reading instruction looked like in their child's grade. Families met in small groups, with a Macdonough staff member guiding each group's conversation. To encourage parents to open up, teachers asked, What advice would you offer next year's parents to support children's reading? Ideas poured out: Visit the library once a month, spend family time reading, write letters to other family members. "Teachers were impressed with parents' ideas and their obvious commitment to learning, and parents’ eyes were opened to the school's intense focus on reading," Romeo recalled.

These gatherings were not a one-shot deal. After these initial conversations, teachers took parents' ideas and drafted compacts. There was a lot of back and forth at grade-level meetings between parents and teachers. For example, teachers told parents that they wanted to send home reading materials with students each night to help students get into the habit of reading and that they’d like parents to monitor and guide their children's nightly reading. Parents were willing, but they asked the teachers to "tell us exactly what you want us to work on and how we can help."

Teachers were surprised; they’d never thought of telling parents what strategies they used in class. Teachers showed parents, for instance, about making text-to-self connections with books. Once parents learned that relating what their kids were reading to something in their lives—like comparing a character's trip to a recent family trip—is motivating and helps comprehension, they said, "Oh, we can do that." Through such exchanges, many people had their fingerprints on the finished compacts (see "Sample School-Family Compact," p. 50).

As redistricting went into effect, Macdonough used the momentum to promote relationships. Teachers took walks in the neighborhood, during which they gave books to families and discussed improvements to the school. A back-to-school picnic enabled teachers and parents to socialize informally. At the school's annual open house, teachers shared concrete information about what students would be learning and doing in class. School staff met with new families to invite them to help the school become the best it could be, using the compacts to explain how families might help improve student success in reading.

News began to spread that the school was improving. In 2008, a state advocacy group named Macdonough one of the 10 most improved schools in Connecticut.

**Bringing Reading Strategies Home**

At M. D. Fox Elementary School in Hartford, literacy coaches Rosana Bannock and Elise Francis initiated the compact-creating process. The school serves 900 children; 70 percent are Latino, and many others are refugees from Bosnia, Thailand, and Laos.

Through flyers and personal phone calls, Bannock and Francis invited parents to a meeting in the school's library that featured a presentation on developing compacts and how important parents are to the process. After the presentation, parents broke into groups according to their children's grade level. Teachers shared with each group tips they could use to help their kids succeed in school, and then asked two questions: What do teachers need to do to help students? and What can the school do to help parents support their children?

Bannock and Francis circulated the parents' ideas to other Fox parents, who checked off the ideas most important to them. Teachers identified recurring themes that they used to construct the final compact for parents' approval. The exchange was a learning process, noted Francis. "We had assumptions about what parents know and can do [to help children learn], and they're much more willing to do things than we thought." Bannock explained how the discussions boosted school attendance:

Parents know their kids need to get to school on time, but single moms with four and five kids are struggling. As a result of the compact conversations, teachers have more sympathy for what families are going through, and grandparents are filling in to help kids get to school.
Teachers designed specific activities for different grade levels in response to parents' suggestions. For example, parents said they didn't understand what children learn in kindergarten—do they just play or do they learn to read? Teachers responded with a three-day kindergarten orientation for parents at which they gave parents learning materials and showed them how to support reading at home. An astounding 95 percent of families came.

Pushing For Pride in Student Work

Renata Lantos, principal at Bielefield Elementary School in Middletown, also had students' reading on her mind. Bielefield's attendance zone is the largest in the Middletown district, and more than one-half of its students are from low-income families. Although reading achievement is now improving steadily, at the time of compact creation, it was below average for the state.

After attending the Compact Conference, Lantos realized she and her staff had to revise their compact, which consisted of general compliance statements. Two teachers developed a presentation for families that explained the schools' reading goals. They linked practical strategies for improving reading skills to these goals and showed how these strategies could be outlined in the compact.

For example, Bielefield teachers now assign each student books that fit that student's reading level. Teachers have agreed to help students select "just-right books" and provide parents with reading materials connected to the books each week; parents agree to ensure that their children read regularly, encourage them to share and use new vocabulary, and use the materials the teacher sends home to have "book talks." Students agree to read these books regularly, keep a reading record, and build a list of new words they learn.

During follow-up conversations, a major issue came up: Students needed to take more pride in their work. They were handing in subpar work that showed a lack of motivation. "The whole building got involved," recalls Lantos. "Parents had great ideas, such as focusing on 'pride in work' in the newsletter and exhibiting student projects." At each grade level, students discussed what taking pride in your work means.

Teachers constructed a rubric that pinpointed three levels of student effort and time on task. Students described the basic level as "No effort. I worked way too quickly, and I didn't reread or revise my work. The paper is not my best and neatest." The top level is "My best effort. I thought and tried my hardest. I spent enough time to give my brain quality time. I carefully reread and revised my work." Teachers sent the rubric home, and parents signed off on reading it. Parents agreed to regularly review their children's work and discuss with them the meaning of pride. During parent-teacher conferences, teachers refer to the rubric.

Lantos says the result has been a huge improvement in student work: "Even 2nd graders get it, like the one who wrote: 'Now I know what quality work looks like.'" All Bielefield students have produced at least one "pride paper" that meets the top-level criteria on the rubric.

Keys to Success

We have discovered practices that help turn compacts into catalysts for action. The most important thing is to create a setting for parents and teachers to talk about how to help the kids—and to get to know one another. At Macdonough, Romeo asked staff members to facilitate meetings with families to ensure teacher buy-in. The process went from a conversation between a self-selected group of teachers and parents, to discussions among many teachers, to one with the entire parent teacher association. Parent leaders who emerged went to follow-up compact conferences, which strengthened their capacity to engage other families.

Continuing follow-up by the principal is important. Administrators should affirm practices that teachers are already doing—such as book drives and trips to the library—and explicitly link existing practices to the compact and the school improvement plan. This takes teachers' actions beyond "random acts of family engagement" and integrates them into a systematic plan for improving achievement (Weiss, Lopez, & Rosenberg, 2010).
Working with grade-level colleagues inspires teachers. We found that developing compacts for each grade level made a big difference. At M. D. Fox, the literacy coaches facilitated grade-level meetings and brainstormed specific activities for teachers in each grade.

There is a striking difference between the school-family compacts of participating schools before and after this improvement effort. New compacts are more focused on student learning and linked to school data. They are stimulating new, creative activities in schools. Connecticut's Department of Education will be launching the program statewide as a best practice for Title I parent involvement, leveraging the language of the law to create a powerful strategy for parent-teacher collaboration.

Tools for Engagement

The following books and websites provide resources for engaging families in students' learning.

- Family Involvement Network of Educators ([www.finennetwork.org](http://www.finennetwork.org)).
- San Diego Unified School District’s website on family engagement ([www.sandi.net/parentoutreach](http://www.sandi.net/parentoutreach)).

References


Endnote

1 Other important partners were the state Parent Involvement Resource Center and the Capitol Region Education Council.
Anne T. Henderson is a senior consultant with the Annenberg Institute for School Reform and coauthor (with Karen Mapp, Don Davies, and Vivian Johnson) of Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships (The New Press, 2007); AnneTHenderson1@yahoo.com. Judy Carson is program manager for family and community engagement in the Connecticut Department of Education; Judy.Carson@ct.gov. Patti Avallone is a retired principal and former Title I director for the New Haven school district; patriciaavallone@sbcglobal.net. Melissa Whipple is district program coordinator and trainer for the Parent Outreach and Engagement department of San Diego Unified Schools; mwhipple@sandi.net.
The Federal Role in Transforming Struggling Schools

“We do not have to close a school, fire most or all of its teachers, or turn it into a charter school to ‘improve’ it. There is a better way. Successful and innovative models of public education that involve partnerships among government, parents, community organizations, education unions, businesses, and foundations are happening around the country. For long-term, sustainable school transformation, shared responsibility and collaboration are essential.”

— NEA President Dennis Van Roekel

No one is sure exactly how best to transform struggling schools—those with high rates of students who struggle academically or drop out of school—into successful centers for teaching and learning. Recently, the federal government has adopted a prescriptive approach that reflects a growing frustration with the lack of progress in “turning around” these schools. However, a more comprehensive and transformative approach to school improvement that follows a deliberate and collaborative process would have clear advantages. Such an approach would be based on reliable evidence of effective strategies that are locally determined and implemented.

Background

Since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001, Title I schools that do not make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) based on annual standardized test scores for two or more consecutive years are subject to one or more required actions: school improvement, mandatory corrective actions, and mandatory restructuring. If school improvement efforts don’t result in AYP for two consecutive years, then corrective action is required. If a school fails to make AYP for three consecutive years despite school improvement efforts and corrective action, then restructuring is required.

Mandatory corrective action may involve any of the following: replacing school staff, implementing new curricula and professional development programs, changing administrators, bringing in consultants, extending the school day or school year, or restructuring the school voluntarily.

Mandatory restructuring may involve one or more further actions: reopening the school as a public charter school, replacing most or all of the school staff, turning over school operations to a private management company or to the state, or making other significant changes to staffing and governance.1

In August 2009, the Obama Administration announced its goal to “turn around the 5,000 lowest-performing schools over the next five years.” In March 2010, the Administration published A Blueprint for Reform: The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which proposes a new classification, Challenge Schools, as part of a new school accountability framework. The Blueprint defines three categories of Challenge Schools:

1. The lowest-performing 5 percent of schools in each state, based on student academic achievement, student growth, and graduation rates.
2. The next lowest-performing 5 percent of schools.

3. Additional schools that have not managed to close significant, persistent achievement gaps.²

The Blueprint directs states and districts to implement research-based, locally-determined strategies to help schools in the second and third categories to improve. Schools in the first category would be required to adopt one of the following four intervention models:

1. **Transformation**: Replace the principal, strengthen staffing, implement a research-based instructional program, provide extended learning time, and initiate new governance and flexibility.

2. **Turnaround**: Replace the principal and rehire no more than 50 percent of the school staff, implement a research-based instructional program, provide extended learning time, and implement a new governance structure.

3. **Restart**: Convert or close the school and reopen it under the management of an effective charter school operator, a charter school management organization, or an education management organization.

4. **School closure**: Close the school and enroll its students in higher-performing schools within the same school district.³

These models are identical to those advanced by the U.S. Department of Education through its Title I School Improvement Grants (SIG) program. In 2009, SIG was expanded and significantly revised, following passage of the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA). By the end of 2010, more than 730 schools receiving SIG funds had begun to implement one of the four turnaround models.⁴

### Analysis

A number of educators have found the four proposed intervention models to be specious and unhelpful in addressing the root causes of poor academic performance in certain schools.⁵ Many Members of Congress, particularly from rural states, have not embraced the Administration’s turnaround policy.⁶

Two of the models, restart and school closure, are not really models for school intervention so much as prescriptive forms of upheaval. They assume that simply closing a school or changing its management would benefit students in the lowest-performing schools, regardless of what other actions may follow. But there is no way to be certain that changing school governance alone would lead to improvement. The SIG guidelines do not explain what a school must do to improve student performance after reopening under a charter operator, charter management organization (CMO), or education management organization (EMO).

The SIG guidelines encourage school districts to engage with the public prior to closing a school, but they fail to address the possible impact of school closure on students, staff, and the surrounding community. They also overlook the impact of school closure on public schools that would receive the students and staff of closed schools. Receiving schools are not given SIG funds to educate students from closed schools, nor are they required to do anything in particular to improve the academic achievement of students from closed schools.

Not surprisingly, many legislators and education advocates have criticized the restart and school closure models as impractical and unworkable, especially in states and communities with few viable “restart” operators or nearby schools with the capacity to absorb students from closed schools.⁷
The turnaround and transformation models offer some policy direction or options that arguably could constitute a model for school intervention or improvement. These two models resemble each other in many respects. Both require that the principal be fired in most cases. Governance, restructuring, staffing, and curricular options that are available to transformation model schools are also available to turnaround model schools.

There are, however, a few key differences. For example, only turnaround model schools are required to fire at least 50 percent of their staff, and only transformation model schools are required to adopt teacher evaluation systems that tie teacher performance to student test scores.6

Both the turnaround and the transformation models require or encourage significant changes in school leadership and staffing. These changes may be considered variations of reconstitution—the term generally used for a school restructuring approach focused on removing incumbent administrators and teachers and replacing them with educators deemed more capable of improving school performance.9

Researchers have cautioned against the widespread use of reconstitution as a reform strategy. One 2003 study concludes, “The more scarce the resources in a district, the more likely that reconstitution will make matters worse. If a district is struggling to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers before reconstitution, it will find recruitment and retention even more difficult after reconstitution.”10

The few existing studies of reconstitution are inconclusive and raise a variety of concerns. One 2008 study asserts the following:

- Reconstitution represents an “enormously complex and difficult process of school reform — perhaps more difficult than initially was thought.”
- “Simple replication of a particular reconstitution approach is inadvisable.”
- “Outcomes in terms of student achievement are quite varied …Reconstitution does not guarantee student learning.”
- “Reconstitution often comes with unintended consequences: political conflict, lowered teacher morale, and a flood of inexperienced teachers into reconstituted schools.”11

Recent research also suggests that reconstitution does not necessarily lead to academic progress. A 2008 study found that reconstituted schools have “no greater likelihood of a school making AYP overall or in reading or math alone.”12
The Federal Role in Transforming Struggling Schools

To bridge the gap in achievement between successful and struggling schools, policymakers must abandon the notion that there is a single best model—or even a limited number of effective models—for school intervention. One study concludes, “Schools fail for a variety of reasons, and [turnaround] strategies need to be tailored to fit the needs of individual schools.” According to the Center on Education Policy, “No single strategy is guaranteed to improve a struggling school; instead, all of the case study schools that raised achievement enough to exit restructuring used multiple, coordinated strategies, which they revised over time.”

A 2008 study by Murphy and Meyers concludes the following:

*Of the various turnaround initiatives (including school reconstitution), no one intervention appears to be significantly more successful than others. Such interventions are difficult to sustain, especially stronger ones that seem to be more difficult to manage and are more costly. Since turnaround interventions do not always succeed, mixing and matching to develop a comprehensive approach seems promising.*

In place of limiting school intervention to particular models, NEA believes that the federal government should require states to develop a comprehensive, collaborative, and flexible process leading to varied and unique reform strategies in each school. Ensuring success for all students requires that all professionals and community stakeholders involved in public education work collaboratively to make decisions based on common understandings and agreements. Of the Obama Administration’s four proposed intervention models, NEA supports significant components of the transformation model as the only model that prioritizes a variety of intervention strategies and refrains from imposing arbitrary decisions about school management and staffing in the absence of a collaborative approach to school improvement.

NEA recognizes that transforming struggling schools presents a complex challenge and that bold action is often warranted. However, NEA believes that the federal government should avoid prescriptive turnaround models that are not based on reliable evidence because using such models would likely produce unintended negative consequences. The role of the federal government should be to support and fund state and local efforts toward a comprehensive, collaborative, and flexible process toward school improvement.

NEA supports the following conclusions from the Murphy and Meyers study:

- Successful schools almost always have good, if not exceptional, principals.
- School improvement initiatives must engage parents and the community.
- Failing schools need ample fiscal resources to turn around. The resources need to last long enough for full implementation of school improvement strategies.
- School self-assessment is a key ingredient in improving low-performing schools.

Researchers have also found that capacity building and school personnel “buy in” are critical in the school improvement process. According to Murphy and Meyers, “Capacity building is an important component of turnaround—this means that cooperation and human development are needed to move forward.” Capacity building means providing teachers with effective induction and mentoring, collaboration, professional
development, and advancement opportunities. Such steps are also likely to contribute to “buy in.” The Murphy and Meyers study concludes, “Teachers must believe in the turnaround intervention being implemented and must be seen as partners and facilitators in the process. When teachers do not buy in, failing schools do not improve.”18 The researchers note that, both before and during implementation, “teachers’ beliefs that the reform would make a difference for their students are critical to the results of turnaround efforts.”19

In sum, it may be expedient in the short term to replace many school personnel perceived as obstacles to school improvement. But studies show that, in order to achieve positive long-term results, school administrators and boards must not underestimate the importance of supporting and investing in current staff.

NEA urges the federal government, through reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), to provide states with appropriate federal assistance, resources, and support to accomplish the following:

- Submit comprehensive state plans to ensure that all students have access to a high quality, well-rounded education.
- Accurately identify struggling or “priority” schools by measuring schools’ progress in raising student achievement, closing achievement gaps between student subpopulations, and improving graduation rates.
- Foster improvements in school self-assessment, and assemble diverse teams of educators and stakeholders to gauge the quality of assessment, curriculum, instruction, leadership, and other critical factors. Such factors include, for example, student safety and health, teaching and learning conditions, and parental and community engagement.
- Adopt appropriate intervention strategies based on the results of comprehensive school assessments. The strategies should be locally tailored; designed to improve student learning, close achievement gaps, and increase graduation rates; targeted to specific populations or goals; evidence-based; determined through an inclusive, collaborative and transparent process; respectful of collective bargaining and other management-labor agreements; and accompanied by appropriate resources and supports for educators and students.
- Cultivate excellent school leadership and build capacity and buy-in of educators.
- Focus on recruiting and retaining accomplished educators at priority schools.
- Ensure sustained funding and resources for school improvement.

Through these steps, the federal government can promote successful school transformation by defining the contours of a process governing school reform and by providing vital resources and support. In so doing, the federal government can entrust decisions about particular intervention strategies and details to individual states, school districts, and schools.

**NEA Resources**

**NEA’s Priority Schools Campaign (PSC):** In a program that began in 2009 and will continue through 2016, NEA is partnering with state and local affiliates to assist low-performing schools, which the Association calls “priority schools.” The Campaign emphasizes the importance of collaboration between the school district and union, as well as the following evidence-based criteria:

- A strong partnership between the school and students’ families
An investment in increasing the skills and effectiveness of the school staff

Community-provided social and health services for students and their families

Highlights of successful school transformation programs are available at www.neapriorityschools.org.

**NEA KEYS Program:** Studies show that effective school turnaround strategies focus on process over prescriptive approaches. Through a program called Keys to Excellence in Your Schools (KEYS), NEA has developed a process-oriented system for school self-analysis and reform based on six steps, or “keys”:

**Key 1:** Shared Understanding and Commitment to High Goals

**Key 2:** Open Communication and Collaborative Problem Solving

**Key 3:** Continuous Assessment for Teaching and Learning

**Key 4:** Personal and Professional Learning

**Key 5:** Resources to Support Teaching and Learning

**Key 6:** Curriculum and Instruction

The first three keys focus on process, and the second three involve capacity building. For more information, see www.keysonline.org.

**National Education Association (2010): School Reconstitution as an Education Reform Strategy:** A Synopsis of the Evidence.


**References**

3. Ibid., p. 12.
7. Ibid.
10. LEADS Report, Center for Educational Policy and Leadership, University of Maryland (2003).
11. Murphy and Meyers (2008), *Turning Around Failing Schools*.
14. Murphy and Meyers (2008), *Turning Around Failing Schools* [citing Kirby et al. (2005), Brady (2003), and U.S. Department of Education (2001)].
15. Center on Education Policy (2010), *Improving Low-Performing Schools*.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid. [citing Borman et al. (2000)].
“Collaboration is a mindset that says, of course I’m going to need the help of others to do my job well!”

Sidney L. Gardner
The Power of Family–School-Community Partnerships
Module 3

Developing long-lasting reciprocal relations is not the same as devising public relations strategies. Engaging stakeholders means truly sharing the power. “Power is not a finite pie, when the whole pie gets bigger, more possibilities are created.”

Larry Ferlazzo

Introduction
Partnerships with families and the broader community are being finally recognized as a key element in school reform. Families and communities play an essential role in increasing student achievement. Though there is still a long way to go to make partnerships a reality, many schools and school districts are taking the necessary steps to build partnerships and strengthen relationships with families and communities. There is a role for everyone to play in taking all our children to the highest level of achievement. This module is a call to parents, teachers, education support professionals, higher education staff, community members, and students to activate their commitment and skills to improve education opportunities. Partnerships at the community level may be the most important process in school system reform efforts.

Objective
To provide the specific outcomes for doing a better job of creating environments in which families can successfully carry out their responsibilities and succeed. This section explores the components of building partnerships, while providing a variety of activities to increase collaborative skills.

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11) Lessons from Geese

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1) Beyond Random Acts
The Power of Family-School-Community-Partnerships

Module 3

“When parents, teachers, students, and others view one another as partners in education, a caring community forms around students and begins its work.”

Dr. Joyce Epstein

Mini Discussion

This module places emphasis on creating community partnerships to support the growth and development of children and families to make their lives better. Collaboration and coalition building at the community level may be the most important process in school reform efforts.

As educators we are not new to coalition building, whether, it’s for a bond increase, support for higher wages, a campaign against violence or against some initiative such as vouchers and privatization. However, educators’ traditional approach to families is to treat them as separate from the school.

Research over the past 20 years has suggested that developing family-school-community partnerships can improve students’ academic achievement, school programs, and school climate; provide family services and support; increase parents’ skills and leadership; connect families with others in the school and in the community; and help teachers with their work. The main reason to create such partnerships is to help all children succeed in school and in later life.

The recognition that families and communities are a critical ingredient in successful reforms, particularly in priority schools, is forcing many schools to look for strategies to reach out to them as partners in the education of children.

While there is no magic way to form partnerships with families in our schools, this module outlines tried and true methods of building collaborations and coalitions. Collaboration is the most intense level of community partnership. It involves programs working together toward common goals that could not be achieved by any program.
acting alone. Resources, information, and activities are shared by the collaborative partners to turn the goals into reality.

The process of building collaborative partnerships with families and the community involves:

1) Recognizing opportunities for change;
2) Mobilizing people and resources to create changes;
3) Seeking support and involvement from diverse and nontraditional partners;
4) Choosing an effective group structure;
5) Building trust among collaborators;
6) Developing learning opportunities for partners.

For the National Education Association and its affiliates, collaboration poses both an opportunity and a challenge to get people and organizations to work together in new ways. The road to collaboration is neither straight nor easy. It involves changing the way people work and think.

“When people collaborate, they move from competing to consensus building, from working alone to including others, from thinking mostly about activities, services, and programs to thinking about the ‘big picture,’ and from focusing on short-term accomplishments to achieving long-term results.”

Michael Winer and Karen Ray, Collaboration Handbook: Creating, Sustaining, and Enjoying the Journey
Module 3 | The Power of Family-School-Community Partnerships
Activity 1

**ANXIETIES, FEARS, AND CONCERNS**

**Purpose**
To provide participants an opportunity to give attention to and discuss their anxieties, fears and concerns about partnerships with families and communities.

**Time Required**
30-45 minutes.

**Equipment/Materials**
Flip chart or large newsprint, markers for each group, masking tape.

**Room Arrangement**
Subgroups of 8 at tables or circular discussion groups.

**Directions**
Form subgroups. Or, this activity can be done as a large group brainstorm activity, depending on the size of the group.

Have each group select a facilitator and someone to report back to the total group the results of this activity.

Introduce the activity by suggesting that each of us holds certain anxieties, fears and concerns about building and strengthening partnerships with parents/families and communities. Suggest brainstorming a list, then discussing together each of those items written on the newsprint. Monitor the work of the subgroups during their brainstorming and discussion.

Have the reporter for each subgroup make a presentation to the full group.

Have the subgroups post their results on the wall (use masking tape).

Use the posted lists throughout the training to be sure that participants’ concerns, anxieties and fears are being addressed.

This activity should be built in as an opening activity for all trainings to gauge participant opinions.
Activity 2: The Rules we Live By

Purpose

This activity gives participants an opportunity to think through the conditions necessary for building trust and respect between group members and to use this information to develop their team's ground rules.

Materials

Chart paper, markers, easel, tape.

Process

In a calm, serious manner, ask each individual to think of a secret that they have never shared with anyone before. Give them time to reflect and for the tension to build. After a few minutes of silence, ask participants to call out the conditions that would be necessary if they were going to share this secret. (Usually participants are relieved as they realize they are not going to have to reveal their secrets.)

Record the conditions on chart paper. Then discuss how these same conditions are necessary for a successful decision-making partnership. Ideas generated might include: trust, respect, acceptance, positive relationship, honesty, ability to keep confidences, etc. Allow 10–15 minutes to discuss the importance of the ideas generated.

Summarize this part of the activity by emphasizing that effective partnerships are based on mutual trust and respect. All team members are responsible for developing and nurturing these key ingredients. One way of defining everyone's responsibility is to develop a plan for working together—a set of rules everyone will be expected to know and follow.

Post the following definition

Ground rules are guidelines that clarify what is expected from everyone on the team. Since everyone will be expected to follow the ground rules, it is essential that everyone on the team develop and agree to them.

Some ground rules are logistical (for example, team members will be on time so meetings can start promptly). Others concern interpersonal communication (for
example, feedback will be courteous and respectful). And some ground rules govern behavior (for example, it is part of every team member’s responsibility to keep the group on task).

Divide participants into three groups. Assign each group a category (logistical, interpersonal communication, or behavior) and ask them to brainstorm a list of ideas for ground rules for their category. Remind participants that they may want to refer back to the conditions for trust that they generated in the first part of this activity.

Allow 15–20 minutes for groups to brainstorm. Have each group tape up their list.

Bring the large group back together and allow some time to review all the small groups’ lists. Explain that the team should use these ideas as a springboard for creating a single set of ground rules. Remind participants that even though all of the ideas on the lists are important, they will need to establish some priorities. Facilitate a discussion on identifying the new ground rules.

Once the ground rules have been identified, check with the group to see if there is any item on the list that causes anyone concern. If so, continue discussion until a set of rules is developed that is acceptable to all participants.
Activity 3: Understanding Team Roles: Where Do I Fit In?

**Instructions:** On the circle, draw a line from each arrow to the center. This will divide the circle into five wedges and help you distinguish between the team roles. Read the descriptions of each role, below. Note the positive characteristics of that role and any challenges a person in this role may have. The first one has been started for you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team Role</th>
<th>Positive Characteristics</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Explorer:</strong> Enjoys thinking about new possibilities. Broadens the horizons of the group.</td>
<td>Creative, gets things going</td>
<td>May need to hold back so others can talk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Caretaker:** Makes sure that everyone participates and is comfortable with the group.

**Peacekeeper:** Encourages group members to be positive and work together. Helps members understand each other and reach compromise or consensus.

**Investigator:** Pushes the group to take a close look at different ideas and test them out. Leads group to focus clearly on its goals.

**Manager:** Focuses the group on how it is functioning at each stage. Helps the group stay on track.

If you need more room, continue on another piece of paper

1) Which team roles do you carry out most often?
2) In your opinion, are various roles important on a team? Why or why not?
Activity 3 Handout: Understanding Team Roles: Where Do I Fit In?

Instructions: In this circle are phrases that describe the different roles you may play on a decision-making team. Circle the 5-6 phrases that describe what you do best, or feel most comfortable doing, on a team. Choose from anywhere in the circle.
Activity 4

MOVING TOWARD PARTNERSHIP: HOW DOES YOUR SCHOOL RATE?

Purpose
The research is clear: when schools involve families in children's learning, children do better in school. The schools get better, too. The more schools work in partnership with families, the better the school becomes. Children in grades K-12 who are the farthest behind gain the most from these partnerships.

This scoring guide will help families, staff, and building leaders rate your school according to a standard of partnership. Using five indicators, the guide sets the following four levels of performance, from Level 1–Partnership School to Level 4–Fortress School.

Time Required
20 minutes to complete the rating
Up to 30 minutes to discuss the results
Possible follow up conversation after sharing

Equipment/Materials
Rating sheets

Directions
Ask participants to check which description best describes their school under each of the five indicators: What is the vision of the school? How high is the trust level? Do families have information and tools for full participation? Are families involved in all aspects of the school? Does the school have policies that support families?

If most of your checks are under Partnership and Open Door, your school meets a high standard. If most checks are under Fortress or Come When We Call, your school needs help. Talk with others in your school community: parents and family members, the principal, support staff and teachers. Share this Rating Sheet and start a conversation about how to grow your school into being either an Open Door or Partnership school.
What is the vision?

**Partnership School:** Our school community is committed to success for all students.
Every classroom has standards.
All children get the help they need to learn to high standards.
Families and staff developed the vision.

**Open Door School:** Families can really help our school.
Families share their cultures and talk to students about their careers.
Families have good ideas about making the school better.

**Come When We Call School:** We need parents to reinforce at home what children learn in school.
School tells families what to do at home. Parents help at school in a few ways.

**Fortress School:** We must protect the school from outsiders.
No community partners involved.
No personal outreach to families (positive phone calls, home visits).

How high is the trust level?

**Partnership School:** School is part of the community.
Staff knows the neighborhood well.
School has many community partners
Families and staff are friends.
School and family center are open all year, serve as advocates for families.

**Open Door School:** Families are almost always welcome.
Teachers contact every family about four times a year.
School makes home visits.
Family center is open during school day, links families to social services.

**Come When We Call School:** Families with the right attitudes are welcome.
Volunteers fill out long forms.
School decides what families can do.
Parents recruited for specific jobs.

**Fortress School:** Parents belong at home.
Little personal contact.
Meetings by appointment only.
Do families have information and tools for full participation?

__**Partnership School:** School gives families power.
School test scores are shared with families.
Training for staff is open to parents.
Families learn how the system works, take leadership and advocacy classes
We talk about issues like racism and tracking.

__**Open Door School:** Families need good information about school programs and the course of study.
Standards posted around school.
Curriculum nights explain what students are learning.
Teachers send home student work.

__**Come When We Call School:** Families need information about how to help their children learn.
Learning packets to take home.
Open house, conferences reinforce what children learn in class.

__**Fortress School:** School shares limited information.
One-way, English only
Parents must request information
School test scores are for school use only.

Are families involved in all aspects of the school?

__**Partnership School:** Parents and families are experts, too.
Families take part in all major decisions.
Families help develop personal learning plans for all students.
Families sit on standards committees, look at student work.
School knows all families well.

__**Open Door School:** Families have a lot to offer, but they are not experts in education.
Decisions made by school council.
Parents group sets own agenda
Parents involved in some classrooms.
Teachers have monthly contact with at least half their families.
Come When We Call School: Families can volunteer as tutors, hall monitors, classroom helpers. Principal and top teachers run school. Small in-crown of parents does all the work. School sees about a third of families during the year. Parents recruited for specific jobs.

Fortress School: Families have no real role at school. The principal makes all decisions. Parent group is small and weak. No school councils or committees. School has no personal contact with most families.

Does the school have policies that support families?

Partnership School: School policies fully support families' rights. Written and will not be reversed. Developed and approved with families. Funds for involving families in school budget (childcare, transportation, space, supplies).

Open Door School: School handbook says how families are involved, respects parents' rights. Principal and teachers talk to families, then decide how to involved families. Some school funds support family activities. Parent group raises the rest.

Come When We Call School: The school sometimes helps families. Some childcare for small meetings. Transportation on a limited basis. Help is given case by case. Parents' rights are seen as a burden.

Fortress School: Families are on their own. No childcare for meetings, transportation not available, school is not aware of parents' rights. Little personal contact. Meetings by appointment only. Families, teachers blamed for low student scores.
Summary

Level 1: Partnership Schools have teachers, parents, and students working and learning together. They talk often about how students are doing. Partnership Schools have high standards for all students, in all classrooms.

Level 2: Open Door Schools welcome most parents in many ways. But teachers and the principal decide how parents will be involved. Open Door Schools try to help all students, but they do a better job with some students than others.

Level 3: Come When We Call Schools involve families in very limited ways. Parents come to school only when invited. Come when We Call Schools don’t expect a lot of their students or families.

Level 4: Fortress Schools keep parents outside. When students don’t do well, the school often blames them and their families. Fortress Schools favor a very few parents and look down on others.
Activity 5

My Feelings About Conflict

Purpose
To provide participants an opportunity to think about and discuss their feelings about conflict particularly as it relates collaboration.

Time Required
30-45 minutes.

Equipment/Materials
Flip chart or large newsprint, markers for each group, masking tape.

Room Arrangement
Subgroups of 8 at tables or circular discussion groups.

Directions
Form subgroups. Or, this activity can be done as a large group brainstorm activity, depending on the size of the group.

Have each group select a facilitator and someone to report back to the total group the results of this activity.

Introduce the activity by suggesting people respond to conflict in ways that reflect their upbringing and life experiences. The questions outlined are to help you think about your feelings about conflict. Brainstorm as many answers to each question as you like. Remember, there is no right or wrong answers.

Have the reporter for each subgroup make a presentation to the full group.
1. What messages did you get about conflict when you were growing up? (For example, "It's impolite to disagree in public." Or, "It's important to stand up for yourself.")

2. When you hear the word "conflict" now, how do you feel? (For example, "Conflict makes me feel nervous." Or, "Conflict makes me feel powerful — I love a good debate.")

3. Think about working with a group of parents and staff. When you sense there is conflict, what do you usually do? (For example, "I get very quiet so I don't have to disagree with anyone." Or, "I get very competitive.")
4. Working together as a team means learning to work through conflict together. What would you like the other team members to know about how you deal with conflict? (For example, "When I'm under stress I get defensive.")

5. If you could change two things about how you handle conflict, what would they be?

1)

2)
Strategies

Module 3 | The Power of Family-School-Community Partnerships
Strategy 1

Understanding Your Community

In order to work effectively in a community, you need to know:

- Population data and characteristics
- Customs and traditions
- Political system characteristics and organization
- Communications channels
- Significant community groups and organizations
- Economic conditions
- Patterns of employment/unemployment
- Political structures and power brokers (both formal and informal)
- Social structures, tensions, and problems that affect the learner and the school; community resources and services
- School-community interrelationships
- Geographic strengths and weaknesses

Strategy 2

Levels of Community Partnership

Overview
The illustration below shows the increasing intensity of community partnerships as they move from the communication and networking level to the collaboration level.

- **Collaboration**: Mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered not by two or more agencies to achieve common goals that could not be achieved by working alone.

- **Cooperation**: By sharing information and activities, some service integration between two or more agencies occurs but do not lose autonomy.

- **Coordination**: Two or more agencies operate autonomously, yet work together to avoid duplication by sharing information and activities.

- **Communication and Networking**: Loose community linkage where the exchange of information and rapport building takes place.

Assessing Partnerships

For each statement Write "yes," or "no," or "unsure."

Communicating with Parents and Community Members

The School Climate

__1. There are signs and welcoming messages that say parents and community are welcome here.
__2. Signs and messages are provided in languages other than English if applicable.
__3. Family members and community members are welcomed as observers in the classroom.
__4. Family members and community members are welcomed as volunteers in the classroom.
__5. Adult-sized chairs, besides the teachers’, are located throughout the school.
__6. Our school has a parent room or parent corner where information is provided to parents in a variety of ways.
__7. A vision of our school is posted throughout the school and distributed to parents and the community.
__8. Our school has a parent/community involvement plan or policy.
__9. Our school’s parent involvement policy or plan was developed with the input of parents and community members.
__10. All school staff is provided staff development opportunities in family community involvement

Outreach

__11. Special efforts are made to involve women and men from different racial and national origin groups in all parent activities.
__12. Linkages have been made with community organizations and religious groups that serve the families of children enrolled in our programs.
__13. Our school buildings are open for use by the community.
__14. Liaisons are available to help with parent involvement activities and outreach.
__15. A particular effort is made to involve male family members in program activities.
__16. Some parent involvement activities take place out in the community.
__17. There are efforts to reach families often stereotyped as hard-to-reach.
Assessing Partnerships — 2

18. All staff make an effort to communicate regularly and positively with parents.
19. There is a regular school newsletter with information for parents and the community.
20. Parent communications are written clearly and simply, using language the family can understand.
21. Curriculum standards and school procedures are clearly communicated to parents at the beginning of each year or when children are enrolled.
22. Positive communication channels are promoted and encouraged with families early in the school year.
23. Communication with families and communities is expressed in multiple ways.
24. School support staff are provided training in communicating with families and community members.
25. Teachers and administrators are provided training in communicating with families and community members.

Policy and Procedures
26. There is an active parent-led organization supported by school staff.
27. Members of the parent organization are representative of the school population by race, gender, and national origin.
28. Parents are trained to be effective team members.
29. Parents and community members are involved in school decision-making teams.
30. Funds and resources are provided to support parent and community involvement.

Assessing Partnerships — 3

Parent and Community Activities
31. There are equal opportunities for working parents and community members to attend meetings and activities.
32. Parents are involved in recommending parent and family activities.
33. There are educational activities and training for parents that enable them to work with their own child at home.
34. There are social activities for families and community members that promote interactions with school staff.
35. There are adult education classes for the parents themselves (ESL, GED, exercise classes, etc.).
36. There are parenting skills workshops for the parents themselves.
37. There is an assessment of the parent/community partnership initiative.
38. There is an updated file of community services and resources for parents and families (e.g., health, social services, financial aid, emergency assistance, etc.).

**Reporting Children's Progress to Parents**

39. Teachers make an effort to say positive things about the child and emphasize the child’s strengths in their progress reports to parents.
40. Teacher concerns about their child's progress are communicated clearly to parents.
41. Parents participate in decisions affecting their child’s education.
42. All educational programs and services for their child are explained clearly to parents.
43. Meetings are arranged at the parents’ request to discuss parent concerns regarding their child.
44. Parent-teacher conferences are scheduled at times convenient to the parents as well as the teachers.
45. Transportation arrangements are made for parents to attend parent-teacher conferences if needed.
46. Child care arrangements are made for meetings and other parent activities if needed.
47. There are teacher/parent/community recognition programs for service to the school.
48. Some parent-school activities offer refreshments and an opportunity for information communication between school staff and parents.
Strategy 4

SOME PRINCIPLES OF COALITION BUILDING

1) DEFINE THE COMMON CAUSE AND THE COMMON VALUES
Define the immediate campaign AND the long-term, positive goals.

2) MAXIMIZE INCLUSION—FROM THE START
Do the groundwork to get broad and genuinely representative participation before forming the coalition. Don't just round up the usual suspects. Race, ethnic, gender, geographic, and issue balance should be a primary concern, not added on afterwards. Acknowledge who isn't at the table and who needs to be.

3) RESPECT ALL PLAYERS, USE ROUND TABLES
Avoid "in-groups" of the familiar players vs. the new participants. Avoid the big organization vs. little organization dynamic.

4) SHARE LEADERSHIP ROLES
And information..

5) CREATE NEW GROUND, WRITE NEW HISTORY
Set aside old fights...Agree to disagree in other arenas.

6) BUILD RELATIONSHIPS, NOT JUST DEALS

7) EXPAND VERTICALLY AS WELL AS LATERALLY
Reproduce the coalition at both the civic and the grassroots levels.

8) USE COOPERATIVE LEARNING Facilitate cross-constituency education within the coalition, at all levels.

9) ASSUME THAT YOU WILL NEED THIS COALITION IN THE FUTURE. You will.

10) COALITION BUILDING IS A TWO-WAY STREET.

Setting Ground Rules

Overview
A successful collaboration requires that all partners contribute to and have a stake in the process. Ground rules can help partners use time wisely, share leadership, and head in the same direction. Ground rules cover planning and conducting meetings, resolving conflicts, making decisions, and maintaining ongoing communication among partners. Ground rules are set by partners as they address the following questions:

- Where, when, and how often will we meet?
- What will be our time frame for working together?
- How will we share responsibility for organizing and conducting the meetings?
- Who will prepare and contribute to the meeting agenda?
- What rules will guide discussion during meetings? Guard confidentiality?
- How will we handle information needs, data gathering, and record keeping?
- How will we make decisions? By majority rule or consensus?
- What steps will we take to make sure decisions are not made behind the scenes?
- What will happen when there is a conflict?
- Under what circumstances will we seek a third-party facilitator?
- How will we evaluate the progress of our work?

There are “no” “right” or “wrong” answers to the above questions. The answers come from the partners of each collaborative effort.
Strategy 6

Involving Everyone

Overview
A skilled facilitator must involve everyone in the collaborative’s work of building relationships, sharing information and ideas, and taking action. Successful collaborations require everyone’s involvement. Below are some of the ways facilitators (and other partners) can get everyone involved.

Meeting Preparations
- Take care of meeting logistics (e.g., meeting date, time, place, refreshments);
- Send out advance notices to clarify the meeting’s purpose;
- Prepare a meeting agenda that shows what each agenda item requires (e.g., discussion, decision) and who is responsible;
- Identify, collect, and send out materials to help partners get ready for a meeting.

Meeting Process
- Follow ground rules as set and agreed upon by partners;
- Follow the agenda, including start and end times;
- Guide actions to get the work done;
- Review the meeting outcomes (i.e., what was accomplished, what happened, what was not resolved, and what will happen next).

Group Process
- Make sure all partners have a role;
- Confirm the value of each partner’s role and contributions;
- Closely monitor group and partner behaviors that surface during meetings and intervene at critical moments;
- Recognize membership organizations and others for helping the collaborative move forward;
- Contact any partners who do not attend a meeting and encourage their participation.
**Information-Sharing**

- Keep an updated partner roster;
- Set up systems for keeping partners and key stakeholders informed about the collaborative;
- Have necessary documents available to partners, such as laws, interagency agreements, demographic data, and assessment findings;
- Write up meeting summaries, showing who attended, items covered, decisions reached, actions taken, accomplishments, partner assignments, and the agenda items for the next meeting;
- Collect and provide data to help partners monitor and evaluate progress.

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Becoming a Part of the Solution

- Fully harness the power of education as the best preventive strategy to combat poverty and other social ills.

- Optimize educational results by playing a role in improving support for families.

- Harness the resources of families and communities to help improve achievement levels.

- Become better partners in building stronger and more supportive communities and neighborhoods.

- Bring together diverse interests and stakeholders.

- Develop more integrated and individualized approaches to serving needy families.

- Harness existing resources in the communities.

- Work towards results-based accountability.

KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL PARENT AND FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

The following list details keys to success when involving parents and families, taken from schools with outstanding involvement programs across the country.

1. Ask parents how they want to help — Assess parent needs and interests about school involvement. Send out surveys, conduct focus groups, and ask directly.

2. Set goals — Based on the feedback from above, set realistic goals for how you will involve parents. Include parents and the community in this goal-setting.

3. Hire a parent liaison — North Carolina’s Thomasboro Elementary School watched their parental involvement soar after hiring a parent liaison to directly contact parents and coordinate activities. This person should be bilingual, as needed, and sensitive to the needs of parents and the community.

4. Design a public relations program — Develop a program to inform parents, businesses, and the community about parent involvement policies and opportunities. Use newsletters, slide shows, videotapes, local newspapers, and other means to get your message out. Your district’s public relations person is a good source. You can also ask local editors and writers to help pro-bono.

5. Don’t duck the important issues — A parent involvement program can serve as a forum for discussion and conduit for change on issues and problems in your community. Use your community’s historic, ethnic, language or cultural resources to generate interest. Find what parents are passionate or concerned about, and create forums where they can share these feelings.

6. Communicate in new ways — Use creativity when communicating with parents. For example, at Azalea Elementary School in St. Petersburg, Florida, parents communicate daily with teachers through student portfolios. Parents also write action plans for how they will help their children succeed in school.

7. Ask parents to volunteer — Parents can assist teachers with instructional or lunchroom tasks, help with administrative office functions, act as volunteer tutors, classroom aides, or even invited speakers. Start with one parent who is willing to help, and gradually reach out to more.

8. Overcome barriers between school staff and parents — When teachers, support professionals and parents join to create lasting partnerships, student achievement is enhanced.

9. Offer information to help with parenting — Integrate information into school communications on such services as health care and nutrition programs, provided by the school or local community agencies.

10. Make programs accessible to single parents who may work multiple jobs. Some don’t have time to give to school activities or even parent conferences. Keep this in mind as you schedule programs and meetings. At Skyview Elementary School, in Pinellas Park, Florida, teachers meet with parents at specified locations in the community. Instead of parents having to go to school, the teachers come to parents — which has significantly increased attendance at parent conferences.

11. Evaluate your programs — A key to success is continually evaluating the effectiveness of the programs and activities you implement. Are your efforts effective? With which parent groups? How many parents are involved?
Sustaining the Effort

- Develop training workshops to educate and inform the community about critical local and state school issues related to student achievement and closing achievement gaps. E.g. state standards, standardized test, school attendance rate, student completion rates, as well higher education recruitment and retention.

- Link achievement gap issues to broader community issues, such as offering libraries, community centers, churches and quiet places at home where students can study.

- Develop a community mapping strategy to identify allies and potential allies to broaden the support base for closing achievement gaps.

- Work with existing coalitions to create a multi-faceted coalition of public education supporters that would include both parents and nonparents of school aged children.

- Reach out to local politicians, state legislators and members of Congress using mailing, briefings and visit to seek support for legislation that would contribute to closing gaps.*

- Create a parent and community guide to academic issues pertinent to closing achievement gaps.

- Forge partnerships that support your advocacy efforts to address progressive tax policies and obtain grant funding.
Collaboration's *Little Instruction* Book 101

By Leslie Anderson

- Formulate the vision early in the process and keep saying it over and over.
- Think holistically and comprehensively there's a danger of "being all things to all people" but somebody has to be the healer.
- Think long term from the inception.
- Create ownership. Early on develop consensus on common beliefs and ground rules.
- Set strategic, results-oriented plans.
- Think in two dimensions — the big picture; small victories.
- Celebrate the victories.
- Build on past successes — affirm the good.
- Be redemptive. Don't spend time or energy placing blame. It's counterproductive.
- Invest in time for a good deliberate process and team building.
- Be inclusive. Bring new players to the table.
- Use the facts to your advantage. Give graphic descriptions of the problem to stimulate involvement.
- Involve consumers. Approach your work from the customer's perspective,
- Have some fun! Enjoy one another.
- From the outset, it's important to remember that it's a dance — three steps forward and two steps backward.
- There aren't any quick fixes or one-project home runs.
- Declare war or at least battle. We found that until the community made an all out commitment to downtown rehabilitation or young children, we did not have the focus, direction, and synergism to make it work.
- Tackle problems that have the highest payoff, ones that have the biggest bang for the buck with the least effort and that create the most lasting change,
- Respect history — of people, of buildings, of organizations.
- Be authentic — in strategies, in relationships.
- Tell the truth, respectfully. It's good for your subconscious, puts things in the right relationship, and gets issues on the table, despite parochial boundaries.
- Create climate. Create an atmosphere where people want to be — where they want to invest their discretionary time, where they can fail securely, and where they can grow.
- Create organizational models that fit and reflect your mission, then don't be afraid to change them as organizational needs change.
- Break the mold. Rather than adding good new programs on to an unhealthy core, start over. Break the mold.
- Take advantage of the Total Quality Management movement and learn from it.
- Manage by fact not anecdote.
- Find one or two leaders who will champion the effort, make it their top priority, and give it a missionary zeal.
- Be prepared for criticism and detractors as change takes place.
- Remember that it is a process and an organic not a linear one. Change is more likely to be incremental chaos than sequential order.
- Learn to live with this tension and go with the flow.
- Invest in staff and try to retain them.
- Continuity of staff is needed to bridge phases of change which take a long time.
- Deal with governance issues early and get a buy-in on how to resolve conflicts.
- Collect benchmark data early so you have a way to measure success.
- Develop common knowledge and understanding of the issues and the players.
- Be patient. There is no single, right way to grow a collaborative.
- Think big and think bold, then do it. When we reach for our dreams often we have to reach past our cumulative and collective disappointments.
- Stop from time to time and evaluate process.
- Ask: How are we doing?
- Live in community.
Strategy 11

We can learn many lessons from nature.

For example, geese have much to teach us about working together.

As each goose flaps its wings, it creates an uplift of air for the bird that follows. By flying in a "V" formation, the whole flock adds 71 percent more flying range than when each bird flies alone.

**Lesson 1:** People who share a common direction or vision can achieve their goals more quickly and easily when they share information, activities, and resources.

Whenever a goose falls out of formation, it suddenly feels resistance; the goose will quickly get back into formation and take advantage of the "lifting power" of the other birds.

**Lesson 2:** By working together, we can achieve common goals that otherwise could not be achieved alone.

When the lead goose gets tired, another goose takes the lead.

**Lesson 3:** It pays to assume new roles and share leadership. The geese information will honk to encourage those up front to keep their speed.

**Lesson 4:** Taking the time to reflect on and celebrate achievements brings renewed energy and commitment.

When a goose gets sick or wounded, two geese drop out of formation and follow their fellow member to provide protection. They stay with the goose until the bird is either able to fly again or dies. Then, they catch up with their flock or launch out on their own.

**Lesson 5:** All collaboratives face challenges. Depending on how the challenges are handled, they can either cause the collaborative to lose momentum and collapse, or they can be the springboard for creativity and revitalization.

Adapted with permission from Jon Seidel, Lessons from the Geese (Oakland, Calif.: EDP Consulting, Inc., 1997)
Module 3 | The Power of Family-School-Community Partnerships
Beyond Random Acts
Family, School, and Community Engagement as an Integral Part of Education Reform

Heather B. Weiss, M. Elena Lopez, and Heidi Rosenberg
Harvard Family Research Project

DECEMBER 2010
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Family, school, and community engagement in education should be an essential strategy in building a pathway to college- and career-readiness in today’s competitive global society. Research repeatedly correlates family engagement with student achievement, yet this strategy is rarely activated as an integral part of school reform efforts. Now is the time to transform family engagement strategies so that they are intentionally aligned with student learning and achievement.

Education reform is headed towards preparing students for the twenty-first century. Family engagement needs to be aligned with this new direction, which involves disrupting the current state of practice. Educators tend to treat parents and families as bystanders rather than as partners, and often overlook their strengths and their capacity to transform public education. Family and community engagement is siloed into disparate programs that are disconnected from instructional practice and school turnaround strategies. This state of “random acts of family involvement” has to give way to systemic and sustained approaches.\(^1\)

The transformation from random acts of family involvement to an effective strategy to promote student success begins with a broad reframing of what it should look like. Family engagement is a shared responsibility of families, schools, and communities for student learning and achievement; it is continuous from birth to young adulthood; and it occurs across multiple settings where children learn.

Although family involvement in education is not an original idea, a systemic and integrated approach to family engagement represents an innovative strategy in education reform. This thinking embodies a dramatic shift in framing family engagement and reorganizing its practice. It taps into an overlooked strategy that can leverage improvements in student learning.

**Purpose of the forum**

The policy forum brought to the center what is now on the periphery of education reform: family, school, and community engagement (FSCE) as a strategy to support student success. The forum sought to serve as a catalyst for reframing what FSCE should look like in the twenty-first century, and for repositioning this engagement as a major contributor to twenty-first century learning and school turnaround efforts. There is a substantial amount of innovation intentionally linking family engagement to learning, as well as a strong base of practice experience on which to build more systemic, integrated, and sustained approaches.

This paper set the stage for the forum by presenting a research-based framing of family engagement. It examines the policy levers for change in promoting systemic FSCE, and focuses on data systems as a powerful tool to engage families for twenty-first century student learning. Because education reform will succeed only when all students are prepared for the demands of the twenty-first century, the forum also aimed to examine the role of families in transforming low-performing schools.

This paper aims to start the conversation and to help shape what role federal policy will play in supporting FSCE efforts in schools across the country.

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INTRODUCTION

The United States needs to prepare our students for the demands of a twenty-first century global society. Unfortunately, as many as one-third of American students fail to graduate from high school on time. Only 60 percent of high school graduates go on to college full-time the following fall, with only one-fifth of these students earning an associate’s degree within three years and a bachelor’s degree within six years. Moreover, many students that do graduate lack the world-class knowledge and skills needed to advance their careers and sustain America’s economic leadership.

Education leaders recognize the many challenges of our current system of education, and major policy shifts are occurring in tandem with entrepreneurial ventures. Policy initiatives such as Race to the Top, Investing in Innovation Fund (i3), Promise Neighborhoods, and efforts to turn around low-performing schools have all been designed to raise student achievement and stimulate innovation. Public–private partnerships are taking the lead on “next generation learning,” with its emphasis on creative solutions to respond to the expectations of a global, knowledge-based economy. Together with these developments, student data systems are being used to drive decision-making within a new paradigm of learning and continuous improvement.

Preparing students for the twenty-first century demands the full spectrum of society’s resources to support all students, and especially the disadvantaged and disengaged. A disproportionate percentage of students who drop out of high school and college are low-income, of ethnic minority status, or have disabilities. Ensuring that all students are able to achieve at high levels will require a comprehensive set of learning supports, beginning in early childhood and continuing all the way to high school and beyond. Over 40 years of research confirms that family engagement improves school readiness, student academic achievement, and graduation rates. FSCE in education should become an essential strategy in building this pathway to college- and career-readiness in today’s competitive global society.

In fact, rigorous empirical research on school reform provides a compelling case for elevating FSCE as an educational strategy. A Chicago study of low-performing elementary schools concluded that five essential supports work together as a system to transform low-performing schools. Leadership is the first support and the driver of four other essential supports: (1) instructional guidance; (2) teacher professional capacity; (3) school climate; and (4) parent, school, and community ties. No single essential support can make a sustained impact by itself; thus, individual programs—whether to improve curriculum, train teachers, or involve parents—often fail to live up to their potential. Just like baking a cake, all key ingredients must be present to successfully create the whole.

The current state of family involvement, though, is not aligned with this systemic framework or with emerging trends in education reform. Educators tend to treat parents and families as bystanders rather than as partners, and often overlook their strengths and their capacity to transform public education. Family engagement efforts are siloed into disparate programs that are disconnected from instructional practice and school turnaround strategies. Kate Gill Kressley,

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senior researcher at RMC Associates, coined the phrase, “random acts of family involvement” to describe these distinct, uncoordinated engagement efforts. As a result, family engagement has not been used strategically to impact student outcomes. As Christopher Cross, former Assistant Secretary for the Office of Educational Research and Improvement at the U.S. Department of Education, pointed out, “While federal policy has attempted to deal with parent involvement...those efforts have been halfhearted, unfocused, and ineffective.” The research base on family engagement repeatedly correlates family engagement with student achievement, and therefore it is time to transform family engagement strategies so that they are intentionally aligned with student learning and achievement.

The transformation from random acts of family involvement to an effective strategy to promote student success begins with a broad reframing of what it should look like. Family engagement is a shared responsibility of families, schools, and communities for student learning and achievement; it is continuous from birth to young adulthood; and it occurs across multiple settings where children learn.

As a reform strategy, family engagement should be systemic, integrated, and sustained. Systemic family engagement is purposefully designed as a core component of educational goals such as school readiness, student achievement, and school turnaround. Integrated family engagement is embedded into structures and processes designed to meet these goals, including training and professional development, teaching and learning, community collaboration, and the use of data for continuous improvement and accountability. Sustainable family engagement operates with adequate resources, including public–private partnerships, to ensure meaningful and effective strategies that have the power to impact student learning and achievement.

Community engagement refers to the support, services, and advocacy activities that community-based organizations—including businesses and faith-based institutions—provide in order to improve student learning and promote family engagement. While an important function of these organizations consists of outreach to community members, they also assume broader roles. Community schools, for example, consist of partnerships between schools and local organizations to provide comprehensive supports such as tutoring and service learning for students, and leadership training, parenting education, and health and social services for families. Community-based organizations build social relationships and bring together resources to achieve collective goals. They are often the implementing arm of national education initiatives such as those for high quality early childhood education, extended learning, and dropout prevention. Although community engagement is a vital component in education reform, this paper will focus primarily on family engagement.

POLICY FORUM TO ADVANCE A NATIONAL STRATEGY ON FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

The policy forum brought to the center what is on the periphery of education reform: FSCE as a strategy that leverages improvements in student learning. The forum sought to serve as a catalyst for reframing what family and community engagement should look like in the twenty-first century, and for repositioning this engagement as a major contributor to twenty-first century learning and school turnaround efforts. There is a substantial amount of innovation intentionally linking family engagement to learning, as well as a strong base of practical experience on which to build more systemic, integrated, and sustained approaches. The forum posed these four questions:

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1. What does family and community engagement look like in a new era of education reform?

2. How can federal, state, and local stakeholders leverage existing and emerging legislation and programs to create systemic family engagement?

3. How can educators and other stakeholders use student performance data to connect families and schools in meaningful ways?

4. What are the opportunities for engaging families in transforming low-performing schools?

In serving as a discussion piece for the forum, this paper begins with a research-based framing of family engagement. It examines the policy levers that can drive change in promoting systemic family engagement, and focuses on data systems as a powerful tool to engage families for twenty-first century student learning. Because education reform will succeed only when all students are prepared for the demands of the twenty-first century, the paper will also examine the role of families in transforming low-performing schools.

A FRAMEWORK OF FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN EDUCATION

Today’s policy environment, with its focus on innovation and outcomes in challenging the status quo, paves the way to reframe family engagement in education for the twenty-first century. This policy environment puts students at the center of “next generation learning.” Next generation learning is personalized and tailored to individual learning needs. It prepares students for the acquisition of world-class knowledge and skills, and engages them in directing their educational experience. One example of this next generation learning is the New York City public schools’ Innovation Zone initiative (iZone), which will be working with 200 schools over the next three years to design and prototype models that move schools from a classroom- to a student-centered approach. Such personalized learning individualizes the education experience by focusing on the pace at which a student learns, as well as how they learn best, while ensuring they gain the competencies needed to succeed in college and the workplace. Teachers, parents and students use tools to help students develop a learning plan that will demonstrate mastery. This approach fosters what psychologist Carol Dweck calls a “growth mindset” that is continuously learning and growing from every experience. Individuals with a growth mindset see their life as a work in progress that they can shape at every level. Barriers and challenges become opportunities, and effort and resilience make for success. By connecting family engagement purposefully to learning and achievement, a systemic approach paves the way for this next generation learning.

Schools and communities can leverage family assets to support personalized learning and cultivate a growth mindset, as illustrated in Poway School District’s approach (see Textbox 1). Families need the support of schools and communities to fully understand what it means to be educated in the twenty-first century. Teachers and administrators also need families to support, monitor, and advocate for their children’s progress. Community organizations can function as intermediaries, building on families’ knowledge and connecting them with new resources to help students develop a growth mindset. Systemic, integrated, and sustained FSCE helps to create a solid foundation for communication between families and school staff, enabling their collaboration in creating a set of support systems—both within and outside of the school—to help students meet their educational goals. Through participation and dialogue with schools and community organizations, families co-create meaningful roles in student learning.

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8 Council of Chief State School Officers, n.d.
Textbox 1

The Poway School District in California adopts an individualized student learning approach. Regular assessments measure student growth and encourage students to set goals for their own learning. After elementary students receive their assessment scores, teachers work with each student individually to develop goals that will help him or her reach the next level of learning. For example, a child who struggles with reading comprehension might set the goal of always summarizing the meaning of each paragraph after she reads it. Parents can attend workshops that explain the assessments; resource materials are also sent to parents and are available through the district website. Not only do parents review their child’s data but they also receive the student’s goals, and they create “family goals” to support learning at home (e.g., setting a limit for time on video games, creating a time and space for homework and reading). Goal-setting helps children and parents see the connections between what children can do and what they need to do to reach the next level of success. Beginning this process in kindergarten and first grade sets the trajectory for developing a habit of continuous collaboration and improvement in order to succeed in school and in life.¹ With the adoption of a new assessment system and related policies to increase student learning, the district’s Academic Performance Index has increased, schools are no longer in “program improvement” status, the community has passed a school bond, and students are more motivated.²

Thus, the first element of reframing family engagement lies in understanding that engagement is a shared responsibility. Shared responsibility represents a shift from an attitude of blame—teachers and school staff blaming parents and vice versa—when things go wrong. Instead, both families and schools should acknowledge their complementary roles in a child’s educational success. Furthermore, shared responsibility is not only about the ideas and practices of families and their relationships with schools and other educational institutions, but also about these institutions’ expectations of, outreach to, and partnerships with families on behalf of a child’s learning and development.³⁰

Family engagement based on a foundation of shared responsibility strengthens four key roles that families play in their children’s educational success:

- **The role of supporting learning**: When early childhood programs and elementary, middle, and high schools impart knowledge about how to support a child’s development and learning, families are better equipped to carry out these responsibilities. Positive parenting—including engagement in children’s play, shared book reading, showing high expectations, and having conversations about a student’s occupational and educational aspirations—is linked to improved academic and behavioral outcomes.

- **The school partner role**: Family involvement with the school—including attendance at parent–teacher conferences, communication with teachers, and volunteer involvement in school activities—provides families with information to make educational decisions and demonstrate support for children, both of which are associated with positive academic outcomes.

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³⁰ Weiss, Bouffard, Bridglall, & Gordon, 2009.
• **The role of advocate for school improvement:** Advocacy, in the form of collective organizing and mobilization, has several positive outcomes, including increased family engagement, improved school climate and policies, and improved student achievement and behavior.11

• **The decision-maker and leadership role:** Although research is not conclusive on whether students benefit from parent participation in school leadership and governance (school councils and school boards), this role builds parent social networks that can influence school climate and give voice to historically underrepresented families. A positive school climate is a key factor in school improvement.

As the Poway example demonstrates, personalized, student-centered learning begins at an early age and sets the foundation for a lifelong quest to develop one’s knowledge, skills, and talents. The second element of reframing family engagement emerges from this developmental perspective: Family engagement is continuous from birth through young adulthood. Although it is often associated with practices in early childhood and the elementary grades, family engagement continues to be important in middle school, high school, and college. When schools and communities support sustained family engagement—including transitions from preschool to school and from one grade level to the next—students benefit. Students with engaged parents throughout childhood and adolescence are more likely to graduate from high school.12 Even if youth do well academically and behaviorally, those with poor relationships with parents are more likely than those with strong relationships to drop out of high school. This suggests that positive and supportive parenting is important for the educational attainment of all youth.

A dominant assumption behind much of educational policy and practice is that school is the only place where and when children learn. This assumption is wrong: Learning happens in the home as well as in early childhood centers, afterschool and summer programs, community schools, museums, libraries, parks and recreation offerings, faith-based institutions, and other community settings, and increasingly, through various new technologies. As such, the third element of reframing recognizes that family engagement reaches across and reinforces student learning in multiple settings. Families, for example, play a pivotal role in helping children and youth access afterschool and community resources for enrichment or assistance in addressing learning challenges. Among low-income families, parents often seek to overcome negative neighborhood conditions that threaten their children’s lives through “community bridging strategies” that link students to mainstream institutions (e.g. libraries, museums) and expand their web of peers and supportive adults.13

In the coming years, families are likely to experience greatly amplified opportunities for engagement outside the classroom. Leading educational experts predict that “the most vibrant innovations in education are likely to take place outside traditional institutions.”14 Such innovations will come from new media, games and play, afterschool programs, and community-based learning programs. These sources of learning for students also become sources of family guidance and participation.

The reframing of family engagement—as a shared responsibility, continuous from birth to young adulthood, taking place wherever and whenever children learn—suggests that new investments in the FSCE field should focus on a systemic and sustainable approach. A handful of districts are already beginning to adopt this approach by building family engagement into the district’s instructional goals and creating the administrative structures to provide standards of practice;

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aligned professional development; outreach and community partnership; and assessment for learning, improvement, and accountability\textsuperscript{15} (see Textbox 2).

\begin{textbox}
Boston Public Schools have adopted multiple approaches to embed family engagement in the educational system. The district promotes family engagement as a strategy to improve student outcomes through increased attendance, decreased suspension rates, and other indicators linked to student achievement. It requires all content-area staff members to address how they involve families in their instructional practices. Curriculum development includes tools to help parents understand the content areas their children need to master on a grade-by-grade basis and to help parents use practice tips at home. The district has modified the National PTA standards to serve as a blueprint for professional development and assessment of school progress in family engagement. A Parent University will centralize the district’s educational offerings to parents of students in pre-K through grade 12. Over 500 parents attended Parent University sessions in the 2009–2010 school year.\textsuperscript{1}

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\textsuperscript{1} Westmoreland, Rosenberg, Lopez, & Weiss, 2009.
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\section*{POLICY OPPORTUNITIES}

\subsection*{The policy landscape}

Since the 1960s, the commitment to family engagement in learning has been manifested in several pieces of legislation and several federal programs. Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) requires districts to spend 1\% of their Title I funds on family involvement activities and includes mandates and opportunities for family involvement at the local level. Under ESEA, underperforming schools are required to include family involvement provisions in their school improvement plans. Several early childhood programs, including Head Start, Early Head Start, and the Even Start family literacy program, include mandates for family involvement, as does the 21st Century Community Learning Centers afterschool program. Family involvement is also part of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and federal special education initiatives.\textsuperscript{16}

With family involvement funding streams and programs spread across federal departments, it has been difficult to develop systemic, integrated, and sustainable efforts. Scattered activities and events fail to make the connection between family engagement and student outcomes, and give the impression that family engagement is an “add-on” rather than integrated into academic goals. In addition, family involvement often consists of short-term activities rather than a sustained pathway running from early childhood programs through high school. While it is critical that family engagement remain a cornerstone of federal law, ESEA and related programs and legislation should focus on providing incentives, guidance, and capacity to scale up research-based and innovative practices at the local level.

\subsection*{Next steps for federal, state, and local policy}

Systemic family engagement is possible: it is being adopted in Boston, Oakland, Federal Way, Wichita, and other school districts around the country.\textsuperscript{17} To bring these emerging efforts to scale,
policy levers can build awareness and interest and engage stakeholders to take steps toward systemic family engagement. These levers include leadership, capacity building, training and professional development, innovation, and learning and accountability. Empirical research on policy implementation, however, suggests that federal mandates alone will not ensure policy success where it matters most: in schools, districts, and communities. It is the people on the ground who ultimately implement policy. Systemic family engagement will depend on the extent to which those charged with carrying out this work see merit in proposed or enacted policies and programs—and if they are willing to change their beliefs, skills, and behaviors. These changes, which are necessary in order to catapult FSCE to a new era of education reform, will require substantial support at each level of the policy process, from federal to state and local levels.

**Leadership.** Using its leadership role, the federal government can put the spotlight on the importance of family engagement as a core element of a new generation of learning, and adopt a clear definition and common framework for family engagement. The U.S. Department of Education can develop a long-term strategy for FSCE, beginning with tighter coordination and alignment of programs within the Department and across other federal agencies. The systemic change that is being seeded in this document will develop deep roots through capacity building, incentives, and funding for innovation, and mechanisms for learning and accountability. This can be facilitated at the federal level by the U.S. Department of Education’s leadership in providing incentives for state and local education agencies to meaningfully engage families, and in capacity building to scale up and replicate effective research-based practices. Similarly, at the state and district levels, leadership and capacity must be in place to develop and implement proven family engagement practices that raise student achievement.

**Capacity building.** Capacity building is crucial because individuals often lack the knowledge and skills to implement effective family engagement, and thus intended policy outcomes are not met. There is a need for well-designed and high quality training and technical assistance in the development, implementation, and evaluation of FSCE initiatives. State and local education agencies are more likely to benefit from such assistance when it is sustained over time until results are achieved.

Intermediary organizations—such as associations of education professionals and volunteer non-profit organizations—play an important role in translating policy into practical tools and tailoring technical assistance to meet the different needs of districts and schools. These intermediaries help districts and schools plan outcome-oriented family engagement strategies. Through documentation and evaluation, they compile best practices that can be shared broadly for adaptation and replication. Intermediary organizations also convene a wide range of practitioners, researchers, and policymakers, and help build networks. Information sharing among these entities builds their respective capacities to strengthen family engagement practice and better serve families.

**Training and professional development.** Much more can be done to strengthen the foundation of those entering the teaching profession. Teachers know that family involvement matters and believe that it is one of the top strategies to reform schools. However, they do not receive adequate training and professional development to support efforts to engage families. Higher education policies can take into account the immediate and long-term needs of building an educational workforce where working with families is a core professional competency of teachers and school administrators. Teacher preparation programs that offer training in family partnerships usually deliver it related to early childhood education and special education. However, FSCE is important across all educational

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levels. It benefits parents and teachers as well as schools. Where teachers are able to communicate with parents and develop trusting relationships, they are more likely to remain teaching in their schools.20

### Textbox 3

Project EAGLE Community Programs of the University of Kansas Medical Center provide families with children aged 0–4 with answers to their two most important questions: *Is my child developing normally?*, and *What can I do to help him become more school ready?* Routine child screening and parent engagement to promote healthy child development is a key tenet of all early childhood programs run by Project EAGLE. These programs include Early Head Start (serving pregnant women and children aged 0–4) and Healthy Families (a program for Spanish-speaking pregnant women and families with children). All families who come into contact with Project EAGLE receive rapid feedback on child assessments and specific guidance about how they can support their child’s development. For example, when a child is identified as having a language delay, Project staff impart to families tips about reading to their child. Project EAGLE uses a Response to Intervention (RTI) approach to early identification and support of children with learning and behavior needs. Research shows that in other programs, RTI has been effective for identifying children at risk of developing learning disabilities and for providing specialized interventions, either to ameliorate or to prevent the occurrence of learning disabilities.1

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### Innovation

Federal leadership is demonstrated in promoting state and local innovation. Social innovation refers to “a novel solution to a social problem that is more effective, efficient, sustainable, or just than existing solutions.”21 Although family involvement in education is not an original idea, a systemic and integrated approach to family engagement represents an innovative strategy in education reform. This thinking embodies a dramatic shift in framing family engagement and reorganizing its practice. It taps into an overlooked strategy that can leverage improvements in student learning, as the Chicago school reform study has fully demonstrated.

Unlike other fields in which innovation might be a technology or product, innovations in education tend to take the form of creative uses and sharing of resources and opportunities to create new practices (see Textbox 3). Productive innovations can be co-developed by researchers, practitioners, and social entrepreneurs who can bring them to scale.22 In this model of research and development, or R&D, innovators develop prototypes, and then test and refine them as part of a continuous improvement process. In addition, there is a federal role in helping to create communities of practice, sharing the lessons from ongoing innovations to support state and local efforts to create systemic approaches to FSCE. Communities of practice—groups of people that come together to share expertise on a common endeavor—can generate new models of FSCE, spread promising practices, and develop stakeholders’ professional skills for high quality family engagement.23 Federal departments can encourage the formation of communities of practice, especially across agency programs that seek to strengthen family engagement, and help organize and support them as part of capacity-building activities. Lastly, there is a federal role in facilitating the use of information about effective initiatives through mechanisms

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such as the What Works Clearinghouse, technical assistance providers, webinars, grantee meetings, and so forth.

**Learning and accountability.** Since ESEA was enacted in 1965, requirements have been in place for state and local education agencies to implement and report on federally mandated family involvement activities. Federal monitoring of these requirements over the years has represented an important first step in ensuring that family involvement provisions are enacted; however, we now have an opportunity to move beyond compliance monitoring to a more comprehensive accountability system to assess the implementation and impact of these provisions. Creating a three-tier accountability system whereby the federal government, along with states, districts and schools, all apply meaningful measures of implementation and impact can ensure that family engagement provisions are not only enacted, but are actually meeting their goals.

The first tier could include a common set of standards and leading indicators for family engagement identified by the federal government that would provide guidance on research-based family engagement strategies. Second, state and local educational agencies would work with families, schools, and communities to develop or expand indicators against which they can benchmark their progress and identify areas where additional support and training are needed. An additional tier of accountability would reside at the school and community level where staff performance assessments would include family engagement indicators. With input from families, these indicators will measure how families’ capacities for supporting their children’s learning are being increased and how their involvement in school improvement dialogue is actively supported.

As evidenced below in Textbox 4, teachers and parents in the Creighton School District use student data to become mutually accountable for children’s learning progress in order to leverage the capacity of both families and educators to raise student achievement.

**DATA DRIVEN EDUCATION REFORM**

Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has made data a vital component of education reform with the commitment to help states refine and expand what they have in place. To be useful, data systems need to be “learner-centered” rather than “institution-centered,” according to Education Sector. Data systems should move away from compliance with federal reporting and expand to provide actionable information that enables teachers, students, and families to set goals, track progress, and take specific actions to promote learning and achievement. Furthermore, a data system that begins in early childhood creates a pathway focusing on the trajectory toward college and career readiness.

A data pathway provides families with facts and figures about children’s development and learning from early childhood through young adulthood so that they are on the right track to graduation and college and career preparation. The data can be used for short-term, (e.g. helping a child increase vocabulary) and long-term (e.g. monitoring a child’s progress across grade levels to be on track for high school graduation within four years) goals. This pathway consists of concise and simple data that families can easily access and understand as they relate to school expectations, academic standards, and continuous improvement. Additionally, the information has to be

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actionable: families turn to data to guide their child’s learning goals and to avail themselves of school and community resources that can enrich student knowledge or address learning challenges (see Textbox 4).

**Textbox 4**

Arizona’s Creighton Elementary School District has nine K–8 schools serving 6,800 students; 93% are on free and reduced-price lunch, and 45% are English-language learners. The district organizes Academic Parent–Teacher Teams as an alternative to the traditional parent–teacher conference.

In three group meetings throughout the year, teachers share with parents aggregate and individual student performance data. Each parent receives a folder with his or her child’s data and learns how to set parent–student academic goals, interpret individual benchmark assessment data and quarterly assessments, and understand the child’s standing in relation to the entire class. Teachers model reading and math skills and parents are able to practice before applying them at home. Parents also participate in one individual parent–teacher meeting to review performance data.

Although teachers were at first hesitant to coach parents, they now welcome their new teaching partners. The pilot in 12 classrooms has grown nearly seven-fold after one year. Parent attendance averages 92%, higher than in regular conferences. Maria Paredes, the Director of Community Education, claims that the parent–teacher teams focus on purposeful communication that demands parents’ engagement and measurable accountability. Parents love this challenge.1


Creating a data pathway demonstrates in concrete and practicable ways the key elements of a reinvented framework of family engagement:

- **Family engagement is a shared responsibility**: Through data sharing, school districts and schools are responsible for communicating student performance with families. Beyond providing access to data, schools also provide training and assistance to ensure that families grasp the meaning of the data so that they can partner with teachers to take action and support a student’s learning goals.

- **Family engagement is continuous across a child’s life**: As student data become available across grade levels, families are equipped with the information to support academic progress throughout a child’s school years. The data enable them to focus on the trajectory of high school graduation and college and career readiness.

- **Family engagement cuts across and reinforces learning in the multiple settings where children learn**: Equipped with data about a student’s learning goals, families are able to direct students to learning resources such as afterschool and homework-help programs. School districts that are sharing data with families are also providing them with tips and tools, often through web-based formats, so that parents can help their children at home.

Data sharing with families can transform the way family engagement is organized, helping to keep the focus on those activities that align with student academic progress and achievement. Rather than being a checklist of activities, family engagement is systemic and linked to specific educational goals. Rather than being an “add-on” to what teachers already do, family engagement is integrated into teaching and learning by providing teachers with a partner who supports and monitors student learning. Rather than being activity driven and dependent on time-limited funding, family engagement is more likely to be sustained when it is outcome-oriented and tied to
the instructional goals for a student, with specific benchmarks across the school year. The power of data as a tool for student learning and meeting school goals is illustrated inTextbox 5 about the Washoe County School District.

TRANSFORMING LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOLS

The need for systemic family engagement is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in the efforts to turn around the nation's lowest-performing schools. Both Congress and the Administration have trained their collective eyes on the bottom 5 percent of America's public schools and have dedicated funding streams and programmatic initiatives to facilitate turnaround efforts. Yet these efforts have revealed some hard truths: we still do not fully understand what causes these schools to slide into such a deep decline or why their low performance remains so entrenched, despite decades of various reform efforts. Furthermore, evidence is scant for turnaround success at scale, suggesting that there is a great need for new and innovative solutions.

What is clear is that there is no one way to address the problems of low-performing schools, no “magic bullet” approach that will work across all grades and all settings. There is, however, emerging evidence of some of the critical elements that must be in place if turnaround efforts are to work, one of which is strong, strategic FSCE. Furthermore, it is important to recognize that many low-performing schools exist in extremely disadvantaged communities in which parents themselves have likely had negative schooling experiences. This makes it even more imperative that schools and districts strengthen their capacity to meaningfully reach out to and engage families, understand the barriers to involvement, and partner with families and other community members to enlist their help in revitalizing struggling schools. Sustainable change in low-performing schools is most likely to occur when it is facilitated and supported by the families and communities who have the biggest stake in the outcomes of such efforts.

Engaging Families and Communities in Turnaround Efforts

Most of the existing turnaround efforts focus on some combination of instructional/curriculum reforms, changes in staffing, intensive professional development, and reorganizations of the structure of the school. Efforts to engage families complement these elements of turnaround movements, helping to strengthen instructional improvements and staff development by increasing families' knowledge of academic goals and demonstrating how they can partner with school staff to reinforce learning in the home and in the larger community. One study of successful turnaround efforts among eight failing Chicago schools reported that parent engagement was not only a core element in helping to dramatically improve student achievement, but: “The results clearly reveal that the existing staff and parents...form a large and untapped reservoir of energy, ideas, and commitment that is ready to transform the quality of their schools, and do it quickly.” Yet engaging families and communities doesn’t always come naturally to school personnel, who often lack training and preparation for family partnerships, or who might be wary of reaching out to parents if most of their school–family interactions are problem-focused, thus creating tension between families and school staff. This points to the need for more innovative approaches to bringing families and schools together to identify common goals and learn how to collaborate to improve student learning.

28 The U.S. Department of Education’s Title I School Improvement Grants Fund governs more than $3.5 billion dedicated to efforts to turn around low-performing schools.
Informed advocacy can be a very effective mechanism for change by empowering parents to demand excellence in local public schools; however, families need to know how to identify high-quality schooling so they can understand which areas need improvement, the types of reforms that best meet the needs of the students, and how to assess the impact of enacted reform measures. Families’ abilities to understand and use data on school performance can help focus their advocacy efforts, and for those parents who might not be aware of the school’s conditions or the need for change, community organizations and advocates can act as intermediaries to both inform and empower parents to demand excellence from their children’s schools.

Effective FSCE in low-performing schools often must begin with intensive efforts to rebuild trust and promises of accountability (factors that other communities can sometimes take for granted) given longstanding dynamics of miscommunication and distrust between these schools and their surrounding communities. Community and faith-based groups serve as a bridge between schools and families, and are often able to act as intermediaries with families who feel alienated from the school or who are simply unaware of improvement efforts and how they can contribute to the process by becoming more actively involved in school reforms. These organizations help to facilitate improvements in school–community relationships and foster a sense of trust and collaboration among families and school staff, providing the necessary foundation on which to build meaningful home–school partnerships.

**Textbox 5**

Washoe County School District in Nevada is working to raise its 56% high school graduation rate through a multi-pronged strategy that includes active family engagement. Although it is essential for parents to know about high school graduation requirements, the district was not effectively communicating this information with parents, many of whom are immigrants and unfamiliar with the U.S. school system and education terminology.

Working with technical support from the Nevada Parent Information and Resource Center (PIRC), Parent Involvement Facilitators (PIFs) in the district’s high schools reach out to and train parents about using the online student data system. Typically, these are parents of students eligible for the free and reduced-price lunch program and who are Limited English Proficient. The PIRC training is targeted toward families who have never used a computer before or do not have internet access at home.

Workshop facilitators train parents about graduation requirements and how to interpret student data so that their children are on track in terms of attendance, grades, and credit accumulation. D’Lisa Crain, Administrator for Washoe’s Department of Family–School Partnerships, says that “Families leave these computer workshops empowered from knowing how to access their student’s data and where to go for help if there is a problem with attendance or grades.” They also know where to find computer kiosks in the 96 community locations that display special banners.1

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identifying the critical juncture points at which achievement tends to decline, and targeting intensive efforts at those periods. For instance, research has shown that the ninth grade is the most critical year for putting students on the path towards on-time graduation and post-high school success. Targeting efforts toward this time period—including the transition into ninth grade—helps to catch attendance, behavioral, and academic problems before they become entrenched and threaten students’ ability to successfully navigate the requirements and rigors of high school. This need to focus on the ninth grade year has further implications for the value of strengthening FSCE efforts, because family engagement tends to drop off as children become adolescents. At this juncture, parents often simultaneously feel less competent about their ability to help with their teen’s academic work and more distanced from—and intimidated by—large, complex high school environments. Efforts to provide parents with clear, actionable information about their students’ academic performance, such as the work done by New Visions for Public Schools in New York (see Textbox 6), can help break down these barriers and foster productive school–home communication.

Textbox 6
In 2007, New Visions for Public Schools (New Visions) was selected by the New York City Department of Education to become a Partnership Support Organization responsible for working with 76 public schools (mostly high schools). New Visions focused its parent involvement efforts on ninth-grade students and families and created both school- and student-level performance data tools and four core ninth-grade college readiness benchmarks that would help communicate critical information to students’ families. The ninth grade benchmarks for each student included attendance rates of 92% over the course of the year, course grades of 80% or higher, completion of eleven or more credits by the end of the year, and passing one or two New York State Regents exams with a score of at least 75%. These benchmarks were widely disseminated to school staff, parents, and students through a parent-friendly publication, Is Your 9th Grader on Track to College?, and at the New Visions “Aiming Higher” parent and train-the-trainer workshops.

The College Readiness Tracker is an additional one-page tool developed as a way for all stakeholders, and especially parents, to quickly and easily determine individual students’ progress in various academic areas as they move beyond ninth grade. To leave school ready for college, students are expected to earn 44 credits in core subject areas, 80% or better in all courses, 92% or better daily attendance average, and 75% or better on 8 Regents exams. The trackers are often mailed with report cards, or distributed at parent–teacher conferences. For the 2010–2011 school year, parents will also be able to access the tracker electronically.

Enhancing Turnaround Efforts through Data Sharing
Advances in student and school performance data systems and efforts to make such data available and accessible to families are of particular importance in efforts to turn around low-performing schools. Experience has shown that the families of students in high-poverty schools are more likely to need assistance in understanding how to interpret performance data, and in particular, how to act on such information in ways that benefit not only their own child’s achievement, but the performance of the school overall.

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The use of data to address the problems of low-performing schools should also move beyond basic report cards that simply chronicle the deficits of the school system. Focusing on negative school performance data can exacerbate the tension and anger that often exist in communities with low-performing schools and work against schools’ and families’ ability and inclination to come together to understand where difficulties lie and how to work together to identify concrete steps to take to improve students’—and thus the schools’—performance. Data sharing in the spirit of building strategic partnerships between families, schools, and communities holds enormous potential in addressing the persistent poor achievement evidenced in low-performing schools.

Engaging families in systemic, integrated, and sustainable ways in turnaround efforts draws on a number of reform areas that impact student achievement: strengthening parents’ ability to support their students’ learning at home, at the school, and in the community; providing opportunities for strategic and collaborative uses of data; and embedding family engagement into professional development and instructional goals so that low-performing schools don’t have to “go it alone,” but rather gain an invested and effective partners in improving student learning—families.

**CONCLUSION**

This paper was designed as a companion piece to the National Policy Forum on Family, School, and Community Engagement, held on November 9, 2010 in Washington, D.C. The paper laid the foundation for a conversation about the role of FSCE in education reform by offering a framework based upon four decades of research and emerging innovations in the family engagement field.

At the forum, over two dozen experts engaged in dynamic, interactive discussions about the role of FSCE in education reform, providing insights based on their own work and identifying new directions for family engagement in the coming years. Everyone present—from the panelists to the participants to special guest speakers from the U.S. Department of Education (USDE)—agreed that FSCE is a key component of successful education reform that needs to be implemented in a systemic, integrated, and sustainable way. The forum emphasized the fact that the essential elements of successful school reform—which include a focus on teaching and learning, a rigorous curriculum, teacher and principal effectiveness, a positive school climate, and family and community engagement—operate as parts of an interconnected system. This system of mutual dependencies requires sustained commitment to each element; for example, schools can’t work well if their relationships with families and communities don’t work well. This makes it critically important that we invest in efforts to better engage families and communities in order to maximize their value in school reform efforts.

Several cross-cutting themes emerged on how this work could be accomplished, which focused on policy levers for change and the use of data to create meaningful partnerships between schools, families and communities:

- At the federal level, attention to family engagement must move from a checklist orientation to a full engagement plan with outcome tracking to assess whether these efforts are impacting student outcomes. The USDE’s proposed increase in Title I set-aside dollars for family engagement needs to be accompanied by clear expectations of what should be done with these dollars as well as accountability measures to show the benefits of how the funds are used. Policymakers must identify meaningful indicators of FSCE that are correlated with student outcomes, and create accountability models that assess how well schools and communities are engaged with one another.

- Better coordination of family engagement efforts at the federal level will model the type of collaboration and integration that needs to happen on the ground. The impending reauthorizations of Head Start, IDEA, and ESEA all provide opportunities to build in
methods of integration so that regulations and laws don’t impede efforts to coordinate and blend programs and funds.

• Given the shifting nature of federal funding streams, it’s unlikely that schools and districts will have guaranteed adequate dollars to dedicate to family engagement, thus making it imperative that stakeholders focus on innovations that can help change the system from within. Schools and districts need to rethink the way schools are organized as a system—the role of the teacher, the management of time and space, the relationship with families and communities—so as to reap the value of FSCE. This could entail hard decisions about what to let go and what to focus on with respect to FSCE.

• Sharing student learning and performance data with families changes the conversation between families and schools. Data provide the content that engages families to understand where students are, where they need to go and the options for getting to their goals. When data use involves parents in this way, it becomes meaningful: it gives parents a voice in the educational process and empowers them to partner with educators to promote their child's academic growth.

• Families and communities can be a force for turning around low-performing schools. Family engagement entails thoughtful effort on the part of districts and schools, so that evidence-based frameworks and practices are adopted, external resources such as community and intermediary organizations are used, and student data become a tool for honest and transparent conversations between families and schools. Underlying these strategies must be a continuous effort at relationship building so that trust binds families, schools and communities to change the trajectory of underserved students.

In her closing remarks at the forum, Carmel Martin, the Assistant Secretary for Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development at USDE, discussed the proposed increase in set-aside dollars for family engagement, noted that the Department plans to embed family engagement throughout its grant proposals, and asserted that family engagement in student learning is an outcome in and of itself, in addition to serving as a “critical, non-negotiable component in terms of a comprehensive strategy to improve our schools.” Education reform initiatives will focus on a comprehensive early childhood-to-college family engagement agenda that can support innovative practices, scale up what works, and empower families to play a greater role in their children’s learning. The insights and recommendations generated from the policy forum will continue to inform and refine the development of these initiatives at the federal level.
“Of all the civil rights for which the world has struggled and fought for five thousand years, the right to learn is undoubtedly the most fundamental.”

W.E.B. DuBois,
The Power of Culture, Language, and Economics
Module 4

Introduction
Over the past several years, student achievement has increased for all groups in all subjects, yet the gap between rich and poor, White and minority remains a persistent problem. A major challenge confronts those of us who work in today’s schools. That challenge is the gaps in academic achievement that exist among students by race, ethnicity, and language differences. The challenge also extends to schools based on the economic status of their neighborhoods, with achievement differences often occurring between affluent and high poverty schools.

This module will provide an overview of how we embrace an agenda that focuses on all children and communities regardless of their culture, language, and economic differences.

Objective
To embrace and actualize an agenda that focuses on building positive relations with families and children regardless of their culture, language, and economic status.

CONTENT

Mini Discussion

Activities
1) “I am from…” Statements
2) Everyone Has a Culture—Everyone is Different
3) What’s in My Name? Que Hay en Mi Nombre?
4) Educator Check-In on Culture: “How Am I doing?”
5) Educational Support Professional Check-In on Culture: “How Am I doing?”
6) Features of Culture

Visuals (Located on PowerPoint)
1) Module 4: The Power of Culture, Language, and Economics
2) Quote: Acknowledge Our Realities
3) Annie E. Casey Foundation
4) Annie E. Casey Foundation (2)
   a. How to Use Annie E. Casey Data:
      i. Trainers in this section should go to www.aecf.org/MajorInitiatives/KIDSCOUNT.aspx to obtain the appropriate data from the annual KIDS COUNT DATA BOOK which
profiles the status of children on a national and state-by-state basis and ranks states on 10 measures of well-being (listed on the visual in this section) for their state.

ii. This data can be used to reinforce the work that must be done with disadvantaged and low income families and communities in your community.

5) 10 Key Indicators of Child Well-Being
6) Unequal Distribution of Child Poverty
7) Unequal Distribution of Child Poverty (2)
8) Research on the Role of Fathers
9) Grandparents as Parents
10) A New Vision of the English Language Learner
11) Teacher Data
12) Five Impossibles and Beyond
13) Cultural Competence
14) Reaching Out to Families from Diverse Cultures
15) Reaching Out to Families from Diverse Cultures (2)

Strategies
1) A Multicultural Organization
2) Making Diversity Happen: Where Do I Start?
3) Making Diversity Happen: What Can Schools Do?
4) Principles Supporting the Framework for Multicultural Programming in Head Start
5) 25 Characteristics of Healthy Communities

Background Readings
1) New Data from U.S. Department of Education/Civil Rights Data
2) Children’s Defense Fund Data
3) Unequal Distribution of Child Poverty/Carsey Institute
4) Fifty Years after *Brown V. Board of Education*
5) Promoting Educators’ Cultural Competence
6) Grandparents as Parents: A Primer for Schools
The Power of Culture, Language, and Economics
Module 4

“People would like to see our diversity problem disappear. And the way they think it’s going to disappear is by not talking about it. But the real way you make it disappear is by talking about it, learning about it, and understanding it, and then you’ll see a change, not just by ignoring it.”

a 12th grade student

Mini-Discussion

As our communities become increasingly diverse, it will become the rule rather than the exception. By learning about the families and communities in which they live, schools and educators will be better equipped to provide culturally appropriate educational opportunities for every student’s academic success. Today’s families have changed considerably from the traditional families with which many of us are familiar. These changes will continue with the increase in economic disparities, families of color, single-parent families, teenage families, grandparent-headed families, non-custodial families, immigrant families, homeless families, blended families. All of these factors intensify pressures on schools to continuously revise educational strategies and to engage in partnerships that will connect families, communities and businesses in a cohesive effort to ensure that our children achieve at higher levels.

Module 4 places emphasis on culture, language, and economic differences of the families in our communities as major aspects of their effect on schools and academic achievement. It is important for educators to know and understand diverse cultures to:

Affirm our need to prepare students for their responsibilities in an interdependent world;
Recognize the role schools play in developing the attitudes and values necessary for a democratic society;
Value cultural differences and affirm the pluralism that students, their communities, and teachers reflect;
Challenge all forms of discrimination in schools and society through the promotion of social justice.
This module offers data, principles, and strategies that provide information to improve educational outcomes for all students. The visuals will help you answer the following questions:

Who are we talking about?
What is cultural competence?
What are the skills necessary to be culturally competent?
What strategies should you use to include diversity in partnerships with families?
What are some additional background readings to further your own personal knowledge and growth?

“We the Alaska Native, American Indian, African American, Mexican American, and Puerto Rican peoples living in the United States are 48 million strong: 20 percent of the nation. In many ways, we are as different from one another as we are from the non-minority population in America, but we all share a common and threatened destiny in our children. “

Quality Education for Minorities. Education that Works
This module offers data, principles, and strategies that provide information to improve educational outcomes for all students. The visuals will help you answer the following questions:

- Who are we talking about?
- What is cultural competence?
- What are the skills necessary to be culturally competent?
- What strategies should you use to include diversity in partnerships with families?
- What are some additional background readings to further your own personal knowledge?
Activity 1

"I am from..." Statements
This activity builds on the exploration of cultural identifies and incorporates writing skills.

Less on Preparation
Grades: 6-12
Duration: 60 min.
Grouping: Whole class
Materials: Paper, pencils, copy of "I Am From..." matrix, "I am from..." statement on either overhead or chart paper
Objectives: Help students examine the variety of cultural factors that shape them; learn more about your students
Assessment: Completion of "I am..." statement by all students and the teacher/ESP

Lesson
Delivery
Briefing:
• Explain purpose of lesson to students
• Point out that each of us is influenced by a variety of factors in our lives
• Focus of activity is expression and creativity vs. punctuation and grammar.

Instructional Frame
1) Show students a sample of an "I am from" statement. (Your own, or see sample below).
2) Show students matrix of sample categories/factors.
3) Ask students if they have any more categories to add to matrix.
4) Give students time to write their own "I am from" statements.
5) Students share their statements at tables.
6) Students discuss ways their statements were alike and different.

Debriefing:
Process this activity by asking students the following:
• How are you like your classmates?
• How are you different from your classmates?
• What did you learn about your classmates?
• What did you learn about yourself?
• What did you learn that surprised you?

I AM FROM...
Southern ways
Music
Soul food
People of all shades
Slaves
Bright colors Loud voices
Concerts
"Go on Girl"
Sweet potato pie and
Turkey in the oven
Chitterlings on the stove
stinking up the house
Dancing all night
Racism and small slights.

(W. Gary, October 2001)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category/factors</th>
<th>Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Places</td>
<td>Events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Products</td>
<td>Phrases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>Smells</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People</td>
<td>Sounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common things</td>
<td>Sights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pictures</td>
<td>Ouches</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2-22 • C.A.R.E.: Strategies for Closing the Achievement Gaps
Activity 2

Everyone Has a Culture—Everyone is Different

Directions: Respond to each question. Use another piece of paper if you need more space

What languages do you speak?

What music do you listen to? What dances do you know?

What foods do you eat at home?

In your family, what is considered polite and what is considered rude? What manners have you been taught? (Think about such things as table manners, behavior toward guests in your home, what to say when answering the telephone, how to say thanks for a meal.)

What do you wear on special occasions?

How often do you see your extended family (for example, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins)? What role do they play in your life?

What holidays and ceremonies are important in your family?

Describe something very important to you. It could be a value, such as respect or honesty. It could be a person, such as a parent, brother, sister, or friend. It could be a goal, such as going to college or designing a Web site. It could be a hobby.

Based on what you’ve written, how would you describe the characteristics of the culture you’re a part of?

Activity 3

Name/Nombre_____________________________ Date/Fecha____________

What’s in My Name?¿Qué Hay en Mi Nombre?

Interview your parents. Then, answer the following questions about your name. Entrevista a tus padres. Después, contesta las siguientes preguntas sobre tu nombre.

1. Why did your parents choose your name?
   ¿Por qué escogieron tu nombre tus padres?

2. If you were named after someone, who was it?
   Si te pusieron el nombre de alguien, ¿de quién fue?

3. Do you like your name? Why or why not?
   ¿Te gusta tu nombre? ¿Por qué, o por qué no?

4. If you could choose another name, what would it be? Why?
   Si pudieras escoger otro nombre, ¿cuál sería? ¿Por qué?

**Activity 4**

**Educator Check-In on Culture**

"How am I doing?"

**Directions:** Review the list below. Place a check by each item to reflect your practice. Then indicate the three items you would like to explore in order to improve your practice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>“I do this a lot”</th>
<th>“I do this a little”</th>
<th>“I haven’t done this”</th>
<th>My priorities to explore</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I know the cultural background of each of my students and use this knowledge as a resource for instructional activities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. I know the culture of my classroom environment and behaviors and how it affects all of my students.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. I design lessons that require students to identify and describe another point of view, different factors, consequences, objectives, or priorities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. I integrate literature and resources from my students’ cultures into my lessons.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. I know the English language level of each of my students (e.g., Language assessments such as Bilingual Syntax Measure, LAS, Woodcock-Munoz, IPT, CELDT).</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. I provide instruction that helps to increase the consciousness and valuing of differences and diversity through the study of historical, current, community, family, personal events, and literature.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. I consistently begin my lessons with what students already know from home, community, and school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. I design my instructional activities in ways that are meaningful to students in terms of their local community norms and knowledge.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. I incorporate local norms and perspective into my classroom instruction on a daily basis by talking to students, parents, and community members, and reading relevant documents.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. I collaborate with students to design activities that build on community resources and knowledge.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. I provide opportunities for parents to participate in classroom instructional activities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. I vary activities to address students’ learning styles (e.g., multiple intelligences, differentiated instruction).</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. I understand the differences between school academic language and my students’ social language and I use scaffolding techniques to bridge between the two.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Activity 5

Educational Support Professional Check-In on Culture
“How am I doing?”

Directions: Review the list below. Place a check by each item to reflect your practice. Then indicate the three items you would like to explore in order to improve your practice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>“I do this a lot”</th>
<th>“I do this a little”</th>
<th>“I haven’t done this”</th>
<th>My priorities to explore</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I know the cultural background of the students and/or parents I come in contact with and use this knowledge to be more effective in our interactions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. I reach out to parents to help them access services and information in our school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. I am familiar with the variety of languages our students use and understand.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. I know the English language level of the students with whom I work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. I work to help increase the awareness and valuing of differences and diversity between students through training and by participating in community events and school activities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. I understand the value of the differences and diversity in our school staff and population.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. I incorporate local norms and perspectives into my work on a daily basis by talking to students, parents, and community members and reading relevant documents.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I collaborate with students, families, and teachers to design activities that build on community resources and knowledge.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. I make connections with parents to help them feel at home in our school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. I understand the differences between school academic language and my students’ social language and I help teachers make connections between the two.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
# Activity 6

## Features of Culture

Directions: For each feature of culture, think of one example common to people in the United States or in the country where you were born. Use another sheet of paper if you need more space to write.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Styles of dress</th>
<th>Concept of fairness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ways of greeting people</td>
<td>Nature of friendship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs about hospitality</td>
<td>Ideas about clothing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of time</td>
<td>Foods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paintings</td>
<td>Greetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>Facial expressions and hand gestures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature</td>
<td>Concept of self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs about child raising (children and teens)</td>
<td>Work ethic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes about personal space/privacy</td>
<td>Religious beliefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs about the responsibilities of children and teens</td>
<td>Religious rituals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gestures to show you understand what has been told to you</td>
<td>Concept of beauty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holiday customs</td>
<td>Rules of polite behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>Attitude toward age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dancing</td>
<td>The role of family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrations</td>
<td>General worldview</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Module 4 | The Power of Culture Language and Economics
Strategy 1

A Multicultural Organization

- Reflects the contributions and interests of diverse cultural and social groups in its mission, operations, and product or service;

- Acts on a commitment to the eradication of social oppression in all forms within the organization;

- Is sensitive to the possible violation of the interests of all cultural and social groups whether or not they are represented in the organization, and supports efforts to eliminate all forms of social oppression.

B. Jackson & and E Holvino, University of Michigan
MAKING DIVERSITY HAPPEN: WHERE DO I START?

- Be alert: Continually examine your own assumptions about race and cultural differences. Listen "beneath the words" when others speak.

- Learn to recognize and confront difficult issues concerning your own biases and privilege.

- Learn all you can about your own cultural background and family history and share your discoveries with your students.

- Be a role model for all students and colleagues.

- Stretch your cultural "comfort zones." Broaden your understanding of other cultures through books, music, and art.

- Recognize that it is your place to discuss issues of race and culture with your students and colleagues when appropriate.

- Nurture professional relationships and communicate often with persons different from yourself.

- Resist the cynicism of your colleagues who don't share your commitment.

From A Moral Choice, Dr. Joyce E. King Teaching Tolerance, Fall 2000.
Strategy 3

MAKING DIVERSITY HAPPEN: WHAT CAN SCHOOLS DO?

Make the physical environment welcoming. Put up banners saying "Welcome" in each language represented in your school; incorporate sayings and proverbs from other cultures throughout the school.

Provide a language appropriate guide for visitors (a staff person, student, or a parent volunteer).

Encourage teachers to tap into student resources available through family/community resources or through the school’s bilingual program, if there is one.

Be sensitive to the printed and visual messages that go to the community from your school. Is the information reflective of your school's demographics?

Develop/publish a listing of community resources across the entire community spectrum, such as museums, parks and recreation department facilities, churches, cultural arts buildings, libraries and programs, and local businesses.

Plan a multicultural day or evening at the school. Feature food, artifacts, clothing and entertainment (songs and dances). Feature workshop sessions that provide information about the school, family, and community culture.

Be consistent when dealing with students and families, yet also be aware of individual and cultural differences.

Invite parents or other school supporters to join a special volunteer effort such as a grandparents' club, a "rocking reader" club, computer chums, friends of the library, community band, or some other special support group.

Encourage students to utilize their knowledge about their history and culture when writing reports or doing creative writing.
Principles Supporting the Framework for Multicultural Programming in Head Start

1. Every individual is rooted in culture.

2. The cultural groups represented in the communities and families of each Head Start program are the primary sources for culturally relevant programming.

3. Culturally relevant and diverse programming requires learning accurate information about the culture of different groups and discarding stereotypes.

4. Addressing cultural relevance in making curriculum choices is a necessary, developmentally appropriate practice.

5. Every individual has the right to maintain his or her own identity while acquiring the skills required to function in our diverse society.

6. Effective programs for children with limited English speaking ability require continued development of the primary language while the acquisition of English is facilitated.

7. Culturally relevant programming requires staff who reflect the community and families served.

8. Multicultural programming for children enables children to develop an awareness of, respect for, and appreciation of individual cultural differences. It is beneficial to all children.

9. Culturally relevant and diverse programming examines and challenges institutional and personal biases.

10. Culturally relevant and diverse programming and practices are incorporated in all components and services.
25 CHARACTERISTICS OF HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

What factors contribute to differences among communities? Based on its own research and work with numerous communities, the Search Institute has developed a list of every characteristic of healthy communities for youth.

Community Mindset
1) Children and youth are a top priority.
2) All citizens have responsibility for children and youth.
3) Community understands that all children need more assets.
4) Emphasis is placed on building a strong foundation in early childhood
5) Community is committed to building family strengths.
6) Community "wraps its arms" around teenagers.
7) Community balances prevention and promotion,
8) Community Data Community has gathered good data on pro-child resources, programs, and strategies.
9) Community understands levels of assets and at-risk behaviors in its own youth and monitors changes in assets and at-risk behaviors.
10) Community Norms
11) The community shares and demonstrates in concrete ways basic values such as responsibility, respect, honesty, justice, and equality.
12) Community has clear and consistent alcohol and drug policies that are currently and actively put into practice.

Community Programming
14) After-school care is available for all children and youth.
15) There is a rich variety of school-based, community, and religious organizations that involve most youth in constructive activities.
16) Organizations have expansive missions that include both prevention and promotion.
17) Youth programs operate with a partnership mentality.
18) Programs reinforce each other with appropriate redundancy.
   Peers educate and support each other.
19) Mentoring is widespread (youth to youth, adult to youth).
20) Young people are involved in and empowered through community service.

Community Education
22) Parent education is available, and parents participate in it.
23) Adult volunteers receive training and continuing education.
24) Schools are caring and supportive of youth collaboration
   Community cooperation and collaboration occur effectively across multiple sectors.

Background Readings

Module 4 | The Power of Culture Language and Economics
New Data from the U.S. Department of Education 2009-10 Civil Rights Data Collection Show Continuing Disparities in Educational Opportunities and Resources

Today, the U.S. Department of Education released data that cast much-needed light on disparities in educational resources and opportunities for students across the country. These data provide policymakers, educators and parents with critical information that will aid them in identifying inequities and targeting solutions to close the persistent educational achievement gap in America.

Known as the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), the data released today is the first installment of a two-part biennial survey. The survey covers approximately 7,000 school districts and more than 72,000 schools, and has also been significantly enhanced and made more accessible through improved data collection, additional data indicators, and publicly-accessible online tools for data analysis. Part 2 of the CRDC is expected to be released this fall.

"To meet President Obama's goal to lead the world in college graduates by 2020, we need efficient, practical and accessible information like this to help guide our path," said U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. "These data show that far too many students are still not getting access to the kinds of classes, resources and opportunities they need to be successful."

The data released in Part 1 today includes information on: access to the rigorous sequence of college and career-ready math and science courses, the number of first and second-year teachers in schools, the number of high school counselors in schools, availability of pre-K and kindergarten programs, districts operating under desegregation orders or plans, and whether districts have written policies prohibiting harassment and bullying on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, or disability.

Within the 7,000 sampled school districts:

- 3,000 schools serving nearly 500,000 high school students offer no algebra 2 classes, and more than 2 million students in about 7,300 schools had no access to calculus classes.
- Schools serving mostly African-American students are twice as likely to have teachers with one or two years of experience than are schools within the same district that serve mostly White students.
- Only 2 percent of the students with disabilities are taking at least one Advanced Placement class.
- Students with limited English proficiency make up 6 percent of the high school population (in grades 9-12), but are 15 percent of the students for whom algebra is the highest-level math course taken by the final year of their high school career.
Only 22 percent of local education agencies (LEAs) reported that they operated pre-k programs targeting children from low-income families.

Girls are underrepresented in physics, while boys are underrepresented in algebra II.

"Despite the best efforts of America's educators to bring greater equity to our schools, too many children—especially low-income and minority children—are still denied the educational opportunities they need to succeed," said Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights Russlynn Ali. "Transparency is the first step toward reform and for districts that want to do the right thing, the CRDC is an incredible source of information that shows them where they can improve and how to get better."

The 2009-10 data reflect important changes both to the method of collection and to the information being gathered. The sample included school districts of all sizes, including every school district with more than 3,000 students as well as state-operated juvenile justice facilities. The survey was for the first time conducted in two phases: Part 1 collected primarily enrollment data, while Part 2 collected cumulative and end-of-year data. Most of the student data are disaggregated by race/ethnicity, sex, disability (including additional disaggregation by disability status in some instances), and limited English proficient status. The Part 2 data, which will be released this fall, will include: numbers of students passing algebra, taking AP tests, and passing AP tests; significantly expanded discipline data; data on restraint and seclusion; retention data by grade; teacher absenteeism rates; school funding data; and data on incidents of harassment and bullying.

The Part 2 data will thus highlight some of the most important civil rights issues facing our schools today, such as whether certain groups of students are being disciplined more harshly or more often than other groups, and whether all groups are equally likely to be taking the SAT or ACT—the tests most likely to help them enter college. Many of these data will be available at the school level for the first time anywhere. State and national projections based on the sample data collected for the 2009-10 school year will also be made available before the end of this year.


For further information on the 2009-10 CRDC, visit http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/whatsnew.html.

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Communications & Outreach, Press Office
400 Maryland Ave. S.W., Washington, D.C. 20202
Children’s Defense Fund
Children in the United States

January 2011

74,548,215 children live in the United States:
951,329 are American Indian/Alaska Native
2,491,422 are two or more races
3,480,257 are Asian/Pacific Islander
11,280,366 are Black
16,750,075 are Hispanic
41,225,410 are White, non-Hispanic

In the United States:
A child is abused or neglected every 42 seconds.
A child dies before his or her first birthday every 18 minutes.
A child or teen is killed by gunfire every 3 hours.

Child Poverty in United States
Number of poor children (and percent poor) 14,656,962 (18.97%)
Number of children living in extreme poverty (and percent in extreme poverty) 6,484,069 (8.5%)
Number of adults and children receiving cash assistance from Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) 4,250,934

Child Health in United States
Number of children without health insurance (and percent uninsured) 8,300,000 (10.4%)
Number of children enrolled in the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) 7,717,317
Number of children enrolled in Medicaid 28,716,633
Medicaid and CHIP participation rate 81.8%
Children as a percent of total Medicaid enrollment 49.1%
Medicaid expenditures on children as a percent of total Medicaid expenditures 25.4%
Percent of two-year-olds not fully immunized 30.1%

Child Hunger in United States
Number of children who receive food stamps 13,470,941
Percent of eligible persons who receive food stamps 66%
Number of children in the School Lunch Program (free and reduced price only) 18,187,514
Number of children in the Summer Food Service Program 2,125,820
Number of women and children receiving WIC (Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children) 8,483,618
Early Childhood Development in United States
Percent of children under age 6 with all parents in the labor force  64.4%
Number of children served by Head Start  1,056,789
Number of children served by the Child Care Development Fund/CCDBG  1,619,100
Percent of 3-year-olds enrolled in state pre-k, Head Start, or special education programs  13.8%
Percent of 4-year-olds enrolled in state pre-k, Head Start, or special education programs  38.9%

Education in United States
Annual expenditure per prisoner  $24,354
Annual expenditure per public school pupil  $9,154
Percent of public school fourth graders:
  unable to read at grade level  68%
  unable to do math at grade level  62%
Percent of public school eighth graders:
  unable to read at grade level  70%
  unable to do math at grade level  67%
Number of high school students who drop out of school annually  1,053,234

Child Welfare in United States
Number of children who are victims of abuse and neglect  751,049
Number of children in foster care  418,422
Number of children adopted from foster care  57,264
Number of grandparents raising grandchildren  2,541,364

Youth at Risk in United States
Percent of 16- to 19-year-olds not enrolled in school who are not high school graduates  6.0%
Averaged freshman high school graduation rate  74.9%
Percent of 16- to 19-year-olds unemployed  24.3%
Number of juvenile arrests  1,621,391
Number of children and teens in juvenile residential facilities  86,814
Ratio of cost per prisoner to cost per public school pupil  2.7
Number of children and teens killed by firearms: 3,042
  2,161 homicides; 683 suicides; 138 accidents; and 60 undetermined

Compiled from the most up-to-date data available as of January 2011. For data sources, please visit www.childrensdefense.org/cits

For more information on the state of America’s children contact:
Children’s Defense Fund
25 E Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001
(202) 628-8787
1 (800) 233-1200
www.childrensdefense.org
This brief reports poverty rates by race and family structure for all children and by place and region for young children (those under age 6). We use the U.S. Office of Management and Budget income thresholds. In 2009, the poverty line for a family of four (two adults, two children) was $21,756.

For all children, especially the youngest, the highest rates of poverty are among blacks, followed by Hispanics and whites (see Table 1). This pattern persists across urban, suburban, and rural places, with estimated rates for children under age 18 as high as 48.9 percent for rural black children and 36.6 percent for rural Hispanic children. The rates for rural white children are significantly lower at 18.5 percent—although still higher than national averages.

Although all children suffer consequences of being poor, young children are particularly vulnerable, and the consequences of early poverty ripple through the life cycle in the form of poorer life-long health, fewer years of completed schooling, and other disadvantages. Our analyses reveal that poverty rates are typically higher among the very young. Further, young white, black, and Hispanic rural children are more often poorer than their urban and suburban counterparts. More than one in five young rural white children are poor, as are more than two in five young rural Hispanic children; however, this affects a staggering one in two young rural black children.

According to U.S. Census Bureau data, nearly 17 million children live in single-mother homes. Indeed, 50.2 percent of black children, 24.9 percent of Hispanic children, and 17.7 percent of white children are living with only their mothers. In all place types, across all regions, single-mother families have dramatically higher poverty rates (40 percent) than married couples with children (8 percent) (see Table 2). There are also important local and regional distinctions. Nearly one in two rural single-mother families are poor, and rates are highest in the rural South, where more than 54 percent of such families live in poverty. Poverty among single-mother families is high in the Midwest as well, where rates approach 50 percent in urban and rural areas. For both family types, poverty is lowest in the suburban Northeast, although the
Table 1. Child poverty by place type and region in 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Central City</th>
<th>Suburban</th>
<th>Rural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percent estimate</td>
<td>Margin of error</td>
<td>Percent estimate</td>
<td>Margin of error</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Children Under 6</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>14.0 +/- 0.24</td>
<td></td>
<td>14.1 +/- 0.53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>41.0 +/- 0.51</td>
<td></td>
<td>45.3 +/- 0.77</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>33.6 +/- 0.41</td>
<td></td>
<td>37.3 +/- 0.62</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Children Under 18</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>12.0 +/- 0.12</td>
<td></td>
<td>12.6 +/- 0.29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>9.7 +/- 0.23</td>
<td></td>
<td>14.8 +/- 0.78</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>13.1 +/- 0.22</td>
<td></td>
<td>15.6 +/- 0.61</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>13.0 +/- 0.21</td>
<td></td>
<td>11.2 +/- 0.47</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>10.5 +/- 0.26</td>
<td></td>
<td>10.8 +/- 0.44</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>36.3 +/- 0.34</td>
<td></td>
<td>41.0 +/- 0.97</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>31.1 +/- 0.78</td>
<td></td>
<td>34.9 +/- 1.06</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>44.1 +/- 0.74</td>
<td></td>
<td>49.7 +/- 0.90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>36.2 +/- 0.45</td>
<td></td>
<td>40.9 +/- 0.77</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>30.3 +/- 1.16</td>
<td></td>
<td>33.2 +/- 1.52</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>30.8 +/- 0.25</td>
<td></td>
<td>34.8 +/- 0.37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>32.1 +/- 0.72</td>
<td></td>
<td>39.7 +/- 1.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>30.5 +/- 0.76</td>
<td></td>
<td>36.5 +/- 1.25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>33.1 +/- 0.42</td>
<td></td>
<td>36.3 +/- 0.72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>28.7 +/- 0.76</td>
<td></td>
<td>31.6 +/- 0.57</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Unit of analysis is children.
b. Levels of urbanization are defined as follows: rural consists of ACS geographic components “not in metropolitan or micropolitan statistical area” and “in micropolitan statistical area,” suburban includes “in metropolitan statistical area—not in principal city,” and central city includes “in metropolitan statistical area—in principal city.”
c. Data are based on 2009 ACS estimates.
d. Percentage points and margins of error are based on rounded percentages and may differ slightly from those that would be obtained using unrounded figures.

rate there for single mothers is 29.9 percent, nearly ten times the rate for married couples (3 percent).

Young children face high rates of poverty in America, especially if they are children of color living in rural areas or in lone-parent families. Research has shown that access to social programs, such as Women, Infants, and Children's (WIC), Medicaid, and home visiting can limit some of the negative effects of poverty. In addition, certain educational programs, such as Early Head Start, are shown to have positive effects on child development, which could set children up for long-term educational success. For children in single-mother homes, focusing on increased compliance with child support orders may be critical for lowering poverty. Overall, access to these types of programs should be improved, particularly for families in rural areas, to provide support for these very young children who are already facing a challenging future.
## Table 2. Poverty by family structure, place type, and region in 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Central City</th>
<th>Suburban</th>
<th>Rural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percent estimate</td>
<td>Margin of error</td>
<td>Percent estimate</td>
<td>Margin of error</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Married couples with children</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>+/-0.11</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>+/-0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>+/-0.26</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>+/-0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>+/-0.20</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>+/-0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>+/-0.20</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>+/-0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>+/-0.25</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>+/-0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Single mothers</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>+/-0.36</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>+/-0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td>+/-0.65</td>
<td>43.6</td>
<td>+/-0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>+/-0.72</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>+/-1.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>42.1</td>
<td>+/-0.53</td>
<td>44.7</td>
<td>+/-0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>+/-0.80</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>+/-1.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Unit of analysis is families.
b. Levels of urbanization are defined as follows: rural consists of ACS geographic components “not in metropolitan or micropolitan statistical area” and “in micropolitan statistical area,” suburban includes “in metropolitan statistical area—not in principal city,” and central city includes “in metropolitan statistical area—in principal city.”
c. Data are based on 2009 ACS estimates.
d. Percentage points and margins of error are based on rounded percentages and may differ slightly from those that would be obtained using unrounded figures.

### Data

This analysis is based on U.S. Census Bureau estimates from the 2009 American Community Survey released on September 28, 2010. Tables were produced by aggregating information from detailed tables available on American FactFinder (http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en). These estimates are meant to give perspective on child poverty, but because they are based on survey data, caution must be used in comparing across years or places, as the margin of error may indicate that seemingly disparate numbers fall within sampling error. Differences highlighted in this brief are statistically significant at the 5 percent level.

**ENDNOTES**

1. The American Community Survey (ACS) data released in September 2010 allow nuanced analyses of child poverty.
3. Sampling size limitations preclude racial/ethnic breakdowns more refined than the three groups (white, black, Hispanic) we use.


9. For more information, see http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DtgsSearchByListServlet?ds_name=ACS_2007_3YR_G00_&_lang=en&_ts=268570514748.

10. Refer to the U.S. Census Bureau’s published tables for detailed margins of error.

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Fifty Years After
Brown v. Board of Education:
A Two-Tiered Education System
Fifty Years After

*Brown v. Board of Education: A Two-Tiered Education System*

The *Brown* decision, a half-century ago, was a promise that every child would have access to the same quality public education. It is a promise we must keep. Competent, caring, qualified teaching in schools organized for success should be every child’s birthright. To better understand what must be done to close the teaching quality gap for low income students and children of color, the staff of the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (NCTAF) analyzed three large-scale surveys of school conditions reported by teachers in California, Wisconsin, and New York. The Peter Harris Research Group conducted these random surveys of 3,336 public school teachers for Lou Harris, one of the nation’s most well-respected pioneers in polling public school teachers. The findings paint a chilling picture of inequitable school conditions that can overwhelm even the best efforts of our teachers and their students. Harris describes “…a two-tiered public school system: one for the more affluent, who enjoy the privileges of a relatively healthy educational environment, and the other for the least privileged, who suffer an educational environment that virtually forecloses their chance of learning.”

The evidence cited by the teachers, school by school, proves beyond any shadow of a doubt that children at risk, who come from families with poorer economic backgrounds, are not being given an opportunity to learn that is equal to that offered to children from the most privileged families. The obvious cause of this inequality lies in the finding that the most disadvantaged children attend schools that do not have basic facilities and conditions conducive to providing them with a quality education. Without such facilities and conditions, both the teachers and the students will be hard-put to achieve any semblance of quality education.

Conditions in these schools deprive children of their most basic civil right: an equal opportunity to learn.
What Must Be Done

Well prepared teachers in schools organized for success are the most valuable resources a community can provide for its young people. Thousands of public school districts across the country are giving their children excellent teachers and supporting them with top quality teaching conditions in classrooms that meet high standards. Many of their schools deliver an education that ranges from good to world-class, and their students are achieving at high levels. But we cannot be content as long as a significant number of teachers and students are struggling in schools with unacceptable teaching and learning conditions.

We know that public schools can do the job; high need does not have to mean low quality. A growing number of studies provide portraits of schools that do an exemplary job of educating large numbers of high need students. In its study of “High Flying Schools,” the Education Trust reported that it found good student achievement in many public schools that enroll higher proportions of poor and minority children than the nation’s public schools as a whole. Research on high performing, high poverty schools reveals that they are consistently staffed by well qualified teachers and principals who work in a professional environment that supports sound instructional practices and high standards.

Why are some schools able to rise to the challenge, while many others do not? The conventional wisdom has been that we can’t find enough teachers to do the job. But the truth is that we can’t keep them. The problem is not that we have too few teachers entering high-risk schools; it is that too many good teachers are leaving. They leave because conditions in their schools do not meet even the most basic requirements for successful teaching and learning.

We have reached a troubling conclusion. As a nation we are committed to improving teaching quality by increasing the supply of qualified teachers for hard-to-staff schools, but an over reliance on teacher supply strategies is protecting the status quo in dysfunctional schools. The heavy emphasis on keeping these schools supplied with teachers is focusing the energy for improvement on recruitment strategies instead of on the need to change the conditions that make these schools so hard to staff in the first place. In too many cases idealistic new teachers are treated like cannon fodder – thrown into schools with the most challenging assignments, given little support, and even less chance for success. A few individuals emerge as heroes who are heralded for their personal ability to succeed in the face of dysfunctional conditions. But when the majority of new teachers drop out, after being worn down by overwhelming odds, they are cast aside to be quickly replaced by the next cohort of novices. Better preparation programs and incentives to attract more teachers to hard-to-staff schools are important, but they are not enough – we must change the conditions that make these schools such difficult places for teaching and learning.

Faced with substandard conditions, it should be no surprise that teachers and students drop out in droves. As the teachers leave, they are replaced by inexperienced individuals who are even less equipped to deal with obstacles that stand in the way of effective teaching. The teachers come and go, and the students with the greatest needs are left behind to be taught by a passing parade of under qualified and inexperienced individuals. Teaching quality declines, student achievement suffers, and the cycle of educational inequality is repeated from one generation to the next. It is time to break this cycle.
Recommendations

As a nation, we have called on our teachers and students to meet demanding standards. Now is the time to give them the schools they need to succeed. It is time to let our teachers and students know that we will not let them down as they prepare to face the complex challenges of a diverse world and a global economy in the 21st Century. We must form a strong chain of support, steering clear of finger pointing and top-down mandates, to make every school a place that can deliver on the promise of Brown v. Board of Education. Our findings and recommendations are summarized below (a full discussion of recommendations appears on pages 33-36).

1. **Acknowledge inadequate school conditions and marshal the political will to seek solutions.**

   This report paints a grim picture of inequities that deny the civil rights of our most vulnerable citizens. The nation’s leaders will not like what they see – but this picture will not change unless we acknowledge these conditions and summon the political will to put things right. Until we take this step, nothing else will matter. We call upon Governors and other leading policymakers at the state and local levels to convene the business and education leadership in their states to publicize this report and plan ways that states and school districts can act on its recommendations.

2. **Listen to the teachers and the students.** Teachers and students are telling us that their schools are inadequate when they walk away in droves – with dropout rates that can be 50% or higher. They are telling us that teaching and learning conditions in their schools are impossible. It is time to listen, and to act on what we know to be true.

3. **Establish school standards that can sustain quality teaching and learning for every child.**

   To ensure that our schools offer a sound education for every child, they should provide the following resources: highly qualified teachers and principals; appropriate class sizes in sound facilities; sufficient books, supplies and equipment; modern information technologies and Internet access; a curriculum that meets high standards; adequate resources for special learning needs; and a safe, orderly, clean and well maintained environment.

4. **Establish funding adequacy formulas based on per-pupil needs in lieu of per-pupil averages.**

   School financing policies should be based on an analysis of what it will cost to raise the bar and close the gaps in student achievement – bringing teaching and learning conditions in all schools up to a high standard.

5. **Collect, analyze and use better data for better decision making, and publicly report on the relationship between school conditions and student performance.** Set standards for school conditions that are aligned with teaching and learning standards, and use data collection systems to measure and report on the extent to which they are being met.

6. **Hire well qualified teachers and principals, support them with strong professional communities, and reward them well.** Create incentives that attract strong principals and teams of promising and accomplished teachers to high-risk schools, and reward them for turning around low performance.

7. **Hold officials publicly accountable for keeping the promise of educational equity.**

   A basic determinant of our success in realizing the dream of Brown v. Board of Education has become clear – we must have strong lines and structures of accountability for quality teaching in schools organized for success. Adequate resources and rewards for performance should be tied to a reciprocal obligation to remove teachers, principals, and school leaders who are not performing adequately. Our education leaders and publicly elected officials at every level also should be judged by their commitment to ending two-tiered public education systems.
Promoting Educators’ Cultural Competence To Better Serve Culturally Diverse Students

Educators with the skills, knowledge, and attitudes to value the diversity among students will contribute to an educational system designed to serve all students well. Our nation can no longer be satisfied with success for some students; instead we must cultivate the strengths of all.

—NEA President Dennis Van Roekel

There is a cultural gap in many of the nation’s schools as a growing number of educators struggle to better serve students from cultures other than their own in response to dramatic demographic changes that have created culturally diverse schools in many areas of the U.S.¹

The cultural gap between students and their teachers can be a factor in students’ academic performance and contribute to achievement gaps among different student groups. Given NEA’s core belief that all students deserve great public schools, we are working to boost achievement for all students. Part of that effort includes advocating for state policies to better equip educators to be culturally competent practitioners who can better serve diverse students.

What is cultural competence?

When applied to education, cultural competence centers on the skills and knowledge to effectively serve students from diverse cultures. In their book, Cultural Competence: A Primer for Educators, Diller and Moule offer this definition:

*Cultural competence is the ability to successfully teach students who come from cultures other than our own. It entails developing certain personal and interpersonal awareness and sensitivities, developing certain bodies of cultural knowledge, and mastering a set of skills that, taken together, underlie effective cross-cultural teaching.*²

There are four basic cultural competence skill areas. They apply to individual educators, to the schools where they work, and to the educational system as a whole.³ Growth in one area tends to support growth in another.

1. **Valuing diversity:** Accepting and respecting different cultural backgrounds and customs, different ways of communicating, and different traditions and values.

2. **Being culturally self-aware:** Understanding that educators’ own cultures—all of their experiences, background, knowledge, skills, beliefs, values, and interests—shape their sense of who they are, where they fit into their family, school, community, and society, and how they interact with students.

3. **Understanding the dynamics of cultural interactions:** Knowing that there are many factors that can affect interactions across cultures, including historical cultural experiences and relationships between cultures in a local community.

4. **Institutionalizing cultural knowledge and adapting to diversity:** Designing educational services based on an understanding of students’ cultures and institutionalizing that knowledge so that educators, and the learning environments they work in, can adapt to and better serve diverse populations.

Why should educators be culturally competent?

Below are a few of the many factors that make a strong case for educators to become culturally competent:

**Students are more diverse than ever.** According to the latest available figures, students of color made up 42 percent of public school students in 2005, an increase of 22 percent from 1972. Minority enrollment grew in all regions of the country, primarily due to growth in Hispanic enrollment. Some 20 percent of public school students are Hispanic, with students of other ethnicities and multiracial students comprising another 22 percent of public school students. In addition, the number of children ages 5-17 who spoke a language other than English at home more than doubled between 1979 and 2005 to more than 10 million students.⁴ And these trends will continue as the nation and the school-age population become increasingly diverse. Overall, “given the dramatic diversification that is currently underway in the United
States, cultural competence may someday reach a status comparable to computer literacy.5

**Culture plays a critical role in learning.** Culture is central to student learning, and every student brings a unique culture to the classroom.6 And while students are not solely the products of their cultures and they vary in the degree to which they identify with them, educators must become knowledgeable about their students’ distinctive cultural backgrounds so they can translate that knowledge into effective instruction and enriched curriculum.7

**Cultural competence leads to more effective teaching.** As students become more diverse, they are likely to benefit from different teaching strategies.8 But educators will not cue into these differences and address them appropriately, unless they use the students’ culture to build a bridge to success in school. Culturally competent teachers contextualize or connect to students’ everyday experiences, and integrate classroom learning with out-of-school experiences and knowledge. Helping learners make the link between their culture and the new knowledge and skills they encounter inside school is at the heart of ensuring that all students achieve at high levels.9

**Culturally competent educators are better equipped to reach out to students’ families.** How families process their values, beliefs, everyday experiences, and child rearing conventions is mediated through their culture, especially through the primary or home language. Culturally competent educators understand that students benefit from a learning environment that increases the connection between home and school culture and involves families and the broader community in students’ education.10

**Cultural competence helps address student achievement gaps.** Most commonly, the term “achievement gap” refers to “differences in scores on state or national achievement tests between various student demographic groups.”11 NEA broadens the term to also include gaps in attainment (e.g., high school graduation, college degrees, employment), as well as gaps in access to a quality curriculum and expert teachers. As the number of minority students, English Language Learners, and students living in poverty increase, more and more students will be at risk of experiencing achievement gaps.

**Cultural competence reinforces American and democratic ideals.** NEA believes that the appreciation of diverse cultures is a core value built on the American ideals of freedom, justice, equality, equity, and human dignity. Schools play a critical role in affirming the pluralism that students and their communities reflect; in challenging discrimination and intolerance; and in developing the attitudes and values necessary for a democratic society. “Teachers who are…culturally competent…know that students who have the academic and cultural wherewithal to succeed in school without losing their identities are better prepared to be of service to others; in a democracy, this commitment to the public good is paramount.”12

**Cultural competence helps educators meet accountability requirements.** Today, educators are required not only to increase all students’ performance, but also to reduce achievement gaps among racial/ethnic groups of students. Under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), all students must make adequate yearly academic progress, and “all” means students in various racial/ethnic subgroups as well as English Language Learners and economically disadvantaged students. Failure to meet state-based achievement targets results in consequences for schools, which can range from creating improvement plans to involuntary transfers of administrators and staff. A culturally competent school staff can be a powerful tool in meeting NCLB’s accountability requirements.

**How is cultural competence a policy issue?**

NEA has identified three policy levers through which states can increase educators’ cultural competence: 1) preservice education, 2) ongoing professional development, and 3) licensure.

Only one-third of states require teacher candidates to study some aspect of cultural diversity in their core preparation courses, and/or to have a teaching practicum in a culturally diverse setting.13 With respect to professional development and licensure, the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) has been developing model policy that states can use as they work to align their teacher licensing systems. One of these model standards focuses on diverse students. (“The teacher understands how students differ in their approaches to learning and creates instructional opportunities that are adapted to diverse learners.”) With this kind of standard in hand, states can begin to align teachers’ initial licensure with their approval of teacher education programs and the ongoing professional development they require for relicensure.14 The standards establish the skills and knowledge that educators need to acquire through preservice education and ongoing professional development and to demonstrate in the classroom.
Only nine states (Alaska, Arkansas, California, Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, New Mexico, and South Dakota) currently have stand-alone state cultural knowledge or competence standards. The remaining states incorporate standards related to cultural awareness in their history or foreign (or world) language standards. In all cases, these are not as rigorous as stand-alone knowledge or competence standards, since they tend to only focus on developing an understanding of various ethnic groups, and they usually involve changes in personal attitudes and values. Cultural knowledge standards, by comparison, go a step further by requiring educators to become familiar with cultural characteristics, history, values, beliefs, and behaviors. But both cultural awareness and cultural knowledge fall short by failing to include a key concept found in cultural competence: operating effectively in different cultural contexts by transforming and integrating knowledge of individual students and groups of students into specific standards, policies, and practices.15

Alaska provides an example of a comprehensive approach to building educators’ cultural competence. In addition to its standards, Alaska has developed accompanying guidelines to implement the standards. The guidelines address the preparation of culturally responsive teachers, the work of culturally responsive school boards, nurturing culturally healthy children, respecting cultural knowledge, strengthening indigenous languages, and creating and implementing cross-cultural programs.

The NEA position

The NEA believes that racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity creates a rich American tapestry that enriches us all. The Association understands that the need for culturally competent educators will continue to grow as the nation’s students become more diverse. And it considers cultural competence a key policy issue in the 21st century.

More specifically, NEA’s resolutions address several of the issues raised in this brief. They include the NEA’s support for early childhood education, students’ reading proficiency, rich middle school/junior high programs, multicultural education, educational programs for English Language Learners, and the education of specific student groups (American Indian/Alaska Native, Hispanic, Black, Asian, Pacific Islander, migrant, refugee and undocumented children, and children of undocumented immigrants).16

The NEA also understands that three powerful state policy levers—preserve education, licensure, and ongoing professional development—can help close the current cultural gap between many educators and the students they serve. Therefore, the NEA is supporting the efforts of its state affiliates to increase the number of states that have cultural competence standards, since these standards will require those who train and license prospective and experienced educators to focus on cultural competence.

References

5 Diller and Moule, 2005, p. 19.
Resources

The NEA believes that all schools must be welcoming places for culturally diverse students. They must be places where students’ differences are understood and valued.

**C.A.R.E.: Strategies for Closing the Achievement Gaps**
This NEA training guide helps educators reflect on the causes of disparity in student achievement and explore ways to improve students’ academic success by using innovative, research-based instructional strategies, including strategies related to students’ cultural, economic, and language differences.

www.nea.org/care-guide

**Ethnic Minority Group Status Reports**
NEA’s Status reports on four ethnic minority groups—American Indians/Alaska Natives, Asian and Pacific Islanders, Blacks, and Hispanics—presents historical, demographic, and other statistical data; recommended practice; resources and perspectives from practitioners, researchers, and community members.

www.nea.org/achievement/whois.html

**Focus On Series**
Each year, NEA’s Human and Civil Rights Department prepares briefs on public education issues relevant to six underrepresented student groups: American Indians/Alaska Natives; Asian and Pacific Islanders; Blacks; Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgendered students; Hispanics; and Women and Girls. Each brief contains concrete strategies to address the issues and additional resources for school personnel.

www.nea.org/teachexperience/achievgapfocus0405.html

**Leading With Diversity: Cultural Competencies for Teacher Preparation and Professional Development.** This 2005 book, from Brown University, The Education Alliance, and the Pacific Resources for Education and Learning, provides current research-based information on cultural competencies. Authors Trumbull and Pacheco review the 2005 status of state cultural competency teaching standards and explore practice-based competencies related to culture, language, and race and ethnicity.

www.alliance.brown.edu/pubs/leading_diversity/index.php

**Language, Culture, and Community in Teacher Education.** The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education published this collection in 2007 on knowledge, practice, and policy in working effectively with linguistically and culturally diverse students. This book examines what is needed to prepare teacher candidates to work with the culturally and linguistically diverse communities from which their students will come.

www.aacte.org/Publications/default.aspx

**Cultural Competence: A Primer for Educators.** This thorough and practical 2005 publication has become the bible on cultural competence for educators. Authors Diller and Moule focus on the social and psychological factors that shape a teacher’s ability to work with students from backgrounds different from their own. The research review is followed by in-depth interviews with five educators from diverse communities who explore what each believes is critical for a culturally different teacher to know to be effective in working with students from these communities.

Search http://academic.cengage.com for ordering information.
An increasing number of American grandparents are finding their later years different from what they expected. Instead of a quiet retirement, sweetened by delights of occasional visits with grandchildren, many grandparents have taken on the role of surrogate parents to their grandchildren. Reasons behind this trend involve a variety of family circumstances, including the death of one or both parents, parental abandonment, the high incidence of divorce, an increase in the number of never-married mothers (especially teen mothers), parental imprisonment, drug addiction, or mental illness. The AIDS epidemic also plays a role in this increasing shift of responsibility for child rearing. The Orphan Project of New York City (1995) estimates that 75,000 to 125,000 children will be orphaned by the year 2000 because their mothers have died of HIV/AIDS.

Recent legislative activity is also likely to contribute to an increase in the number of grandparent-grandchild families in the future. The amended September 1995 Social Security Act requires states to specify adult relatives as the first foster care option; the Kinship Care Act of 1996 (introduced by Senator Wyden of Oregon and recently referred to the Senate Committee on Finance) puts grandparents first in line as potential foster care parents and adoptive parents for grandchildren who, for safety reasons, have been removed from their parents' home.

In short, while grandparents have often raised their grandchildren in times of family crisis, the proportion of families in crisis situations is growing. A 40 percent increase in grandchildren living in their grandparents' homes, many without their parents, was reported between 1980 and 1990 (de Toledo & Brown, 1995). Families made up of grandparents and their grandchildren are just one of the diverse family structures with which schools are learning to work.

The National Center for Health Statistics (Saluter, 1996) reported that 3.735 million children under the age of 18 (5.4 percent) live in the home of their grandparent or grandparents, and that black children are more likely (13 percent) to live with a grandparent than white children (3.9 percent) or Hispanic children (5.7 percent). While nearly half the grandparent households with a grandchild include the child's mother, about a million families in the United States are made up of grandparents raising their grandchildren without one of the children's parents (Takas, 1995). Thus, about 1 in 20 children under 18 lives in a home headed by a grandparent without parents present. Grandparents serving as surrogate parents represent all socioeconomic and ethnic groups. Most families headed by grandparents live in an urban setting and have less than a high school education, and more such families live in the south (57 percent) than in all other areas of the United States combined (Turner, 1995).
How Schools Can Help

Schools can contribute significantly to helping grandparents cope with the stresses of parenting a second time around. As a basis for understanding and helping, school personnel may need to learn to recognize and accept strong feelings experienced by each member of the grandparent-parent-child triad. Grandparents (even those who find great satisfaction in raising their grandchildren) often feel disappointment mixed with anger, blame, guilt, and serious concern about family finances. Parents usually have ambivalent feelings of gratitude and resentment, as they grieve the loss of their child even if they recognize that the decision to remove the child from their care is in the child's best interest. Often, resentment deepens as estrangement widens. Children raised by grandparents may express feelings of abandonment, even though they are grateful to their grandparents for taking care of them (Saltzman & Pakan, 1996). Grandparent and grandchild interactions with noncustodial parents can be supportive or damaging to all the parties involved.

School Strategies Intended To Help Grandparents

Schools can use many strategies to support grandparents who are working to raise and educate their grandchildren. Many schools may find the following list of suggestions useful.

Examine school policies on enrollment. Existing policies may need revision to accommodate the realities of children living with their grandparents. For example, in some districts, once the grandparent has informal authority from the parent or legal authority, he or she is able to enroll the child in school, review the child's records, and make any requests or decisions about the child's education (American Association of Retired Persons AARP, 1993). In other districts, formal guardianship is required for anyone other than a parent to make school decisions on behalf of the child.

Have helpful information on hand for grandparents acting as parents. School counselors may want to write to the organizations in the Resource List accompanying this digest for more information on parenting the second time around, and they may want to share it with teachers and grandparents acting as parents. They may want to check with local social service agencies to find out about support groups and "reparenting" or "grandparenting" classes for grandparents raising a second family. Such services may help reduce the isolation that is commonly cited as a major problem for grandparents raising their grandchildren (de Toledo & Brown, 1995).

Keep in mind that short-term "respite care" for young and school-age children often tops the "wish list" of grandparent caregivers (Turner, 1995). If they do not already routinely do so, schools can prepare information in advance on before- and after-school programs, on lunch and breakfast programs, and on Head Start or other preschool programs for "all" families.
Be sure that school policy supports appropriate referrals for educational, health, and social services, as needed. Grandparents may not be aware of services available to help their grandchild academically or to help the child deal with emotional and psychological problems. Eligibility for such services may be in question in some situations, yet many grandparent-grandchild families are particularly in need of this kind of assistance (AARP, 1993).

Keep in mind that school may be a much different place from the schools that grandparents remember. Schools might consider scheduling extra time for grandparent teacher conferences, letting grandparents know how to reach the teacher not only when there is a problem but at any time, and encouraging grandparents to volunteer at school to gain a sense of current school practices.

Use "family-friendly" strategies to encourage surrogate parents to take an active role in their children's education. These strategies include using inclusive language on home-school communications. Schools might want to stress to teachers the importance of understanding how the child views his or her primary caregiver. When the teacher is sending home important notices, the teacher needs to know whether it is "Grandmommy" or "Poppa" who will need to read, sign, and return the forms. The child and his or her classmates need to hear the teacher's accurate acknowledgment of this important relationship.

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**School Strategies Intended To Help Grandchildren**

Schools can also help children cope with the stresses of adjusting to their living arrangements. The strategies listed here particularly affect the children.

Anticipate transitional or adjustment difficulties and act to minimize them. If a grandchild has only recently come into the grandparents' home, he or she may need time to adjust to a new routine, including expectations that he or she will attend school regularly and complete schoolwork.

Look for children's strengths and build on them. As many as two-thirds of children who have grown up in difficult circumstances have within them the resilience to grow up to lead healthy, productive lives (Benard, 1991). With support and sensitivity, these children can often meet teachers' expectations.

Place children living with grandparents with the most stable and experienced teachers. Whether because of long-term family instability or recent sudden trauma, children living with their grandparents may not only need extra attention during the school year but also the classroom stability that an experienced teacher can provide.

Try not to single out children because of their family status in front of peers or other teachers. Shame and the feeling of being different from their peers, however unjustified, can contribute to a difficult school adjustment for these children.
Conclusion

Children from families headed by grandparents constitute a growing proportion of students in schools, and their numbers can be expected to continue to increase. Schools that recognize and support these nontraditional families will be able to provide better service to their communities.

See the Grandparents as Parents Resource List of related publications and organizations.

For More Information


GRANDPARENTS RAISING THEIR GRANDCHILDREN: WHAT TO CONSIDER AND WHERE TO FIND HELP. Washington, DC: AARP.


Credits

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Source: http://www.kidsource.com/kidsource/content2/grandparents.3.html
“Hold fast to dreams, for if dreams die, life is a broken winged bird that cannot fly”

Langston Hughes

Module 5 | The Power of Families and Communities in Academics
The Power of Families and Communities in Academics
Module 5

“Hold fast to dreams, for if dreams die, Life is a broken winged bird that cannot fly.”
Langston Hughes

Introduction
Over the past decade, the Association has dedicated significant time, resources, and effort to helping school districts across the country close the achievement gap that exists among low-income students, students of color, and their White more affluent peers. Without question, this gap in academic achievement has jeopardized the status of America as a world leader in education and has had major financial implications on the workforce readiness of our nation.

The achievement gap is as much about unequal access as it is about inequitable funding of schools in urban and rural communities. Through the Priority Schools Campaign (PSC), the Association is providing support to schools who receive Title 1 School Improvement Grants (SIGs) An average 90 percent or more of the students in these schools are members of an ethnic minority, or more than one half of the students qualify for free or reduced lunches. While the PSC initiative represents a significant step in addressing funding inequities, it does not address the need for equal access to information and training that is so vital to the survival and empowerment of schools in high-poverty neighborhoods.

The challenges priority schools face seem insurmountable when all the responsibility for remedying achievement inequities falls solely on the shoulders of school administrators and educators. However, the goal of closing the achievement gap will not be met without the informed, sustained, and positive involvement of families and communities working in partnership with school administrators and faculty. Therein lies the POWER to bring about meaningful change.

The Association must work to ensure transparency and openness in partnership efforts and seek to empower all partners with the data, strategies, and resources they need in order to build home and community environments that support academic achievement.
Objective
This module is designed to give Association leaders and members strategies for helping families and communities understand the importance of data and how to access and use it to ensure maximum learning opportunities. The intent is to equip family and community members with the knowledge and skills they need to help students prepare for college, jobs, and career paths in the middle school years.

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1) NEA Policy Brief: Keeping Family-School Community Connections Helps Support Students’ Success
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Mini Discussion 1

The Importance of Understanding Data
One of the most far-reaching requirements of Title 1 of the No Child Left Behind Act has been the public reporting of achievement data. Districts and schools must now report how all groups of students are progressing towards meeting educational standards. This data must be disaggregated by race, poverty level, children with disabilities, and English language learners. States also have to define what constitutes a highly qualified teacher. The data frequently revealed some startling inequities. High-poverty schools with large concentrations of minority students frequently have less qualified teachers, fewer instructional resources, a less challenging curriculum where there were few opportunities for developing critical thinking skills, and overall lower expectations of student performance. This and other types of information have become critical tools in evaluating the effectiveness of academic programs and schools.

Many families and community members in the NEA Priority School Campaign still do not know that they have a right to school district data and a right to be involved in local school improvement efforts. Data can be intimidating or it can be empowering. To accomplish the latter, we must teach families and community members: 1) why school data are important; 2) how and where to access school data; 3) how to interpret the data and compare their local school’s performance to that of other schools in the district; and 4) how to work in partnership with the local school to design programs that ensure high academic achievement and success.
Mini Discussion 2

Families and Communities: The POWER to Transform Schools

In the Harvard Family Research Project newsletter, the U.S. Department of Education acknowledged that “Under current law, family engagement is too often focused on a checklist of activities rather than on driving results, funding isn’t always targeted to the most effective practices, and family engagement is treated as a discrete activity rather than an integrated strategy that should have a place across multiple programs.” The landscape is gradually changing and changing for the better. Some of the most successful efforts to empower families have been engineered by outside advocacy organizations. There has been a marked increase in books and publications on family engagement, and through the efforts of several national universities and organizations, the field of education has become distinguished with research on best practices in family engagement.

Through the Priority Schools Campaign, NEA has embarked on a campaign to highlight, learn from, and share best practices with its members. Some of the current efforts to engage families in school improvement with strategies that link to learning include:

- Holding data workshops to help families/community members understand how data are used to improve achievement;
- Providing achievement data in plain language and connecting key concepts to daily life;
- Displaying high-quality student work in prominent places throughout the school as exemplars of what is expected;
- Including family learning activities in newsletters and implementing family literacy/family math nights;
- Using student achievement data to help families focus on specific grade-level academic goals;
- Including families on school improvement teams and grade-level planning meetings.

The Roles Families Play

Without question, family and community involvement in education has vastly changed from the roles prescribed in the infancy of Title I ESEA. NEA’s Community Support for C.A.R.E. says “We now understand that new roles for families and the broader community must include decision making, school governance, and supportive home learning activities. Thus, we aspire to family engagement that
goes beyond involvement.” The question at the local school level is how do we create an environment where these roles are encouraged and welcomed?

Families play four primary roles in helping children do better in school:

Families SUPPORT children by providing their basic needs, including food, clothing, and protection, as well as the need for praise and love. Support also means letting children know that the family values education and expects them to do well in school.

Families LEARN how to help children learn. When a child starts school so does the family. Family members learn what their children are learning and want to ensure the children are on track for each grade. They also monitor homework and study time and set clear boundaries and expectations for academic performance.

Families TEACH. Families are the first teachers of their children from the day they are born. What families teach includes how to eat, walk, play with other children, and help with chores. It is particularly important that families increase their language interactions with their children, especially during the early years to ensure that they are prepared for school.

Families make DECISIONS and advocate for their children. They, better than anyone else, know what is best for their children and the hopes and dreams they have for their children.

It is important that families and community leaders work with schools and other organizations to ensure that their collective voice is heard. Federal programs like Title 1, SIG, Bilingual Education, and Special Education explicitly provide opportunities for families to be engaged.

Often family involvement is more visible in the elementary years but research shows that families must remain involved throughout the education of their child. Generally speaking, the middle school years tend to be the most critical as students need family guidance as they begin to make decisions about high school, college, jobs and career preparation.

The resources in this module will provide additional information on how families and community members can be engaged in a child’s education.
Building a Home Environment in Support of Learning

One of the most effective ways that families can support a child’s learning is through the environment and expectations they set at home. Creating a literacy-rich home environment is a cornerstone of academic success.

Schools can support the creation of a literacy environment in the home in a variety of ways:

- Offering books and other literacy materials as door prizes at school events;
- Hosting Family Literacy Nights as a way of showcasing how the school teaches reading or math literacy and how families can support these efforts;
- Creating lending libraries or mobile units that flood the community with books and literacy materials;
- Preparing take-home literacy packets for use when school is in session and on holidays or breaks;
- Connecting families with programs like Reading is Fundamental, the National Center for Family Literacy, and local book fairs to access free or low cost reading materials;
- Taking advantage of the family resources available from NEA’s Read Across America;
- Holding learning activities in the community, using churches, libraries, and community centers as the hub of activities.

These are only a few suggestions; brainstorming with families and other members of the community will provide many more.

Preparing Children for College, Jobs, and Career Opportunities

“College Begins in Kindergarten.” So says The Education Trust, a national advocacy organization headquartered in Washington, D.C. They make a compelling argument that today’s kindergarteners have already begun the process of preparing to compete for 21st century jobs. Perhaps even more alarming is that these same students will compete on an international stage with students from other countries who often achieve at higher levels than students in this country.

The challenge is not just to start earlier but to demand more. Research shows that rigorous, challenging middle and high school curriculums go a long way in preparing students for college or career paths. Advanced placement (AP) and IB (International Baccalaureate) classes frequently offer the kind of critical thinking and experiential learning opportunities that develop leadership as well as academic skills in students.
Often these programs are “watered down” or non-existent in high poverty schools, or are “reserved” for the handful of higher-income students who prefer to attend the neighborhood school. Thus, the achievement gap continues.

Again, families have a right to know how their children are being prepared for college and the job market. A simple review of the school’s program offerings or AP and other test data will give them an idea of academic expectations and college/job preparation. How do the course offerings and curriculum at one school compare to those at another school within the same or a different district? This may be a starting point to organize and work with other families to make sure all students are offered the challenging curriculum they need. *How Well is Our High School Preparing Students For College?* is included in this module as a starting point for discussion and planning purposes.

**Characteristics of Effective Families**

“U.S. teens spend as much time online—about 2.9 hours a day—as they do watching television. Combine the television and computer use and it shows that most teens are spending almost 5 hours a day immersed in some kind of media. For minority youth, the toll is even greater. They spend more than half their day consuming media content, a rate that’s 4.5 hours greater than their White counterparts.”

Northwestern University

Effective families have boundaries and expectations. They communicate the latter in how they establish the former. Without clearly stated, consistent boundaries, children are less likely to be academically, socially, or emotionally successful.

“If students spend as much as 70 percent of their waking hours out of school, family and community members can positively influence how that time is spent by monitoring how children use their time, engaging in home learning activities, and setting household rules and expectations that ensure structured time.

The Association’s effort to intensify partnerships with families and communities is one of the most important priorities we have taken. They won’t happen unless we try.

“America’s future will be determined by the home and the school. The child becomes largely what he is taught; hence we must watch what we teach, and how we live.”

Jane Addams
Activities

Module 5 | The Power of Families and Communities in Academics
Activity 1: Current Efforts to Engage Families in our School

Purpose
To provide participants an opportunity to identify and discuss their school strategies to engage families in their schools. Participants will discover what strategies seem to work well with families (and what didn’t) and why these strategies were successful. Participants are also able to examine their current efforts and how to broaden them to ensure student achievement and school improvement are the primary goals of our efforts with families.

Time
This activity normally takes about an hour but can be adapted to meet the needs of the professional development. It is a strong exercise to use early in a session to allow the participants an opportunity to examine how they engage families in their schools.

Materials
Activity 1 Handout: Current Efforts, sticky dots so each participant/team can select their most successful efforts.

Mapping
At each table participants should think about and discuss how their school has engaged families in the education of their children. Participants should reflect on the entire school year and share the activities and strategies used throughout. Each table should fill in as many boxes as possible and discuss the following questions.

From the examples, what do you think worked well and why?
What specific audiences participated in the activity? Who are we missing?
What criteria are we using to judge effective?

Voting
Distribute 3 dots/stars to every participant and have them vote for those examples they judged most effective.

Sharing
Have each table share one best example voted as “most successful” and how they determined its effectiveness.
Debrief
How do we strengthen the strategies/activities used to ensure families are engaged primarily in strategies that focus on student achievement and school improvement?
Activity 1 Handout

Current Efforts to Engage Parents in Our School
Activity #2

Interactive Homework—Math in My House

Successful family learning programs involve both generations. In some learning programs, children and adults learn side by side. In others, they learn separately. In still others, they do both. Adults acquire skills, as needed, for their own benefit and to model learning for their children. They also acquire specific skills they can apply in helping their children learn. What unites all of the activities under the heading “family learning” is the goal to assist children, directly or indirectly, in acquiring the skills necessary to become life-long learners.

One way to do this is through a “homework partnership” as you see in the following handout. By structuring homework to be more interactive between families, students, and teachers, learning can be enhanced for both students and their families.

Interactive Homework: A Three-Way Partnership

Requires students to:

• Talk to someone at home about what they are learning in class
• Share their work, ideas and progress with their families
• Think, write, then teach parents the lesson and discuss the outcomes

Requires parents to:

• Become involved in their child’s learning
• Share thoughts, ideas, insights and experiences with their child
• Comment on their child’s work and progress
• Request information from teachers in a communication session

Requires teachers to:

• Communicate with families about how to work and interact with their children at home
• Guide involvement and interaction
• Design homework that elicits family participation
• Clarify homework objectives, processes and evaluation procedures

(From NEA Membership and Organizing, Family-School-Community Partnerships Training Manual, 2004).

One example of interactive homework is found in this math activity developed by the WEEA Equity Resource Center.

Activity: Math in My House

Grades: 3-9
Duration: 20-40 minutes
Materials: Graph paper or chalkboard, “Math in My House” worksheet (page 6-16), calculator

Objective:

• To make students aware of the various ways their family members use mathematics in their daily lives
• To help involve parents in their children’s math education
• To reinforce math concepts and skills (Computing and interpreting statistics, calculating percentages, constructing bar and circle graphs)

Preparation

1. Design a tally sheet on which students may record their answers.

2. Plan the questions students will use to interview their parents or other family members about the ways their family members use mathematics or math skills. Prepare some key questions
such as:
- How do you use math to pay bills?
- How do you use math to do taxes?
- How do you use math to invest?
- How do you use math to budget?
- How do you use math to cook?
- How do you use math to sew?
- How do you use math to do woodworking?
- How do you use math to garden?

3. Using their math books as a resource, students might also prepare a list of key topics, for instance, rounding whole numbers and decimals, addition and subtraction of decimals, problem solving, reading graphs and charts, using geometric concepts, and so forth. They can ask their parents how they use these skills at home.

4. After the interview, have each student categorize and tally their family data. Have students prepare data summaries, graphs and charts, and figure averages. Ideas for data summaries are listed below. The summaries can be done in small groups or by the whole class.

Idea for data summaries

1. What math skills are used most often at home? Have students count and tally the number of times each math skill was mentioned by their family members, and combine to find class totals. Make a bar graph to display the data for the 6 to 12 most frequently used skills.

2. Which family member uses math skills in the most ways at home? Have the class tally the number of ways math skills are used by their fathers, mothers, aunts, uncles, etc. They can then compute averages for each type of family member and make a table to display their findings.

3. Which types of home activities are most often mentioned as requiring math skills? Have the class decide on how they want to categorize home activities. Suggestions include:
   - Housework—cooking, yardwork, and repairs
   - Financial—paying bills, preparing taxes, and creating budgets
   - Shopping—for groceries, clothes, gifts, or household needs
   - Leisure activities—woodworking, sewing, gardening, and other hobbies

4. Combine the data for the entire class, and make a circle graph that shows the major types of activities and the percentage of times each was mentioned by family members. For example, your students may find a class total of 600 ways math is used at home. They might determine that 50 percent of these “ways” were in the financial area, 15 percent in housework, 30 percent in shopping, and 5 percent in leisure activities.

This activity can be expanded to survey the ways parents or other family members use math on their jobs.

WEEA Equity Resource Center at EDC, Newton, MA, www.edc.org/WomensEquity/pubs.htm
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ways My Family Uses Math at Home</th>
<th>Family Member</th>
<th>Math Skills Needed</th>
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6–16 • C.A.R.E.: Strategies for Closing the Achievement Gaps
Activity 3

Planning for College

Hawkins Middle School

“LITTLE BY LITTLE FILLS THE POT”

African Proverb

Background

Hawkins Middle School has 700 students in grades five through eight. The student population is 45% African American, 25% Hispanic and 30% Caucasian. Most of the students live in mixed income housing and in an apartment, River Run Terrace complex. Hawkins Middle has a Title 1 school wide program with the majority of the children eligible for free or reduced lunch.

Hawkins Middle School is a successful school academically and believes in the involvement of families and the community in the children’s lives and education. Workshops are offered for families and the school has an active parent teacher organization.

Hawkins Middle has been adopted by a wealthy philanthropist who has promised to pay for every child’s college education/career path if they maintain a B average throughout middle school and high school. The philanthropist will also provide a support team to assist students and their families.

A group of teachers, parents, the principal, community organizations and churches have formed a committee to begin to educate the families and prepare their students to “think college/career”.
Planning Activity

Your group is the committee. Using the information you have and additional information you may need, write a plan to help reach the goal of ensuring all parents are more knowledgeable about the opportunity for students to go to college/plan for a career and the preparation required and that students begin to “think college/career”. The plan should include any supports and assistance that are needed. Your committee should consider courses students must take, workshops parents and community members may need, college timelines for applications, career preparation needed, field trips and other support and expenses students and families will need to ensure they are on track. Think out of the box!
**Activity 3 Handout**

**College/Career Preparation Planning Chart – Worksheet**

Goal: To prepare our families and our students to “think college/careers/”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Do We Need to Take to Reach Our Goal?</th>
<th>Who Should Be Involved?</th>
<th>What Support Do We Need?</th>
<th>What information Do We Need from Students, Parents, School Staff and Community Orgs.?</th>
<th>How Will We Know If We have Been Successful?</th>
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### College/Career Preparation Planning Chart - *(continued)*

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<th>What Support Do We Need?</th>
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Other considerations we must make:

Adapted from: Aligning Parent Engagement with Student Educational Success
National Council for Community and Education Partnerships
Strategies

Module 5 | The Power of Families and Communities in Academics
Strategy 1

Dr. Jeannie Oakes, Director of Education and Scholarship for the Ford Foundation and Professor Emerita of Education at the University of California at Los Angeles argues that teachers need to develop the capabilities to engage in cross-race interactions with families, some of whom may feel uneasy about their relations with schools.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g7kwfOYKvFQ

Educator Reflection—100 Ways to Make Your School Family Friendly

Here is a “tip sheet” that educators can use to make their schools open and inviting for families.

100 Ways to Make Your School Family Friendly

1) Create a policy for family involvement in your school.

2) Use the word “family” instead of parent when communicating with families.

3) Make sure family involvement is part of your school mission and vision statements.

4) Celebrate the cultures in your community with specific school programs and practices.

5) Celebrate families-of-the-month or week.

6) Create a family or parent center within your school.

7) Designate special family parking to make access to your school easy.

8) Make sure your school entrances and directions are clear and in languages spoken within your community.

9) Train teachers, administrators, and students about the importance of family involvement in schools.

10) Involve families in staff development programs with staff.

11) Give positive feedback to show appreciation to families through notes, telephone calls, and special events.

12) Approach all families with an open mind and positive attitude.

13) LISTEN!

14) Learn children’s strengths, talents, and interests through interactions with families.

15) Explain expectations to families in a manner they can understand and support.

16) Set aside appointment times that are convenient for working families.

17) Make family conferences student-led and mandatory at all grade levels.

18) Understand the best ways families receive information from the school and then deliver it that way.

19) Explain school rules and expectations and ask for home support.

20) Create opportunities for informal dialogue with families.

21) Address concerns honestly, openly, and early on.

22) Show support for PTA and other parent and family organizations by attending as often as you can.

23) Create classroom, grade-level, and school newsletters.

24) Maintain and update your Web page.

25) Publish and post your school and office hours.

26) Create a family handbook similar to your student handbook.
27) Have all information available in languages spoken within your school.

28) Use available technology to promote your family involvement goals.

29) Work with families to understand cultural practices that will promote better communication.

30) Listen to family perceptions of how they feel when they visit your school.

31) Listen to family perceptions of how families feel they are treated at your school.

32) Modify school climate based on family and student input.

33) Know the students in your school and their various peer groups.

34) Provide programs on topics of interest to families.

35) Evaluate all of the family meetings you have and move two from the school into the community.

36) Provide family support programs or groups to help families work with their children.

37) Keep abreast of parenting issues to offer assistance to families.

38) Offer parenting classes in child development, discipline, and similar topics.

39) Create and attend fairs and events especially designed to bring all families together.

40) Create a database of families and their special talents, interests, and ways in which they can support school activities. Use this database when calling families to assist in school.

41) Start a family book club.

42) Be available before and after school, and in the evening at specified times and dates.

43) Help teachers understand the importance of family involvement.

44) Evaluate and spruce up the exterior and entrances to your building.

45) Evaluate and repaint areas that need repainting.

46) Remove all graffiti and vandalism within twenty-four hours.

47) Suggest your school be used as a polling place on Election Day.

48) Provide displays and information when community groups are using your school.

49) Create bookmarks with important school information and pass them out to visitors.

50) Evaluate and create a plan for appropriate lighting for evening activities.

51) Allow all families access to your school computer labs and library.

52) Make sure the “reduced speed” signs in the school zone are visible.

53) Allow family members to be involved in the governance of your school.

54) Train parents to participate in school planning and decisionmaking.

55) Provide biographical information about the principal and administration.

56) Publish important telephone and fax numbers in at least five different places.

57) Publish the names of administrators and their phone numbers in every newsletter and on the school Web site.

58) Publish a monthly newsletter.
59) Place all printed information on the school Web site.

60) Increase the number of events geared to families for whom English is their second language.

61) Promote your school logo or mascot on all publications.

62) Create a “brag about” that promotes your school and its programs. Have copies in every visitor area of your school.

63) Provide all staff with business cards.

64) Provide all teachers with telephones in their classrooms.

65) Evaluate the clubs and cocurricular activities at your school to ensure that all students have opportunities for involvement.

66) Increase the percentage of students in clubs and student activities.

67) Schedule a club fair during the school day.

68) Create a plan to articulate more closely with your feeder schools.

69) Find five ways to celebrate and promote your school’s diversity.

70) Identify all of the peer groups in your school. Have lunch with each of them monthly.

71) Create a program to bring diverse students together.

72) Ensure school governance opportunities are open to students.

73) Publish a school calendar with pictures that promotes activities about your school.

74) Evaluate all of your school publications for school “jargon.”

75) Create classes that help families understand school curriculum.

76) Promote visitation days for families.

77) Publish your school safety and security plan.

78) Train security personnel in family friendly concepts.

79) Establish a nonthreatening sign-in or entrance policy.

80) Send letters home to all families the same day as a problem or negative occurrence in school.

81) Use telecommunications technology to send messages home about school activities.

82) Create family invitations to school functions.

83) Increase the number of school staff involved in student activities and family programs with incentives and grants for extra pay.

84) Provide opportunities to expose students to school activities within the school day.

85) Celebrate the history of your school by providing information to all students and families.

86) Ask families to share their experiences if they attended your school.

87) Involve grandparents in school functions.

88) Ask families to share their cultures with students during the school day.

89) Create experiential learning opportunities by using families in the process.

90) Fill the walls of your school with motivation to families and students.

91) Always thank families for their involvement in your school.
92) Handwrite five thank-you notes to families per month.

93) Create opportunities to recognize and reward all students, staff, and their families.

94) Allow students to organize and implement new student orientation programs.

95) Ask businesses to help you promote family involvement.

96) Find ten businesspersons to provide mentors for your school.

97) Make sure your school governance council has a business liaison.

98) Create a budget for all school assemblies.

99) Increase by 20 percent the number of opportunities for families and teachers to communicate.

100) Believe that family involvement improves the achievement of every student.


Educator Reflection—Family Support for Learning

Schools can create family learning programs that provide support for student achievement. Parents create a learning environment for their children through the natural, everyday activities and experiences that occur in the home. All families, even families with low literacy skills, are capable of building rich home learning environments. The list on pages 6-12 and 6-13 shares some characteristics of good home learning environments and can be shared with parents in a number of ways, for example:

- Educators can share this information verbally and in writing at open house in a large group presentation.

- Educators can share this information verbally and in writing at a parent conference. This may open up a dialogue that allows teachers to identify areas where they can assist parents.

- The characteristics can be shared and discussed as part of a parent education class.

It may also be useful to have a discussion of these characteristics among the school staff, to identify possible barriers parents may encounter, assistance that schools may need to provide, training opportunities, etc. Education Support Professionals (ESPs) can be especially effective in communicating expectations about home learning environments because they most often come from the neighborhoods and communities of the students. Engaging ESPs in creating events to reach out to family members about what they can do to promote student achievement helps to bridge the gap between home and school.

Dr. Joyce Epstein, the Director of the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships, at Johns Hopkins University, discusses the principal’s role in prioritizing and encouraging parental involvement.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VYUbflGQ9OA
Strategy 2

Family Support for Learning

Creating Successful Home Learning Environments

- Establishing a Daily Family Routine
- Providing time, space, quiet and materials for child's studying, reading and hobbies
- Assigning chores and regular household tasks
- Encouraging good health habits: proper balance of rest and activity, regular breakfast and dinner schedule, good nutrition, health care as needed

Monitoring Out-of-School Activities

- Guiding the constructive use of leisure time: after-school activities, use of TV, and time with friends
- Setting clear rules and standards
- Discussing rules with child
- Rewarding success and applying sanctions appropriately and consistently

Modeling the Value of Learning and Hard Work

- Setting an example by reading at home and engaging in other learning activities
- Encouraging effort for long-term gains vs. short-term benefits
- Playing games together (e.g., Scrabble, Monopoly, dominoes) that require planning ahead and problem solving rather than pure luck
- Communicating openly and encouraging verbal give-and-take

Expressing High but Realistic Expectations for Achievement

- Setting developmentally appropriate goals and standards for child's conduct
- Discussing regularly topics concerning education, careers, life skills, rules
- Affirming personal worth through positive messages and affirming the child as a winner

Encouraging the Child's Overall Development and Progress in School

- Cultivating a warm and supportive home atmosphere
- Expressing interest in child's education both at home and by attending school events
- Urging child to work hard in school
- Staying in touch with child's teachers
- Expressing affection and approval
- Noticing and rewarding achievement in school
Family Support for Learning

Reading, Writing, and Discussion among Family Members

- Reading and listening to children read
- Discussing school day, family members’ lives, and current events
- Storytelling, recounting experiences, and sharing problem-solving strategies
- Writing of all kinds (e.g., grocery lists, telephone messages, letters, diary entries)
- Relating everyday experiences to what is being learned in school, and using these experiences as teaching opportunities
- Helping students expand their vocabulary
- Conducting family activities that help students expand their view of the world

Using Community Resources to Meet Family Needs

- Exposing children to cultural activities (e.g., visits to library, museums, movies, concerts)
- Enrolling children in youth enrichment programs (e.g., after-school sports or lessons, community programs, clubs)
- Introducing children to responsible mentors (e.g., coaches, counselors, friends, staff of local organizations or churches)
- Using visits to the library to expand learning opportunities and develop interests

(From NEA Membership and Organizing, Family-School-Community Partnerships Training Manual, 2004.)
Information Brief
NATIONAL COLLABORATIVE ON WORKFORCE AND DISABILITY
ISSUE 28 • May 2011

Helping Youth Develop Soft Skills for Job Success: Tips for Parents and Families (Excerpted from http://www.ncwd-youth.info/information-brief-28 Spanish version also available at this site)

This InfoBrief discusses the importance of soft skills and offers strategies parents can use to help their child develop skills for employment success.

Many parents of youth approaching adulthood worry about their child’s future. Whether youth have disabilities or not, parents want to know what they can do to help their sons and daughters decide on a career, support their job hunting, and succeed in the workplace. One way family members can help is by working with and encouraging youth to develop soft skills. Even though parents may not know this term, they will discover that they are familiar with these every day, common sense skills that are important in all aspects of life. Soft skills help youth succeed in life no matter what they are doing. By improving these skills, a youth can enhance his or her social life, do better in postsecondary studies, and be more successful at finding and maintaining employment. Families can use several strategies to help develop soft skills.

Which Skills are Needed to Succeed?

In the 1990s, several initiatives attempted to classify the types of skills needed to succeed in the workplace and adult life. Included among these efforts were the 1991 Secretary of Labor’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) and the Equipped for the Future Framework (EFF), which was the result of a 10-year initiative by the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL). The NIFL effort is the most holistic in that it addresses some key foundational “hard skills,” specifically reading, writing, and math skills along with the important soft skills needed not only in the workplace but as members of families and society. From these 16 skills, 10 have been further validated for the purpose of developing entry level skills needed across all industry sectors. The EFF skills include:

**Communication Skills**

- Read with Understanding
- Convey Ideas in Writing
- Speak so Others Can Understand
- Listen Actively
- Observe Critically
Interpersonal Skills
- Guide Others
- Resolve Conflict and Negotiate
- Advocate and Influence
- Cooperate with Others

Decision Making Skills
- Use Math to Solve Problems and Communicate
- Solve Problems and Make Decisions
- Plan

Lifelong Learning Skills
- Take Responsibility for Learning
- Reflect and Evaluate
- Learn Through Research
- Use Information and Communications Technology

Youth who have these skills are more likely to be hired and less likely to be fired—giving them an important advantage in today’s job market.

How Families Can Build These Skills at Home

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Does your child need to work on speech communication skills?

According to annual surveys done by the National Association of Colleges and Employers, communication skills consistently rank among the top skills employers look for in a new employee. Helping youth improve communication skills will not only help them get a job, it can help them advance in their careers.

How to Help:
- Use a flip cam or cell phone to record your child giving directions for using the microwave or doing something they are good at, such as playing a computer game. Review the video with them. Did they speak clearly? Were the instructions clear? Other family members and friends can provide feedback as well.

Does your family member pay attention to what others are saying and remember what was said?

Listening to others’ needs and opinions is part of being a good communicator. Understanding and remembering what is said are important skills for the workplace when interacting with employers and customers.

How to Help:
- Encourage your child to have conversations with family and friends. Listening to others and contributing to the conversation will help him develop listening skills.
Does your son or daughter communicate nonverbally in an effective way?

Much communication is nonverbal. Nonverbal communication is important when interacting with employers, coworkers, and customers. Youth may need to improve aspects of nonverbal communication, such as making proper eye contact. In addition, some youth have disabilities that make it difficult to read the nonverbal communication of others such as facial expressions and gestures. Families can help their youth improve these skills by practicing at home.

How to Help:

- Have your family member look people in the eye and shake hands when introducing him to other adults. Practice the nonverbal language that would take place at a job interview. Let your son or daughter know that it’s important to have eye contact with the person doing the interviewing and to limit fidgeting or nervous movements.

INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

Is your child ready to take direction from and work cooperatively with others?

Teamwork and the ability to work well with others consistently appear among the highest ranked qualities employers are looking for in an employee in the annual surveys of National Association of Colleges and Employers. In today's world, this includes the ability to communicate and work with people from different racial, religious, ability, and ethnic groups.

How to Help:

- Encourage your child to help an elderly neighbor with yard work or volunteer as a family to serve a meal at a homeless shelter. Youth can learn about working with others by volunteering.

Does your youth know how to handle conflicts?

Self-control, respecting others, and being able to deal with conflict are important soft skills. Refusing to follow directions and orders and the inability to get along with other people are among the most common reasons people get fired.

How to Help:

- Help your child understand how his behavior may contribute to a misunderstanding. If he talks about a social mishap that happened at work, help him reflect on the situation. Ask your child to determine what he did right, and also discuss if there was anything he or his work colleagues could have done differently. If necessary, discuss next steps to address the misunderstanding.

Is your child careful with his appearance?

Good personal hygiene and appearance promotes social interaction with others while poor hygiene can give employers and co-workers a bad impression.
How to Help:

- Discuss personal cleanliness, stressing that most workplaces require employees to dress in a specific way and to be clean.

Is your son or daughter friendly, courteous, and tactful?

Employers are looking for employees with good people skills. While especially important in jobs where employees interact with customers, people skills can also help interactions with co-workers, avoid conflict, and stand out from other job applicants or employees.

How to Help:

- Teach your child phrases she can use on the phone: “May I please speak to Mr. Smith?” or in the workplace, “I’m Deborah. It’s nice to meet you.” Have your son or daughter answer the phone at home in a professional and courteous manner.

LIFELONG LEARNING SKILLS

Does your family member demonstrate personal responsibility, initiative, self-management, and perseverance?

A strong work ethic, initiative, and decision-making skills are other skills employers consistently rank highly in the annual surveys of the National Association of Colleges and Employers.

How to Help:

- Have your son or daughter take responsibility for taking care of a pet or getting ready for school or work.

Does your youth try to learn new things?

- Take your child to concerts, sporting events, or encourage participation in activities that match her interests.

Summary & Resources

Both at home and at school, families and other caring adults play a vital role in helping young people with and without disabilities build work skills that will help them be successful in employment. Families who are aware of the expectations of employers, understand that they are partners in helping youth prepare for and maintain employment, and use everyday activities in the home to build work skills give their youth a much better chance of succeeding in the job search and in the workplace.

REFERENCES


Families Strengthen Their Children’s Literacy

http://www.newvisions.org/reading-literacy/literacy-and-your-family

Literacy has always been important, and in today's knowledge-based global economy, it is more important than ever.

As a parent, you can have a powerful impact on your children's literacy — supporting and helping them grow into critical thinkers and discerning users of information.

This section is designed to help you make literacy a part of your family life:

- Develop your children's literacy skills from the day they say their first word until the day they graduate from high school.
- Understand what your child will be learning in school and when.
- Give you many ideas for how to support your children's literacy learning.

With strong literacy skills, our young people will be prepared to succeed in school, develop their own interests, graduate from college and get good jobs.

Much of the material in this section was adapted from Opening the Door to Learning: Literacy Is a Family Affair, developed by New Visions for Public Schools and the New York City Department of Education.

Grades 6-8

Young teenagers are trying to figure out who they are and how they relate to other people. They go back and forth — sometimes on a minute-to-minute basis — between being tough and insecure, confident and doubting, outgoing and shy. Families and schools can support their development by letting adolescents try on different identities in environments that are safe, challenging and fair.

Young teens hunger for new ideas. They learn by relating new ideas to themselves: “What does this mean to me?” and “Why does this matter to me?” Most young people this age start to think about abstract ideas like justice and independence. They begin to draw conclusions and make predictions based on the information they find. This does not happen in a nice, neat pattern: They might campaign to save the environment one day and refuse to recycle the next.

These years are very important to the development of literacy. Adolescents spend much of their time outside school communicating with their friends and using various technologies to connect to the world. They may send instant messages, listen to music, chat on the phone, cruise through Web sites and work on homework all at the same time. All of this communication helps
adolescents discover their own strengths, express themselves in various ways, connect reading and writing to their own lives, and use language to make sense of their world.

What you can do at home

Speaking and Listening

- Talk with your adolescents about things they are interested in, from music and video games to clothes. Don’t talk down or try to sound overly “cool” — just talk.
- Ask what they think about an issue and listen to the answer. Respect their voice, but expect reasons for the opinions.

Reading

- Encourage your young teenagers to read and tell stories to younger siblings or grandparents.
- Encourage them to read for many purposes, like finding out about a popular music star or about a sports event.
- Encourage them to think about the meaning of what they are reading and writing.
- Talk with them about what they are reading. Ask questions and relate your own experiences that connect to the reading.
- Visit the library often together. Help select materials that they can read independently.
- Encourage and help them to read at least 25 books each year in a variety of genres, both fiction and nonfiction.
- Save favorite children’s books, and don’t be surprised if your middle-grade student enjoys rereading them.
- Create a reading space in the home with comfortable seating and interesting materials to read, like novels, information books, comic books, magazines and newspapers.

Writing

- Encourage your adolescents to express personal thoughts and feelings in a journal, and respect their privacy.
- Provide whatever inspires them to write — a quiet place, a new pad of colored paper, colored ink, writing tools (computer, dictionary, quotation book) or background music.
- Encourage them to share writing publicly by posting it on the refrigerator, sending copies to relatives or friends or reading/performing it in youth groups or at family gatherings.
- Encourage them to participate safely in the online environment. Help them find safe blogging sites, create a personal space page or family Web site that reveals interests without personal identifiers, share creative writing with online teen magazines and access appropriate interactive online sites.
What your student may be experiencing at school

Speaking and Listening

- Learning to listen carefully and respond respectfully to others.
- Engaging in conversations with peers and teachers throughout the school day.
- Recognizing that the way words are spoken persuades and conveys meaning (for example, sarcasm, enthusiasm, humor).
- Gathering information with different points of view from multiple sources. Using those ideas to persuade a listener about an issue based on accurate evidence.
- Presenting information in a variety of formats (five- to seven-minute oral reports, speeches, debates, panel discussions).

Reading

- Reading a variety of materials in every class, including literature, information books, biographies and magazine articles.
- Using knowledge of root words (words that originated in Latin, for example) and cognates (words that are similar in two languages) to figure out the meaning of new words.
- Learning the vocabulary of academic subjects.
- Using reading comprehension strategies, such as asking questions, re-reading, comparing new ideas with what they already know, summarizing ideas, visualizing or figuring out the author’s point of view.
- Recognizing how characters in a story or novel change over time.
- Reading and understanding at least 25 books for enjoyment.
- Evaluating what they read: Is it well written? Is it accurate? Has the author provided enough evidence to back up the main points?
- Connecting their reading with what they already know and to their own experiences.
- Participating in book clubs and other opportunities to share their thoughts about books with other students.

Writing

- Writing in every class.
- Taking notes from books and from what the teacher says.
- Writing for a variety of reasons and audiences to respond to literature, compare and contrast elements in literature, share information, tell an original story, create a poem or play or persuade someone.
- Putting together ideas, information and points of view from several sources to produce essays, reports and other products.
- Using different methods to plan and organize their writing (for example, a writer’s notebook, outline or graphic organizer).
- Revising writing to produce polished work.
- Publishing or performing writing through displays, school newspapers, writing contests, plays or oral reports.
Grades 9-12

For most teens, high school is a time of transition — from discovering where one fits with friends to discovering where one fits in the world. High school students need to develop sophisticated literacy skills to meet the challenges they will face as family members, college students, employees and citizens.

At this stage, young people find meaningful connections between what they are reading and their own lives. They also discover reasons for writing beyond school: resumes, college applications and diaries.

What you can do at home

Speaking and Listening

- Ask questions about what your adolescents are reading, listening to and studying. Listen carefully to the answers. Discuss homework assignments.
- Share family stories.
- Point out interesting news articles in the paper and talk about them together.
- Watch television programs together and discuss your reactions.

Reading

- Encourage your adolescents to read stories to younger siblings and to help them use the Internet to gather information.
- Encourage them to read and understand 25 books each year.
- Help them find answers to questions, both personal and academic.
- Provide time and space for homework, reading and writing.
- Find out about their school through homework, the school newsletter, parents night, visits with teachers and conversations with them.
- Be sure that everyone in the family has a public library card and that you visit the library often with your family.
- Read what they are reading and discuss it with them without making judgments or talking down.

Writing

- Encourage your adolescents to write about thoughts, feelings and experiences in a journal. Respect their privacy.
- Exchange writing with them in which you share thoughts, conflicts and feelings.
- Provide support tools for writing (computer, paper, pens and reference books such as a dictionary, thesaurus and quotation book).
- Encourage public sharing of writing, such as community essay contests, community newspapers and letters to the editor.
What your student may be experiencing at school

Speaking and Listening

- Asking questions, restating what they have heard and stating different opinions.
- Presenting oral reports and stating their own opinions in all subjects, with supporting examples and facts.
- Listening respectfully to others.
- Talking about ideas with peers.
- Having different types of speaking experiences, from informal discussions to giving speeches.

Reading

- Reading poetry, nonfiction and fiction in different subject areas.
- Reading to discover new ideas and ways of thinking.
- Investigating topics that are connected to their own lives, passions and academic interests.
- Participating in book clubs, literature circles and other opportunities to talk about books.
- Reading to learn the main ideas for all their classes.
- Evaluating what they read to decide if it is unbiased, accurate and complete.
- Exploring college and career opportunities beginning early in the ninth grade, to discover the ones that match their interests, talents and ambitions.
- Using charts, diagrams, tables and graphs to get information.
- Inferring meaning that is not directly stated in a text.

Writing

- Writing in every class.
- Working together to revise and edit writing.
- Trying a variety of formats for their writing, including poetry, stories, essays, letters, journal entries, plays and research papers.
- Producing polished pieces of writing by creating first drafts and then revising to improve both the expression of ideas and the use of language.
- Publishing or performing their writing.
- Expressing themselves about important issues to different audiences, for example, telling their own stories, writing letters to the editor.
Background Readings

Module 5 | The Power of Families and Communities in Academics
Keeping Family-School-Community Connections Helps Support Secondary Students’ Success

Research shows that parent involvement begins to decline at the onset of the pre-teen and adolescent years. It is extremely important for parents to be engaged in their children’s education and to support student learning throughout the grades. Increasing parent involvement in middle and high schools can lead to higher student achievement, higher graduation rates, and more students admitted to colleges. Collaboration between parents, educators, students, and the community is the best way to ensure students meet the demands for higher education and the 21st century workforce.

—NEA President Dennis Van Roekel

Ask teachers what factors beyond the walls of their classrooms have a positive impact on student learning, and they consistently put parent and community involvement on the list.

The good news is that parents of elementary school students do seem to be engaged in their children’s education. A recent survey from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) found that 90 percent of the parents of elementary students said they had attended a parent-teacher conference—and that 60 percent volunteered or served on a school committee. But those numbers do not hold up once you move past the elementary years. At the middle school level, 76 percent of parents reported attending a parent-teacher conference—and that 60 percent volunteered or served on a school committee; at the high school level, the study found that only six in 10 had attended a parent-teacher conference, and only a third (34 percent) had volunteered or served on a school committee.

This trend of parents becoming less engaged in school activities during the middle and high school years needs to be addressed because the family’s role in monitoring, motivating, and modeling positive behaviors is critical as students move into adolescence. Research unequivocally affirms the fact that parent, family, and community involvement in education has a positive and long-lasting effect on student learning in both middle school and high school, debunking the myth that parental involvement is either unnecessary or unwanted.

Engaging families at the secondary level

Research shows the value of keeping parents engaged as their children move up the grades. An important study in 2008 found that student achievement of tenth graders increased when parents were engaged in these specific ways: discussed activities or events of interest to the student as well as topics the student studied in class; reviewed course selection with the student; attended a school meeting and volunteered at the child’s school. The authors of the study equated this level of parent involvement with the district spending an additional $1,000 per pupil.

Dr. Joyce Epstein, a distinguished researcher who directs the National Network of Partnership Schools at Johns Hopkins University, has been studying the effects of parent, family, and community involvement on student outcomes for nearly three decades. Her framework of six types of parent involvement has set a firm base for policies and practices to support student academic success.

Other researchers confirm that engaged families and communities have a positive impact on students’ academic achievement (in English and math in particular), school attendance and graduation rates, the number of credits earned, postsecondary education and career intentions, and more. Keeping families engaged helps ensure students meet the demands for higher education and the 21st century workforce.

It’s never too late for involvement

Researchers exploring the impact of ongoing parental involvement in high school on math achievement test scores found, for example, that school, family, and community factors independently and significantly affect students’ math achievement. The analyses indicated that students in neighborhoods with high concentrations of poverty had lower math achievement test results, but scores improved with ongoing parental involvement. With such encouraging results, Epstein concludes that “it is never too late to initiate programs of family and community involvement, as benefits accrue through grade 12.”

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plans, and other indicators of success in school. Indeed, when middle and high school parents and families work together with schools, students complete more course credits, hold higher aspirations for themselves, are more motivated and prepared to learn, and have fewer behavioral problems. The evidence holds true for all students regardless of the parents’ education, family income, or background.

With the consensus among researchers and practitioners that parent involvement and community support have a positive impact on student learning, partnerships between schools and the community have become a common feature of high-performing schools. Research shows that the most effective policies and practices at the secondary school level focus on (1) providing clear information and resources so that parents can help their teenager at home, and (2) offering a variety of opportunities for parents to volunteer and participate in school or school district governance and decision making.

Effective partnerships are not stand-alone projects or add-on programs; they must be well integrated into the school’s overall mission and goals. To be successful, especially at the middle school and high school level, partnerships must be linked to student academic improvement and integrated into overall school improvement efforts.

Two models have documented their success:

- The TIPS (Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork) program, developed by Epstein and teachers in Baltimore, Md., has successfully boosted student writing skills, grades, and test scores of 700 African American middle schoolers. In addition, parents have become more involved in their children’s education, and students are more likely to finish their homework. Longer parents took part in TIPS, the more students’ writing scores improved. Sixth- and eighth-grade teachers, who sent weekly assignments home with information about how students could engage their families in science, found not only that students’ grades in science improved, but also that there was a higher level of family involvement in science than by students in non-TIPS classes.

- Since 1987, more than 375,000 immigrant parents in California have increased their knowledge and skills to support their children’s academic achievement and enrollment in higher education by participating in the Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE) program. Since then, PIQE programs have expanded to other cities in Arizona, Texas, and Minnesota. A recent study documented that children of Hispanic parents who completed the San Diego PIQE program achieved a 93 percent high school graduation rate and 79.2 percent student enrollment in college or university.

**NEA affiliates create partnerships to engage families and communities**

The Parent-Teacher Home Visit Project (PTHVP), a partnership formed 10 years ago between the Sacramento City Teachers Association, a faith-based community organizing group, and the school district, organizes teams of educators and parents to visit students and their families at home, build trusting relationships, and share instructional tools. Starting in 2006, teams in Sacramento provided information about new exit-exam graduation requirements and resources to assist students. Today, more students are passing. As a result of PTHVP visits to homes of students transitioning to high school, more parents are participating in school events. Outside of California, home visits have also become a successful and institutionalized part of school reform efforts in Ohio, Massachusetts, Montana, and Colorado.

Adding an extra period to the school day is no easy feat, but parents, faculty, and members of the Community Council in Layton, Utah, collaborated in 2007 to do just that. The Sophomore Advisory and Tutorial Period, a new guidance program, was originally planned to help sophomores who were having a hard time adjusting academically and behaviorally at Northridge High School. Soon, however, planners realized that all 1,900 students could benefit. School staff and administrators found that the extra period had a significant impact: students completed more homework on time, one-on-one tutorials boosted grades and test scores, and student-teacher relationships were strengthened.

Vocabulary building became a school and community project in Idaho Falls, Idaho. Teachers and administrators at Skyline High School created a Word of the Week Program to help students prepare for the SAT, and then invited local businesses to get involved. Students were encouraged to use the words at school, and business people reinforced the learning by offering discounts to students who used the word on the premises. Students, teachers, staff members, and community members all incorporated the new vocabulary words into their lexicon as they all learned and used the words together.

**R U Smarter Than a Middle Schooler?** a game show modeled after a popular television program, brought parents and students together at Adams Friendship Middle School in Friendship, Wis. Teachers who were looking for new ways to encourage students to be more academically engaged in math, science, health, and social studies created a game show event to spark student interest. Parents and students used the teacher-
 developed study packets to prepare for the challenge. Each time a student turned in a study sheet, his or her name was entered into the drawing to be an on-stage contestant eligible to win more than $1,000 in cash and prizes donated by area business leaders and community members. Everyone felt like a winner. Students were excited to show off their knowledge and parents were proud to see how much their children had learned.14

**States stepping up efforts**

States are stepping up their efforts to boost parent engagement in secondary schools. At least five states—California, Connecticut, Florida, New York, and Ohio—mandate that all public schools engage in specific activities to involve all parents in their children’s education.15 States must develop, adopt, and implement written policies and procedures to link parent involvement to student achievement goals. And eight more states—Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, South Carolina, Utah, and Wisconsin—recommend, support, and encourage parent engagement but do not mandate any specific actions. South Carolina, for example, directs the state superintendent to “promote parental involvement as a priority for all levels from preK–12, with particular emphasis at the middle and high school levels where parental involvement is currently least visible.”16

Many states promote parent and community involvement in developing school improvement strategies, school safety, and dropout prevention programs, as well as initiatives to address the needs of at-risk youth and English Language Learners. Even without mandates, many states develop policies or issue guidance to reinforce the intent and spirit of their laws.

Since passage of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) in 1997, that state has established some 800 family resource and youth services centers in or near all qualifying elementary and secondary schools. Parent-school-community partnerships are viewed as essential program components; more than 1,400 parents across the state have been trained to conduct school improvement projects. In 2007, the Education Commission’s Parent Advisory Council issued a set of state standards and recommendations for family and community involvement that focused on student achievement.

Georgia’s Family Connection Partnership, created in 1991, is the largest statewide network of community collaboratives in the nation. Almost all counties include efforts to support student success and strengthen families. Partners in the local collaboratives include educators, business leaders, locally elected officials, faith-based and civic organizations, public and private service providers, families, and others.17

Some state policies affirm the principles contained in federal law, such as Section 1118 (20 U.S.C. § 6318) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA/NCLB), and use Title I funds to provide secondary parents/caregivers substantial and meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children. Like ESEA/NCLB, these state policies require that every Title I school have a written parent involvement policy, developed with and approved by parents.

The economic stimulus bill (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, or ARRA) is dramatically increasing the level of funding for education, and may provide unprecedented opportunities for schools and school systems to engage parents, families, and communities in the education of elementary and secondary students through family or community programs, initiatives, or partnerships designed help improve schools and student learning.

**What policymakers should consider**

State and local policymakers should advocate for laws, policies, and regulations that promote successful family-school-community partnerships that are research-based, well organized, adequately funded, and sustainable. In particular, we need to encourage parents, families, and communities to become more engaged in the education of middle and high school students.

**NEA recommends that states:**

- Develop and implement formal policies on parent and community involvement for all secondary schools. They should be research-based and coordinate with federally funded Parent Information and Resource Centers and other state agencies that focus on youth and young adults. States should allocate Title I funds and other state resources to assure sustainability.
- Include provisions that ensure families have timely access to information and employ communications strategies that effectively address various family structures, languages, and cultures. States should fund school-based parent information centers and hire school-community coordinators who are knowledgeable about the community’s historic, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural background.
- Collaborate with employers to develop parent- and family-friendly policies so that parents/caregivers can participate in school or education-related activities. States should encourage districts to develop reasonable background check requirements for adults.
- Waive fees or reduce the cost of background checks—and expedite requests.
Allocate funds for professional development for all school personnel that make parent, family, and community engagement an integral component of student achievement and school improvement goals.

Support collaborative efforts between state departments of education, local school systems, and higher education institutions so that the issue of parent, family, and community involvement in education is addressed in all teacher and administrator preparation programs.

Require regular data gathering, evaluation, and reporting on the effectiveness of family involvement programs and activities.

NEA believes that much more needs to be done to actively engage parents, families, and community stakeholders in the academic life of middle and high school students. The drop in parent, family, and community involvement in education that occurs when students reach pre-teen and teen years can and must be reversed. To do so, many more research-based strategies, innovative practices, and effective policies must be implemented and sustained.

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8 Henderson, Anne T. and K.L. Mapp. 2002. “A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family and Community Connections on Student Achievement.” Austin, TX: National Center for Family & Community Connections with Schools, Southwest Education Development Laboratory.
15 Moles, O. 2008. “State Requirements for Parent Involvement Activities by Schools.” This paper is an independent product and was not commissioned by any organization. Contact the author at omoles@verizon.net for full text and further information.

Resources


Communities in Schools has connected community resources with schools to help students succeed in school and in life. During its 30-year history, the organization has coordinated the delivery of resources into schools in a way that is responsive, cost-efficient, and results-oriented. www.cisnet.org

Parent Involvement Schools of Excellence Certification Program. The National PTA, in partnership with national school principals’ associations, recognizes, through a nationally accredited method, parent and family involvement in education and showcases schools that are implementing outstanding parent-community-school partnerships. www.pta.org
The terms college readiness and access are buzz words being voiced by policy makers, business leaders, school and community leaders, and researchers across the country. It is no longer acceptable or realistic for students to obtain only a high school diploma. Instead, research demonstrates that our educational system must view high school as a pathway to post-secondary opportunities, not as a terminal diploma (Sagawa, Shirley, and Schramm, 2008).

An innovative practice for secondary schools being implemented in the Indianapolis Public School (IPS) District is the formation of College Pathway Teams, a dedicated group of champions focused on working together to create a college-going culture in their school and community.

What are College Pathway Teams?

- Each College Pathway Team is composed of the principal/assistant principal, guidance counselor, college support staff, parent liaison, and families. As decision-makers and supporters of education, families play a critical role in developing school improvement strategies.
- College Preparation Expert: the College Pathway Team is competent in the latest researched best practices for improving academic standards, high school persistence and graduation rates, and college enrollment and completion rates. College Pathway Teams use data, assessment tools, and technology to improve student learning and school performance. As their children’s first teachers, parents are experts of their children.
- Assessors: the College Pathway Team develops and implements data-collection systems that enable them to document, monitor, and track student performance and access to supports such as college advising, tutoring, and financial-assistance information.
- Partners: in collaboration with their school improvement team, the College Pathway Team develops a college preparation action plan to improve college access and readiness at their school.
- Champions: the College Pathway Team is the voice, the coordinator, and the expert for building on the community assets and leveraging the participation of community partners and families to work collectively together to achieve the college preparation action plan goals.
- Advocates: the College Pathway Team assesses school policies, curriculum, and funding to support the college preparation action plan and requests changes in policy, programmatic, and funding areas to achieve the goals.

“I ask every American to commit to at least one year or more of higher education or career training. This can be community college or a four-year school; vocational training or an apprenticeship. But whatever the training may be, every American will need to get more than a high school diploma.”

President Barack Obama
Address to Joint Session of Congress, February 24, 2009

Spotlight on Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS)
IPS set the stage for promoting college readiness and college access by creating College Pathway Teams for all of their secondary schools during the March Parent Liaison Staff College Readiness training hosted by The Indiana Partnerships Center. Dr. Jane Kendrick, Assistant Superintendent of Secondary Education, directed all secondary school principals to establish and lead a College Pathway Team at their respective school beginning immediately. IPS’ College Pathway Teams will include the principal as the lead, the lead guidance counselor, the AVID liaison, parent liaison, and families. Dr. Kendrick directed the principals to meet monthly with their College Pathway Team to assess their school’s college-going culture and develop a school action plan to improve graduation and college readiness and participation rates at their school.

“We believe every student in our district deserves the opportunity to attend college regardless of race, income, or family background. In IPS, we have formed College Pathway Teams for each of our high schools to help us achieve our vision. Their mission is to make sure our students graduate on time and successfully complete a program of study in the college or post-secondary institution of their choice.”

-Dr. Jane Kendrick, Indianapolis Public Schools

For more information about parent engagement, contact The Indiana Partnerships Center at www.fscp.org.
What are the Key College Pathway Indicators?

A Culture of College Access

A school-wide belief among all faculty, students, and parents that all students can graduate in a timely manner and attend college, is instrumental in creating a college-going culture, as well as increasing high school graduation and college attendance and completion rates. Faculty expectations shift from thinking that a college education is a privilege for a few to encouraging and preparing all students for post-secondary educational opportunities (Boser, Ulrich and Burd, Stephen, 2009). Faculty shift the question from, “How do we stop kids from dropping out?” to “How can we increase college enrollment?”

Young people tend to achieve what’s expected of them. As a result of faculty and families expecting their students to attend college, students begin to see a meaning and purpose for their academic work and are motivated to achieve. Research demonstrates the positive impact when parents are involved in their student’s learning and college planning (Henderson and Mapp, 2002). Several tangible action steps for creating a college-going culture include:

- Prominent visual and physical space devoted to college information that is available for students and families, such as a college corner in a parent resource center
- Enrollment in Twenty-first Century Scholars and other similar scholarship programs
- Exposure to college and careers for students and families
- College visits for students and families
- Developing a career/college plan so students know exactly what courses to take to stay on track to achieve post-secondary goals

Timely Support Networks and Partnerships

By providing timely and necessary assistance for students, in partnership with the community, all students are supported to navigate the process and pursue a college education (Ascher and McGuire, 2008). Research demonstrates that school, family, and community connections have a powerful, positive impact on student achievement (Henderson and Mapp, 2002). Timely interventions can include:

- Meaningful two-way communication between home and school
- Student enrollment in before, after, and/or summer school enrichment and tutoring programs
- Student participation in one-on-one instruction
- Mentoring for every student
- Connecting students to family supportive services, such as counseling and transportation
- Test-taking strategies and multiple practice sessions
- Identifying students with risk factors and linking them to timely supports

Academic Rigor for All

According to a recent U.S. Department of Education report, a powerful predictor of whether high school students will graduate and earn a college degree is the rigor of the high school curriculum they complete. Completion of ‘college gateway courses,’ such as Algebra I by the end of 8th grade is strongly linked to a student’s rigorous courses in high school that ultimately lead to high school graduation and a college degree. However, one study found that in sixty districts, high schools offer 286 different math courses to students with nearly 50 varieties of algebra. Worse, remedial tracks linger, and courses are often disconnected from important college and career preparation. Offering opportunities for students to take Advanced Placement courses and/or to earn college credit through attending courses at nearby colleges are also linked to student success. Research also demonstrates the positive impact of making stronger connections between courses and future careers for students to excel and see the value in their coursework (Harris, 2008).

There are key benchmarks throughout a student’s academic career that we must help them reach if we expect our youth to prepare for college.

Roderick Wheeler, Grants Officer, Central Indiana Community Foundation

Effective Use of Data

The mantra, “We value what we measure and we measure what we value” is true in schools. Research demonstrates the importance of developing and implementing data systems that regularly collect and analyze data on student progress toward their post-secondary goals (Ascher and McGuire, 2008). To ensure continuous improvement, schools should document, track, and report college enrollment, college attendance, and college completion rates, as well as the number of students who take the PSAT/SAT tests and complete their FAFSA.

The National Student Clearinghouse (NSC), a non-profit organization that reports college enrollment data representing 91% of college students in the United States, for a fee, can determine a high school’s college enrollment rate. When schools and the communities that they serve are aware of their college attendance rates, they may be more likely to invest in efforts to increase college-going. It is also critical for parents to understand the rates at which their student and school are attending and graduating from college (Sagawa, Shirley, and Schramm, 2008).
School districts and states across the country are working to implement the key college pathway indicators by developing and enhancing best practice models to improve their high school graduation and college attendance and completion rates. Research demonstrates that students with involved parents are more likely to graduate and go on to post-secondary education (Henderson and Mapp, 2002).

**Spotlight on Chicago**

A pioneer in using college enrollment data, Chicago Public Schools (CPS), became the first major school system in the country to track and report the college participation rates of its graduates. In 2005, CPS launched the High School Scorecard Directory that publicly made available a comprehensive summary of a school’s performance, including graduation and college enrollment rates. As a result of the High School Scorecard Directory, parents became equipped to make informed decisions about their child’s future, and school and community leaders have meaningful data to develop efforts for improvement. The district also benchmarks monthly the progress that each high school is making toward its goals, including the FAFSA completion rate and college application completion rates for high school seniors (Sagawa, Shirley, and Schramm, 2008).

**Spotlight on Indianapolis**

In 2008, the Central Indiana Community Foundation, through support from the Lumina Foundation, funded ten community-based organizations with grants to improve access to college, help students prepare for post-secondary education, and enhance college success. The first year of the grant has focused on Marion County students and families, specifically low-income and first generation college families, so that all students and families know that college is possible.

The Indiana Partnerships Center (IPC) was one of the grantees selected and has focused on increasing the capacity of Indianapolis Public School’s Parent Liaisons to serve families with information, resources, tools, and experiences that will better assist them in supporting college readiness and access for their students. During a training for IPS Parent Liaisons in February 2009, IPC coordinated the attendance of the other nine grantees to facilitate the distribution of critical college information and partnership between IPS Parent Liaisons and community-based organizations.

**Spotlight on New York City**

In New York City, thirteen high schools have “beaten the odds” to bring low-performing ninth-graders to timely graduation and college enrollment. New York City had a four-year high school graduation rate of 57 percent, yet some high schools in New York succeeded beyond expectations to achieving almost a 70 percent graduation rate, followed by enrollment in college. The thirteen schools included two vocational schools, nine small high schools, and two high schools created in the reconstitution of large, failing high schools. A follow-up qualitative study, conducted in 2006 by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, identified four key factors, along with benchmarks of good practice, for adopting practices of high performing schools that beat the odds (Ascher and McGuire, 2008).

“Planning for a positive future is the flip side of dropout prevention. Families play a critical role in helping students set goals, navigate the system, and plan for college and a career. New research on high-performing schools gives us a clear road map for how to support families to do this, and if we follow that map, it will make an enormous difference in student success.”

Anne Henderson, Annenberg Institute for School Reform

**Spotlight on Los Angeles**

The second largest school district in the country, educating 700,000 students, Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), realized that they did not have a good data system for tracking college enrollment rates, and the school board agreed to enter into a contract with NSC to track LAUSD graduates’ enrollment and completion in colleges. LAUSD plans to share data findings with the high schools and have dialogues regarding the significance of the data and goals for improvement (Sagawa, Shirley, and Schramm, 2008).

For more information about parent engagement, contact The Indiana Partnerships Center at www.fscp.org.
Using the framework of the Beating the Odds study, the researchers and Anne Henderson created a tool called the College Pathways Rubric to help a secondary school assess how well it is preparing students, especially low-income students, to graduate from high school on time and attend college (Ascher, Henderson and McGuire, 2008). There are five parts to the tool (which can be accessed at www.annenberginstitute.org/Products/CollegePathwaysRubric.php):

1. Benchmarks of good practice for each of the four key components.
2. Three levels of performance, or evidence of implementation, for each indicator, ranging from practices that reach all students to those at the beginning stages for a school.
3. Examples of practices and programs that help students achieve strong results.
4. A blank rubric that a school can use to evaluate the extent to which it has adopted effective practices in the four key components and to map where your school’s practice falls.
5. A short resource directory with links to more information about best practices and useful publications or resources.

**Research and References:**


**Recommendations to consider:**

- Develop a College Pathway Team at each secondary school to have a dedicated team of champions invested in college readiness and access.
- Increase faculty’s understanding of the research trends and best practices related to college access and readiness that may be applicable for your school.
- Gain knowledge of College Pathway tools, such as the rubric, data systems, and assessment tools to improve student learning and school performance.
- Collaborate with community-based partners, including funders, to align goals and values to work to improve student graduation and college completion rates.
- Engage parents and students in having voice and choice in the planning, decision-making, and transformation process in the school.

**About this Publication**

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For more information about parent engagement, contact The Indiana Partnerships Center at www.fscp.org.
“When your words and actions match, people know they can trust you”

John C. Maxwell
The Power of Capitalizing on Resources
Module 6

“As the nation’s educators, we must take responsibility for forsaken schools. I believe it is our calling to fulfill public education’s shining promise for all children. And if we do, we’ll all breathe a little easier in the end.”

John Wilson

Introduction
The National Education Association has made building partnerships with families and communities a major component of its priority school agenda. This section will explore pulling it all together. A focus on action planning and matching interventions with desired outcomes will be discussed. Aspects of some of NEA’s model programs will be highlighted with a focus on how they can be used to implement family-school-community partnerships.

Objective
To aid educators, families, and community members to action plan in a collaborative and systemic approach to support student achievement in priority schools through the use of family-school-community strategies and NEA resources.

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The Power of Capitalizing on Resources
Module 6

“Quality public schools depend on quality public engagement and on sustained public involvement.”
Wendy Puriefoy, president, Public Education Network

Mini Discussion

The National Education Associations’ Priority School Campaign Family-School-Community Partnership training offers many opportunities to become involved in organizing and mobilizing to take action. This module is intended to take all of the key concepts, strategies, and research you have learned in this training and incorporate them with available NEA resources to reframe Family-School-Community Partnerships from random acts to a more cohesive and sustained approach for school improvement. In this module, participants can take an active role on a planning team. In practice activities, they can apply a strategic planning approach to the development of a collaborative initiative and are encouraged to “take action” by bringing their shared vision to life.

In order to move to the action planning phase many questions need to be answered:

1) Do we need to change?
2) What are we trying to accomplish? What do we need to change?
3) How ready are we for family-school-community partnerships?
4) What resource or other limitations do we face in implementation?
5) What do we know about the National Education Association’s resources that can provide support?

Action planning in conjunction with systems thinking allows you to get the ball rolling for short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes. Action planning has six stages: collect data, analyze data, set a goal, make a plan, implement plan, evaluate. There is a wealth of information, opportunities, and resources available to be agents of change in building family-school-community partnerships to close the achievement gap in priority schools.
“Good leaders make people feel that they’re at the very heart of things, not at the periphery. Everyone feels that he or she makes a difference to the success of the organization. When that happens, people feel centered and that gives their work meaning.”

–Warren Bennis

“The best leader is the one about whom, after the group has finished, someone says, “Who was the leader?”

Lao Tze
Activities

Module 6 | The Power of Capitalizing on Resources
Activity 1: Thinking Outside the Box

**Purpose**
To stimulate creative thinking at a planning or action planning meeting.

**Time Required**
20-30 minutes.

**Equipment/Materials**
Flip chart or large newsprint, markers for each group, masking tape.

**Room Arrangement**
Subgroups of 8 at tables or circular discussion groups.

**Directions**
Form subgroups. Often times, this activity can be done very quickly as a large group opening brainstorm activity or if more time is available a group facilitator can be selected with a report back to the total group.

In the left hand column, list some traditional ideas about how to increase family, school, community partnerships. In the right-hand column, list some innovative ideas.

Post the results on the wall for further discussion or compilation if warranted.
Thinking Outside The Box

Traditional Thinking

Forward Innovative Thinking
Activity 2: Who and What Needs to Make Your Plan Successful

**Purpose**
To provide an opportunity to create a preliminary outline of what needs to done and who will be responsible for the work. This activity allows teams to focus on action and empowerment for the entire team.

**Time Required**
1 hour.

**Equipment/Materials**
Flip chart or large newsprint, markers for each group, masking tape.
Activity 2 Handout #3: Action Plan (Short Form)

**Room Arrangement**
In this activity participants should be grouped by actual teams that will be working in their schools or communities.

**Directions**
Introduce this activity after the discussion on Pulling it All Together and the Stages of Action Planning (visuals in this module). Have them design a plan of action to implement for further study. There is usually not enough time within the training to do a thorough action plan but enough to outline the work and set up time for further discussion.

Have a reporter from each group make a brief presentation to the full group if time permits. Make sure a copy of their plans is duplicated so that the trainers or sponsors of the training may have copy for any future support.
Activity 2 Handout #1:

Who and what needs to make your plan successful.
Activity 2 Handout #2:

- Who and what needs to make your plan successful?
- Community Members?
- Parents, families/students/teachers/ESP?
- Do we have agreements for working together? Do we need them?
- Who provides leadership? Do we need to build capacity?
- Are we all communicating? How?
- Who did we leave out of the action plan?
## ACTION PLAN (Short Form)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What</th>
<th>Who</th>
<th>When</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</table>

Have access to: **RESOURCES** Needed

This form is an alternative or used in conjunction with the action planning activity Who and What Needs to Make Your Plan Successful.
Module 6 | The Power of Capitalizing on Resources

Strategies
From communication to engagement

- Establishing a hierarchy for decision making
- Building a network of stakeholders
- Goals and strategic plans
- Values/vision
- Product
- Process
- Public relations
- Public engagement
From communication to engagement

- Communicate to deliberate
- public Community conversation
- talk, to tell talk
- information out information around

"Reason for hope, Voices for Change" Annenberg Institute for school Reform
From communication to engagement

- seeking to establish/protect turf
- authority
- influencing the like-minded
- top down
- seeking
- responsibility
- understanding those not like-minded
- bottom

"Reasons for Hope, Voices for Change"
Annenberg Institute for School Reform
Strategy 2

15 Tools for Healthy Communities

1. Plan with people, not for them: Start by listening to local residents. Any detailed plan of action, in order to be legitimate, must arise directly from their most pressing concerns.

2. Goals will help you see the big picture: in any successful community-building effort, there should be such clarity of purpose that the essence of the undertaking can be described in no more than two or three sentences.

3. Strategies will help you get from here to there: As you gauge your neighborhood’s needs and its capacities (that is, its available resources to reach a particular objective), and as you discover what has worked for others engaged in similar efforts, you will begin to develop the tactics and strategies best suited to the goals of your project. As with other challenges in life, you need a well thought out and executed plan to succeed.

4. Leadership is about selecting the ones to follow: You can’t always choose your first leaders, so agree from the beginning that leadership can change. After that, the best course is to grow your own, train your own, replace your own. As for staff, it’s easier to hold employees accountable than volunteers.

5. Governance is about authority, power, representation and equity: The “start-up” group has great influence over how decisions will be made and who will make them. The permanent structure they create needs to be based on equitable distribution of power and responsibility.

6. Come to grips with racism: The complex issues of racism, which play out as blatant or subtle injustices must be candidly addressed right from the start. The more educated people are about racism, the more effective their strategies to overcome it will be.

7. Draw strength from multicultural identities: Know and appreciate your separate traditions. It’s possible for different groups to form an effective tapestry of community if each has equal opportunity, respect and status.

8. Bridge language barriers: For people to be included in conversation, they must be able to understand and be understood. Be aware of these needs, and make preparations before every important gathering for people to talk and listen in the major languages represented.

9. Money matters: Project leaders must take the utmost care to determine what the work will cost, to identify sources of financial support and learn how to tap them, to spend wisely, and to be fully accountable for all funds. A healthy donor-recipient relationship is driven not by guilt or charity but by mutual respect and appreciation.

10. Action and analysis go together: Once you have put your plan into motion, analysis must proceed with it, step by step. Without continuing evaluation, self-reflection, adjustment, refinements, and retraining as needed, continuing action will soon lose its energy and direction.

11. Stay grounded in the community: Issues change, priorities rise and fall, people come and go—but community-building projects tend to fare best when they keep their eyes on the prize and their primary focus on the people of their neighborhood. If injustice remains, so does the need for goals and strategies, action and analysis.

12. Work hard to build constructive partnerships: Without losing sight of your permanent interests, the best way to gain allies is to be allies with others, whether publicly or behind the scenes—and with or without credit for missions accomplished cooperatively.

13. Cultivate the media: Television, newspapers, and other media greatly influence people’s thinking about public issues, and about the causes of problems and their possible solutions. The harder you work to maintain sound professional relationships with reporters and editors, the more likely your project is to get full and fair media coverage.

14. Keep the motor running: You should be constantly measuring where your project is in relation to where you expect it to be, so you’ll always know what’s working, what’s not and what remains to be done.

15. Be committed to the long haul: Follow the game plan, keep up the pace, analyze, make changes, hold some resources in reserve—these are a few of the disciplines that will help you keep a long-term commitment to community building.
15 Tools for Healthy Communities

15 Tools for Creating Healthy Productive Interracial/Multicultural Committees. Project of the Institute for Democratic Renewal and Project Change Anti-Racism Initiative
Background Readings

Module 6 | The Power of Capitalizing on Resources
My name is Bryan Sanguinito, and it gives me great honor to serve as the new president of the Reading Education Association.

I am humbled by the support of my fellow teachers, librarians, school counselors, and school nurses in the Reading School District.

However, I realize the earnestness of the duties that lie ahead for my fellow officers and me.

In this difficult economic climate, we realize the serious issues that burden our state and our community. But we cannot ignore the fact that the young people we work with daily - your children and your neighbors' children - are the most grossly underfunded public school students in the entire Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

A "Costing Out" study conducted several years ago showed that the level of poverty and the socioeconomic disadvantage your children experience every day is staggering.

Reading is one of the poorest school districts in Pennsylvania. The latest budget proposal from Harrisburg would harm your sons and daughters even further!

We, the members of the Reading Education Association, believe that our students - your sons and daughters - deserve better. For a child to be financially disregarded by those with the power to help out, due solely to where he or she happens to live, quite frankly, is disgraceful.

Contrary to the misguided assertion that teachers unions do not have the best interests of children in mind, please be aware that here in Reading, the success of your children is what drives us.

Helping our students enhance their quality of life is what keeps us coming to work every day, whether we live downtown or over an hour away.

Making positive connections with children who encounter so much negativity every day; providing a safe haven for young men and women who too often witness danger and violence; enabling our students to believe that they can achieve anything to which they put their minds; allowing the youth of Reading to realize that they matter just as much as anybody else — all of these are the reasons that I and so many of my fellow REA members look forward to coming to work every day.

Your children are our children.

Likewise, your children's learning conditions are our working conditions. When REA advocates for improving dilapidated buildings, fixing safety hazards, removing mold, unifying schedules, providing reasonable classroom temperatures, retaining teachers, developing professional relationships, and enhancing the quality of education, we do indeed have an ulterior motive: to see that everybody involved in the educational process in the Reading School District finds success.
We will always ask and expect that students and educators in Reading shall be treated fairly and equitably. We will demand that politicians in Harrisburg and Washington D.C. stay true to their promise of a quality education for every child.

But we also need you — the families, friends, and neighbors of these children — to stand up and speak out!

We commend those of you within the community who already work diligently to improve the lives of this city’s young people every day. But for those of you still waiting to get involved, your time is now!

No longer can we, as a community, afford to remain silent while our children endure tacit socioeconomic discrimination from those with the power to make a difference.

Some politicians — especially locally — are on our side; we thank them for their efforts and look forward to continuing to work with them.

However, there are many other public officials who do not share our vision; this is unfortunate and unacceptable. The boys and girls of the city of Reading are just as important as any other students in any other community. It is time that all policymakers in Pennsylvania realize, remember, and respect that. This is not an opinion. This is the truth.

In order to spread our message, there will be times when my fellow association officers and union members will come to you for your support. More importantly, we will solicit your participation — whether through community outreach programs, through attendance at school functions, or through political involvement.

It is our sincere hope that when the time comes for the call to go out, you will listen and respond with great vigor. It must be our common goal to enable the children of this city to reach for their dreams, to strive for excellence, and to discover greatness.

We — your children's teachers, librarians, school counselors, and school nurses — want that for them. And we have dedicated our professional lives to this cause. But we need you to help us make that happen.

Together, we can improve our children's lives in ways never before imagined. Together, we can help our young people exceed expectations and redefine success.

Please feel free to contact me at REAPresident@yahoo.com if you have any questions, suggestions, ideas, or comments you would like to share. I look forward to spending the next several years working with you and my fellow REA members to enhance and improve the educational atmosphere in the city of Reading. Thank you.
Un estudio de costos realizado hace varios años, demostró que el nivel de pobreza y las desventajas socioeconómicas a las cuales nuestros hijos se enfrentan son asombrosos.

Reading es uno de los distritos más pobres en Pennsylvania, ¡y la última propuesta presupuestaria de Harrisburg podría lastimar a sus hijos e hijas aún más!

Nosotros, los miembros de la Asociación de Educación de Reading, creemos que nuestros estudiantes (sus hijos e hijas) merecen algo mejor. Honestamente, el que aquellos que poseen el poder para ayudar ignoren las necesidades financieras de un niño por el simple hecho del lugar en donde éste viva, es vergonzoso.

Contrario a la afirmación equivoca de que las uniones de maestros no tienen en mente los mejores intereses de los niños, usted puede estar seguro de que aquí, en Reading, el éxito de nuestra niñez es lo que nos guía.

Ayudar a mejorar la calidad de vida de nuestros estudiantes es lo que nos mantiene animados para venir a trabajar cada día, vivamos en el pueblo o a una hora de distancia. Lograr conexiones positivas con los niños que enfrentan tanta negatividad a diario; proveer un lugar seguro la juventud que también atestigua con frecuencia los peligros de la violencia; permitirle a nuestros estudiantes creer que pueden alcanzar cualquier cosa que se propongan; y permitirle a los jóvenes de Reading darse cuenta de que importan tanto como cualquier otra persona, son las razones que nos motivan a mí y a tantos de mis colegas en REA a trabajar cada día.

Sus niños son nuestros niños.

De igual forma, las condiciones de la enseñanza de sus niños son nuestras condiciones de trabajo. Cuando REA aboga por reparar edificios en ruinas, arreglar amenazas a la seguridad, remover moho, unificar itinerarios de clase, proveer temperaturas razonables en los salones de clase, re-adiestrar a los maestros, desarrollar relaciones profesionales y mejorar la calidad de la educación, lo hacemos con un motivo ulterior: asegurarnos de que todas las partes involucradas en el proceso educacional en el Distrito Escolar de Reading obtengan el éxito.
Sin embargo, para alcanzar esta meta, necesitamos su asistencia. Es del interés de la Asociación de Educación de Reading trabajar en colaboración con los profesionales del campo de la educación para hacer lo que es correcto y mejor, tanto para nuestros estudiantes como para nuestros miembros.

Siempre exigiremos y esperaremos que el estudiantado y los maestros de Reading sean tratados con justicia e igualdad. Exigiremos que los políticos en Harrisburg y Washington D.C. se mantengan firmes en su promesa de proveer una educación de calidad para cada niño, pero también necesitamos de usted; de los familiares, amigos y vecinos de estos niños, ¡para que se levanten y hagan escuchar su voz!

Felicitamos a aquellos de ustedes quienes actualmente trabajan diligentemente para mejorar las vidas de la juventud de nuestra Ciudad, día a día. Pero para quienes aún estén esperando involucrarse, ¡el momento es ahora!

Como comunidad, ya no podemos seguir dándonos el lujo de mantener silencio, mientras nuestros niños padecen de la discriminación socioeconómica infligida por quienes tienen el poder para lograr la diferencia.

Algunos políticos (especialmente los locales) están de nuestro lado. Les agradecemos sus esfuerzos y esperamos poder continuar trabajando con ellos.

Sin embargo, existen muchos otros oficiales públicos que no comparten nuestra visión. Esto es lamentable e inaceptable. Los niños y niñas de la Ciudad de Reading son tan importantes como cualquier otro estudiante en cualquiera otra comunidad. Es tiempo de que todos los legisladores de Pennsylvania reconozcan, recuerden y respeten este hecho. Esta no es una opinión. Es la verdad.

Con el propósito de difundir nuestro mensaje, habrá momentos en que mis colegas y miembros de la Unión se le acerquen para solicitar su apoyo.

Con mayor importancia solicitamos su participación, ya sea a través de su participación en programas comunitarios de alcance o funciones escolares, al involucrarse en la política.

Es nuestra esperanza que, cuando llegue el momento de salir a la calle, usted escuche nuestro llamado y responda con vigor. Debe ser nuestra meta común permitirle a los niños de esta Ciudad alcanzar sus sueños, esforzarse por la excelencia y descubrir su grandeza.

Nosotros (los maestros, bibliotecarios, consejeros escolares y enfermeros de sus niños) queremos esto para ellos, y hemos dedicado nuestras vidas profesionales a esta causa. Sin embargo, para lograr que esto suceda necesitamos de su ayuda.

Juntos podemos mejorar las vidas de nuestros niños de maneras jamás antes imaginadas. Juntos, podemos ayudar a que nuestra juventud exceda las expectativas y redefina su éxito.

Por favor, siéntase en la confianza de comunicarse conmigo escribiendo a REAPresident@yahoo.com, de tener cualquier pregunta, sugerencia, idea o comentario que quisiera compartir. Espero poder invertir los próximos años trabajando con usted y mis colegas de la REA, con tal de mejorar la atmósfera educativa de la Ciudad de Reading. Gracias.
**PARENT INVOLVEMENT**

“Measuring Parent Involvement Effectiveness in Elementary Schools”


This tool is a series of questions to help teachers, parents and principals measure parent involvement effectiveness in elementary schools. Too often, school districts capture numbers of parents involved, but fail to describe whether the actions taken help to boost achievement. Together, educators and parents can use these questions to gain initial insights into a school’s parental involvement activities, and whether actions are connected to student learning.

Honest and searching answers will provide parents, teachers, administrators and central office personnel with a sincere snapshot of how well parental involvement is working in a specific location. There are three sections: Parent Engagement, School Efforts, and Transition from Early Childhood Learning to Kindergarten. The questions are designed to create a roadmap of sound practices that could inspire more robust parent involvement and ultimately raise student learning and attainment.

**ERASING THE OPPORTUNITY GAP**

“The Same Starting Line: How School Boards Can Erase the Opportunity Between Poor and Middle-Class Children”


Throughout the United States, school districts that contain a mix of middle-class and high-poverty neighborhoods display an “opportunity gap” in which wealthier kids possess better resources that lead to better academic outcomes. In many cases, not only are teachers better credentialed, more experienced, and more talented, but children in middle-class areas receive a stronger, more challenging curriculum and learn in buildings that are in far better condition than those of their poorer peers.

This report looks at the difference in learning-related education resources in impoverished neighborhoods by comparison and recommends ways that school boards, superintendents, teachers, principals and community members can work together to bring better academic inputs to children in need. It also features a tool that allows communities to their own equity self assessment (see below).

“Resource Equity Assessment Document (READ)”


This simple but power tool allows caring teachers, principals, central office officials or school boards to compare the various learning-related education resources available to students in middle-class or
affluent schools versus those in high-poverty schools. The action research results help to guide data-drives conversations about how school districts can align resources in the fairest way possible. Teachers should be a central part of the conversation, advocating for both the tools necessary for their classroom success and for the vulnerable children who look to them as a means of building a successful future.

CONTACT:

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Edarden@Appleseednetwork.org
THE PARENT/TEACHER HOME VISIT PROJECT
is an inexpensive and easily replicated model of family engagement that has been proven to end
the cycle of blame between families and school staff by building trust and respect, instilling
cultural competency and increasing personal and professional capacity for all involved.

The increased communication, trust and support between families and teachers via home visits result in:

- Increased student attendance rates.
- Increased student test scores.
- Decreased suspension and expulsion rates.
- Decreased vandalism at school site.

Home visits also provide a positive opportunity to meet federal and state mandates that families
be meaningfully informed of their child’s academic standing.

This model began in Sacramento, California but has since been adopted and adapted by schools
and districts in eleven other states.

Mission Statement

The Parent/Teacher Home Visit Project is a nationally recognized non-profit organization jointly
governed by three founding member groups: a teacher’s union, a faith-based community
organizing group and a school district. Together, we have more than a decade of experience
developing and running a district wide program, providing interactive staff development training
sessions, serving as a resource and leader for participating sites and connecting home visiting
efforts locally, statewide and nationally. Our project increases trust and communication between
schools and families using a proven model of voluntary and relational home visits that build the
capacity of educators, families and students leading to increased success for all.

For more information: http://www.pthvp.org/
'Parent Unions' Seek to Join Policy Debates

By Sean Cavanagh

Whether they’re organizing events, buttonholing legislators, or simply trading ideas and information, a growing number of "parentunions" are attempting to stake out a place in policy debates over education in states and districts, amid a crowded field of actors and advocates.

As the term implies, some of these organizations see themselves as countering the political might of teachers' unions, though others see the labor groups as allies. Still other parents' unions are less concerned with teacher and labor-management issues than with advancing their own tightly focused—or very broad—agendas. Those agendas include improving school gifted-and-talented programs, for instance, and closing achievement gaps between minority and white students.

Many parents' unions are still in their infancy, and can count few outright successes or failures in trying to shape policy. Whether such groups emerge as powerful voices, or fade into obscurity, remains to be seen.

In Connecticut, a parents' union currently is attempting to play an active part in shaping state legislation on school choice, teacher tenure, and other issues. In Ohio and Texas, efforts to establish such unions are just getting started, and are being led by parents working out of their homes and sharing information with counterparts in other states. In Washington state, a former Microsoft executive, frustrated by what he sees as poor state and national school performance, has begun raising money and is preparing to launch a union this year.

As they take a more forceful role in education debates, some parents' unions have drawn more scrutiny, and criticism, for their work and their alliances with education advocacy organizations representing various interests and ideologies. If there is a common thread linking the parents' organizations, though, it's the belief that parents' voices have been shut out of policy debates for too long.

"I knew that parents needed more say about schools," said Gwendolyn Samuel, the founder of the Connecticut Parents Union, which grew out of an effort to enact a so-called "parent trigger" law in that state.

"Otherwise, we were beholden to everyone else's decisions," she said. "We're more at the table than we ever were before."
Choosing Allies

While parents' unions are relatively new players in education, many organizations have long identified themselves as the voices of parents in one way or another.

The best known of those is the National Parent Teacher Association, a 5 million-member organization based in Alexandria, Va., which describes itself as the largest volunteer child-advocacy association in the nation.

The National PTA takes policy positions—it has advocated for and against No Child Left Behind Act reauthorization proposals, for instance—as do its state and local affiliates, though its "keystone issue" is promoting family engagement in education, said Betsy Landers, the president of the national group.

Other organizations working with parents have taken harder-edged—and, in some cases, opposing—positions on specific state and local policies.

For example, Parents Across America fights what it sees as private-sector overreach into education and excessive testing; it supports small class sizes and equitable funding across schools and student populations.

Parents Across America has opposed parent-trigger proposals—a stance that puts it at odds with another parent-advocacy organization: Parent Revolution, a Los Angeles-based group that has spearheaded efforts to give families more leverage to make changes to low-performing schools. (Parent Revolution receives funding from the Walton Family Foundation, which also helps support Education Week's coverage of parent-empowerment issues.)

Ms. Samuel, the mother of two school-age children, says her effort to found a parents' union was sparked by the push in Connecticut for a parent-trigger law, an effort she supported. In other states, those laws, which have drawn opposition from teachers' unions, allow parents to reorganize schools, or convert them to charters through a majority vote.

State legislators eventually approved a law that created school governance councils, composed of parents, teachers, students, and others, with the power to recommend, though not require, that academically struggling schools be reorganized. Ms. Samuel said she was frustrated by the "watered-down" law, and formed a union in January of last year.

Today, her group has more than 700 members, she estimates. Most of her time so far has been spent building membership and advocating policies such as strengthening the power of school governance councils, expanding school choice, and setting higher standards for teacher tenure—a goal that Connecticut Gov. Dannel Malloy, a Democrat, is backing this year. ("Conn. Governor Promotes Changes to Teacher-Tenure System," February 22, 2012.)

Ms. Samuel's organization has received financial support from ConnCAN, a school advocacy group based in New Haven that supports expanded public school choice, higher standards
for tenure, and other measures. ConnCAN says it provided the ConnecticutParents Union with $1,750 in 2011. Lawyers and others volunteer time to the union, Ms. Samuel said. The national advocacy organization StudentsFirst, founded by former District of Columbia Schools Chancellor Michelle A. Rhee, is working with the Connecticut Parents Union, a spokeswoman said, though not providing it with financial support. (StudentsFirst also receives funding from the Walton Family Foundation.)

The Connecticut Parents Union's interest in political advocacy has drawn the attention of state officials. Last month, the Connecticut office of state ethics, a watchdog agency, wrote to both Ms. Samuel and Ms. Rhee, saying that their organizations needed to register as lobbyists if they planned to spend $2,000 or more on lobbying activity. (Ms. Rhee's organization has done so, but Ms. Samuel's has not, because she said it has no plans to exceed the monetary threshhold.)

While Ms. Samuel said the title of her organization is meant to draw a contrast between its role and that of teachers' unions, she said it agrees with unions on many issues, including promoting safe schools and giving educators adequate resources and training. "There will be more alignment than not," Ms. Samuel said.

Tempered Response

Francine Lawrence, the executive vice president of the American Federation of Teachers, said her national teachers' union has no objection to the work of parents' unions, though it opposes some of the proposals favored by Ms. Samuel, such as the parent-trigger concept. Depending on the issue, the AFT can work just as easily with parents' unions as it does with groups such as the PTA, Ms. Lawrence said. "Parent engagement and involvement are absolutely essential" to improving schools, she said.

But Ms. Lawrence also said the relationship will depend on "the agenda of the leadership of those parents' groups" and the ability to discuss policy issues free of "passion and politics."

Another parents' group, the New York City Parents Union, supports giving parents more power over schools, but is skeptical of the approach used through some parent-trigger proposals and similar efforts it believes will lead to more control of schools by private companies, with less accountability, said Mona Davids, the group's founder and president. Her organization supports charters, but also believes they should be strongly regulated, and that ineffective ones should be shut down, she added. Those safeguards lead to "true parent empowerment," Ms. Davids said.

The organization, which has 740 members, is more closely aligned with teachers' unions than some parents' groups. It received $10,000 in support of a fundraiser last year from New York City's teachers' union, the United Federation of Teachers.
Varied Goals

In Ohio, the founder of a parents’ union says her decision to start the group was directly related to her experiences with her children, which drew nationwide attention. Kelley Williams-Bolar, of Akron, was jailed after authorities concluded she broke the law after she enrolled her daughters in a nearby school district, the Copley-Fairlawn system, where she did not live. She served nine days in jail, and her felony convictions later were reduced to misdemeanors by Ohio Gov. John Kasich, a Republican. Ms. Williams-Bolar, said she sought out the Copley-Fairlawn district for her children for safety and academic reasons. She said her union, launched last year, will support policies in Ohio that allow students to attend schools out of district.
"I don't feel any parent should have to endure what I went through," she said.

In Washington state, an effort to launch a parents' union next fall is being led by Scott Oki, a former senior vice president for sales, marketing, and service for the Microsoft Corp. Mr. Oki said in an email that the new organization would be a "counterbalance to the entrenched interests" that hinder school improvement. Mr. Oki did not specify those interests, but he said his group would work with teachers' unions and other organizations. His philanthropy, the Oki Foundation, in Bellevue, Wash., is providing seed capital for the group, along with other donors he declined to name. Eventually, Mr. Oki wants the parents' union to be supported financially by its members.

Parents' organizations that succeed in shaping policy and improving schools typically have several things in common, said Edwin C. Darden, the director of education law and policy for Appleseed, a nationwide nonprofit in Washington, D.C., that focuses on social-justice issues and attempts to engage parents. The successful ones use technology effectively to build membership and support for their ideas, and they know how to use data to give their arguments credibility, he said. Parents' groups that are focused on improving schools academically also need to ensure that all of their work is "tied to student learning," rather than peripheral matters, such as fundraising, extracurricular activities, and political controversies, Mr. Darden added.

Matt Prewett, who founded the Texas Parents Union last year, began with a central goal in mind: improving gifted-and-talented programs, which he said were lacking at an Austin-area school district his son attended. His son now goes to a private school. Mr. Prewett, an electrical engineer, works to build his organization out of his home in Cedar Park, Texas. In addition to improving gifted-and-talented programs, he wants to reduce schools’ emphasis on high-stakes testing, which he says detracts from other subjects and school programs—a view shared by many teachers' unions—and expand school choice. He envisions having members of the parents' union in all of the state's school districts.
That will take some work: Mr. Prewett estimates his organization has between 20 and 30 members now and about 1,000 Facebook followers. But he's confident. "There's just a lot of feeling that parents should be the primary stakeholders in education," Mr. Prewett said. An increasing number of parents, he said, are saying "I'm willing to make this my project."
ADELANTO, Calif. — The national battle over the best way to fix failing schools is ripping through this desert town like a sandstorm, tearing apart a community that is testing a radical new approach: the parent takeover.

Parents here are trying to become the first in the country to use a trigger law, which allows a majority of families at a struggling school to force major changes, from firing the principal to closing the school and reopening it as an independent charter. All they need to do to wrest control is sign a petition.

The idea behind the 2010 California law — placing ultimate power in parents’ hands — resonates with any parent who has felt frustrated by school bureaucracy.

“We just decided we needed to do something for our children,” said Doreen Diaz, a parent organizing the trigger effort. “If we don’t stand up and speak for them, their future is lost.”

Her daughter attends Desert Trails Elementary, where last year two-thirds of the children failed the state reading exam, more than half were not proficient in math, and nearly 80 percent failed the science exam. The school has not met state standards for six years, and scores place it in the bottom 10 percent of schools statewide.

The children can’t wait years for improvement, Diaz said.

It’s just the type of situation that reformers had in mind when they crafted the trigger law, which applies to 1,300 public schools in California that under certain criteria are labeled as “failing.”

Others see the trigger law as dangerous, handing the complex challenge of education to people who may be unprepared to meet it. Critics also say the law circumvents elected school boards and invites abuse by charter operators bent on taking over public schools.

Trigger laws are spreading beyond California, passing or sparking debates in other states, including Maryland. Even Hollywood has noticed; a feature film, made by the producers of the 2010 documentary “Waiting for Superman,” is coming out this fall.

In Adelanto, the debate is destroying friendships, sowing suspicion and attracting powerful outside interests to this town on the edge of the Mojave Desert.

Parents trying to pull the trigger are backed by Parent Revolution, a Los Angeles organization funded in part by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Walton Family Foundation.
In recent weeks, a group of parents opposed to the trigger has formed, with help from the California Teachers Association, the state’s largest teachers union.

“We all agree we’d like to see some improvements, but would you rather blow everything up, start from scratch and hope for better?” asked Lori Yuan, who has two children at Desert Trails and is fighting the trigger. “That doesn’t sound very good to me.”

In a plotline worthy of a soap opera, each group has accused the other of intimidation, harassment and hidden agendas. The district attorney has been asked to investigate charges of fraud, and lawyers are lining up.

“This has never been done before, and it’s very confusing,” said Carlos Mendoza, the president of the Adelanto School District Board of Trustees, who is also a high school teacher and a union member. “If we can get all these outsiders out, we can work out something.”

The school board is set to decide Tuesday night whether the trigger moves forward.

**Support from left and right**

The politics underlying parent trigger laws are complex, with support from an unlikely mix of progressives and conservatives.

“The left, particularly minority groups, see it as a way to shake up the school system,” said Jack Jennings, founder of the Center on Education Policy, a nonpartisan think tank in Washington. “They’re frustrated that their kids are getting such a poor education and not much is being done about it. On the right, it’s just another way for conservative forces to trim back the power of the teacher unions.”

Last year, similar trigger laws were enacted in Mississippi and Texas, and a milder version was approved in Connecticut. A Maryland lawmaker proposed legislation but withdrew it, saying he needed to build political support. This week, the Florida Legislature is voting on a parent trigger, and at least a dozen other states are weighing similar measures this year, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

The federal No Child Left Behind law requires failing schools to gradually face escalating penalties, including closure. Trigger laws put that process on steroids and let parents decide the schools’ fate.

In Adelanto, the 666 children who attend Desert Trails are mostly black and Latino, and nearly all meet the federal definition of poor. The school lacks a full-time nurse, a guidance counselor and a psychologist. About one in four students was suspended last year, nearly twice the district average. Desert Trails has had three principals in the past five years.

One is Larry Lewis, who helped launch the trigger effort out of frustration with teachers who, he said, resisted his efforts to improve classroom instruction.
“Adelanto is known as the armpit of the high desert,” said Lewis, who resigned in October for health reasons. “And Desert Trails is the armpit of Adelanto.”

Teachers, who filed a dozen grievances against Lewis, have a different view. “We have a great school district, serve great kids that live in a great community,” said LaNita M. Dominique, president of the Adelanto teachers union.

Unions and others say putting parents in charge doesn’t guarantee better schools.

“I have my college education, but I still wouldn’t feel comfortable if someone said, ‘Here’s a school — run it,’” said Yuan, one of the parents opposed to the trigger.

‘I started to feel scared’

Adelanto, a working-class community of 31,700, sits 90 miles northeast of Los Angeles. It boasts one shopping center, a federal prison and acres of empty brown desert interrupted only by hulking steel lattice towers tethered together by high-voltage electric lines.

When she moved from Los Angeles County three years ago, Cynthia Ramirez didn’t think twice about the schools. “We just assumed everything is fine,” said Ramirez, who has a 3-year-old son and a 7-year-old daughter. “But here, there are no after-school activities. They’re only teaching math and reading. There is no science. I started to feel scared for my daughter.”

Ramirez joined Doreen Diaz and others, who sought help from Parent Revolution. The group, founded by a charter school entrepreneur, sent professional organizers to Adelanto to give the parents a crash course in the law, signature gathering, educational policy and even media handling.

Parent Revolution rented a house near the elementary school and converted it into a nerve center for the pro-trigger parents, who spend afternoons there stamping envelopes, making phone calls and plotting strategy.

The parents want preschool classes, a longer school day, a computer lab, every teacher to have a master’s degree, a full-time librarian and clean, working restrooms, among other things.

The district can’t afford those demands, said Superintendent Darin Brawley, adding that state education funding is down 20 percent this year. “There’s no way we could do all those things at Desert Trails without making cuts elsewhere, from other students in the district,” he said.

Brawley says the school is no worse than scores of others in San Bernardino County.

Pro-trigger parents say they want Desert Trails to remain part of the Adelanto school district but to be given autonomy, so the principal has full control over hiring, firing, curriculum and spending.

Friendships dissolve
The political fight has quickly turned personal.

Last year, Ramirez and Chrissy Alvarado were best friends. With their daughters in the same class at Desert Trails and their homes within walking distance, the women bonded over coffee and errands.

Ramirez became a leader of the trigger group, believing it is the best way to improve her daughter’s education. Alvarado is opposed and calls it a hijacking of the public school by outside interests.

Their daughters stopped having sleepovers; the women no longer chatted.

Then Alvarado sent a series of text messages to Ramirez announcing that their friendship was over. “This is going to get big quick,” Alvarado wrote about the coming divide in the community. “I never thought you would become one of them.”

Alvarado’s suspicions stem from Parent Revolution’s first, unsuccessful attempt to use the trigger law last year. It paid canvassers to collect signatures on a petition demanding that a Compton elementary school be shut down and reopened as a charter school run by a company selected by Parent Revolution.

That effort collapsed under a legal challenge.

Parent Revolution learned from Compton, said Ben Austin, the organization’s executive director and a Democratic operative who worked in the Clinton White House. “We were the ones who picked the charter school, the transformation model, collected the signatures,” he said, adding that those decisions should be made by parents. “We are learning in real time.”

Austin was working for the Green Dot charter network, based in Los Angeles, when he developed the idea of a parent trigger. It squeaked through the California Legislature by one vote in each chamber, part of a reform effort to compete for federal Race to the Top funding. California didn’t win the grant, but the parent trigger was law. Since then, Parent Revolution has been helping trigger efforts in other states.

At Desert Trails, Principal David Mobley is trying to focus on children and keep controversy out of the classroom. It’s not easy.

“You’ve got all these outside entities with bigger political agendas,” said Mobley, who became principal in October, unaware of the tempest that was brewing. “Parents here are sincere. But I worry that they’re pawns in somebody’s big chess game.”
What is KEYS?

KEYS 2.0 is a comprehensive, research-based, and data driven continuous school improvement program grounded on *42 Indicators of School Quality* that are clustered around six “Keys.”

- *Shared Understanding and Commitment to High Goals* (5 Indicators)
- *Open Communication and Collaborative Problem Solving* (9 Indicators)
- *Continuous Assessment for Teaching and Learning* (5 Indicators)
- *Personal and Professional Learning* (11 Indicators)
- *Resources to Support Teaching Learning* (5 Indicators)
- *Curriculum and Instruction* (7 Indicators)

The KEYS Data

At the heart of the NEA’s KEYS program is a survey that gathers the perception from all school stakeholders on how their school stacks up against every indicator in each “Key” area. School results are presented in bar graphs that illustrate the level of consensus among survey takers, how the school compares with all schools that took the survey, as well as with schools that are at the 90th percentile of the scale. Survey results belong to the school and are held *strictly confidential*. The decisions on what, to whom, when, and how to share the results rest on the hands of the district and school leadership teams made up of district, school, and association leaders acting in accordance with previously agreed upon guidelines memorialized in a memorandum of understanding.

The KEYS Process

Stakeholders can use KEYS either as a complete step-by-step guide for improvement or as the assessment component of an improvement program that a school already has in place. To begin the KEYS process:

- Potential KEYS users contact the NEA state affiliate and/or local office
- NEA staff or state KEYS coaches provide training to school KEYS coordinators and facilitators
• Districts register their schools and school KEYS facilitators complete the school’s demographic form
• School community (educators, ESPs, administrators) takes the online KEYS survey in either English or Spanish. Parents including community members with no children in school take the parents and community surveys in either English or Spanish that are also online. All survey questions have been normed and all indicators correlate positively with conditions present in high performing schools. **All survey participants enjoy complete anonymity.**
• Surveys close 21 days after being opened to receive input by at least 80% of expected respondents. Surveys can be re-opened for an extra 10 days when requested.
• System automatically generates survey results in bar graph form for analysis and use as basis for action and decision-making.

**The Power of KEYS**

**To Turn Around Priority Schools:**
• Provides baseline data essential for measuring long-term continuous school improvement
• Helps schools establish priorities and target efforts on areas needing improvement.

**To Promote and Strengthen Positive Relationship within the School Community:**
• Offers a partnership opportunity among all school stake-holders in addressing issues of mutual concern
• Builds trust between and among school/district management and staff
• Gives a voice to all members of the school community in the school improvement process.
• Promotes buy-in and collaborative effort in decision-making and problem-solving

**NEA’s KEYS program demonstrates and promotes the association’s deep commitment to school improvement.**

**FOR MORE INFORMATION ON KEYS, LOGON TO** [www.keysonline.org](http://www.keysonline.org)

**NPP/PSC CONTACT – SONIA JASSO YILMAZ:** SYilmaz@nea.org

**E-MAIL QUESTIONS TO:** NEAKEYSinfo@nea.org
NEA Public Engagement Project (PEP):
A Priority Schools Campaign (PSC) Resource

ENGAGING COMMUNITIES TO TRANSFORM PUBLIC SCHOOLS
The NEA Public Engagement Program (PEP) is a model for family/school/community dialogue that can assist any School in gaining community support for its efforts to close student achievement gaps. In the last few years we’ve expanded our model to include the ACTION needed to ensure that all students learn. Our enriched model — Closing Achievement Gaps through Community Conversations that Lead to Collective Action — combines the power of many NEA departments working together to deliver a range of products, tools, resources, proven strategies, and services that support schools and communities as they work to close achievement gaps.

THE PROCESS
Through funds provided by the NEA specifically targeted to supporting Priority Schools in their transformation efforts, The PEP program typically involves a 4-step process:

1) ENGAGE THE COMMUNITY. The local Association works to establish an Organizing Coalition Committee, comprised of a wide variety of community stakeholders including: parents, businesses, grassroots political organizations, faith-based groups, and ethnic minority organizations. The Coalition then initiates and moderates a Community Conversation focused on how to ensure the success of all children in an identified school, feeder pattern, or district. NEA staff will train local community members to facilitate small group discussions within the Conversation.

2) IDENTIFY THE CRITICAL ISSUES. With assistance from NEA staff, the Coalition Committee — including selected Community Conversation participants — meets to analyze the Community Conversation data and to identify the community’s top three priorities as elicited during the Conversation.

3) AGREE ON PRIORITIES & CREATE AN ACTION PLAN. The Coalition Committee hosts a second Community Conversation, focused this time on coming to a common understanding of the community’s priority areas for improving student outcomes. The group then develops an action plan that addresses the changes they seek.

4) MOBILIZE THE COMMUNITY. Guided by the plan of action, community members work together towards improving student success. NEA staff is available, by request of the Coalition Committee, to help build capacity through skill-building sessions, trainings, or focused actions tailored for the community.

If you are interested in engaging your community in the PEP process or need more information, please contact NEA External Partnerships & Advocacy staff: Roberta Hantgan (rhantgan@nea.org) or Brenda Vincent (bvincent@nea.org).

Following is a list of PEP Implementation in PSC’s targeted sites and states.
Public Engagement Project (PEP) Implementation

PEP Implementation in Priority Schools Campaign Targeted Sites

Linden Community – Columbus, OH
PSC State Contact: Demetrice Davis, (614) 227-3100, davisdem@ohea.org

Tulsa, OK
PSC State Contacts: Margaret Bujold, 918-665-2282 x290, mbujold@okea.org
Dottie Hager, 405, 523-4315, dhager@okea.org

PEP Implementation in Priority Schools Campaign Targeted States

Alabama (Selma)
Arkansas (Little Arkansas)
California (Davis, San Jose, Merced, Coachella)
Colorado (Westminster)
Florida (Franklin County, Gadsden County, Leon County)
Georgia (Clayton County)
Iowa (Cedar Rapids)
Maryland (District Heights)
Mississippi (Homes County)
Nebraska (Grand Island, Lincoln, Winnebago)
New Jersey (Patterson)
North Carolina (Charlotte-Mecklenburg)
Oklahoma (Tahlequah, Weatherford, El Reno)
Wyoming (Wind River Reservation)
C.A.R.E.

STRATEGIES FOR CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAPS

The C.A.R.E. guide from the National Education Association focuses on closing the gaps in student achievement by examining research in working with culturally and linguistically diverse students. The guide looks at the research on cultural, language, and economic differences, as well as at unrecognized and undeveloped abilities, resilience, and effort and motivation—the “C.A.R.E. themes.”

The guide:

- Offers research-based suggestions for what you can do to create a learning environment in which low-income and/or culturally and linguistically diverse students can learn;
- Challenges educators to meet accountability demands while still offering quality instruction to those students who need the most help;
- Includes video resources from noted experts in the nea.org online version.

You will find the following in the C.A.R.E. guide:

- Information on NEA’s work to close the gaps in student achievement and its connection to research on diverse students.
- The research base and activities on the role of the following in students’ learning:
  - Cultural, economic, and language differences
  - The development of academic ability
  - Academic and personal resiliency
  - The connection between classroom, family, and community
  - Connecting to students’ interests, experiences, and knowledge to motivate and engage them in learning
  - The essential interdependent elements of the school as a system.

The guide also includes a sampling of articles, books, curricula, and Web sites that support the research and strategies.
C.A.R.E. Strategies Training Assessment
(Assessment conducted by NEA Research)

- C.A.R.E. Strategies Training program was investigated for application and impact using the model below. Areas of inquiry:
  1. Did the training lead to changes in instructional practices?
  2. Were the actual tools and materials provided for each C.A.R.E. theme used?
  3. Did the strategies lead to global changes in students and schools?

  1. Changes in Instructional Practices
  2. Use Tools and Materials
  3. Student & School Results

  | Teachers learn new ways of educating diverse students and adapt their own behavior | Teachers use the actual tools, materials and techniques that are provided in the training | Improved student achievement, relationships with families, and school improvement plans |

Views about Specific Changes in Teaching Practices since C.A.R.E. Strategies Training

Since C.A.R.E., I am more likely to:
- Consciously think about teaching: Agree Somewhat 35, Agree Strongly 55
- Be more sensitive to learning style: Agree Somewhat 41, Agree Strongly 49
- Have improved teaching methods: Agree Somewhat 49, Agree Strongly 36
- Have better relations w/ diverse students: Agree Somewhat 48, Agree Strongly 37
- Have better relations w/ diverse families: Agree Somewhat 55, Agree Strongly 24

Views about Student Achievement Since C.A.R.E. Training

- Sixty six percent of respondents said they noticed differences in their students’ achievement after applying the C.A.R.E. strategies
- Noticed increased motivation and interest in learning

- Eighty three percent said the C.A.R.E. strategies contributed to closing achievement gaps between students in their classes who are struggling and those who are not
- Gave more self-confidence and self-esteem
- Improvements in test scores and assessments observed

Impact of C.A.R.E. Compounded When

- More than half of trainees report help with engaging of their students’ families
- Trainees share the C.A.R.E. Strategies with colleagues
  - 69% shared with them at their school
  - 37% shared them in their district
- They are incorporated into School Improvement Plans
- About a fourth accomplished this
NEA’s English Language Learners: Culture, Equity & Language Training Module for Closing the Achievement Gaps is a resource with research-based and classroom focused instructional and advocacy strategies to help educators:

- Engage English language learners (ELLs) students in academic learning and English language development.
- Recognize and build on demographics, cultural and equity assumptions, and culturally relevant instruction.
- Create classroom and school environments that facilitate language learning.
- Absorb, understand and capitalize on language acquisition theory.
- Recognize language development stages and promising instructional practices for teaching in the classroom and school.
- Identify appropriate ELL instructional strategies aligned and differentiated to lessons and objectives and goals.
- Find innovative ways to motivate ELLs to practice academic language skills that are carefully structured and require students to demonstrate growing proficiency.

This ELL training module is intended for closing the achievement gaps for all ELL students of various cultures and languages. It is being made available to support and assist educators in understanding how to apply the best research-based ELL, culture and equity practices in the classroom and to further one’s own professional development.

Achievement gaps among ELLs are deeply rooted, pervasive, complex, and challenging for the National Education Association affiliates and members. The good news is that NEA is actively addressing the complex issues by, engaging in research and advocacy, and proposing strategies that we can pursue individually and collectively to help eliminate those gaps!

Gaps in English language learner achievement exist across the nation and within our communities, school districts, and schools. These gaps exist based on ethnicity, income levels, language background, disability status, and/or gender. While closing them isn’t easy, there are strategies each of us can pursue to accomplish this worthwhile goal.

NEA is making “Closing the Achievement Gaps” a key priority throughout the organization. The work is focused on helping members to be effective advocates and practitioners in “Closing the Achievement Gaps” for culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse students. In addition, NEA is helping state affiliates secure public policies and funding to close the achievement gaps.

Among the unique aspect of NEA’s work in this area are the emphasis on putting the learner at the center of the change effort and promoting an appreciation for the strengths of students in struggling schools. To close the achievement gaps and help English language learners succeed, schools need a new vision of the English language learner students that recognizes they are culturally and linguistically enriched and economically diverse.

For more information: Linda Ana Cabral, Associate Director
New Products and Programs/English Language Learners Program
Telephone: (202) 872-7733 • E-mail: lcabral@nea.org
The Priority School Campaign sites and other NEA affiliates now have the opportunity to learn about 16 communities where robust family-school-community partnerships are in process. For detailed information on this report or to download a copy, visit the NEA Priority Schools Campaign web site http://bit.ly/wQbxnz

In Creating this Report, What Did We Look For?

- Active teachers/leaders in NEA local and/or state affiliates
- A 2-5 year track record of operation
- Successfully engaged families and/or community members/groups
- Evidence of improved student outcomes
- Increase in family involvement over time
- Reasonable costs and replicability

What Did We Include?

- Programs/efforts to engage families
- Efforts to engage the community, including families, community members and community organizations
- Programs that provide wraparound social services to children and families

What were some of the Characteristics Demonstrated in the Best Practices and Powerful Partnerships that We Identified?

- Building collaborations: Pulling in strategic partners such as community groups, colleges, and businesses.
• **Agreeing on core values:** Thinking about what we believe and why we think our efforts will work.

• **Building relationships between families and teachers that are linked to learning:** Taking time to have conversations at all levels about improving student learning.

• **Reaching out to targeted families:** Identifying which groups need special attention and then giving it.

• **Setting high expectations:** Making it clear that success is the norm for creating pathways to college.

• **Using data to focus strategies:** Looking closely at current trends and addressing areas of weakness.

**How did Our Members and their Unions provide Essential Value-Added in the Identified Practices?**

• By providing leadership in community organizing initiatives
• Through facilitation of community conversations and by building support for transformation
• By providing necessary support and extra resources
• By taking the lead in improving student outcomes
• Through becoming agents for positive change

For more information contact: Roberta Hantgan, Manager, NEA Public Engagement Project, RHantgan@nea.org, 202-882-7721
The following is a list of selected publications, many of which were reviewed in the preparation of this manual:


40. 100 Ways To Help Your Child and School SUCCEED. National PTA. www.pta.org

41. PTA Goes to Work Toolkit; Helping Students Prepare for College Careers and Life After High School (in partnership with the U.S. Department of Labor). www.pta.org


43. PARENT POWER, a (film); Annenberg Institute for School Reform. Trailer: http://vimeo.com/21407183


45. Parents and Learning; Educational Practices, Series 2. Redding, S. Lincoln, IL: Center on Innovation and Improvement.
46. **Parent and Community Involvement in a College/Career-Ready Culture**, briefing paper. Austin, TX: Texas Comprehensive Center, SEDL. 
   www.sedl.org/connections/


   www.sedl.org

   www.sedl.org/connections/


51. **Parent Engagement in Education**, research brief. Indianapolis, IN: Indiana Parent Information Resource Center (PIRC), The Indiana Partnership Center. 
   www.fscp.org


53. **A Toolkit for Title 1 Parental Involvement**. 2009. National Center For Family and Community Connections with Schools. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory SEDL.


55. **Equity Matters; Ensuring Access to Quality Education for Minority Students**, issue brief. Baltimore, MD: NAACP Education Department.


60. Making the Difference; Research and Practice in Community Schools, executive summary. 2003. Coalition for Community Schools. www.communityschools.org