

Developing Family / School Partnerships

A Framework for Family Involvement

A comprehensive and meaningful partnership meets the needs of the families, schools, and communities involved, and incorporates each of the concepts below in ways that are unique to the school community.

Supporting Communication

Communication is the foundation of effective partnerships.

Parents (or other responsible family members) and schools should communicate regularly and clearly about information important to student success. Schools should inform families about standards and how they relate to the curriculum, learning objectives, methods of assessment, school programs, discipline codes, and student progress. Sharing information can be accomplished through the usual means of newsletters, handbooks, parent-teacher conferences, open houses, as well as home visits, homework "hot lines", the Internet, e-mail, and voice mail. Translations should be made available, if needed, to ensure non-English speaking parents are fully informed. Personal contact, whether by telephone or in person, is the best way to promote two-way communication.

Schools can reach out through community groups.

Schools can form partnerships with community and faith-based organizations to engage families from low-income and diverse cultural backgrounds who often do not feel comfortable in school. Conferences, meetings and informal get-togethers can take place outside the school building, such as at a faith-based or community center. Interpreters should be provided as needed.

Supporting School Activities

Families can support schools and children's learning in important ways.

They can volunteer as tutors, classroom aides and curriculum resources, as well as assist with field trips and in the lunchroom, health clinic and front office. They can organize school events and assemblies and attend student performances, sports events, and other school-related activities.

Schools should create an environment that welcomes participation.

Signs that greet families warmly at the school door, the central office, and the classroom should be in the languages spoken by the community. A school-based family resource center providing information, links to social services, and opportunities for informal meetings with staff and other families also contributes to a family-friendly atmosphere.

Supporting Home Activities

Families model and support children's education at home.

Families can help their children develop good study habits, supervise their homework, monitor TV viewing and after-school activities, and supervise regular bedtimes and school attendance. Families also model good learning practices through their own continuing education activities.

Educators can guide families in parent-child activities.

Teachers can suggest parent-child activities that are coordinated with the curriculum. Other learning activities may include interactive homework, skill practice, enrichment games, or other activities that support their education. Educators also play an important role informing

families about state standards and school expectations for student learning. At the middle and high school level it is important to explain what courses students should take to graduate and qualify for higher education, such as taking high level math and science. Parents should also be informed about school and community-based services that support student growth and learning.

Supporting Life-Long Learning

Families should be encouraged to develop their own knowledge and skills.

These activities may include ways of working with schools and helping their children learn, GED preparation, literacy instruction, basic adult education, job training, continuing education, child development instruction, and parenting education. To support these learning activities, schools can offer the use of facilities and other resources.

Schools can provide cultural education for staff and parents.

Schools should provide professional development opportunities for teachers and other staff in the cultural and community values and practices that are common to their students and their families. Strengthening the school-family partnership with professional development for all school staff as well as parents and other family members is an essential investment.

Promoting Advocacy and Shared Governance

Leadership training should be provided for educators, staff, and families interested in participating in school governance.

When parents are members of school advisory or site-based management councils, Title I, and parent organizations such as PTA's and other groups, they can advocate for change. They can help develop family involvement and school improvement plans, participate in the development of school policy and governance procedures, and provide community representation and support. These groups can take the lead in assessing school needs, developing goals and monitoring for continuous improvement.

Parents are advocates.

As advocates, parents make sure their children are being treated fairly and getting all the help they need to do well. Many schools collaborate with families to develop personal learning plans for each student. Parents should fully understand their child's program (remedial, advanced, honors, Title I, special education, etc.) and how that program would ensure they learn to high standards.

Collaborating with Community Organizations

Schools should collaborate with community organizations.

Schools support families and students by forming collaborative relationships with many public and private agencies that provide family support services. These relationships may include partnerships with public health and human service agencies, local businesses, institutions of higher education, youth-serving organizations, and religious, civic, and other community-based organizations. Linking families to services and community organizations can strengthen home environments and student learning. These partnerships create shared responsibility for the well being of children, families, and schools by all members of the community.