Working Together: School-Family-Community Partnerships

A Toolkit for New Mexico School Communities

2nd Edition

Sponsored by

The New Mexico Public Education Department

Developed by

Center for the Education and Study of Diverse Populations
New Mexico Highlands University

June 2006
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This Toolkit is also available on CD and on the web.

www.ped.state.nm.us

www.cesdp.nmhu.edu
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April 1, 2006

Dear New Mexico Educators and Education Partners:

The New Mexico Public Education Department (PED) is pleased to provide you with Working Together: School-Family-Community Partnerships, A Toolkit for New Mexico School Communities. The purpose of the Toolkit is to assist educators and education partners with information, resources and strategies to help strengthen parent and community involvement. We want our schools to be places that foster community collaboration and make parents and families feel welcome.

The Toolkit has been created by The Center for the Education and Study of Diverse Populations (CESDP), an educational, technical assistance research center out of New Mexico Highlands University. It is based on the National Standards for Parent and Family Involvement Programs published by the National PTA. The standards were built upon the six types of parent involvement identified by Joyce L. Epstein, Ph.D., of the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University. The standards should be used in conjunction with New Mexico Content Standards, Benchmarks and Performance Standards to support children’s learning and success.

Governor Richardson’s focus initiative, “Making Schools Work”, emphasizes that partnerships among parents, children and schools are the key to learning. The PED staff is available to address questions and concerns pertaining to our public schools, as well as act as a resource for accessing information regarding parent and community services that may be available through the PED.

Your commitment to improving learning opportunities for New Mexico’s children is deeply appreciated. Should you have any questions about this Toolkit, please contact Barbara Bianchi, Manager of the Rural Education Bureau, at (505) 827-3538.

Truly,

Veronica C. García, Ed.D.
Secretary of Education
The Center for the Education and Study of Diverse Populations (CESDP) was established by the New Mexico State Legislature in 1993 in order to address the unique and diverse educational needs of the state.

The mission of the CESDP is to assist communities in improving the quality of education for all learners. The CESDP manages state, federal and private contracts or grants that support this mission. Services focus on partnerships with districts and communities that have culturally and linguistically diverse populations.

CESDP staff has expertise in the needs of the diverse learners and families of the southwest, student and family literacy, system-wide school improvement, implementation of federal regulations and grants, program planning and implementation, research and evaluation, educational resource development and dissemination and standards-based education.

Products/Publications

*New Mexico Content Standards, Benchmarks and Performance Standards Reference Guides*

*Standards Primer: A Guide to Standards-Based Education in New Mexico*

*Equal Chance, Equal Learning through Literacy (ECELL) Toolkit*

*Working Together: Parent, Family and Community Involvement in Education Toolkit (First Edition)*

*Working Together: School-Family-Community Partnerships, A Toolkit for New Mexico School Communities (Second Edition)*

*Cultural Competency Professional Development Manual*

*Drawing From the Well Curriculum and Place-Based Teaching Video*

*Supplemental Education Services Evaluation Report*

*High Quality Sheltered Instruction Professional Development Manual*
April 1, 2006

Dear New Mexico Educator:

The Center for the Education and Study of Diverse Populations (CESDP) at New Mexico Highlands University has spent the past decade engaged in research and development, technical assistance delivery and evaluation activities. Those efforts have always been directed at providing educators and policy makers with information and resources to improve education on many levels. We are pleased to have been invited by New Mexico’s Public Education Department to develop the most current of those resources - Working Together: School-Family-Community Partnerships, A Toolkit for New Mexico School Communities.

We created this Toolkit to provide educators and families with information, resources and strategies to both increase and strengthen parent, family and community involvement across New Mexico. The Toolkit is based on the research of Dr. Joyce Epstein from Johns Hopkins University who has identified six types of parent involvement. In addition, we used the National PTA’s standards for parent and family involvement as an additional reference for development. Our intent has been to create both a research-based guide as well as a practitioner-friendly resource for New Mexico educators and families.

The CESDP joins Governor Bill Richardson and Secretary of Education Dr. Veronica García in emphasizing the importance of parent, school and community alliances in learning. We have long supported these collaborations not only as a goal of effective school reform but as a statewide imperative. If New Mexico is to continue building a stronger ethic around teaching and learning, parents and families must be supported by schools in increasingly effective ways.

I want to extend my thanks to Secretary García and her staff for guiding this project from inception to completion. Moreover, I wish to thank my staff at the Center for the Education and Study of Diverse Populations for their passion and commitment in completing this Toolkit. We at CESDP hope you find this product an effective tool for building stronger parent, school and community partnerships. Please contact us at CESDP if you are interested in professional development services in the area of building school-family-community partnerships.

Sincerely,

Paul Martínez, Ed.D.
Director, CESDP
New Mexico Voices

“The use of the Epstein Model allows for a comprehensive Toolkit. This will be useful to schools as they prepare and implement Educational Plans for Student Success (EPSS) as well as engage in professional development in the area of parental involvement.”

Barbara Bianchi, Manager, Rural Education Bureau, New Mexico Public Education Department

“This Toolkit is an important effort towards enhancing parental involvement by utilizing concrete, experience-based suggestions and resources for creating school-family-community partnerships in schools across New Mexico.”

Diana E. Bateman, Education Administrator, Title I, School Assistance Bureau, New Mexico Public Education Department

“This Toolkit has many practical tools that school administrators and teachers can use to empower parents and tribal members to increase their participation in the education of our children. The Toolkit highlights resources to reach out to parents in innovative ways.”

Deloria Chapo, Education Administrator, Indian Education Bureau, New Mexico Public Education Department

“Over the years families have changed. This Toolkit is sensitive to that and provides an opportunity for educators, as well as parents, to utilize these creative resources to strengthen their approach to include all families . . . I look forward to using these resources in my district.”

Renee Romero, Kindergarten Teacher in the Los Niños Dual Language Immersion Program, Los Niños Elementary, Las Vegas City Schools

“This Toolkit is packed with resources and ideas for parents and teachers. The tip sheets and self assessments are a great help in getting a handle on school-family-community partnerships, a key to positive outcomes for all children.”

Stephanie K. Johnson, Program Manager, Parents Reaching Out

“The content in this Toolkit will go a long way in providing solid methods to breakdown barriers between schools and communities. The manual, its implementation and support are in great need.”

Linda Jackson, Vice President, Rio Grande Educational Collaborative

“The Teacher, Family and Professional Development Tools of the Toolkit will provide many useful resources that can support parental involvement initiatives.”

Robert Archuleta, Superintendent, Jemez Mountain Public Schools

“Our district administrators had the opportunity to receive two days of professional development based on a preview of the Toolkit and felt that the resources would be very useful for teachers and families. We look forward to working together with the Public Education Department and the Center for the Education and Study of Diverse Populations as we continue to build school-family-community partnerships.”

Dr. Harry J. Hayes, Former Superintendent, Bloomfield Schools

(Dr. Hayes was a strong supporter of parent and family involvement and expressed his excitement in the anticipation of this Toolkit. Regrettfully, Dr. Hayes passed away before this Toolkit went to print. We honor the work and life of Dr. Harry Hayes.)
Introduction

“Families are big, small, extended, nuclear, multi-generational, with one parent, two parents and grandparents. We live under one roof, or many. A family can be as temporary as a few weeks, or as permanent as forever. We become part of a family by birth, adoption, marriage or from a desire for mutual support.”

Source: Report of New Mexico House Memorial 5 Task Force on Young Children and Families, (1990)

New Mexico families represent the cherished diversity of the state. A deep love for family and land are part of what makes the state a wonderful place to live. New Mexico’s strong multicultural heritage keeps life in New Mexico vital and provides a variety of illuminating perspectives (Education Achievement in New Mexico: Why Rural Matters, 2005).

The deeply ingrained multiculturalism that makes New Mexico unique also presents challenges in communicating and setting shared priorities. Schools face their own set of challenges in accommodating all families, making them part of the school community and including them as partners in their child’s education.

As mentioned in the quote above, families change. As they do, schools must also change to become welcoming and safe for all students and families. Successful family involvement programs are based on the premise that parents are interested in their children’s education and are willing to participate in activities that are meaningful and well coordinated. It is crucial that we consider the needs and ideas of New Mexico’s diverse families and work to make positive connections beyond the school walls, moving to chapter houses, community centers, local libraries and other neighborhood facilities to meet with families while integrating school and community interests, resources and priorities.

We must redefine parent involvement to include the perspectives of diverse families in strategic planning and implementing school-family-community partnerships. The resources and gifts that come from families and communities can enhance and support the education of each and every one of our children.

“The way schools care about children is reflected in the way schools care about children’s families. If educators view children simply as students, they are likely to see the family as separate from the school. If educators view students as children, they are likely to see both the family and the community as partners with the school in children’s education and development. Partners recognize their shared interests in and responsibility for children and they work together to create better programs and opportunities for students.”

- Joyce L. Epstein

Four factors have been found to support school-family-community partnerships:

• a high commitment to learning;
• support from leadership;
• a welcoming climate; and
• community partnerships.
The Center for the Education and Study of Diverse Populations (CESDP) gathered New Mexico families’ stories at its annual Back to School Family Institute 2005.

Participants’ most common requests included:

- opportunities for two-way, reciprocal communication;
- learning about rights and responsibilities and how to use them to help children;
- developing an understanding of New Mexico Content Standards and Benchmarks and the high-stakes testing of their children;
- promoting strong relationships with other parents; and
- use of creative communication strategies to promote two-way communication with parents who are unable to attend school functions.

Families, teachers and administrators all want the same thing: children who learn, reach their potential and grow into successful adults. The needs and wishes of those who support children in pursuit of this goal are not so different from one another.

This Toolkit offers materials to help family members, teachers and administrators develop the communication, relationships, trust and skills needed to successfully bridge school-family-community partnerships.

Throughout this toolkit are references to “parental” involvement, parents, fathers and mothers. All such references should be interpreted broadly to include the adults who play an important role in the child’s family life, since other adults - grandparents, aunts, uncles, step-parents, guardians - may have primary responsibility for a child’s education, development, and well-being.
**Toolkit Goals and Use**

Anyone interested in improving educational experiences for children will find something useful in this *Toolkit*. It is designed to support the development of school, family and community partnerships with the ultimate goal of helping all children and youth succeed in school and in life.

The *Toolkit* is divided into three sections: *Teacher Tools, Family Tools* and *Professional Development Tools*. These tools are intended to support partnerships that can improve school programs and climate, provide family services and support, increase parents’ skills and leadership, connect families with others in the school and community, and help teachers in their daily work.

- The **Teacher Tools** section includes modules that feature research links, effective practices, relevant New Mexico Teacher Competencies, *Self-Assessment Rubrics, Teacher Reflection Tools*, and other useful resources.

- The **Family Tools** section includes modules that feature research links, sample practices, *Parent/Family Reflection Tools*, and other useful resources.

- The **Professional Development Tools** section includes modules that feature PowerPoint presentations, a CD, handouts, hands-on activities, and resources for further inquiry.

Each of the three sections is organized into six modules based on the National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs.

- Module 1: Improving Communication
- Module 2: Promoting Positive Parenting
- Module 3: Enhancing Student Learning
- Module 4: Increasing Volunteerism
- Module 5: Supporting Decision Making and Advocacy
- Module 6: Collaborating with the Community

Although each section is organized into six modules, the materials do not need to be used sequentially. Any resource tool can be copied and distributed to staff and/or families, included in newsletters, sent home by teachers or parent organizations, or used as discussion guides at staff or parent meetings. This Toolkit can be most effective when used with integrated groups of educators, school staff, family members, and community members.
Accessing the Toolkit on the Web or CD

Teachers, administrators, parents or other interested community members can access any portion of the Toolkit electronically. This will allow for flexibility and easy access in utilizing the wide range of resources included within the Toolkit.

The electronic availability will allow users to:

- Access PowerPoints included in the Professional Development Tools section
- Print out specific resources
- Search topics of interest or need
- Modify or change tools to meet specific needs
- Personalize resources with school name or logo
- Connect to direct links listed in the “Worth a Clicks” sections and other active web sites

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It is available on CD and the web at the following sites:

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www.cesdp.nmhu.edu

Building Family-Friendly Schools

Many of New Mexico’s schools realize the need to strengthen family and community involvement programs and are implementing effective strategies, however, as New Mexico’s Secretary of Education traveled around the state in 2005 to conduct “Community Conversations” in several New Mexico school communities, it became evident that some parents and community members do not feel welcome in the schools. It is therefore, the intent of this Toolkit, to support ongoing efforts to create family-friendly schools.

Building Family-Friendly Schools, on the following page, is included to be used as a guide to determine how welcoming a school is to families and community members.

A Survey for Assessing School Level Family and Community Partnerships

Following, is a Survey for Assessing School Level Family and Community Partnerships, which is intended to be used across the six areas of parental involvement based on the National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs.

This tool can be used to provide information on the strengths of partnerships and insights about future directions or needed improvements in a school’s parental and community involvement/partnership program.
Building Family-Friendly Schools

“Schools must become places where families feel wanted and recognized for their strengths and potential.”

Family-friendly schools create a climate in which every characteristic of the school is open and helpful. These family-friendly schools make every effort to build partnerships with all families, not just those that are most involved. Use this checklist to determine how family-friendly your school is and how you can increase its friendliness in a way that is reflective of the cultures and languages it serves.

**Practices for creating a family-friendly school environment:**

- Create and publicly post a family-school-community partnership policy or mission statement that provides the philosophical framework for all family-school-community activities.
- Establish policies and practices that acknowledge and support traditional and nontraditional families, as well as those with differing schedules and commitments.
- Create an open-door policy and climate that is responsive to parents and their concerns. (If for safety reasons it is necessary to lock some doors, be sure that families understand this and know the procedure for calling and being met at the front door.)
- Set school calendars, when possible, to accommodate major community events, activities and ceremonies.

**Create a front office atmosphere that makes people feel welcome:**

- Greet families with a smile and warm welcome.
- Have parent friendly information translated into other languages as necessary.
- Create a comfortable, clean place to sit, meet and access resources.
- Hire bilingual staff to serve as interpreters as necessary.
- Recognize that families have different learning styles and require that you vary the way information is shared.
- Arrange for flexibility in routine tasks such as registration and orientation (on-line and telephone options, day and evening hours, etc.)

**School staff who are successful in engaging family members share the following qualities:**

- Recognize that parents play a crucial role in their child’s learning.
- Always treat parents with respect.
- Demonstrate professionalism and confidence.
- Demonstrate concern for students in all interactions with parents.

Adapted from: Ballen, J. & Moles, O. (1994, September)
Working Together:
School-Family-Community Partnerships

A Survey for Assessing School Level Family and Community Partnerships

This survey may be used to assess a school’s progress in strengthening partnerships between school personnel and the school’s families and community members. It is suggested that the survey be used at different points in the school year to assess progress in the six areas of parent involvement identified by the work of Dr. Joyce Epstein and the PTA’s National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating Scale</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>Occurs in most classes or grade levels. Receives substantive time and emphasis.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A highly prevalent component of the school’s parental involvement plan.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Occurs in some classes or grade levels. Receives minimal or modest time and emphasis.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not a prevalent component of the school’s parental involvement plan.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Strategy does not occur at the school or occurs in isolation.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. IMPROVING COMMUNICATION
   Communicate effectively with all families in the community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Our School:</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conducts parent-teacher conferences with every parent at least once a year.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provides translators to assist families as needed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provides clear information about report cards and how grades are earned.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Has established two-way channels for communication from home to school and from school to home.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provides clear information about selecting courses, programs and activities in this school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sends folders of student work home weekly or monthly for parent review and comments.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sends home positive messages or makes phone calls to parents about students on a regular basis.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Notifies families of students having academic or behavior problems.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Teachers have easy access to telephones to communicate with parents during or after school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provides parents with the telephone numbers of the school, principal, teachers and counselors (at school or at home).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Has a homework hot line for students and families to hear daily assignments and messages.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conducts an annual survey for families to share information and concerns about students’ needs and reactions to school programs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Our school newsletter includes:</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>A calendar of school events.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student activity information.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Information about curriculum, assessments and standards-based instruction.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Information regarding volunteer involvement (when and how to volunteer).</td>
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<tr>
<td>School governance information (how the school is run, site council, etc.).</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A column to address parents’ questions.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Recognition of students, families and community members.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### 2. PROMOTING POSITIVE PARENTING

Assist all families with parenting skills and in setting home environments to support children as students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Our School:</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sponsors parent education workshops and other courses or training for parents.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides families with information on child or adolescent development.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provides families with strategies that support learning at home.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lends families books or tapes on parenting or videotapes of parent workshops.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asks families for information about children’s goals, strengths and talents.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sponsors home visiting programs or neighborhood meetings to help families understand schools and to help schools understand families.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Respects the different cultures represented in our student population.</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3. ENHANCING STUDENT LEARNING

Provide information to families about how to help students at home with their homework and other curriculum-related activities and decisions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Our School:</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Never</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provides family-friendly information to families on New Mexico’s Content Standards and Benchmarks.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides information to families on how to monitor and discuss schoolwork with their child.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provides information on how to assist students with skills that they need to improve.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Has a regular schedule of interactive homework that requires students to demonstrate and discuss what they are learning with a family member.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asks parents to listen to their child read or to read aloud with their child.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provides calendars with daily or weekly activities for families to do at home and in the community.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assists families in helping students to set academic goals, select courses and programs and plan for college, their next level of schooling (i.e. middle school and high school) or work.</td>
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</table>
4. INCREASING VOLUNTEERISM
Organize volunteers to support the school and its students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Our School:</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Never</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conducts an annual survey to identify interests, talents, and availability of volunteers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provides a parent room or family center for volunteers or family members to work, meet, and access relevant resources.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provides ways for families to be involved at home or in the community if they cannot volunteer at school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recognizes our volunteers for their time and efforts.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Schedules plays, concerts, games, and other events at different times of the day and evening so that all parents can attend.</td>
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<tr>
<td>We encourage families and the community to be involved at school by</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assisting in the classroom (e.g., tutoring, grading papers).</td>
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<td>Helping on trips or at parties.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Giving talks (e.g., careers, hobbies, etc.).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Checking attendance.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monitoring halls, working in the library, cafeteria or other areas.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leading clubs or activities.</td>
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</table>

5. SUPPORTING DECISION MAKING AND ADVOCACY
Include families as participants in school decisions and develop parent and community leaders.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Our School:</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Never</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Has an active PTA, PTO or other parent organization.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Invites parents to be on the school’s advisory council, improvement team, or other committees at our school.</td>
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<td>Asks involved parents to make contact with parents who are less involved to solicit their ideas and report back to them.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provides information on school or local elections for school representatives.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Develops formal networks to link all families with their parent representatives.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Involves parents in school level decisions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Involves parents in revising school/district curricula.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Includes parent leaders from all racial, ethnic, socio-economic and other groups represented in school.</td>
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6. COLLABORATING WITH THE COMMUNITY

Coordinate resources and services from the community for families, students and schools.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Our School:</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Never</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provides a community resource directory for parents and students with</td>
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<td>information on community agencies, programs and services.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provides information on community activities that link to learning skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>and talents, including summer programs for students.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Works with local businesses, industries and community organizations on</td>
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<tr>
<td>programs to enhance student skills.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Offers after-school programs for students, with support from community</td>
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<tr>
<td>businesses, agencies or volunteers.</td>
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<td>Sponsors inter-generational programs with local senior citizen groups.</td>
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<td>Provides “one-stop” shopping for family services through partnerships with</td>
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<tr>
<td>school counseling, health, recreation, job training, and other agencies.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organizes service learning projects for the community, students, families,</td>
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<td>and schools.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Building is open for use by the community after school hours.</td>
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Adapted from Dr. Joyce Epstein, et al, 2002

Summary of Strengths and Needs

- Ratings of “frequently” indicate that the activity or approach is strong.
- Ratings of “sometimes” or “never” indicate that the activity is not yet part of the school’s program or needs improvement.

The results provide information on the strength of current practices and insights about future directions or needed improvements in your school’s parental and community involvement/partnership program. Use the chart below to begin identifying areas of strength, need and plans for improvement.
Notes